

**THE CANADIAN ARMY**  
**1939 - 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.

# *The Canadian Army*

1939 – 1945

*An Official Historical Summary*

*By*

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**Illustrated with Paintings by Canadian Army War Artists**

**Maps drawn by  
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*God send me to see suche a company  
together agayne when need is.*

LORD HOWARD D'EFFINGHAM.

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## PREFACE

This volume has been prepared in order that the people of Canada may have in their hands at as early a date as possible an authentic comprehensive outline of the work of their Army in the War of 1939-1945 against Germany, Italy and Japan and their satellites.

In no previous conflict did the military forces of Canada serve in so many lands and in such varied roles as in this Second World War. Canadian soldiers did duty in some capacity in every continent, and the tasks they performed were of such diversity as to defy enumeration. In this relatively brief summary our main concern must of course be their battles, and these in themselves would fill a much wider set of covers. The Canadian field army was denied large-scale action for a long period, but when its time came it played distinguished parts in two of the three great European campaigns which produced the defeat of Germany: that in Sicily and Italy beginning on 10 July 1943, and that which began with the invasion of Normandy on 6 June 1944.

In the nature of things, this account of these events cannot be definitive. It is an interim report: a Summary, not a History. It is too brief to tell the whole story, and is published too soon to be able to make any claim to finality. The activities of the Canadian Army in the late war are recorded in hundreds of thousands of documents—War Diaries, reports on operations, departmental and headquarters files, and miscellaneous papers of scores of different sorts. Before anything approaching a final history can be produced, these documents must be read in detail. The historian must also consult the multitudinous British and Allied documentary sources of information, as well as the great mass of papers captured from the beaten enemy. In addition, he must seek assistance from men who participated in the events of which he tells, supplementing the evidence of official papers by drawing upon the memories and the private records of individuals.

This task is obviously enormous, but fortunately it is now far advanced. Historical work was in progress throughout the war. There had been a Historical Section of the General Staff in the Department of National Defence for many years; and as early as 1940 the present writer was appointed Historical Officer at Canadian Military Headquarters in Great Britain, with the duty of “collecting and preparing material for the Official Historian”. When the Canadian troops were

committed to large-scale active operations, a Field Historical Section was provided to accompany them in each of the two main theatres where they fought. These Sections were ultimately so organized as to provide a team consisting of an Historical Officer and a War Artist, with a clerk and drivers and independent transport, for every Canadian Division engaged in operations.

Thanks to these activities in the field, a great deal of valuable historical information which would otherwise have been lost was obtained and recorded. At Canadian Military Headquarters, at the same time, the work of preparing formal and detailed Preliminary Narratives to serve as the basis for the future Official History was in progress from 1942 onwards; but it was inevitably much in arrears of events when hostilities came to an end. It is still going on, and a probable period of about two years is required for its completion.

The present volume is far from exhausting Allied sources of information, and has drawn only to a limited extent upon the German documents which became available more recently. The only episodes on which examination of enemy sources can be said to have been completed are the Dieppe raid and the campaign in Sicily and Southern Italy during 1943. This Summary is, however, enriched by the results of a programme of interrogation of German officers, in the course of which some thirty senior commanders and staff officers who were especially concerned with operations against the Canadians were interviewed. As a result of the recent war crimes trials at Hong Kong, useful information has been obtained concerning Japanese operations there.

This volume supplements three booklets already published by the Department of National Defence under the collective title *The Canadian Army at War*. Of these booklets, the first, *The Canadians in Britain, 1989-1944*, dealt with the long static period in the United Kingdom; the second, *From Pachino to Ortona*, chronicled the first six months of Canadian operations in the Mediterranean theatre; and the third, *Canada's Battle in Normandy*, told the story of the Canadian share in the opening phase of the campaign in North-West Europe in 1944-1945. On these special episodes, the booklets mentioned afford rather more detail than can be included here, and the reader is referred to them. Certain other episodes not dealt with at length in those booklets, but on which much historical investigation has been done—notably the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Brigade's experience in France in June 1940, and the Dieppe raid of 1942—are treated here in a more detailed fashion than the length of the book might otherwise justify. It has been felt in particular that, since full details of Dieppe are now available, they should be given to the public at this time, even at the cost of somewhat upsetting the balance of the book.



As for the Official History proper, the "target date" for its completion is the autumn of 1950. It is intended that it shall consist of three volumes, arranged as follows:

VOLUME I: History of the Canadian Army, 1939-43, including organization, training and home defence measures in Canada; organization, training and operations in the United Kingdom and adjacent areas; operations in the Pacific Theatre.

VOLUME II: The Campaign in Sicily and Italy.

VOLUME III: The Campaign in North-West Europe.

In addition, a volume is to be prepared on Canadian military policy in the broad sense, covering the organization and employment of all three armed services.

It is intended to tell the story as completely as is possible within these limits, but in terms comprehensible to the average person. The main function of the Official History, it is considered, is not to instruct the Canadian soldier of today, though it is hoped that he will find it useful; the object is to tell the Canadian citizen what his army accomplished in the last war, and to provide him, perhaps, with the means of forming an intelligent judgement on military issues that may confront him in the future.

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The volume now presented deals primarily with operations overseas. It is too small to contain, in addition, any detailed account of military policy in general and of events in Canada. Accounts of these matters, and of many others which cannot be brought within the compass of this Summary, will be included in the more complete Official History above described. The Summary attempts to tell in broad outline the story of the Army as a whole, and particularly of events on the battlefield. It has been out of the question to explain individually the work of many arms and services without whose tactical and administrative support the units actually in contact with the enemy could not have fought. That must be left for other studies.

It has likewise been impossible to do that full justice to the work of Canadian, British and Allied Naval and Air forces which would be ideally desirable. The war was won by the selfless cooperation of brave men of many nations and of three fighting services. This book's particular task is to tell the story of the part played by the Canadian Army.

It is not possible to express adequately here the writer's sense of gratitude to the very numerous persons who have helped him in his considerable task, or to thank them individually by name as would be

proper. The Historical Section, Cabinet Office, London, and the Historical Division, War Department Special Staff, Washington, have both given kind assistance. A great number of soldiers and ex-soldiers of various ranks have read the book in draft, in whole or in part, and have made most helpful comments. Several eminent Canadian historians have also read the draft and made valuable suggestions for its improvement. Of the personnel of the Canadian Army's Historical Section, during the war and since, literally scores—officers, other ranks and civilians—have made direct or indirect contributions to this book. It may perhaps be proper to mention those officers of most senior rank who have been closely connected with the work. Most of them have now returned to civil life. Lieutenant-Colonel G. F. G. Stanley was the writer's first assistant at Canadian Military Headquarters, and his skilful scholarship and boundless industry made incalculable contributions to the programme both there and, later, at Ottawa. Lieutenant-Colonels W. E. C. Harrison and S. H. S. Hughes served as Historical Officers in the field during the operations and subsequently at C.M.H.Q., to the very great profit of the History. Lieutenant-Colonel G. W. L. Nicholson has given invaluable service in the preparation of preliminary narratives, and also drafted the section of this volume dealing, with the second half of the Italian campaign. Two special obligations are those to Major T. M. Hunter, who drafted portions of the account of the North-West Europe campaign, and to W.O.II V. Boucher, who typed the many successive drafts of the volume. To these and other helpers the book owes much of whatever virtue it possesses. For its shortcomings the present writer takes full responsibility.

In a volume so relatively brief and so comprehensive as this, it has not been considered either necessary or practicable to supply detailed references to sources of information. The book is based upon fully-documented preliminary studies which are held in the Historical Section at Ottawa. It will be found that in many cases the sources of quotations and statements made are identified in the text. It should be noted that officers are invariably described by the ranks held at the time of the events referred to.

The author will be grateful if readers will advise him of, any errors or important omissions which they may detect in this volume.

C. P. S.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

A.D.G.B.....	Air Defence of Great Britain	M.B.E.....	Member of the Order of the British Empire
A.V.R.E.....	Assault vehicle, Royal Engineers	M.C.....	Military Cross
Bde.....	Brigade	M.G.....	Machine gun
B.E.F.....	British Expeditionary Force	M.M.....	Military Medal
B.S.T.....	British summer time	N.C.O.....	Non-commissioned officer
C.A.....	Civil Affairs	N.R.M.A.....	National Resources Mobilization Act
C.A.O.F.....	Canadian Army Occupation Force	O.B.E.....	Officer of the Order of the British Empire
Capt.....	Captain	PIAT.....	Projector, infantry, anti-tank
C.B.....	Companion of the Order of the Bath	Pte.....	Private
C.B.E.....	Companion of the Order of the British Empire	R.A.F.....	Royal Air Force
Cdn.....	Canadian	R.A.M.C.....	Royal Army Medical Corps
C.G.S.....	Chief of the General Staff	R.C.A.....	Royal Canadian Artillery
C-in-C.....	Commander-in-Chief	R.C.A.F.....	Royal Canadian Air Force
C.M.G.....	Companion of the Order of St. Michael and St. George	R.C.A.M.C.....	Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps
C.M.H.Q.....	Canadian Military Headquarters, London	R.C.E.....	Corps of Royal Canadian Engineers.
Col.....	Colonel	R.C.H.A.....	Royal Canadian Horse Artillery
COSSAC.....	Chief of Staff, Supreme Allied Commander	R.C.N.....	Royal Canadian Navy
C.O.T.C.....	Canadian Officers Training Corps	R.C.R.....	The Royal Canadian Regiment
C.S.M.....	Company sergeant-major	R.D.F.....	Radio direction finding (now called radar)
C.W.A.C.....	Canadian Women's Army Corps	Recce.....	Reconnaissance or reconnoitre
D.C.M.....	Distinguished Conduct Medal	R.F.C.....	Royal Flying Corps
Div.....	Division	R.H.L.I.....	The Royal Hamilton Light Infantry
D.S.O.....	Companion of the Distinguished Service Order	R.M.C.....	Royal Military College
E.D.....	Canadian Efficiency Decoration	R.N.....	Royal Navy
F.B.M.....	Feet board measure	S.A.S.....	Special Air Service
G.C.M.G.....	Knight Grand Cross of the Order of St. Michael and St. George	S.F.....	Special Force
Gen.....	General	SHAEF.....	Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force
G.H.Q.....	General Headquarters	Sitrep.....	Situation report
G.O.C.....	General Officer Commanding	S.S. (British).....	Special Service (i.e. Commando)
G.O.C.-in-C.....	General Officer Commanding-in-Chief	S.S. (German).....	Schutzstaffeln (plural): originally elite guards of the Nazi party; later used as an independent term; fighting units of S.S. were known as Waffen S.S. (i.e. Combat S.S.)
G.S.....	General Staff	Tac.....	Tactical
H.E.....	High explosive	U.S.....	United States
H.L.I. (of C.).....	The Highland Light Infantry of Canada	U.S.A.....	United States Army
H.M.C.S.....	His Majesty's Canadian Ship	V.C.....	Victoria Cross
H.M.S.....	His Majesty's Ship	V.D.....	Colonial Auxiliary Forces Officers Decoration
Hon.....	Honourable	W.O. II.....	Warrant Officer, Class II
Inf.....	Infantry		
Lieut. (Lt.).....	Lieutenant		
L.M.G.....	Light machine gun		
L. of C.....	Lines of communication		
Maj.....	Major		



## CHAPTER I

### THE FIRST CANADIANS OVERSEAS, 1939-1940

#### CANADA GOES TO WAR

On Sunday, 10 September, 1939, a fateful proclamation in the King's name was published in the *Canada Gazette*. It contained the words:

Now therefore We do hereby Declare and Proclaim that a State of War with the German Reich exists and has existed in Our Dominion of Canada as and from the tenth day of September, 1939.

On 1 September, the German armies had surged into Poland. On 3 September, Great Britain and France declared war on Germany in defence of the liberties of Europe. That same day a German sub-marine sank without warning the passenger liner "Athena", killing more than a hundred civilians of whom a dozen were Canadians. On 7 September the Canadian Parliament assembled in emergency session; and it had now approved the recommendation of the Government that Canada should take up arms against the aggressor state whose policy threatened to destroy free government everywhere. For the second time in one generation, Canada was at war with Germany.

The country's immediate means for waging war were slender. Although Canada did not lack warlike traditions, and her forces had done great things on the battlefields of 1914-18, she had never shown much disposition to prepare for war in time of peace; only in moments of actual emergency did her people and her legislature look to their arms. Even the great cataclysm of the First World War, in which she sent overseas about 425,000 soldiers and maintained in the field a strong Corps which greatly distinguished itself on the Western Front, had left little permanent mark on Canadian military policy; for when peace returned the fighting forces were reduced very nearly to their 1914 level of insignificance. During the depression period of the thirties the country's total annual expenditure on its three defence services together fell as low as \$14,000,000. When war came in 1939, Canada possessed only about 4500 professional soldiers, while the professional strengths of her naval and air forces were about 1800 and about 3100 respectively.

Nevertheless, she was not absolutely unprepared. Since 1936, while the international situation went from bad to worse, a modest programme of improvement of the defence services had been in progress. Canada's

total expenditure on her fighting services rose to \$34,800,000 in 1938-39, and of this some \$15,800,000 went to the Militia (army) services. The organization of the country's citizen army, the Non-Permanent Active Militia, had been revised in the light of modern requirements, and a very small beginning made on the task of re-equipping it. Larger appropriations had permitted somewhat more effective training. A coast-defence programme had been undertaken. Mobilization plans had been made. On the whole, Canada was better organized for war than she had been in 1914; but it must be emphasized that by world standards the nation was very far from a state of readiness for participation in a great conflict. After so long a period of neglect a country's defences cannot recover in a mere three years; and (as we can now see) the measures taken in those years, though sound and intelligent, were not proportioned to the magnitude of the crisis that was marching down upon mankind.

So far as the Militia was concerned, the greatest single point of weakness in 1939 was equipment. The arms available were almost entirely of 1914-18 pattern; the units, whether of the Permanent Force or the Non-Permanent Active Militia, possessed virtually no transport whatever, although the war now beginning would clearly be the most highly mechanized in history; the Dominion had only begun to develop the basic elements of a munition industry, and with the arms factories of the United Kingdom (Canada's traditional source of supply) working day and night to meet Britain's own requirements, the outlook for a rapid improvement in the armament of the forces was not bright.<sup>1</sup> One specific item of equipment may be mentioned as exemplifying the general situation. Until 1938 the Canadian military forces did not possess a single tank. In that year *two* light tanks were received from England. Fourteen more arrived in 1939 on the actual eve of the declaration of war. Yet during the coming struggle Canada was to place in the field two armoured divisions and two independent armoured brigades.

The "Munich Crisis" in the early autumn of 1938 had shown how serious was the danger of war. In the following spring Hitler's seizure of Czechoslovakia in defiance of all agreements and assurances seemed to indicate that war was now actually unavoidable, and Britain took the unprecedented step of instituting compulsory military service in time of peace. Canadian apprehensions were reflected in legislative appropriations for the fighting services larger than any previously provided in peacetime:

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<sup>1</sup> In the summer of 1939 a delegation of the Canadian Manufacturers' Association, accompanied by Major-General A. G. L. McNaughton, the President of the National Research Council, visited England to study armament production and explain Canadian industrial capacity to the British authorities. It should be mentioned also that a Survey of Industry from the point of view of defence production was in progress in Canada; 1600 plants had been surveyed by the spring of 1939.

the total sum for 1939-40 exceeded \$64,500,000. These appropriations, however, came too late to bear much fruit before war began.

Before fighting actually began in Europe, the Government had already ordered such military precautions as the country's limited means allowed. The plans developed by the General Staff at Ottawa during the past few years were now put into effect. On the evening of 25 August, when' hostilities already seemed almost certain, the country heard the highly portentous announcement that certain units of the Non-Permanent Active Militia had been called out to assist in the protection of federal property; the guarding of essential communications and the manning of coast defences. The service was purely voluntary, the response highly satisfactory. For the first time since 1918, men of Canada's citizen army now took up their arms in the serious expectation of using them in defence of their country. The force thus called out amounted to roughly 10,000 men: and on the night of the 26<sup>th</sup> the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Ian A. Mackenzie) was able to announce that the programme for the protection of vulnerable points was "ninety per cent complete".

On 1 September, with the guns already firing in Poland, the Department of National Defence issued a General Order authorizing the immediate organization of a "Canadian Active Service Force"<sup>2</sup> of two Divisions with a proportion of ancillary troops. This force, sometimes referred to in pre-war discussions as a "mobile reserve", had been carefully designed in advance of the crisis, its composition and staffs being subjected to constant revision. It had, of course, been quite clear that in a major war the country would require such a field force, either for home defence if Canadian territory were directly threatened or for employment overseas if circumstances called for it. The force was firmly rooted in the existing Militia organization; unlike the Canadian Expeditionary Force organized in 1914, its units bore the names, badges and battle honours of established Militia regiments, chiefly of course of the Non-Permanent force. They thus drew strength from traditions and *esprit de corps* of long standing. To quote the comment of a distinguished Canadian professional soldier, "We had a citizen volunteer Army. It was that Army we mobilized and it was that Army and nothing else that fought our war". The Permanent Force made a contribution out of all proportion to its numbers; the ranks of all units, Permanent and Non-Permanent, had to be filled up, on mobilization, with civilian volunteers; nevertheless, it was the Non-Permanent Active Militia that made Canada's wartime Army possible, and the fact should be remembered.

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<sup>2</sup> In 1940 this term became obsolete, and the force was designated "Canadian Army (Active)". The term used in pre-war planning was "Canadian Field Force"; this was changed to "Canadian Active Service Force" on 1 September 1939.

Although enlistment into the Canadian Active Service Force was entirely voluntary, and medical standards were high, nearly all the officers and a considerable proportion of the other ranks of the units mobilized in 1939 came directly from the Active Militia. The rest of the men required were obtained with comparative ease by volunteering from the general public. No legislation providing for compulsory service was introduced at this time. The opinion, it should be noted, had lately been widely expressed in Parliament that in any new, war Canada's contribution was unlikely to take the form of intervention overseas with a large expeditionary force; and as recently as March of 1939 both the Prime Minister (Mr. W. L. Mackenzie King) and the Leader of the Opposition (Dr. R. J. Manion) had specifically committed their respective parties to a policy rejecting the idea of conscription for overseas service in the event of conflict.

#### THE BEGINNING OF THE CANADIAN ARMY OVERSEAS

Mobilization of the Active Service Force now proceeded (under serious difficulties imposed by shortages of clothing, boots and blankets); and the employment of the force was discussed. On 11 September 1939 the Minister of National Defence referred in the House of Commons to the possibility of using it overseas; and on 16 September a telegram informed Canada House, London, that the Government was considering sending, one division. The date of departure would depend upon the availability of modern equipment in England, and the War Office was to be consulted immediately on this point. Steps were now taken to re-attest all personnel already appointed or enlisted into the Active Service Force, that there might be no doubt of their having voluntarily accepted the obligation of general service either at home or abroad for the duration of the war.

The proposal to send troops overseas was warmly welcomed in London. A communication from Canada House dated 21 September reported the views of the War Office. It noted that the Allies were faced with a serious situation in the Western theatre (where British regular divisions were already taking up positions beside the French) and that the need for additional divisions was acute. The supply of equipment was the "limiting factor", but the War Office had given an assurance that the Canadian Division would certainly not be sent to the front with a scale of equipment inferior to that of the British Territorial formations then being prepared for duty there.

On 28 September the Minister of National Defence publicly confirmed that the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division would be sent overseas, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division "kept under arms as a further measure of preparedness". Early in October Major-General A. G. L. McNaughton, a former Chief of the

General Staff who for some years past had been seconded for duty as President of the National Research Council, was appointed "Inspector General of the Units of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division". It was intended that he should assume command of the Division when it was concentrated.

During the latter part of October and the early days of November, the new Inspector General travelled across Canada from Halifax to Vancouver, visiting and reporting upon the units of his prospective command. On 20 October the British authorities were informed that the 1<sup>st</sup> Division would be ready to sail early in December. A suggestion from the War Office that it might be sent directly to the South of France was discouraged by the Canadian authorities, who felt that both obtaining equipment and maintaining morale would be more difficult there than in England. It had previously been arranged that the Division was to be concentrated at Aldershot, the great military centre in Hampshire; and this plan was proceeded with.

In the meantime, steps had been taken to set up in Britain a Canadian administrative headquarters which could make arrangements for the reception, accommodation and equipment of the troops and form a permanent point of contact with the War Office. The officer selected to head it was Brigadier H. D. G. Crerar, who as Director of Military Operations and Intelligence at the Department of National Defence had played a great part in drafting Canada's war plans, and at the outbreak of war was Commandant of the Royal Military College, Kingston. In addition to setting up the Headquarters, Brigadier Crerar would be Military Adviser to the head of a delegation which was going to England to confer with the British Government on the best methods of achieving maximum cooperation. This delegation arrived in London on 28 October, and Brigadier Crerar began work at Canada House.

On 13 November the advance party of officers and other ranks for "Canadian Military Headquarters in Great Britain" landed from the "Antonia" at Liverpool. The party was commanded by Colonel P. J. Montague. Space was obtained in London in the building of the Sun Life Assurance Company of Canada at 2 Cockspur Street, adjoining Canada House, and the little Headquarters — it was to grow steadily throughout the war as Canadian overseas activity increased — began to function immediately.

During the first days of December, at various points across Canada, the units of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division were entraining for Halifax. In contrast to the procedure followed in 1914, when the whole of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division of that day was transported overseas in a single great convoy, it was now considered desirable to lessen the risks of transit by dispatching the force in groups of between 7000 and 8000 men. The "First Flight", which amounted to about 7400 all ranks at embarkation,

was carried in five ships, the "Aquitania", the "Duchess of Bedford", the "Empress of Britain", the "Empress of Australia", and the "Monarch of Bermuda". At this time these vessels still carried their peacetime fittings and the troops travelled in a degree of comfort unknown in later stages of the war, when liners had been stripped and one ship frequently carried as many men as crossed the Atlantic in the five large vessels of this first convoy.

The Admiralty had provided a powerful naval escort; it comprised the battle-cruiser "Repulse", the battleship "Resolution", the cruiser "Emerald", the aircraft-carrier "Furious", and, for the first stage of the voyage, six destroyers, of which four were Canadian. The convoy began to move out of Halifax Harbour at noon on 10 December. The passage was virtually uneventful (except for a collision in fog on the last day between the "Aquitania" and the S.S. "Samaria", which very luckily caused no serious damage to either vessel) and no sign of enemy activity was seen. On 16 December the convoy made rendezvous with twelve destroyers from the United Kingdom, and on the following morning the ships were passing up the River Clyde. "All along the narrow channel", wrote one unit diarist, "the Scots poked their heads out of windows and doors, waved flags and bunting, and shouted a welcome to us".

By noon the convoy had reached Greenock; and an official party including Mr. Anthony Eden, Secretary of State for the Dominions, and Mr. Vincent Massey, High Commissioner for Canada, came aboard the "Aquitania" (in which were General McNaughton and his Headquarters) to greet the Canadians. A message from His Majesty the King made them welcome. "The British Army", he wrote, "will be proud to have as comrades-in-arms the successors of those who came from Canada in the Great War and fought with a heroism that has never been forgotten". The troop trains were already pouring men into Aldershot when on 18 December Mr. Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, announced to the world that the Canadians had arrived.

The Second Flight, slightly larger than the first, was carried in seven ships. It sailed from Halifax on 22 December with an escort including two battleships — the British "Revenge" and the French "Dunkerque". Christmas was kept at sea, and the ships entered the Clyde on 30 December. Thus virtually the whole of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division was in the United Kingdom by the end of the year. The Third Flight, consisting mainly of ancillary and technical troops additional to the Division,<sup>3</sup> did not reach Scottish waters until 7 February, 1940. With its arrival the first programme for the despatch of Canadian troops overseas

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<sup>3</sup> These included some units provided as the result of a British request and originally intended for service in British formations pending the possible organization of a Canadian corps. In the event, they served under Canadian command throughout.



was complete. On 21 February the strength of the Canadian Active Service Force in Britain was 1066 officers and 22,238 other ranks.

The Canadians in 1939 were more fortunate than their predecessors of 1914: they escaped the miseries — now a part of national legend — of a winter under canvas on Salisbury Plain. Nevertheless, although they spent them in the permanent barracks of Aldershot, their first months in the United Kingdom were quite sufficiently disagreeable. In the opening days of January, 1940, “Britain experienced the coldest conditions since 1894”. In many places the thermometer fell to zero (and the visitors discovered that that temperature in England was as trying as much lower ones in their own country). No English buildings, and certainly not the Aldershot barracks, were designed for such conditions; and this abnormally severe winter of 1939-40 the first of a series of cold war winters — brought the Canadians no little discomfort.

To make matters worse from the point of view of morale, the war was in the doldrums. Poland had been beaten down in a brief campaign without her allies being able to give her any effective aid; the Western Front was static, the combatants watching each other from their fortifications and waiting for the spring; the anticipated air attacks on Britain had not materialized, not a single bomb having yet been dropped on the British mainland; it was the period of “the phony war”. The peaceful appearance of affairs was deceptive, as events in April and May would amply show; but in the meantime it had its effect on men’s minds, and neither Canadians nor Englishmen had yet formed an accurate estimate of the desperate nature of the crisis. Although the Canadians received much hospitality in and around Aldershot, the people of that area were in general too well accustomed to the presence of soldiers to make much of any newly-arrived formation, whatever its origin; and taking all the circumstances of the time into account it is not surprising that the Canadians, fresh from their homes and as yet unused to the discomforts of military life, sometimes became unduly sorry for themselves. “Boredom, homesickness and a feeling of not being really needed”, was one observer’s explanation for the grumbling that was chronic among the men that winter.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Division when it arrived in Britain had had only elementary training (it was estimated in advance, that four months’ further training would be required there) and was very incompletely equipped for modern war. The men, it is true, had personal equipment, including rifles and respirators, but not including steel helmets. The infantry had light machine-guns; but they were Lewis guns — a type at best obsolescent. These were gradually replaced with Brens from British sources. (A contract for 7000 Bren guns which had been placed in Canada in 1938 had not yet had time to produce results.) A considerable number of

artillery pieces were brought from Canada with the Second Flight, but these were the 18-pounders of the last war or other obsolescent guns of heavier types. Replacing them with 25-pounder and 5.5-inch gun-howitzers proved a very slow process. The provision of transport also turned out to be difficult, but in March of 1940 the first vehicles from Canadian factories began to reach the units in England.

As soon as the Division had settled down in Aldershot vigorous training began. It continued through the winter, somewhat hampered however by the severe weather and by shortage of modern equipment. Unit collective training commenced in March, and the battalions contrived fairly realistic exercises in spite of the dearth of transport. But before the programme could be completed it was interrupted by the impact of tremendous events on the continent.

It had been universally assumed that the Canadians would go into action as part of the British Expeditionary Force which was now deployed on the Franco-Belgian frontier; and in January both the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division and the Canadian ancillary units were tentatively allotted to the 4<sup>th</sup> British Corps, which was expected to join General Lord Gort's command in France early in the summer of 1940. On 25 January, however, the Canadian Prime Minister announced in the House of Commons that the Government proposed to send a second division overseas "as soon as may be possible". This inevitably suggested the possibility of forming a Canadian Corps at a comparatively early date, and preliminary discussions with such a development in view were accordingly undertaken overseas. The Canadian Government did not at once authorize this further expansion, which involved providing some 8000 more Corps Troops. After discussion, however, the Cabinet early in April approved an arrangement by which, pending the organization of a higher Canadian headquarters, the 1<sup>st</sup> Division and the ancillary troops would constitute together a self-contained Canadian formation directly under G.H.Q. in France.

#### ALARUMS AND EXCURSIONS: NORWAY

On 9 April 1940 the "strange and unnatural calm" in Western Europe was rudely disturbed by dramatic events in Scandinavia. On that day the Germans, without diplomatic preliminaries of any kind, made an utterly unprovoked attack upon two weak neutral states. Carrying out this piratical enterprise with all their customary skill in aggression, they overran Denmark completely in a few hours and in a scarcely longer period obtained so firm a grip on Norway that they were evicted thence only after the general collapse of their European system in the spring of 1945. In the face of gallant and not wholly ineffective Norwegian resistance they seized Oslo, Bergen, Trondhjem and Narvik at the very

outset, and thus placed themselves in possession of the keys of King Haakon's kingdom.

Although limited military preparations had been made in Britain at the beginning of April with an eye to the possibility of a request from Norway for intervention, the British authorities had neither appropriate plans nor adequate forces ready for the northern campaign thus suddenly forced upon them, and they were compelled to improvise as best they could. As finally settled, their campaign plan envisaged two main military operations, directed towards the recovery of the ports of Trondhjem and Narvik. The Trondhjem enterprise was the more important of the two, since this centrally-situated port controlled the communications which held out the hope of effectively supporting the Norwegian resistance. The plan for assailing it comprehended diversionary landings at the little ports of Namsos to the north and Andalsnes to the south, followed by a frontal attack upon Trondhjem itself.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division, General Crerar<sup>4</sup> recorded on 8 April, was now the "most forward" division in the United Kingdom in both training and equipment. It was thus natural that in this crisis the War Office should turn to the Canadians; and on 16 April they were asked to help, "in view of lack of other trained troops". It was proposed that they should share the honour and the peril of the Trondhjem frontal attack, providing the infantry parties (eight detachments of 100 men each) which were to land from destroyers and silence the forts of Trondhjem Fjord, clearing the way for two battalions of the Guards, supported by French Chasseurs Alpins, who would push through to occupy the vital Trondhjem aerodrome. An immediate decision was necessary. General McNaughton at once agreed to cooperate, and set about organizing the force required for this desperate venture. As finally constituted it consisted not of 800 men but of 1300, commanded by Colonel E. W. Sansom and composed in the main of two units of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade — Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry and the Edmonton Regiment.<sup>5</sup>

The Canadian assault force left Aldershot on the evening of 18 April and arrived next day at the Scottish port of Dunfermline, where it was intended that it should embark. But it did not embark. The plan had been changed — chiefly, it would appear, as a result of a revised estimate of German strength, and particularly air strength, in the Trondhjem area. On 26 April Colonel Sansom's men were back at Aldershot. The frontal attack on Trondhjem was never made; the diversionary attacks had been delivered but were not successful. Narvik was ultimately taken too late to affect the campaign as a whole, and had

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<sup>4</sup> Brigadier Crerar was promoted Major-General as of 15 January 1940.

<sup>5</sup> Now The Loyal Edmonton Regiment.

to be relinquished again. By early June all Allied troops had been evacuated from Norway. For the Allied cause, the campaign there had been the first of a series of disasters; for the Canadians in particular, it was the first in a singular succession of disappointments and frustrations. The second was not far behind.

### ALARUMS AND EXCURSIONS: DUNKIRK

Before the Canadians could take their allotted place in the British Expeditionary Force in France, that, quiescent front suddenly flamed into violent activity and the B.E.F. became involved in an Allied *débâcle* far worse than that of Norway.

On the morning of 10 May 1940 the Germans assailed two more unoffending neutral countries with the same lack of scruple and the same brutal efficiency which they had displayed in the case of Denmark and Norway. The French had never really extended the great Maginot Line fortifications facing Germany to cover the Belgian frontier; though the weak existing defences there had been materially improved during the past winter. Now Hitler's armies poured into both the Netherlands and Belgium in a well-calculated attempt to outflank the Maginot works. As soon as the German move was clear the British and French forces lining the Belgian frontier left their fortified positions and advanced into Belgium in a great wheel pivoting on the region of Sedan.

The result was disaster. Nothing could be done for Holland; the Dutch Army surrendered on 15 May, and the Dutch Government took refuge in England. Simultaneously the whole Allied position in Belgium was imperilled by rapid German penetration across the Meuse to the south. The Sedan pivot was smashed and a great bulge created in the Allied line. The British and French armies in Belgium were ordered to fall back, and did so. It proved impossible, however, to prevent the Allied forces being cut in two. By 20 May the Germans were in Amiens; by the 21<sup>st</sup> an armoured spearhead had reached the Channel coast near Abbeville. The British, Belgian and First French Armies were isolated in the north; and the British, now back in roughly their original positions on the Franco-Belgian frontier, were in imminent danger of having their communications with England wholly severed as the German scythe-blade swept up the Channel coast.

At this point the possibility of employing the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division, or a portion of it, as part of an effort to restore the situation, came to the fore in London. On 23 May General McNaughton was called to the War Office and told by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (General Sir Edmund Ironside) that it was proposed to dispatch him to France to restore the threatened communications of the B.E.F. The object was to "re-establish the road and, railway line through Hazebrouck and

Armentières"; the new line of communication would be opened through Calais if possible or, failing Calais, through Dunkirk. General McNaughton was to take command of all troops in the area, including a brigade group which had just been sent from England to Calais; and it was intended to reinforce him with one brigade from his own Division, followed by a second if this seemed desirable.

In the course of the same day all arrangements were completed for the movement of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, commanded by Brigadier Armand A. Smith and composed of the Royal Canadian Regiment, the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment, and the 48<sup>th</sup> Highlanders of Canada, with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Field Regiment Royal Canadian Artillery, two anti-tank batteries and some engineers attached. In the early hours of 24 May these units began to arrive in Dover by rail; by eleven o'clock the first flight of the Brigade was embarked and ready to sail. But it did not sail.

On the evening of 23 May General McNaughton, accompanied by his senior general staff officer, Colonel G. R. Turner, and a small party of officers and men, had left Dover in H.M. destroyer "Verity" to see for himself the situation in the French Channel ports and to form opinions as to what could or should usefully be done there. He went first to Calais and spent two hours there interviewing British and French officers and gathering information; then the "Verity" carried him on to Dunkirk (being several times attacked by enemy aircraft on the way). Here he met Admirals Leclerc and Abrial and General Fagalde and was able to establish that the enemy was now astride the road between Calais and Dunkirk and that the prospect of re-opening it seemed remote. It was very clear also that the general situation in the area was entirely chaotic and that communications of every sort were uncertain and unreliable. At eleven a.m. on the 24<sup>th</sup> General McNaughton and his party re-embarked in the "Verity". What he had seen and heard had produced in his mind the conviction that the Dunkirk area was already quite sufficiently congested; what the troops there needed was not reinforcement but organization.

Before five p.m. he was again in Ironside's room at the War Office, conferring with the principal officers of the War Office and General Crerar. This conference was followed immediately by another attended by the new Prime Minister (Mr. Churchill), the heads of the three British defence departments and the Chiefs of Staff. General McNaughton reported at length. No final decision as to sending troops to Dunkirk was taken; but it was agreed that this should not be done for the moment, and orders were sent for the units at Dover to disembark and return to Aldershot. It was a bitter pill for the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade.

By 26 May the Belgian army was weakening under the weight of the very heavy German attacks and Lord Gort was forced to undertake a

withdrawal to the coast and evacuation through Dunkirk. On the previous day he had already inquired of the War Office whether a Canadian brigade could be dispatched "to provide a nucleus of fresh and well trained troops on the bridgehead position". The result, shortly after midnight on the night of 25-26 May, was orders for the same Canadian troops designated on the 23<sup>rd</sup> to be ready to move the following night.

During the 26<sup>th</sup> the project was fully discussed at the War Office. Both McNaughton and Crerar were convinced that it was militarily unsound; but the former made it clear that if higher authority thought the expedition desirable he was quite prepared to undertake it. Major-General R. H. Dewing, the Director of Military Operations and Plans, was strongly opposed to the scheme on the grounds that "it would be throwing good material into a quicksand which is already on the way to engulfing far too much" and would imperil troops who might be badly needed shortly for the defence of England. General Sir John Dill, Vice Chief of the Imperial General Staff, was of the same opinion; but the plan had been approved by the War Cabinet, and it was necessary to seek the concurrence of Mr. Churchill before "Angel Move", as it was called, was cancelled. Even then, the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade's transport was left loaded at Aldershot and the units remained on eight hours' notice. And on 27 May the scheme was revived a second time; McNaughton and Crerar agreed upon a revised composition for the force, with a view to committing as few men as possible to what more and more appeared to them a useless sacrifice; but in the afternoon "Angel Move" was finally abandoned.

The same day the King of the Belgians asked the Germans for an armistice. The evacuation of the B.E.F. through Dunkirk was now beginning. During the next week some 338,000 British and Allied soldiers were successfully withdrawn, though virtually all their heavy equipment had to be left behind. While these great events were taking place the Canadians in Britain were not idle. It was now quite possible that Hitler might attempt an immediate invasion of the United Kingdom; as Mr. Churchill said on 4 June, "We must expect another blow to be struck almost immediately at us or at France". General McNaughton, strongly of the opinion that the direct defence of the United Kingdom was now the Canadians' paramount task, had taken steps, on 25 May, to organize them for it in a new manner. The 1<sup>st</sup> Division and the ancillary troops were to form *four* self-contained brigade or equivalent groups, capable in turn of being broken down into battalion groups constituting flying columns of all arms. The object was to turn the Canadian force into a "highly mobile, quick acting, hard hitting reserve"; and General McNaughton suggested that it should move to a central area from which it could strike at an invader crossing any portion of the coast. G.H.Q. Home Forces agreed; the War Office found additional transport for the Canadians; on 27 May they were ordered to an assembly area in the

vicinity of Northampton; and on 29 May the whole body, including both the Division and the ancillary troops, was formally constituted as a self-contained organization known as "Canadian Force". The same night the move from Aldershot to Northampton began.

The people of Northampton and the neighbouring towns gave the arriving Canadians a great welcome — a welcome that many of them have never forgotten; but they were not allowed to linger long in this pleasant area. The enemy had no immediate intention of attacking England. The destruction of the surviving armies of France was now his object, and on 5 June he assailed General Weygand's line on a broad front. It was the policy of the British Government to sustain the French at almost any cost; and on this same day, accordingly, the War Cabinet took the bold resolve to form a "Second B.E.F." and dispatch to the continent every division fit to move. Two British divisions — the 51<sup>st</sup> (Highland) and the 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured, neither of which had joined Gort's army before it was cut off in the north — were still on French soil and fighting under Weygand. The only ones in Britain ready for immediate action were the 52<sup>nd</sup> (Lowland) and the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian; and it was now proposed to send these to France immediately, with the 3<sup>rd</sup> British Division (then reequipping and reinforcing at top speed after its return from Dunkirk) following as soon as possible. The whole British force — a "forlorn hope" if ever there was one — was to be commanded by Lieutenant-General Sir Alan Brooke.

On 6 June the Canadians were ordered back from Northampton to Aldershot. By 8 June the move had been completed, and that day, in glorious weather, units of the Division were inspected by Their Majesties the King and Queen. The significance of this visit was not lost upon the troops; they rightly interpreted it as presaging a trip to the fields across the Channel where in these bright summer days the Third French Republic was fighting its last desperate battle.

### TO FRANCE AFTER DUNKIRK

The 52<sup>nd</sup> Division and the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division were to move to France in that order. Brigadier Smith's 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Brigade Group, which had suffered such bitter disappointment at the time of the "Dover Dash", was to form the first flight of the Canadian movement; and its advanced parties left Aldershot on the evening of 8 June. Vehicles and the men accompanying them were embarked at Falmouth, while parties travelling by rail moved through Plymouth. The leading vehicle parties disembarked at Brest on 12 June, but the main body of the Brigade began landing there only in the early morning of the 14<sup>th</sup>. In the meantime General McNaughton had set up his Advanced Divisional Headquarters at Plymouth. He planned to move to France on the evening of the 14<sup>th</sup>, and

expected to find his advanced units assembled close to Brest.

It is not, perhaps, wholly surprising that subsequent events indicate that all parties concerned were not fully clear or fully in agreement as to the proposed operational role of the Canadians. A great State, its armies defeated and its leaders hopelessly divided among themselves, was tottering tragically to its fall; an alliance that had seemed the hope of mankind was breaking asunder; and in such conditions it is extremely difficult either to make firm operational plans or to ensure that the plans when adopted are known, understood and acted upon by all those concerned with them across a broad theatre of war.

The Canadians, however, were fairly definite in their own minds as to their immediate role, partly because General Brooke had visited Aldershot and discussed the matter with McNaughton. A draft divisional Operation Instruction (prepared with a view to distribution after the Division had arrived in France, but, as things turned out, never issued) records their commander's understanding of the situation and defines their task as follows: with the other forces of Brooke's command, they were to "threaten", from a general line running across the base of the Brittany peninsula through Rennes, the flank of any German advance south-westwards towards Nantes, and relieve pressure on the French by drawing German forces westward. The Canadian units, landing at Brest, were to assemble "north-east of the port".

The plan thus sketched is obviously related, though in a somewhat indefinite manner, to a project which was under discussion within the dissolving French government, and between French and British leaders, in these days: the possible defence of a "redoubt" in Brittany. The scheme came to nothing; it was rejected, not only by the defeatist politicians who were now in the act of seizing control in France, but also by competent soldiers of both nations who pointed out that there were no longer enough well-organized troops available to make it practicable. And so far as the Canadians were concerned, their expectation as to their role was not realized in any single detail. Only the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade Group got to France; and that group, instead of moving, as General McNaughton had expected, to an assembly area close to Brest to await the rest of the Division, was immediately sent forward deep into the interior-for the authorities on the Lines of Communication who were now in control of the movement had not received such instructions as the Canadians had been led to expect. The British Headquarters at Brest had been ordered merely to carry out the same routine followed in the movement of the original B.E.F. to France in 1939, and the Canadian units were sent to the same assembly area-about Laval and Le Mans-which had then been used. This area, roughly halfway between Brest and Paris, was now becoming decidedly exposed. In accordance with these orders, the road parties were sent



forward from Brest in little groups of vehicles moving independently; the rail parties were put on trains which carried them rapidly inland.

As a result, the Canadian troops, by the night of 14-15 June, were extraordinarily scattered. A large part of the Division was in Aldershot preparing to move (one Engineer unit in fact was still back at Northampton); other elements were at Plymouth and Falmouth, embarked or preparing to embark; still others were at Brest or scattered along the roads between there and Le Mans; the 1<sup>st</sup> Field Regiment, R.C.H.A, was in billets at Parc  in the assembly area; and three trains — carrying, respectively, the Headquarters of the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade with the 48<sup>th</sup> Highlanders, the Royal Canadian Regiment, and the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment — were approaching that area.

By this time, however, it had been decided to cancel the whole movement. Early on the 14<sup>th</sup> the Germans entered undefended Paris. The same morning General Brooke, who had set up at Le Mans his extremely rudimentary headquarters (one of his staff said later that they had “not even a typewriter”), discussed the situation with Generals Weygand and Georges. It was quite apparent from these conferences that the French Army was falling into a “general state of disintegration”. Brooke therefore at once recommended to the War Office that all movement of British forces to France should be stopped, and arrangements made for evacuation. That afternoon orders arrived from London for the withdrawal to England of all parts of the B.E.F. not actually fighting under French orders.

To reverse the movement of troops still in England, or on shipboard at Plymouth, or even Brest, and turn them back towards Aldershot, was a simple matter; to extricate the units in France was not quite so easy. Lt.-Col. J. H. Roberts, commanding the 1<sup>st</sup> Field Regiment, got the news in the early morning of the 15<sup>th</sup> and incidentally received confirmation of the order from General Brooke himself in a chance meeting. The Hastings train was turned about at Laval, that of the R.C.R. near (it appears) Chiteaubriant. These units were re-embarked at Brest and arrived safely at Plymouth early on the 17<sup>th</sup>. Somewhat more exciting was the experience of Brigadier Smith’s headquarters and the 48<sup>th</sup> Highlanders. The train carrying them had reached its destination at Sabl -sur-Sarthe before the reversal order was received. It came from the mouth of a Railway Traffic Officer whom the Canadians at first suspected of being a “fifth columnist” but who identified himself satisfactorily. The train, after some delay and some argument with the engine-driver, pulled out of Sabl  pointed back towards Brest, with officers and men of the 48<sup>th</sup> riding the engine as an emergency crew and two men with tommy guns on the tender “to look after the recalcitrant engineer or any person trying to stop the train”.

With all possible preparations made for defence, and every carriage bristling with assorted weapons, the train rolled on through the countryside, a little moving island of Canadian territory, with the French Republic dissolving into ruin all about it. At Rennes a mistake was made in routing — with the result that the train ended up not at Brest but at St. Malo. Such an error might have been fatal; but by very good luck there was a British transport alongside the quay. She took the Canadians aboard, sailed, much overloaded, on the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup>, and reached Southampton that afternoon. Luck, indeed, had been with the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade. It is a remarkable fact, in view of the conditions then existing in France, that only six Canadians were left behind across the Channel. One was dead, having been killed in a motorcycle accident. Four were interned in France by the Germans or the French Vichy government, but succeeded in escaping and made their way back to England during 1941. The sixth man remained a prisoner of war until the end of hostilities.

With respect to transport the story was less happy. The authorities at Brest had been ordered to destroy vehicles and equipment that could not be loaded; and Canadian reports indicate that in fact very little was allowed to be loaded. The officers in control on the Lines of Communication were evidently fearful that attempts to save material might interfere with the saving of men. So the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade lost the vehicles that had been so slowly and painfully collected, most of which had only lately been issued. A total of 216 Canadian vehicles was lost; only one is known to have been saved — a station wagon which the Hastings and Prince Edward managed to embark on a trawler.

Equipment, as distinct from transport, was almost entirely lost save for personal weapons. There was, however, one very notable exception: the 1<sup>st</sup> Field Regiment brought back its guns. Its War Diary tells how Lt.-Col. Roberts went to Headquarters, Brest Garrison, and “fought hard for nearly two hours to save the guns”. The order to destroy them was twice given; but the Garrison Commandant (an ex-cadet of R.M.C., Kingston) finally obtained from the G.O.C., Lines of Communication, permission to proceed with loading. Lt.-Col. Roberts was given two hours to put aboard ship as many guns as he could. In that time he embarked all his own and in addition a dozen light anti-aircraft guns and a number of special vehicles belonging to British units. Thus a not unimportant group of weapons was saved for the protection of England.

All these developments in France had been quite unknown to General McNaughton at Plymouth. His first intimation that the movement had been reversed was word that Movement Control had ordered the Toronto Scottish (who were on shipboard waiting to sail) to disembark. He then telephoned the War Office and was told by General Dewing that his troops were needed for “another battlefield”. Speaking

over an open line, Dewing could not particularize further; but he meant that the task now was the defence of Britain.

On 21 June General Dill, who had become Chief of the Imperial General Staff, wrote to his friend McNaughton a characteristic letter:

My dear Andy,

I cannot tell you how much I regret all the disappointments you have had. It was with many misgivings that I saw you start for France, and yet while there was a hope that the French Army might still succeed we felt that they ought to have the best the Empire could give. I do hope that you won't think that it was wrong of us. Then when it was quite clear that the French Army was ceasing to offer any effective resistance we came to the conclusion that it would be a crime to let you enter the cauldron. Even you and the Canadian Division could not have saved the situation.

It is all rather a sorry tale but I am sure in the circumstances you will realise what our difficulties were and will forgive us for all the inconvenience you have been caused.

Yours ever,

JACK DILL.

Writing in reply some days later, General McNaughton mentioned his own chagrin at the failure to concentrate the Division close to Brest and at the loss of transport, which he called "very bitter medicine". His letter concluded:

We are now squarely set for what I have long thought was the important task, the defence of these islands. Two out of three of our Brigade Groups and our reserve of Artillery, Engineers, Machine Gun Battalions, etc., all on wheels, are poised to go in any direction and you and the C.-in-C. can count on a quick moving, hard hitting, determined force which will be prompt to execute your orders.

There are many lessons to be learned from our experience and sometime I hope we may go over them together but, meanwhile, we have other work to do and you can be sure that we stand with you with all our hearts.

## CHAPTER II

### ON GUARD IN BRITAIN, 1940-1941

#### AFTER THE FALL OF FRANCE

On 18 June, the day after the French asked the Germans for an armistice, Mr. Churchill delivered in the British House of Commons one of the greatest and bravest of his war speeches. He said:

What General Weygand called the "Battle of Rance" is over. I expect that the battle of Britain is about to begin. Upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilisation. Upon it depends our own British life and the long continuity of our institutions and our Empire. The whole fury and might of the enemy must very soon be turned on us. Hitler knows that he will have to break us in this island or lose the war. If we can stand up to him, all Europe may be free and the life of the world may move forward into broad, sunlit uplands. But if we fail, then the whole world, including the United States, including all that we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new Dark Age made more sinister, and perhaps more protracted, by the lights of a perverted science. Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, "This was their finest hour".

There was need for courage. Britain's military position was well-nigh desperate. The last effort to save France had left it even worse than it had been immediately after Dunkirk. The 52<sup>nd</sup> Division had been extricated, but (like the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade) only with the loss of most of its transport and equipment, which left it temporarily almost useless. The same was true of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Division. Since the formations of the original B.E.F. were far from recovered from Dunkirk, the Canadian force (save for those units of it that had reached France and lost their transport there) was now, in point of training and equipment combined, the strongest element in a very weak fabric. Its closest competitor was Major-General B. L. Montgomery's 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, the most forward of the Dunkirk divisions, which it had been intended should follow the Canadians to France. As, however, this formation's War Diary had recorded that its strength on 6 June was only 4500, it still cannot have been in first-rate condition a fortnight later.

In these circumstances, "Canadian Force" was reconstituted as a self-contained formation on 20 June; and on the 23<sup>rd</sup> it began to move from Aldershot to a new "position of readiness" in the Oxford area, from which, in its role of mobile reserve directly under G.H.Q. Home Forces, it could strike effectively in any required direction. The force was again organized in brigade and battalion groups constituting mobile

columns capable of rapid and flexible action (an organization which was now imitated by the other divisions under Home Forces). General McNaughton set up his Advanced Headquarters on storied Shotover Hill, just outside Oxford. He had with him only two of his three brigade groups (the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, immobilized by the loss of its vehicles, remained in Aldershot until it could be re-equipped); but the ancillary troops (including three artillery regiments) formed an additional "reserve" group; and the whole force lay in the pleasant fields of Oxfordshire, reconnoitring routes to likely points of attack, and waiting for the word. Their commander described them as "a mobile reserve with a 360-degree front", which might have to operate "anywhere in Great Britain from the south coast to Scotland, or in Wales It was no inconsiderable responsibility.

Their stay in the Oxford area was short. As British formations improved in organization and equipment, it became possible to plan for one two-division mobile corps north of the Thames and a similar one south of the river. The latter was to be composed of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian and 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Divisions; and on 2 July the Canadians broke camp and moved south-eastwards into Surrey. Their new position of readiness was the agreeable region of the North Downs. Here, in the Guildford-Reigate-Sevenoaks area, just south of the great metropolitan mass of London, they spent the next few months.

### THE 7<sup>th</sup> CORPS AND THE INVASION SUMMER

The new Corps was not to be Canadian, but it was Anglo-Canadian. On 7 July the C.-in-C. Home Forces formally sought authority from the War Office for the formation of the 7<sup>th</sup> Corps, to be commanded by Major-General A. G. L. McNaughton with the rank of Lieutenant-General. The Canadian Government concurred in this arrangement, and the Corps came into being on 21 July. General McNaughton set up his headquarters at Headley Court, a rambling but impressive Victorian mansion on the outskirts of Leatherhead, which was to house the senior Canadian field headquarters through almost the whole period until the First Canadian Army moved to France in 1944. His staff was partly British and partly Canadian. And the Corps in its composition was even more broadly imperial; for in addition to the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division (now commanded by Major-General G. R. Pearkes, V.C.) and Major-General Roger Evans' 1<sup>st</sup> British Armoured. Division, it included the New Zealand Force (the greater part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> New Zealand Division) commanded by Major-General Bernard Freyberg, V.C. The Corps Troops consisted of the Canadian ancillary troops reinforced by numerous British units.

The summer of 1940 was lovely but ominous; and in England it was a time of anxious expectation and feverish activity. The invasion of

Britain was the logical military sequel to the German victory in France; and the immediate means for combatting such an invasion were so slender that unlimited courage, ingenuity and effort were required to improve and supplement them. Nor were these qualities lacking that summer, — among the indefatigable but almost unarmed Local Defence Volunteers who later became the Home Guard; among the factory workers who laboured at their lathes until they were ready to drop, making arms to replace those lost in France; among the local authorities who busied themselves with removing road-signs, obstructing possible landing-grounds and warning the citizens against fifth-columnists and the effects of careless talk; among those indomitable matrons who wrote to the War Office demanding hand grenades. And certainly there was no lack of activity in the regular services — the men who fought the enemy in the clear skies over Kent, who patrolled the waters of the North Sea and the Channel, or who prepared to meet on the ground in England such German soldiers as might get past the Navy and the R.A.F.

Not the least busy were the men of the 7<sup>th</sup> Corps. Training was intensive, and in exercises special emphasis was laid on practising brigade and battalion groups in rapid movement by road, and on co-operation of ground forces with aircraft and of infantry with tanks. Reconnaissance squadrons, equipped as a stopgap measure with motorcycle combinations, had been organized to increase the mobility of the Canadian formations; they were designed to operate on the front, flanks and rear of fast-moving columns. The Corps Commander and officers of his staff made constant trips to acquaint themselves with those parts of England over which they might have to fight. And Canadian engineers were active in constructing defences at many points and improving road communications for military purposes; Canadian artillerymen, organized into two Super-Heavy Batteries, manned 9.2-inch guns on railway mountings on the Kentish coast; and much experimentation was carried on in novel and special methods of warfare.

While these things went on in Southern England, the first phase of the invasion battle was actually being fought out overhead. The sudden collapse of France had found the Germans unprepared for an immediate attack upon England; shipping had not been gathered, and the German military forces were not appropriately grouped or trained for the task. Hitler, moreover, seems to have been uncertain in his own mind as to the next step, and senior German officers believe that he continued to cling to the idea that he could make a satisfactory arrangement with Britain without invading her. On 16 July he issued a belated directive whose terms give colour to this theory: "Since England, in spite of her militarily hopeless situation, shows no signs of coming to terms, I have decided to prepare a landing operation against England and, if necessary, to carry it out". Preparations were now pushed forward rapidly,

and were visible to our air reconnaissance. Vessels were collected; troops practised amphibious operations all along the coast; airfields in Northern France and the Low Countries were enlarged and multiplied; and heavy batteries were constructed on the Straits of Dover. As late as the first week of August, activity seen on the continental coasts was still not such as to indicate "a serious threat" of immediate invasion; but on the 8<sup>th</sup> of the month the German began heavy bombing attacks upon England. Another portent was the beginning of cross-Channel shelling on the 12<sup>th</sup>. These things were pretty clearly the prelude to the main operation.

### THE AIR BATTLE OF BRITAIN

Relatively small,<sup>1</sup> incompletely organized and ill-armed as the military force in Britain was, it was nevertheless in one sense the crux of the Germans' problem. They knew how hard it would fight; and its existence meant that the island could be successfully invaded only by an army which *on arrival on British soil* was strong enough to engage and beat it. Britain still had very formidable sea and air forces ready for action against any cross-Channel movement. The Germans' own navy was weak, and they had just one instrument which could possibly ensure such movement against disaster: their powerful air weapon. Now, accordingly, they threw the Luftwaffe into a great preliminary offensive designed to clear the way. During July there were attacks on Channel convoys intended to bring the R.A.F. to battle.<sup>2</sup> For ten days after 8 August, when strong raids on land objectives began, shipping, naval bases and ports were the targets; then the attack was switched to the inland fighter aerodromes in southern and south-eastern England. The enemy's offensive was met by the R.A.F. Fighter Command with magnificent skill and courage. In the skies above the southern counties the Germans sustained a series of great defeats, losing far more aircraft than the defenders: on 15 August, for instance, they lost 76 against 34 of ours.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, despite this disparity, the situation of the R.A.F. was far from satisfactory. Its resources in planes and pilots were severely taxed; an injured pilot or a damaged aircraft were as much out

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<sup>1</sup> The force in Great Britain and Northern Ireland in August 1940 amounted to 28 Divisions (two of them Armoured) plus seven Anti-Aircraft Divisions and a large number of independent brigades of various types.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Dowding, then C.-in-C. Fighter Command, considers that the Battle of Britain may be said to have begun on 10 July. A directive from Hitler's headquarters dated 1 August refers to "the air offensive against Britain, scheduled to begin on approximately August 5".

<sup>3</sup> Examination of German documents has indicated that at the height of the battle the R.A.F. over-estimated the enemy's losses. From 24 August to 6 September, for instance, the estimate was 643 aircraft destroyed; the actual number was 378, plus 115 damaged. (The Germans at the time admitted the loss of 243.)

of the battle, for the moment, as if the man were dead or the machine destroyed; and there were many injured pilots and damaged aircraft.

South of London the Canadians waited, watching the twisting white vapour-trails that marked the manoeuvres of the combatants “grappling in the central blue”, and momentarily expecting the call to action. By the end of August military preparations for invasion were unmistakably apparent; on the 31<sup>st</sup> a 7<sup>th</sup> Corps Intelligence Summary noted “an advanced stage of land-preparedness for an expedition” and observed that an attempt might be made during the first half of September. The German Army was making ready to play its part. The German Air Force was very far from having obtained the success for which it had hoped; nevertheless, it obstinately determined to initiate the third phase of its plan in spite of the relative failure of: the first two. On the lovely afternoon of Saturday, 7 September, it began the assault upon the British capital which had evidently been planned as the culminating stage of the air offensive. It was London’s one really damaging daylight attack. Early that evening, while the fires still raged in the city, G.H.Q. Home Forces sent out the code word “Cromwell”, signifying “invasion imminent” and bringing the defending armies in Southern and Eastern England to the final stage of alert. Next day the 7<sup>th</sup> Corps was placed on four hours’ notice to move, with the units “standing to” at dusk and dawn. These were exciting nights, full of alarms and rumours, when roadblocks were manned and sentries kept their fingers on the trigger, and no Canadian doubted that “the real thing” was just around the corner.

The middle of September brought the height of anxiety. The ports across the Straits of Dover were crammed with shipping. Mr. Churchill told the secret session of the Commons on 17 September that “upwards of 1700 self-propelled barges and more than 200 sea-going ships” could be seen. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month the Luftwaffe made one of its greatest efforts. The result was another heavy defeat: 56 aircraft destroyed against only 25 of the defenders’. This, plus effective R.A.F. blows at his barges, helped the enemy decide not to attempt invasion.<sup>4</sup> By 21 September his shipping was observed to be moving away from the Channel; and before the end of the month it was fairly clear that the immediate crisis was over. It is now known that the Germans had ordered the dispersal of shipping on 19 September. General Gunther

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<sup>4</sup> Hitler could never face quite squarely this question of invading Britain: the prospect always alarmed him. Invasion was not part of his original plan for the 1940 campaign, which is summarized in the following terms in German naval records dated 25 November 1939: “By means of offensive action in the west and an advance into the area of the French *Channel coast*, we must seek to obtain favourable strategic bases for an offensive war against Britain by submarines, mines and aircraft”. On 19 January 1941 Hitler told Mussolini and Ciano that, in the matter of invading Britain, “we are in the position of a man with only one round left in his rifle; if he misses, the situation is worse than before.”



Blumentritt, who then and later was one of Rundstedt's senior staff officers, claims that although Rundstedt was to direct the operation no one at his headquarters had taken it very seriously. It may well have been a political rather than a military project. But if Hitler's aim was to frighten Britain into submission, the project was a notable failure.

It is worth while to outline here the German operation plans as they appear in captured documents and in the evidence of German officers. After long uncertainty, D Day for the invasion (Operation "Sea Lion") was finally fixed at 21 September. On 14 September, however, it was decided not to attack on this date, but to continue preparations. On 17 September Hitler decided to postpone the operation indefinitely. On 12 October a formal directive advised that it would not take place before the spring. The plan had contemplated an attack on England in precisely that area which was the counter-attack responsibility of the 7<sup>th</sup> Corps. The Germans intended to land two armies, in the first instance, on the south coast from Margate to Portsmouth (the first bridgeheads were to be established between Folkestone and Worthing), and to advance northwards with a view to making good the line of the North Downs as a base for further operations. It was somewhat tentatively proposed to commit a third army subsequently, well to the west in the Lyme Regis area. Later phases were not planned in detail, for the Germans anticipated that the decisive battle would be fought before the North Downs were reached, and all further planning would depend upon its outcome. Had the invasion come to pass, the Canadians would thus have been in the forefront of the fight. As it was, they had suffered one more disappointment.

It has frequently been said that the Germans were guilty of a fundamental error of judgement in not attempting the invasion of England in 1940. Yet it can be argued that the decision not to do so in September was militarily sound. As we have seen, their air weapon was all they had to rely upon to open the way across the Channel, and it had been tried and had failed. The defending military forces in September were more formidable, alike in organization and equipment, than they had been in June; by the end of the month about 1000 tanks of all types were available. To attempt invasion, without established air superiority, in the face of the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force, could only mean that the military assault forces would be certain to suffer heavy losses during the sea passage and would arrive on the English beaches weakened and shaken and with their communications in the gravest danger. Under such conditions the enterprise would have been an invitation to disaster.

“ALL THE RIFLES OF CANADA”

Rear-Admiral Riiser-Larsen, who in 1940 was engaged in organizing the Norwegian air training scheme in Canada, once told how at that time he paid his first visit to the airport on Toronto Island which was soon to be "Little Norway". The gate was guarded by a sentry; and the sentry's weapon was a shotgun. At this sight the Admiral exclaimed, "Thank God!" A companion not unaturally inquired the reason for the exclamation. Riiser-Larsen replied, "All the rifles of Canada are on the way to England!"

The remark was almost literally true, for that summer Canada was pouring across the Atlantic, to strengthen the beleaguered fortress of Britain, virtually all her disposable resources — still, unfortunately, relatively slender — in both men and equipment. Among the weapons sent were 75,000 Ross rifles — arms which had been discarded by the Canadian military forces during the war of 1914-18. These rifles were in good order and were a welcome addition to the armament of the British Home Guard.<sup>5</sup>

On 10 May, the same day on which the Germans broke into the Low Countries, a telegram from Ottawa advised Canada House in London that a special meeting of the War Committee of the Canadian Cabinet had that day been considering the means of immediate further co-operation with the Government of the United Kingdom in the common cause. British suggestions were invited; and in the meantime the Canadian Ministers indicated certain immediate measures -naval, military and air — which they proposed to — take. Among those affecting the military forces were the decisions to accelerate the movement overseas of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division and to send a Canadian battalion to replace British troops in the West Indies. As a result of the latter decision, the Winnipeg Grenadiers disembarked in Jamaica on 20 June; the former produced a large augmentation of the Canadian force in the United Kingdom later in the summer.

As already noted, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division had been mobilized simultaneously with the 1<sup>st</sup>; but the latter, being slated for early service overseas, had received priority in almost everything. It had already been in the United Kingdom about a month when the decision to send the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division overseas also was announced in Ottawa. Not until 6 April 1940 was Major-General V. W. Odium, who had served with distinction in both the South African and Great Wars, appointed Inspector General of its units with a view to becoming General Officer Commanding in due course. And the complete concentration of the Division in the United

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<sup>5</sup> At this time a Canadian civilian who had once been a member of the University of Toronto Contingent, Canadian Officers Training Corps, was working in an aircraft equipment factory at Cheltenham, England. When the works formed a Home Guard unit, he joined it; and in due course, to his considerable astonishment, he was issued a Ross rifle bearing the mark of the U. of T. C.O.T.C.!

Kingdom was long delayed by some of its units being despatched for garrison duty in Iceland.

Iceland, which in German hands would have constituted a most dangerous threat to the vital seaway between North America and Britain, was occupied by small British forces in May 1940. Immediately after receiving the Canadian telegram of 10 May mentioned above, the British authorities suggested that Canada might assume the responsibility of garrisoning Iceland with troops other than those required for the Canadian field force. Ottawa in reply offered to provide and maintain an infantry brigade. The only troops immediately available, however, were those of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division. The first unit to arrive in Iceland was the Royal Regiment of Canada, which reached Reykjavik on 16 June, accompanied by the headquarters of the Canadian force ("Z" Force), which was commanded by Brigadier L. F. Page. The remainder of the force, consisting basically of Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal and a machine-gun battalion, the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa (M.G.), arrived on 7 July. The changed situation following the French collapse had led the British Government to the conclusion that it was desirable to strengthen the garrison of Iceland, and they would have been glad to see the whole of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division concentrated there. The Canadian Government felt, however, that in view of the uncertainty of the situation in the Pacific it was desirable, pending completion of the mobilization of new formations, to keep as large a proportion of this Division as possible in Canada unless there was a paramount need for it elsewhere; moreover, it was remarked that Canadian public opinion appeared unlikely to welcome the idea of Canadian forces being "permanently in garrison abroad". After further discussion it was agreed that the United Kingdom should provide troops to relieve the Canadians then in Iceland, and that the whole of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division should be concentrated in England.

The strength of the Canadian force in Iceland amounted to close to 2700 all ranks. They remained in the island until the autumn, suffering considerable discomfort from rain, wind and inadequate accommodation. The greater part of the force sailed for England on 31 October; only the Camerons stayed in Iceland through the winter. This unit was now destined for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division.

In these circumstances the assembly of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division in Britain was a lengthy process. Its first unit to reach there was the 2<sup>nd</sup> Field Company, R.C.E., which disembarked on 22 May 1940; the first infantry units and Divisional Headquarters formed part of the Fifth Flight of Canadian troops, which reached the Clyde on 1 August; the main body arrived on 4 September with the Seventh Flight; and the last two infantry battalions came to the United Kingdom only with the Eighth Flight on Christmas Day.

Beginning late in October, parts of the Canadian force assumed a

new role in the defence of England: the actual guarding of the beaches. The three brigades of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division and two of the 2<sup>nd</sup> successively held for three-week periods, under the 12<sup>th</sup> British Corps, the sector of the Sussex coast between Worthing and Newhaven. Their function was to guard against the possibility of reconnaissance raids by the enemy. No such raids materialized, however, and the episode served merely to alleviate the monotony of the garrison role in Surrey and Hampshire and to introduce the Canadians to a county with which they were subsequently to become identified in a very special manner.

### THE CANADIAN CORPS

The passing of the invasion crisis in the autumn of 1940, and the completion of the concentration of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division in the United Kingdom, made possible a basic change in organization: the replacement of the Anglo-Canadian 7<sup>th</sup> Corps by a Canadian Corps. The necessary arrangements having been made between the two governments, the 7<sup>th</sup> Corps officially ceased to exist on Christmas Day 1940. Simultaneously the Canadian Corps (later to be known as the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps) came into existence, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division (previously subject to his advice rather than his direction) came under Lieutenant-General McNaughton as Corps Commander.

The announcement by the Prime Minister on Christmas Eve that there was again to be a Canadian Corps was recognized as marking an epoch in the war effort of Canada. The phrase evoked memories, both proud and sorrowful, of the old Corps of 1915-1918, and of its sacrifices and its triumphs on a score of hard-fought battlefields. Even Canadians too young to remember that earlier war knew well the significance of these familiar words. The tradition which they embodied was to be part of the equipment of the new Corps, and of the Canadian Army that would come into existence in due course.

The headquarters organization of the 7<sup>th</sup> Corps was in general taken over by the new one; some British staff officers within it remained until they could be replaced by Canadians. Similarly, certain British units of Corps Troops would continue to serve the Corps until Canadian units could be provided to take their places. And the Canadian Corps inherited the tactical role of its predecessor: that of a counter-attack force in G.H.Q. Reserve<sup>6</sup> south of the Thames. The 1<sup>st</sup> Division and Corps Troops remained in Surrey; the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was in Aldershot, where it had moved, on its arrival, into the barracks lately vacated by the 1<sup>st</sup>. Aldershot was becoming an increasingly Canadian area; for the

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<sup>6</sup> That is, it was a reserve force not under any of the English Commands, but directly under G.H.Q. Home Forces.

Canadian Holding Units (later redesignated Reinforcement Units), created to accommodate and further train the quota of reinforcements which it was necessary to keep available to replace battle or other casualties in the field units, were being set up either in the town itself or in communities nearby.

Inevitably, it was with no great enthusiasm, after the excitement of the summer and autumn and so many disappointments, that the Canadian troops reverted to the essential but undeniably dull routine of individual training. And the fact that the winter of 1940-41, like the previous one, was unusually cold, and therefore unusually disagreeable, did not help. Nevertheless, however much the Canadians might grumble, their morale remained sound. There was, indeed, much to support it. The Commonwealth still stood proudly alone against the brutal conqueror who had overrun so many "great and famous states"; the weapon-pits along the English beaches were still the front line trenches of freedom; and throughout the winter and the spring the enemy's bombs screamed down intermittently upon the English towns and cities. Britain was certainly not a comfortable place in those days, but in this moment of humanity's crisis it was nevertheless a good place to be.

At the end of 1940, the Canadian military force in the United Kingdom had grown to nearly 57,000 all ranks. This was only a fraction of the total strength of the Army, for extensive mobilization measures had been taken in the Dominion during the year.

#### THE EXPANSION OF THE ARMY DURING 1940

In the grim summer of 1940 the manhood of Canada was coming forward in a manner which reflected the country's consciousness of the desperate nature of the crisis, and which deserves to be recorded. During the three months of June, July and August, a total of 77,770 Canadians were voluntarily enlisted or appointed into the Active Service Force. These patriotic volunteers provided the material for a great expansion of the army.

As we have seen, the original Canadian force organized in September 1939 was two infantry divisions and a proportion of ancillary troops; the majority of the units of the Non-Permanent Active Militia remained unmobilized. The disasters in France and the Low Countries brought about an immediate and important increase. As early as 20 May 1940 the formation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division was announced; simultaneously, the nine rifle battalions of the 4<sup>th</sup> were mobilized. During succeeding weeks the remaining units of this division were also ordered to mobilize, as were a large variety of miscellaneous units, including a considerable force of infantry for coast defence and other duties. A Veterans Home Guard (subsequently renamed the Veterans Guard of

Canada) was organized for protective duty within the country. At this time, too, the Canadian Forestry Corps came into being.

The summer crisis of 1940 also produced a significant change in Canadian manpower policy. Parliament proceeded to pass the National Resources Mobilization Act, a brief, highly generalized statute which gave the government the most sweeping powers over persons and property. Compulsory military service was thus authorized; but the proviso was included that these powers did not extend to obliging men to serve outside of Canada. (This proviso, we shall see, was removed from the Act in 1942, and in 1944 N.R.M.A. trainees were sent overseas.) Regulations made under the Act authorized calling up for training all men aged 21 to 45. In the first instance men were called up for 30 days only; in February of 1941, however, the period was increased to four months, and in April it was announced that trainees would be retained in the service indefinitely for home defence.

July 1940 saw important changes at Ottawa. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of the month Colonel J. L. Ralston, formerly Minister of Finance, became Minister of National Defence, succeeding Mr. Norman McL. Rogers, Minister since 19 September 1939, who was killed in an air accident on 10 June. During July also General Crerar returned from England to become Chief of the General Staff, succeeding Major-General T. V. Anderson, who had borne the heavy responsibilities of this appointment during the opening phase. Major-General P. J. Montague took Crerar's place as Senior Officer at Canadian Military Headquarters, London, and had the important task of commanding the Reinforcement Units and other base establishments in England.

One of Crerar's first tasks at Ottawa was to prepare an appreciation of the military situation and a Canadian Army Programme for 1941 that would be adequate to its demands. He concluded, on the basis of the experience of the campaign in France, that an army of defensive type was bound to meet defeat; that, accordingly, the Canadian Army should be based on mechanized power, including artillery, armour and close-support aircraft; and that the Dominion's industrial capacity should be utilized to the fullest extent. No largescale attack on Canadian shores had to be seriously considered while the fortress of Britain held firm; the main Canadian effort, Crerar argued, should therefore be directed towards building up the Canadian force in Britain in a balanced and co-ordinated manner. He recommended that a Corps of three divisions should be completed in the United Kingdom early in 1941, and should be joined by an armoured brigade group as soon as possible. The 4<sup>th</sup> Division should follow when required, — if necessary, in the latter part of 1941. It was desirable to make other provision for the home-defence role when the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Divisions and the Armoured Brigade left Canada.

Following discussions held when the Minister of National Defence

and the Chief of the General Staff visited the United Kingdom late in 1940, modifications were introduced providing for a still larger armoured element, and the programme for 1941 finally emerged as the dispatch of the balance of the Corps Troops and an Army Tank Brigade early in the year, of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division in the spring, and of a complete armoured division in the autumn. The 4<sup>th</sup> Division was to remain in Canada until 1942.

In the autumn of 1940 the units of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division began to move into the Maritime Provinces, where great new camps were taking shape at Debert, N.S., and Sussex, N.B. At the same time the foundations of Canadian armoured forces were being laid at Camp Borden, Ontario. A General Order had called the Canadian Armoured Corps into existence as from 13 August, and simultaneously the organization of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade was authorized. Early in 1941 the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Army Tank Brigade was organized and took over two of the Armoured Brigade's units. Within a few months the Army Tank Brigade would arrive in England, the first Canadian armoured formation to serve overseas.

While Canada was rushing aid across the Atlantic to the United Kingdom, she was also concerting defensive measures with her great republican neighbour, even though the latter was still at peace. Following a conference between the Prime Minister and President Roosevelt at Ogdensburg in August 1940, the two countries set up a Permanent Joint Board on Defence. From this time, accordingly, an effective organ existed for continual international consultation upon and review of the problems of the joint defence of North America. From this flowed all the many measures of joint defence taken as the war progressed. There had been a time, long ago, when the defence of Canada had meant defence against the United States, pure and simple; now Canada and the United States stood shoulder to shoulder.

#### DEVELOPMENT OF THE ARMY OVERSEAS, 1941

The year 1940 had brought the Canadians overseas no chance of coming to grips with the enemy; and yet it had been a year of excitement. There had been the constant promise of action, even though action never in fact materialized, and there had been the sense of living in the forefront of world-shaking events. The year 1941 was less exhilarating. Another year without battles, it was at the same time largely without its predecessor's other stimulations.

The spring, it is true, brought a revival of the expectation of invasion, and the Canadians again confronted the likelihood of fighting a campaign of unexampled bitterness across the countryside of Kent and Sussex. The probability of any such event, however, was clearly

considerably diminished by the German attack on Russia on 22 June. The enemy's main land forces now became involved in a stupendous campaign in Eastern Europe which Hitler had certainly expected would be short but which proved instead to be long, exhausting, and in the end disastrous. The year also witnessed heavy and fluctuating fighting in North Africa, the short and ill-starred campaigns in Greece and Crete, and operations in Irak and Syria. The last month of the year produced a further extension of the war. On 7 December the Japanese made their treacherous attack. As a result of this, two Canadian battalions, sent from Canada only a few weeks before, crossed bayonets with the Japanese at Hong Kong before the Canadians in Britain, who had waited so long, were given any opportunity of measuring themselves against the Germans.

General McNaughton's force had only one piece of active employment during 1941. This was the expedition to Spitsbergen, which as it turned out involved no contact with the enemy. Even the bombing of Britain, intense early in the year, greatly diminished after May. In these circumstances, the history of the Canadian Army Overseas during 1941 is largely a story of uninterrupted development. The year witnessed the conversion of the Canadian Corps from a two-division formation possessing no armour of its own into a powerful force of three infantry divisions and an army tank brigade; while before the winter a complete Canadian armoured division was also in Britain preparing to take its place in the order of battle.

First formation to move overseas as such in 1941 was the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Army Tank Brigade. Brigadier F. F. Worthington, well known to the Canadian public as a pioneer of armoured warfare, took command of the Brigade in March. The units' training in Canada was hampered by lack of equipment, most of the tanks available at Camp Borden being 6-ton Renaults, decrepit veterans of the last war acquired from the United States. The brigade arrived in the Clyde in the ships of the Eleventh Flight on 30 June and immediately moved into a tented camp on the northern edge of Salisbury Plain, where it trained until the autumn. A "training scale" of equipment was issued at once. Among the tanks received were some of the first Mark IV infantry tanks ("Churchills") to come off the assembly line. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division had been commanded in the first instance by Major-General E. W. Sansom, but in March 1941 he was transferred to the command of the new armoured division and succeeded by Major-General C. B. Price, formerly commanding the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade. The greater part of the Division embarked in the Twelfth Flight, which reached the United Kingdom on 29 July; most of the remainder arrived at the beginning of September. The armoured division forming part of the Army Programme for 1941 was organized in Canada early in the spring,



the first step being the authorization of its two armoured brigades. In the beginning it was known as the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Division, but this designation was shortly altered to 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian (Armoured) Division. The Divisional Headquarters and most of the units arrived in the United Kingdom in the Fifteenth Flight of Canadian troops on 22 November. This was the largest single troop movement from Canada up to that date, the eight ships of the convoy carrying very nearly 14,000 all ranks. Thanks to these developments, the strength of the Canadian Army Overseas had grown by the close of 1941 to just under 125,000. In terms of the “build-up” of the Canadian forces, 1941 had been perhaps the most important year of the war.

This great overseas movement had been effected almost without the loss of a man. Indeed, not a man was lost from any Canadian *troop convoy* between North America and the United Kingdom in 1941 or in any other year of the war. The only actual casualties suffered by the Canadian Army in the Atlantic were 73 men lost in the sinking on 30 April 1941 of the S. S. “Nerissa”, a small vessel sailing unescorted with some soldiers among her passengers. Except for these, every one of the 370,135 all ranks of the Army who embarked in Canada for the United Kingdom before the end of hostilities in Europe in May 1945 reached Britain in safety.<sup>7</sup> That so tremendous a task of marine transport was carried out with virtually no casualties in spite of the intensive efforts of enemy submarines and aircraft in and over the Atlantic is a remarkable tribute to the skill and determination of our naval and air forces and of the merchant service.

### TRAINING AND EQUIPPING THE CANADIAN CORPS

While new formations and units poured in from Canada, those already overseas were hard at work. During the latter part of the winter of 1940-41 the new Canadian Corps carried out its first largescale “schemes”. February and March saw the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Divisions and Corps Troops engaged in exercises designed to practise them in the approach march and the attack, as required by their counterattack role; the difficult problem of traffic control on English roads received special attention. In June 1941 the Corps as a whole took part in important manoeuvres directed by South Eastern Command and known as Exercise “Waterloo”. This, like all other large exercises of this period, was postulated upon a German invasion of England, and ended with the Canadian divisions attacking the northern escarpment of the South

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<sup>7</sup> The total does not include a very few departures by air. It does include roughly 2000 duplications, caused by individuals returning to Canada and then going to the United Kingdom a second time. Embarkation for Iceland (2674 in number) have also been included, as the Iceland force moved to the United Kingdom in due course.

Downs to evict the invaders.

In the early autumn came a still greater test, involving probably the largest forces ever to fight a mock war in Britain. This was Exercise "Bumper", in which twelve divisions took the field. General McNaughton's Canadian Corps, with the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Divisions under command, "fought" under Lieutenant-General H.R.L.G. Alexander, G.O.C.-in-C. Southern Command. The earlier exercises had taken place in Kent and Sussex, but "Bumper" carried the Canadians into the Chiltern Hills, north-west of London, where they clashed with a "German" force assumed to have pushed inland from ports in East Anglia.<sup>8</sup>

Equipping the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division, in the conditions existing in England in 1940, had been a discouraging business; for even of the small quantities of equipment available the War Office, that autumn, was sending 60 per cent to theatres of war overseas. Few guns came to the Division's artillery before the end of the year, and those that did come were obsolescent 75-millimetre pieces, most of them with steel tires and therefore incapable of movement at any speed. During 1941 things gradually improved. Thanks to Canadian production, the infantry were complete in Bren guns before the end of February;<sup>9</sup> but the field artillery did not get a full scale of 25-pounders until September, a whole year after arriving in Britain. Medium artillery weapons were a serious problem. In the autumn of 1941, however, the new 5.5-inch gun-howitzer began to become available. Anti-tank arms were in especially "short supply". At this time the infantry weapon against armour was the .55 Boys rifle, that of the artillery the 2-pounder; and the units of the Corps had only about half the proper number of these weapons in the late summer of 1941.

Anti-aircraft guns were likewise extremely difficult to get. For a long period the Canadian units had simply no anti-aircraft weapons except machine-guns. On 20 August 1940, with the Battle of Britain at its height, General McNaughton pointed out "the absolute lack of light anti-aircraft guns" in the Canadian forces or the British troops of the 7<sup>th</sup> Corps. "We are dependent entirely on small arms fire for local protection", he wrote. Early in 1941 a very few 40-millimetre Bofors guns began to come to hand and in consequence steps were taken to organize the Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments required for each Division and for Corps Troops under the new organization which had grown out of the previous year's experience in France.

Equipping the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division was very much easier than had

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<sup>8</sup> These exercises are outlined in somewhat greater detail in Chapter II of *The Canadians in Britain, 1989-1914*.

<sup>9</sup> The first Canadian-made Brens reached the Canadian force in the United Kingdom early in November 1940. The merits of the particular contract entered into in 1938 are not a matter for discussion here; but there can be no controversy on the fact that it was very fortunate for the country that an arrangement for the manufacture of Bren guns was made at that time.

been the case with the 2<sup>nd</sup>, for now there had been a general improvement in the situation. The Division was fully supplied with 25-pounder guns almost immediately after its arrival in England, and most other equipment was equally readily come by. Anti-tank weapons, however, continued to be a problem.

The Canadian armoured formations began to receive equipment from the time of their landing. The 1<sup>st</sup> Army Tank Brigade, however, was completed much more rapidly than the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division. Brigadier Worthington had faith in the Churchill, in spite of the many mechanical difficulties encountered with it in the beginning; and before the end of 1941 the Brigade was fully equipped with this tank. The Armoured Division was long in receiving its full "establishment" of tanks. It was intended to equip it with the Canadian-designed and Canadian-made "Ram", a vehicle combining what were considered the best features of British and American design; but the first Rams did not reach the United Kingdom until February 1942. In the meantime the War Office provided a certain number of American "General Lee" and "General Stuart" tanks, the former serving as a useful introduction to the Ram.

## CHAPTER III

### NEW TASKS AND PROBLEMS, 1941-1942

#### TO THE ROOF OF THE WORLD: THE EXPEDITION TO SPITSBERGEN

As we have said, 1941 brought the Canadians in Britain one piece of active employment. In August and September a small Canadian-British-Norwegian force commanded by Brigadier A. E. Potts of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade carried out an expedition to the Arctic Archipelago of Spitsbergen, which lies only some 600 miles from the North Pole.

With the involvement of Russia in the war these distant islands (which are Norwegian territory) had suddenly assumed a new importance. Spitsbergen had valuable coal mines which it was desirable to deny to Germany; the archipelago also constituted a potential threat to the convoy route between Britain and North Russia. The possibility of an expedition was first discussed late in July 1941, when Sir John Dill offered the operation to General McNaughton and the latter accepted it. At this time the proposal was that Spitsbergen should be occupied by a military force adequate to the protection against seaborne and airborne raids of a naval anchorage and refuelling base which it was planned to establish there. It was intended to withdraw the force at the end of four months, prior to the winter freeze-up.

The plan was to send an infantry brigade less one battalion, with attached units; and Headquarters 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Brigade, with Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry and the Edmonton Regiment, plus a field company of Engineers, were designated for the task. Later a field battery was added. This force moved early in August from Sussex to Glasgow, and thence to the Combined Training Centre, Inveraray, where it did some amphibious training. Further discussions in London, however, led to doubts concerning the utility of the expedition as planned, and on 16 August a meeting of the Chiefs of Staff Committee which General McNaughton attended took a resolve to carry out a much more limited scheme, comprising merely the temporary landing of a force which would destroy or remove the mining facilities and wireless and meteorological stations. It was also to repatriate the considerable Russian community in the islands to Archangel, and remove all Norwegians to the United Kingdom.

In consequence the force was greatly reduced. "Force 111", as it was called, was now to consist of a skeleton brigade headquarters with

signal section, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Field Company Royal Canadian Engineers, a company of the Edmonton Regiment, a detachment of machine-gunners of the Saskatoon Light Infantry, and Medical and Pay detachments. In addition, a British Engineer detachment and other British specialists were included, as was also a Norwegian infantry party numbering 25 all ranks. The total strength of the military force which went to Spitsbergen was 46 officers and 599 other ranks, of whom 29 officers and 498 other ranks were Canadian.

This force could be carried on one transport, which could also find room for the entire civilian population of Spitsbergen. Most of the men waiting hopefully at Inveraray were now sent back to England; the fortunate few selected for the expedition sailed from the Clyde in the "Empress of Canada" on 19 August. That evening the transport made contact with Force "A", the naval squadron which was to escort her on her unique mission. It was commanded by Rear Admiral P. L. Vian, and consisted of the cruisers "Nigeria" and "Aurora", and the destroyers "Anthony", "Antelope" and "Icarus". On 21 August the squadron reached Iceland, and here Brigadier Potts conferred with Admiral Vian and final plans were made. The ships sailed again that evening. Next day the soldiers were told their destination for the first time.

On the morning of 25 August the squadron was close to westward of Spitsbergen. An aircraft from "Nigeria" reconnoitred the Isfjord (Ice Sound), the great inlet, leading into the island of Vest Spitsbergen, on which the most important settlements lay. No enemy activity being discerned, the squadron closed in, and at 4:30 a.m. a small party of signallers and Norwegians landed from "Icarus" at the wireless station at Kap Linne at the mouth, of the inlet, and were cordially received by the Norwegian staff. The heavier ships now entered the Isfjord and steamed on into the arm of it called Green Bay, on which lay the Russian mining village of Barentsburg. Brigadier Potts went ashore to discuss the proposed evacuation with the Russian authorities, while military parties occupied the other Russian and Norwegian settlements along the Isfjord.

The first great task was the removal of the Russian inhabitants to Archangel. During 26 August the whole Russian population (some 2,000 souls) was embarked in the "Empress of Canada", and that night the ship sailed for Archangel escorted by "Nigeria" and the three destroyers. "Aurora" remained at Spitsbergen to protect the expedition and assist in the liquidation of the more remote settlements, which was carried out during the next few days.

During the absence of the "Empress", extensive demolitions were undertaken at Spitsbergen. The great dumps of free coal at the mines were set alight (it is estimated that 450,000 tons were thus destroyed). Mining machinery at Barentsburg, Longyearby, and other settlements

was disabled or removed. Great stores of fuel oil were poured into the sea or burned.

On the evening of 1 September the "Empress of Canada" and her escort again dropped anchor in Green Bay, having successfully completed their mission to the White Sea. During 2 September all the 800 or so Norwegians in Spitsbergen were embarked; and just before midnight on the night of 3-4 September the force sailed again for the United Kingdom, leaving the islands void of humanity. Along the shores of the Isfjord the fires in the coal-piles still blazed brightly. The whole occupation had lasted ten days less five or six hours; but the Canadians had found it hard to keep track of time, for owing to the midnight sun it was never wholly dark, and throughout the period the men worked hard in shifts, four hours on duty, four hours off.

A task of special value had been performed by the Signals detachment of the force with the aid of the Norwegian staffs of the islands' two wireless stations. These were both in touch with the Germancontrolled station at Tromso in Norway, and had been in the habit of sending out meteorological data. Thanks to the loyal co-operation of the Norwegians, it was possible to continue normal transmissions by way of concealing from the enemy the fact that anything unusual was going on in Spitsbergen. The data sent out, however, were in some respects mendacious. To discourage enemy air reconnaissance, fog conditions were reported from the arrival of the expedition until the departure of the "Empress" for Archangel. The same procedure was followed after her return until the final departure of the force. The last transmission went out at 8:00 p.m. on 3 September, after which the stations were put out of action. The deception appears to have been complete, for when the force was well out to sea on its homeward voyage Tromso was heard calling Spitsbergen and inquiring urgently why it did not answer.

On 6 September the cruisers "Aurora" and "Nigeria" parted company with the "Empress", bound for an enterprise against enemy naval forces in Norwegian waters, which produced a very satisfactory little fight in which the German gunnery training ship "Bremse" and other vessels were sunk. The military force had an uneventful return voyage to Britain. The "Empress of Canada" re-entered the Clyde on the night of 7-8 September; and next day the Canadians were on their way back to the stations in Sussex from which they had been absent for more than a month. The expedition had successfully achieved all its modest objects. It had had no contact with the enemy, and had not lost a man from any cause. Far from interfering with the undertaking, the Germans had not even succeeded in discovering that it was in progress. In spite of the absence of action it had been an adventurous enterprise. Never before had a military force advanced so close to the North Pole; and

throughout the war no other Canadian detachment operated in an area so remote as that which fell to the lot of the expedition to Spitsbergen.

### TUNNELLERS AT THE ROCK

Only one other considerable group of Canadian soldiers left the United Kingdom during 1941 for employment abroad. This was No. 2 Tunnelling Company Royal Canadian Engineers, which embarked in March for Gibraltar, where it was to reinforce other Canadian tunnellers who had been working on and in the Rock since the previous autumn.

The collapse of France in June 1940 and the simultaneous entry of Italy into the war suddenly made the Mediterranean an active theatre of operations, placed British interests there in the utmost jeopardy and rendered the fortress of Gibraltar much more important than before. Its defences had long been comparatively neglected; now there was urgent need for improving them, and in particular for extending the tunnels within the Rock to provide bomb-proof accommodation. On 23 October 1940 the Secretary of State for the Dominions wrote to the High Commissioner for Canada asking "as a matter of urgency" that part of No. 1 Canadian Tunnelling Company, then in England, might be made available for work at Gibraltar. The Canadian Government at once agreed, and a detachment of 100 men with diamond drills disembarked at the fortress on 26 November and were soon hard at work. The British Government almost immediately asked for more Canadian tunnellers, and a new unit was raised from among qualified men in the United Kingdom. No. 2 Canadian Tunnelling Company reached Gibraltar on 10 March 1941, and remained there until the end of the following year.

The Canadians shared the work at the Rock with British tunnelling companies. They carried out several major mining projects, the best-known one being "Gort's Hospital", a system of commodious chambers cut out of the heart of the Rock to ensure thoroughly bombproof medical accommodation for the garrison in case of siege. An even larger task, however, was the nearby tunnel known as "Harley Street", with its side-chambers for the hospital laundry, etc. All told, No. 2 Tunnelling Company, during its long stay at Gibraltar, mined and removed approximately 140,000 tons of solid rock. Apart from their main mining tasks the Canadians carried out much miscellaneous work on the defences. A "special detachment" of No. 1 Tunnelling Company which was sent out independently and arrived in February 1942 made a useful contribution to one of the most essential additions to the equipment of the fortress: the new aerodrome which had been created on the site of the racecourse on the North Front. This detachment had the task of providing the "fill" necessary for extending the runway out into the Bay of Algeiras sufficiently to enable heavy bombers to use

the field. The fill was brought down from the screes on the face of the Rock, first by diamond drilling and blasting, and, when this proved unsuitable, by hydraulic methods. The importance of this task became apparent in November 1942, when the Allies launched the invasion of French North Africa. Without the new runway at Gibraltar this great operation would have been far more difficult and perhaps impossible.

Gibraltar is a fascinating place to visit, but under war conditions the Canadians found the tiny colony a confined and tiresome station. There was no more action there than in England; and virtually the whole of the normal civilian population had been evacuated. As the months passed, the men grew increasingly anxious to rejoin their comrades in the United Kingdom. It was finally found possible to relieve them late in 1942. The main body sailed from Gibraltar on 16 December. They left behind them permanent monuments, the chambers they had hollowed, which will serve the garrison of the Rock as long as the British flag flies there.

### FIGHTING THE LUFTWAFFE

The only contact with the enemy vouchsafed to the Canadian troops in Britain previous to 1942 took the form of a limited amount of anti-aircraft action against German raiders.

During the great air attacks in 1940, Canadian units frequently engaged the enemy with their machine-guns, and the destruction of two aircraft was claimed — one shot down by Lewis gunners of No. 1 Tunnelling Company near Canterbury on 18 August, and one by the Toronto Scottish near Portslade, Sussex on 26 November. Earlier, in the spring of 1940, a number of anti-aircraft Lewis gun teams from the 1<sup>st</sup> Division had been lent to the Admiralty for the protection of trawlers in the North Sea. They performed this service until June; but they seldom saw the enemy, and only one hit on a German aircraft is recorded.

As the great “blitz” had ended by the time Canadian anti-aircraft artillery units were organized, trained and ready for battle, these units saw less action than they had hoped for. As soon as the batteries had attained a sufficient standard of training they were lent to Anti-Aircraft Command for temporary employment on gunsites in “A.D.G.B.” (Air Defence of Great Britain). The first actual success credited to a Canadian artillery unit was achieved by a detachment of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (which actually had not yet graduated to A.D.G.B.) near Frinton on the East Coast on the night of 6-7 August 1941, when a JU 88 was shot down into the sea. German raids at this time were hit-and-run affairs, often by single machines, in which a small and difficult target was presented to the guns for perhaps a very few seconds; and even such a target might appear only after weeks or months of fruitless waiting on an isolated and uncomfortable gunsite.



## THE CORPS MOVES INTO SUSSEX

Since the collapse of France in June 1940, and indeed for a few weeks before that event, the Canadian field force in England had been, as we have seen, in "G.H.Q. Reserve", charged with the responsible task of counter-attack against any attempted invasion of southeastern England. It remained in this role for a year and a half, and throughout this period its normal stations were in Surrey, with elements in eastern Hampshire and western Kent: — convenient positions from which to move against an enemy assailing any part of the coast between Margate and Southampton. In the autumn of 1941, however, the Canadian Corps assumed a different tactical function; it ceased to be a mobile reserve and assumed the direct defence of an important sector of England's front line — the coast of Sussex.

During the summer of 1941 the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division had anticipated the larger move by temporarily relieving the 55<sup>th</sup> British Division on the Sussex beaches between Peacehaven and Rye. It remained here from the first week in July until nearly the middle of August, under the operational control of the 4<sup>th</sup> British Corps. The 55<sup>th</sup> took its place in Aldershot and served temporarily as a formation of the Canadian Corps. The change of scene was very agreeable to the men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, who had been a long time in Aldershot.

The Corps move, though under discussion from early in the spring, did not actually begin until 15 October, when the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division returned to Sussex, relieving the 55<sup>th</sup> for a second time. The Canadian Division was again under the 4<sup>th</sup> Corps until 17 November, when the Canadian Corps took over the coastal area. By 1 December the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division had taken over from the 38<sup>th</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division, which was now considered ready for an operational role, from the 47<sup>th</sup>. Finally, the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Army Tank Brigade came into Sussex in mid-December. In the cases of both the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division and the Tank Brigade the move to Sussex may be said to mark the end of the period of preparation and the emergence of the Brigade and the Division as fully operational formations. The Canadian Corps, now entirely concentrated in Sussex, had become a very formidable military factor.

The Corps Headquarters was established in the first instance at Worth Priory, south-east of Crawley, but Advanced Headquarters was subsequently set up at Wakehurst Place, a delightful Elizabethan house a few miles away. A considerable number of British units, including the batteries of Royal Artillery manning the fixed coastal defences, came under Canadian Corps command. The Canadian Corps itself passed as from 17 November under the "operational control" of South Eastern Command.

On 18 November it was announced that General Sir Alan Brooke was to replace General Sir John Dill as Chief of the Imperial General Staff;

Lieutenant-General Sir Bernard Paget became C.-in-C. Home Forces in succession to Brooke, and Lieutenant-General B. L. Montgomery succeeded Paget as G.O.C.-in-C. South Eastern Command. The movement into Sussex thus brought the Canadian Corps under General Montgomery's dynamic direction. Almost simultaneously there were important changes in Canadian command. General Odium was appointed High Commissioner in Australia, and was succeeded in the command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division (at first in an acting capacity) by Brigadier J. H. Roberts. Lieutenant-General H. D. G. Crerar, who was anxious for employment in the field, now handed over the appointment of Chief of the General Staff at Ottawa to Major-General K. Stuart and returned to the United Kingdom to assume, it was announced, the command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, reverting to Major-General to do so. Although gazetted to command this formation, he never actually took over. Before he reached England General McNaughton had been obliged by illness to relinquish the command of the Corps for a time. Major-General Pearkes acted as Corps Commander until the arrival of General Crerar. Crerar, who was senior to Pearkes, took command of the Corps as of 23 December, resuming the rank of Lieutenant-General. General McNaughton never in fact returned to the Corps; when recovered he left for a visit to Canada, and on coming back to England took up the new appointment of G.O.C.-in-C. First Canadian Army.

The Corps front in Sussex extended from the Hampshire border on the right to Fairlight Church (a couple of miles east of Hastings) on the left. Immediately after taking over the sector, the Canadian commanders undertook an overhaul of the defensive arrangements. Instructions were issued providing in detail against every likely emergency, whether of the nature of raid or invasion; the possibility of large-scale airborne attack received particular attention. When the plans were complete, the troops fell to work on reconstructing the actual defences, and much time and effort were expended on improving the positions along the beaches and about the Downs. Had the enemy obliged by attacking, he would have found the Sussex coast, in this condition, a difficult military proposition. But he never did attack; in spite of a considerable number of false alarms and a great many rumours, the Germans never attempted anything in the nature of a seaborne or airborne raid on even the smallest scale.

The winter of 1941-42 was a rather difficult period. The Canadian troops were tired of inaction, and in the circumstances of the day, with the Germans fully occupied in Russia, they now saw little possibility of being actually called upon to do battle in defence of the shores of England. The fact that British (and some Canadian) troops were now engaged against the Japanese in the Pacific, while the fight against the Germans in Africa still went on, made the waiting still harder to bear; and the cessation of heavy air attacks on Britain heightened the sense of being in a backwater. Under such conditions there were bound to be some



### GARDING THE SUSSEX COAST

From a watercolour by Major C. F. Comfort, 1943

The Gun is a 40-millimetre Bofors of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, R.C.A., in position above West Beach, Selsey. In the background can be seen two types of obstacles intended to prevent the landing of tanks: concrete blocks and "tubular scaffolding".

difficulties, and inevitably there were local complaints of soldiers' behaviour. Yet the actual number of offences recorded is rather surprisingly small; and the spirit of the men remained much higher than might have been expected in the circumstances.

### THE FIRST CANADIAN ARMY

By the autumn of 1941 the Canadian force in Britain had grown considerably beyond the proportions of a normal army corps. It now amounted to four divisions, an army tank brigade and large numbers of ancillary troops; and there remained in Canada the 4<sup>th</sup> Division, which was to come overseas in due time. In these circumstances, the formation of a Canadian headquarters higher than the corps level was a natural development. There was much discussion of the subject during 1941. In August, for instance, General Crerar (then still C.G.S.) wrote to General McNaughton suggesting the possibility of forming a Canadian army comprising two corps, each of two infantry and one armoured divisions. This he admitted was an ambitious proposal, but at the time it was believed that the necessary manpower could be found. Discussions with British military authorities elicited the fact that they agreed that the Canadian force was growing too large to be handled by one Corps Commander; and in due course it was resolved to set up an Army Headquarters and a second Corps Headquarters. Further manpower study, however, did not appear to justify the provision of a sixth division for overseas service, and instead of raising a new armoured division it was decided to convert the existing 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division to armour.

Before General McNaughton left for Canada on 23 January 1942, the essential decisions had been made; and on 26 January the Prime Minister outlined the Army Programme for 1942 to the Canadian House of Commons in the following terms:

During 1942... it is proposed to create overseas a Canadian army of two army corps: one army corps to comprise three infantry divisions and two army tank brigades; the other to consist of two armoured divisions. In addition, all necessary ancillary units to serve these two corps will be provided.

To reach this objective it will be necessary: first to convert the present 4<sup>th</sup> Division into an armoured division and train and equip it for this special role and dispatch it overseas in due course; second, to raise, equip, train and dispatch overseas another army tank brigade for use with the infantry divisions of the Canadian Corps; third, to raise, equip, train and dispatch additional ancillary troops both for the infantry corps and the new armoured corps; fourth, to maintain and reinforce these two corps; fifth, to provide headquarters staff organizations for an army and an armoured corps.

This project was modified in one respect in practice. Experience had indicated the undesirability of grouping armoured divisions under the control of specific armoured corps headquarters; it was considered

that every corps headquarters should be capable of controlling either infantry or armoured divisions, and on these lines Canadian as well as British organization henceforth proceeded.

While in Canada General McNaughton conferred with the Minister of National Defence and the Chief of the General Staff on the implementation of this programme; and on 6 March he attended a meeting of the Cabinet War Committee and gave a detailed exposition of his plans for the development of the army. He returned to the United Kingdom late in March.

On Easter Monday, 6 April 1942, Headquarters First Canadian Army came into existence at Headley Court, with Lieutenant-General A. G. L. McNaughton as General Officer Commanding-in-Chief. Its staff was all-Canadian. The Canadian Corps (now to be designated the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps) remained in Sussex under General Crerar's command and under the operational direction of General Montgomery as G.O.C.-in-C. South Eastern Command. Organization of the Headquarters of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps was long delayed, mainly by the shortage of trained staff officers. Although it had originally been considered that it could be formed about 1 July 1942, it did not actually come into existence until early in 1943.

#### DEFENSIVE MEASURES IN CANADA

Steps taken for the local security of the actual territory of Canada lie largely outside the scope of this Summary. Essentially, the country was being defended abroad; the best policy was to defeat the aggressor before he reached Canadian soil; and, as explained in the Preface, defensive measures taken on that soil can be only briefly mentioned here.

In the precautions taken in pre-war years, the defences of the Pacific coast had received rather more attention than those on the Atlantic — a situation which doubtless reflected the contemporary distribution of British naval strength as well as the fact that the only first-class sea-power which could possibly be considered a menace to Canada was Japan. Coastal batteries and air bases on a very considerable scale were planned and executed. When war came, however, it came in the Atlantic, and the Pacific remained in some degree true to its name for over two years. Protective measures in the Maritime Provinces, which had been accelerated after the 1938 crisis, were now given higher priority, and the area became still more important after the disaster of 1940 in France and the resultant heightened anxiety of the United States for the security of North America. The defences of the eastern ports were strengthened accordingly.

Newfoundland — not a part of Canada in the political sense, but vitally important to her strategically — deserves special notice. There

was close co-operation between the Canadian and Newfoundland governments from the outbreak of war. Newfoundland afforded all facilities to the R.C.A.F.; Canada provided Newfoundland with equipment including some coast-defence guns; and when France collapsed in June 1940 steps were immediately taken to safeguard the great airport at Gander and the seaplane base at Botwood. An infantry battalion and a flight of bomber reconnaissance aircraft, now hastily despatched, were only the vanguard of larger forces. In the following August a Canadian delegation headed by the Air Minister (Mr. C. G. Power) visited the Island and arrangements were made for comprehensive co-operation in defence. Canada took responsibility for the security of Newfoundland soil, and when in the same month the Dominion instituted an Atlantic Command under a G.O.C.-in-C. (Major-General W. H. P. Elkins) responsible for all military measures in the east coast area, Newfoundland was included within it along with the provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and the greater part of Quebec. Canadian units garrisoned Newfoundland throughout the war, co-operating with the local authorities and with the United States forces to whom the British Government had accorded base facilities there as part of the arrangement on bases announced in August 1940.

In the autumn of 1941 work began, and progressed with great rapidity, on another giant trans-Atlantic airport in Newfoundland territory — at Goose Bay on Lake Melville in Labrador. A Canadian garrison was stationed here from the beginning for the protection of what rapidly became one of the great centres of world air transport.<sup>1</sup>

In October, 1940, came the authorization of a Pacific Command parallel to that already set up on the Atlantic. The first G.O.C.-in-C. was Major-General R.O. Alexander. This command comprehended the whole of Military Districts Nos. 11 and 13 (that is, the provinces of British Columbia and Alberta, the Yukon and the adjacent portions of the North-West Territories). Considerable forces had been maintained on and near the Pacific coast since the beginning of the war with Germany; but after Japan entered the war in December 1941 further measures were taken.

Although the strength of the Canadian Army Overseas in fighting formations was not increased beyond five divisions and two independent armoured brigades, three additional infantry divisions were in due course raised in Canada and retained there in a home-defence role. In the summer of 1941, with the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Divisions both moving overseas shortly, it appeared that the 4<sup>th</sup> would soon be the only one

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<sup>1</sup> At the time of Germany's surrender, there were 2788 all ranks of the Canadian Army in Newfoundland, 480 in Labrador, 786 in Jamaica, 163 in the Bahamas, and 181 in Bermuda. At an earlier time, a detachment of the Veterans Guard of Canada had served in British Guiana, protecting bauxite ships on the Demerara River.

remaining in Canada. Authority was accordingly given in July for the mobilization of the three brigade groups of the 6<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division, utilizing some units already organized. On 18 March 1942 the War Committee of the Cabinet authorized the organization of the Headquarters and remaining units of the 6<sup>th</sup> Division and the mobilization of the three brigade groups of the 7<sup>th</sup> Division. Later in March authority was given for the completion of the 7<sup>th</sup> in the same manner and for the organization of the brigade groups of the 8<sup>th</sup> Division, whose completion was in turn authorized in June. The three home defence divisions were all commanded by officers who had previously been brigade commanders overseas: the 6<sup>th</sup> by Major-General A. E. Potts, the 7<sup>th</sup> by Major-General P. E. Leclerc, and the 8<sup>th</sup> by Major-General H. N. Ganong. The 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> served in Pacific Command, the latter being responsible for Northern British Columbia; the 7<sup>th</sup> was allotted to Atlantic Command.<sup>2</sup>

Early in June 1942 the war came closer to British Columbia. The Japanese now occupied the islands of Kiska and Attu in the Aleutians. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of the month shells fell on Canadian soil when an enemy submarine fired at the wireless station and light at Estevan Point, Vancouver Island. There was much anxiety on the west coast, and General Stuart, the Chief of the General Staff, himself assumed for some time the duties of G.O.C.-in-C. Pacific Command. In September, General Pearkes, formerly G.O.C. 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division, returned from England to take over this appointment. The next year, as we shall see, troops from the Command participated in the expedition against Kiska.

### THE QUESTION OF THE EMPLOYMENT OF THE OVERSEAS ARMY

On 20 August 1941 the Prime Minister of Canada arrived in the United Kingdom to visit the Canadian forces overseas and to have the benefit of consultation with the British Government. On 23 August (incidentally one of the wettest days of the year) he attended the Canadian Army Sports at Aldershot and spoke to the men assembled as spectators. During his address there were some interruptions which received perhaps disproportionate attention in the press; a Canadian newspaper correspondent suggested that they were "symptomatic of a certain impatience to get into action". Mr. King spent 26 August with the 1<sup>st</sup> Division and spoke four times to the troops. The gist of these addresses was that, while he realized how difficult it was for men who had come overseas to fight the enemy to find the moment of battle

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<sup>2</sup> These Home Defence divisions were never wholly complete in all services; they did not need to be.

constantly postponed, they were in fact performing essential service in Britain. As reported in *The Times*, the Prime Minister said on one of these occasions:

Only a day or two ago Mr. Churchill told me that he hoped I would realise that the reason the Canadian forces were being retained in these Islands was that he and his colleagues regarded Britain itself as the most important of all parts of the Empire, and that the defence of Britain would be, above all else, the most significant of all the factors that would ultimately determine the outcome of the war.

Mr. Churchill understands, and I want you all to understand, that so far as the dispositions of the troops are concerned, the Canadian Government places no restriction whatever upon any decision that may be made, other than that the Government itself shall have the opportunity of knowing what is contemplated and an opportunity of expressing views.

All of us in Canada realise that, if you are being kept here in the British Isles rather than being sent to some other theatre of war, it is because the British Government itself regards the United Kingdom as the most important of all centres of liberty in the world. It is the citadel of liberty, and you have been given the honour of defending that citadel.

On 4 September, at a Mansion House luncheon in Mr. King's honour, Mr. Churchill himself spoke of the enforced inactivity of the Canadian troops in terms which should be set down here:

You have seen your gallant Canadian Corps and other troops who are here. We have felt very much for them that they have not yet had a chance of coming to close quarters with the enemy. It is not their fault; it is not our fault; but there they stand, and there they have stood through the whole of the critical period of the last fifteen months at the very point where they would be the first to be hurled into a counter-stroke against an invader.

No greater service can be rendered to this country: no more important military duty can be performed by any troops in all the Allies. It seems to me that although they may have felt envious that Australian, New Zealand and South African troops have been in action, the part they have played in bringing about the final result is second to none.

The question of the employment of the Canadian force had indeed become one of burning interest. About its original role there had been no doubt: it was to fight in France with the B.E.F. When France collapsed, it slipped naturally into the new role of defender of Britain; this was the result of compelling circumstances, not of planning or negotiation. But when the invasion of Britain did not materialize, and the Germans turned instead against Russia, the future tasks of the increasing Canadian force in England inevitably became a matter for discussion by the public and consideration by statesmen and generals. It was quite clear, of course, that an attempt at the invasion of Britain was still a definite possibility, against which' solid insurance was required;



but it was equally clear that the Russian adventure had materially changed the aspect of the question.

On 30 June 1941, very shortly after that adventure began, Brigadier E. L. M. Burns, General McNaughton's Brigadier General Staff, discussed the Canadian role with Brigadier A. W. S. Mallaby, a Deputy Director of Military Operations at the War Office. The latter indicated that the War Office understood "that Canadian troops were not available for employment elsewhere than in the United Kingdom". Brigadier Burns hastened to explain that the Canadian Government had never taken any such stand; on the contrary, it would consider any proposals from the British Government for the commitment of its troops in another theatre. In such a case, he said, General McNaughton's advice would presumably be given great weight; and the General, while considering that it was not the business of the Canadian Army Overseas to initiate suggestions for its own employment, was always ready to advise his Government in favour of employing its forces at any point where the need for their services could be demonstrated by the British Chiefs of Staff Committee. Brigadier Burns added (the words are those of his memorandum of the conversation)

Lieutenant-General McNaughton, however, had always considered it a principle that the bulk of the Canadian Military Forces should be employed in one theatre, so that Canadian authority over our troops could be properly maintained, and would not favour any course of action that would involve splitting the Canadian Army Overseas into several packets.

The possibility of using the Canadians in the Middle East was mentioned; and Burns suggested that, in view of the ease with which troops could be moved from Canada via Vancouver and Singapore to Suez, if any such project were contemplated a decision should be made before the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division and the Armoured Division were brought to the United Kingdom. The same day Mallaby wrote Burns telling him that he had subsequently discussed this question with the Director of Military Operations and Plans. The latter was interested in Burns' views on the possibility of employing Canadian troops in the Middle East. "He said, however, as I rather expected", wrote Mallaby, "that it would be premature to raise the issue now because our requirements for home defence against the possibility of an invasion in the Autumn preclude our sending further considerable forces overseas, and because, in any case, we could not transport such forces in the near future." The Canadian Corps remained in the United Kingdom, and the build-up of the force there went steadily on. General McNaughton's own view, expressed to the Minister of National Defence during the latter's visit to the United Kingdom later in 1941, was that the best employment for the Canadian Corps during the winter was in Britain; in

the spring, he thought, it might be practicable to participate in operations elsewhere "as a Corps".

While in North America early in 1942, General McNaughton visited Washington. On 9 March he visited President Roosevelt in company with the Canadian Ambassador, and described to him the task of the Canadian force in Britain as he saw it. McNaughton's notes of the conversation indicate that he explained that the purpose of the force was twofold:

First, that in the present period it was desired to contribute as well as we could to the security of the United Kingdom, which we considered to be under-insured, and to the maintenance of our foothold for an eventual attack on the Continent of Europe; secondly, that we never lost sight of the fact that we were part of an important strategical reserve, which sooner or later there would be an opportunity to employ against Hitler, and even in the meanwhile its very presence in England would continue to tie down German Divisions perhaps of greater total strength.

The following day General McNaughton had an interview with the Acting Chief of the War Plans Division of the War Department, Brigadier-General Dwight D. Eisenhower, who told him that "he had racked his mind to discover how we could present Germany with a second front, and that the more he thought it out the more firmly had he been driven to the conclusion that it would be possible to do so only by attacking Western Europe from the British Isles". With this McNaughton expressed the fullest agreement. His views as put to Eisenhower were thus recorded by Major-General M. A. Pope, who was present:

There could be no question but that the war could only be ended by the defeat of Hitler and the only way of doing so was to attack him from the West. He had never lost sight of this object and while he had had constantly to think in terms of the defence of the United Kingdom, he had always been convinced that an offensive would sooner or later have to be launched from the United Kingdom across the narrow seas. This view he had represented to the Canadian Government the previous week and he was glad to be able to say that it had been accepted.

The President, it is interesting to note, had questioned his Canadian visitor concerning the problem of morale among the troops in Britain during their long period of static employment. General McNaughton's reply was as follows:

I told him that I had no particular anxiety on this score at the moment nor would I have for some months to come. I told him that this was because the force was rapidly growing, there were ample outlets for promotion, that we had been working the men very hard, that we were constantly changing the scene of our activities, that we had paid attention to education, etc., and most importantly that I thought our soldiers were a highly intelligent body of men, who recognized that they were only there for the purpose of making a definite contribution to the defeat of the Axis. They were just as well aware as I was of the wisdom of deferring action until a proper opportunity developed for their

use, because what we wished to do was not to fight for the sake of fighting, but to bring the maximum possible continuing effect against the enemy.

### THE COMPLETION OF THE FIELD FORCE

When Headquarters First Canadian Army was organized on 6 April 1942 the Army it was to control was incomplete. The 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division (lately converted from infantry) did not begin to arrive from Canada until early in the autumn; the greater part of it came in two convoys, on 1 September and 7 October. Major-General F. F. Worthington was in command.

The Canadian Army's adoption of a new British organization for armoured divisions, under which the division would consist of one armoured brigade and one infantry brigade instead of two armoured brigades, called for more infantry units but left the Canadian Army Overseas with several surplus armoured regiments. General McNaughton desired to utilize three of these to provide a third army tank brigade, and on 21 December 1942 he cabled Ottawa proposing "as a long term objective" that the Canadian Army should comprise two corps, with three infantry divisions (each of three infantry brigades), two armoured divisions (each of one infantry and one armoured brigade) and three army tank brigades. Although the War Committee of the Canadian Cabinet agreed to the organization of a third tank brigade headquarters to administer the surplus armoured regiments provisionally until their disposition was decided, the retention of the brigade was not finally approved. Manpower stringency was becoming a source of increasing anxiety. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Army Tank Brigade arrived in the United Kingdom from Canada in June 1943. This Brigade was now disbanded and the one organized overseas, heretofore called the 3<sup>rd</sup>, assumed its number; it also ceased to be an army tank brigade and was designated the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade.

An independent unit not destined for service in the First Canadian Army arrived in the United Kingdom late in July 1943. This was the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Parachute Battalion. Arrangements had been made to incorporate it in the 6<sup>th</sup> British Airborne Division, which it joined almost at once. With this division it was to fight through the campaign in North-West Europe.

The question of provision of the large number of rearward units required to support an army of five divisions is dealt with below.

The strength of the Canadian Army Overseas had grown steadily. At the end of 1942 it was 177,000 all ranks; by the end of 1943 it had risen to 242,000, and at 31 May 1944, on the eve of the invasion of Normandy, it was 251,000. Of these, about 75,000 men were in Italy.

## CHANGING POLICIES ON MANPOWER

Since manpower has been mentioned, the development of this question in Canada during this period may conveniently be briefly referred to here. Early in 1941 it was found necessary to call for recruits in a manner not before required, and in the spring an intensive recruiting campaign was launched. It should be noted that Canada's available manpower was being subjected to a much greater degree of inter-service competition than had been the case in the last war, when her naval forces were very small and she had no Air Force of her own, but merely contributed men to the R.F.C. and R.A.F. She had now organized great Naval and Air services, both of which offered many attractions and thus complicated the Army's problem of obtaining volunteers.

With the expansion of Canada's effort, pressure on manpower steadily increased. There was considerable popular demand for general conscription to replace the policy of compulsion for home defence only, expressed in the National Resources Mobilization Act; this grew louder after Japan's attack in December 1941. The Government, while not convinced that the time had yet come for general conscription, now decided nevertheless to clear the way for the adoption of such a policy when and if it seemed desirable; and the Speech from the Throne at the opening of the Dominion Parliament on 22 January 1942 contained the following passage:

The government is of the opinion that, at this time of gravest crisis in the world's history, the administration, subject only to its responsibility to parliament, should in this connection and irrespective of any previous commitments, possess complete freedom to act in accordance with its judgment of the needs of the situation as they may arise.

My ministers accordingly will seek, from the people, by means of a plebiscite, release from any obligation arising out of any past commitments restricting the methods of raising men for military service.

The plebiscite was taken in April. The question presented was this "Are you in favour of releasing the Government from any obligation arising out of any past commitments<sup>3</sup> restricting the methods of raising men for military service?" The result was a decisive "Yes" vote, with the Services voting somewhat more strongly in favour of release than civilians. Quebec was the only province to poll a majority against release.

The National Resources Mobilization Act was accordingly amended, the restriction on sending out of the country persons called up for military service being removed. The Government was now armed with full powers for general conscription; these were, however, held in reserve, not being invoked until November 1944. In the meantime the call-up for home

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<sup>3</sup> On the commitments, see above, p. 4.

defence proceeded on an increasing scale; and it must be noted that a by-product of this call-up was a steady flow of general service recruits for the Active Army, for a material proportion of the men warned for service under the N.R.M.A. invariably chose to "go active".

### THE CANADIAN WOMEN'S ARMY CORPS

Until this period women had been able to serve in the military forces of Canada only in the traditional role of Nursing Sisters in the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps — a role in which, we may note in passing, 3633 women served in this war. Now, however, they were to be given wider opportunities. The possibility of employing female volunteers for static military duties and thereby releasing men for combatant service had been under discussion for some time; and on 26 June 1941 the Government announced its intention of forming a Canadian Women's Army Corps. The first recruits were enrolled in the following September.

The Corps had already proved itself in Canada, and a detachment had given good service in Washington, D.C., when the decision was taken to employ C.W.A.C. units in establishments overseas. The first C.W.A.C. draft arrived in the-United Kingdom on 5 November 1942. The Corps' assistance proved invaluable at C.M.H.Q. and at Headquarters, Canadian Reinforcement Units; and when Canadian forces were committed to active operations C.W.A.C. detachments served at the Canadian static headquarters in both Italy and North-West Europe. The tasks which the women of the Corps performed grew more and more various as time passed. Clerical work always accounted for the majority, but other forms of employment ranged from service in the concert parties which entertained our troops in Britain and the theatres of war to duty as staff officers at static headquarters.

At the time of the conclusion of hostilities in Europe in May, 1945, the strength of the Canadian Women's Army Corps was 652 officers and 13,282 other ranks. Of these, 101 officers and 1843 other ranks were overseas in the European zone.

The formation of the Canadian Women's Army Corps was one of the most striking innovations of Canadian military policy in the Second Great War. No one acquainted with the facts will deny that it was also one of the most successful.

## CHAPTER IV

### AT THE WAR'S TURNING-POINT, 1942

#### THE CLIMACTIC TEAR

The climactic year of the war was 1942. During that year the flood of German conquest reached its highwater mark in both Europe and Africa; while the early months saw also the greatest triumphs of Japanese aggression in the Far East, with the fall of Singapore and the final overwhelming of the American forces in the Philippines. Yet at the year's end the situation had vastly changed.

In Russia the Germans had been decisively checked at Stalingrad in the autumn and by Christmas the Russian counter-offensive was rolling forward and had already recovered much ground. In North Africa, Rommel, who in October had been within easy striking-distance of Alexandria, had been driven from Egypt, and was now being assailed from the east by the Eighth Army and from the west by British and American forces landed in Algeria. In the Pacific, moreover, the Japanese had suffered naval defeats in the Coral Sea and at Midway, and Australian forces in New Guinea and United States Marines at Guadalcanal had passed to the offensive successfully on land.

In the western war against the Germans, with which this account is mainly concerned, it was the victory at El Alamein (23 October — 4 November) and the landings in French North Africa (8 November) that marked the turning of the tide. By the spring of 1943 the Germans had been cleared from the African continent. A new phase, the invasion of Southern Europe, opened in July, when an Allied force including Canadians landed in Sicily. The decisive stage of the offensive against Germany did not begin, however, until 6 June 1944, when Anglo-Canadian forces, partnered now by very powerful United States formations, returned to the soil of France from which they had been driven four years before.

The pattern of the Allied grand strategy evolved only gradually; but it was in 1942 that the most vital decisions were taken. During that spring and summer the military and political chiefs of the United Nations were hammering out, by a slow and somewhat painful process of discussion and negotiation, resolves which deeply affected the whole subsequent conduct of the war. Some account of these seems essential to full understanding of the Canadian events of this year, which witnessed the first battle of the new Canadian Army against the Germans — the great combined raid on Dieppe.

Just before Christmas of 1941 Mr. Churchill went to Washington, and he and Mr. Roosevelt agreed that a major operation against Germany must be attempted during 1942. In the following April, General George C. Marshall, Chief of Staff of the United States Army, went to London and conferred with British leaders. In these discussions there was general agreement on the necessity of an ultimate blow from the West, and a full-scale offensive against the Germans in France (known at this stage as Operation "Roundup") was tentatively set for the summer of 1943. It was recognized, however, that it might be desirable to undertake, to quote General Marshall, "a diversionary assault on the French coast at a much earlier date if such a desperate measure became necessary to lend a hand toward saving the situation on the Soviet front". The "emergency plan" was given the code name "Sledgehammer". It was a desperate scheme indeed, for it envisaged using six divisions, of which one or two would probably be Canadian, to establish a permanent limited bridgehead in France. Planning was undertaken both for the main and the secondary project.

In June, Mr. Churchill again went to Washington, accompanied by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, and discussed "Roundup", "Sledgehammer" and operations in the Mediterranean. At the middle of July, the discussions were renewed in London, General Marshall, Admiral King and other American leaders being present. The most immediately critical aspect of the situation now was the position in Russia. Here the Germans, after suffering severe reverses during the winter, had returned to the offensive in May. On 1 July Sebastopol fell to them, and on 24 July they took Rostov and began to drive into the Caucasus. The situation of the Soviet forces was very serious; the Western Allies were being subjected to heavy pressure from Moscow for a large-scale offensive in the West; and there appeared in fact to be a very palpable danger of Russia's being driven out of the war. Russian demands were seconded by popular movements in England and other Allied countries; on 26 July, for instance, a meeting in London, attended by perhaps 60,000 people, called for what was known, somewhat inaccurately, as the "Second Front

In spite of these circumstances, the British and American leaders saw with increasing clarity, as the weeks passed, that it was out of the question to undertake immediate major operations in Western Europe. In General Marshall's words, "Poverty of equipment, especially in landing craft, and the short period remaining when the weather would permit cross-Channel movement of small craft", ruled out "Sledgehammer" for 1942. The conclusion was that the only major operation that could be undertaken with a fair prospect of success that year was "Torch", the landings in French North Africa. The decision (reached on 25 July) to launch this great enterprise was fundamental; for it entailed

committing Allied resources to the Mediterranean to an extent that would probably render a large-scale offensive in North-West Europe impossible before 1944.

### CANADIAN RAIDING OPERATIONS: ASPIRATIONS AND DISAPPOINTMENTS

While the United Nations' strategy was thus being worked out "on the highest level", the hopes of the Canadians in Britain were largely centred, for the moment, on more modest projects. When the men of the Canadian Corps moved to the Sussex coast in the autumn of 1941 they indulged the expectation that their new role would bring the opportunity of taking part in raids against the German-held shores across the Channel. By this period the "Commandos" of the Special Service Brigade, working under Combined Operations Headquarters, had already carried out a number of daring enterprises which had caught the public imagination.

Cross-Channel raids had been discussed between Generals Paget and McNaughton as early as September 1941. As a result, selected groups of men were given special training in combined operations. It was anticipated that it would be possible to mount a succession of minor raids during the winter. Plans for two small operations existed and it was hoped that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division might be able to carry them out. They were proposed for three successive suitable periods, in December, January and February; but on all three occasions the operations were cancelled because no assault landing craft were to be had.

General Crerar, on taking command of the Canadian Corps, was determined to do his utmost to get raiding opportunities for his troops; and in February and March of 1942 he urged upon both General Montgomery and Commodore Lord Louis Mountbatten the desirability of giving them a chance of matching their skill and courage against the enemy. Further combined training was now arranged. In April a large detachment from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division carried out ten days' intensive training, and there seemed a possibility that it would be employed in an actual operation. Once again, however, the men's hopes were disappointed.

In this same month, nevertheless, Canadian troops did finally participate in a raid, although it brought them little satisfaction. On 1 April G.H.Q. Home Forces inquired whether the Canadian Corps would provide 50 trained men for use in a commando raid. Generals Crerar and McNaughton having approved the scheme, a party of the Carleton and York Regiment, commanded by Lieut. J. P. Ensor, was allotted the task. The raid (Operation "Abercrombie") was directed by Major Lord Lovat of No. 4 Commando; the Canadian party had an independent role under him. The objective was the area of the village of



Hardelot, just south of Boulogne. The aims were to reconnoitre defences, destroy a searchlight post and capture prisoners. The Canadians, transported in two assault craft, were to land south of the village, while the Commando men went in north of it.

After a first attempt had been frustrated by bad weather on the night of 19-20 April, the raid took place two nights later. Lovat's own men duly landed and three patrols went out; but the recall rocket had to be fired before the searchlight post could be attacked, and (the enemy in the actual beach defences having rapidly decamped) no prisoners were taken. The Canadians never even got ashore. The naval commander of their group of craft fell ill the morning of the operation and had to be replaced. It is also reported that the craft had defective compasses. Whatever the reason, the assault craft carrying the Canadians and the support craft in which was the naval commander failed to keep station properly and Ensor's boat became separated from the others. Search was made without success. In these circumstances it was impossible to carry out the plan and any landings could only have been made at random, for it seems clear that the navigators were quite at a loss. While the craft were still searching for each other, the recall rocket was seen; and on hearing by wireless that the Commando troops had re-embarked, the Canadians' craft shaped course for Dover independently. It is questionable whether the enemy had seen them, and though there was considerable machine-gun fire in their general direction they suffered no casualties.

Full of chagrin, they wrote the incident down as one more in a most singular series of frustrations; it was little comfort to them to reflect that this party had a good claim to be considered the first "formed body" of the Canadian Army to come under the fire of German ground forces in the Second Great War. Lord Lovat (who learned of their misfortune only after his own return to Dover) wrote to General McNaughton expressing sympathy for this "very fine detachment". "I hope I may be allowed to go tiger shooting with them again sometime", he said. He was, in fact, to have the opportunity of hunting very big game indeed in Canadian company before the year was out.

## THE ORIGINS OF THE DIEPPE OPERATION

In October 1941 Captain Lord Louis Mountbatten was appointed Adviser on Combined Operations, succeeding Admiral of the Fleet Lord Keyes who had held the title of Director. On 18 March 1942 Mountbatten became Chief of Combined Operations with the rank of Vice Admiral, and at the same time Combined Operations Headquarters was considerably expanded. This headquarters had two main functions: the organization of raiding operations to do immediate damage to the enemy, and the development of equipment and technique for amphibious

operations generally and for the ultimate full-dress invasion of North-West Europe in particular. It was with both in view that Combined Operations Headquarters originated the project of an attack on Dieppe. The raid on St. Nazaire, the most ambitious so far undertaken by the Combined Operations Command, took place on 28 March 1942; and in April planning began for that on Dieppe, a much larger enterprise.

This project had a far closer relation to the future invasion of the continent than any raid yet attempted. It would illuminate what was considered in 1942 the primary problem of an invasion operation: that of the immediate acquisition of a major port. It was on a sufficient scale to afford a test of the new technique and material (including tank landing craft) which had been developed. Such a test was felt to be essential before attempting full-scale amphibious operations, for there had been no major assault landing since those at Gallipoli in 1915, and the small raids so far made had thrown no light on the handling of a large naval assault fleet in action.

The perilous enterprise was not undertaken without deep consideration. On 8 September 1942, reviewing the "hard, savage clash" at Dieppe in one of his periodical reports to the House of Commons, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom said: "I, personally, regarded the Dieppe assault, to which I gave my sanction, as an indispensable preliminary to full-scale operations". Mr. Churchill had, in fact, at an advanced stage of the planning, after his return from the United States late in June, specifically sought the counsel of some of his most senior service advisers on the utility of the proposed raid in a private conference at Downing Street. The answer which he received, couched in the most decided terms, was that a raid on the French coast on a divisional scale was absolutely essential if the project of the ultimate invasion of France was to be seriously considered.

Dieppe, a resort town with a good harbour, lies some 67 miles from Newhaven in Sussex, just nicely within the range of the fighter aircraft of 1942. The coast hereabouts consists mainly of unscalable cliffs. The only really large gap in this barrier is at Dieppe itself, where there is nearly a mile of beach between the commanding headlands east and west of the town; but there is an accessible beach at Pourville, about two and a half miles west of Dieppe harbour, and a much narrower gap in the cliffs at Puits (also called Puits) a little over a mile east of it. Another possible landing place is Quiberville, at the mouth of the River Saane, eight miles west of Dieppe. Topography thus imposed severe limitations upon any plan of attack.

The Combined Operations Headquarters Planning Staff began work on an Outline Plan about the middle of April. The Army was represented by staff officers from G.H.Q. Home Forces. At an early stage, the C.-in-C. Home Forces delegated his authority in the matter to

the G.O.C.-in-C. South Eastern Command (Lieutenant-General B. L. Montgomery), who thereafter took the responsibility for the military side of the planning and himself attended some of the later meetings of the planners.

Documentary evidence on the development of the Outline Plan is fragmentary, but it appears that two alternatives were considered: one providing for no frontal attack on Dieppe itself, but based upon landings on the flanks at Puits, Pourville and Quiberville, and the other comprehending a frontal attack, supplemented by flank attacks at Puits and Pourville, and by attacks by parachute and airborne troops on two coast defence batteries situated near Berneval, five miles east of Dieppe, and near Varengeville, four miles west of it. The latter plan was ultimately adopted, the planners recommending committing the tanks (which it was proposed to use for the first time in a Combined Operations raid) to a direct assault on Dieppe.

This frontal-attack scheme may have been related to the problem of immediate acquisition of a port, just referred to; an attempt to "pinch out" a port by landings on its flanks might lead to delays which would give the enemy time to demolish the harbour, whereas if the place could be seized by a blow into the centre the problem would be solved. It was moreover considered preferable to land the tanks in front rather than to use the flank beach at Quiberville, because a tank attack directed from that distant point upon Dieppe, and upon the aerodrome of Dieppe-St. Aubin, directly south of the town, which was one of the main objectives, would have little chance of achieving surprise and would have to cross two rivers, the Saane and the Scie, whose bridges would require to be secured in advance. It was by no means certain, moreover, that these bridges would carry a Churchill tank. In the early stages consideration was also given to landing tanks at Pourville, but this idea was dropped, apparently because the exits from the beach were considered inadequate. On 25 April a formal meeting at Combined Operations Headquarters, presided over by Lord Louis Mountbatten and attended by Major-General P. G. S. Gregson-Ellis of G.H.Q. Home Forces, adopted the Outline Plan just sketched — incorporating a frontal assault preceded by air bombing.

On 11 May, the Chief of Combined Operations submitted this Outline Plan to the Chiefs of Staff Committee, informing them that it had the concurrence of the G.O.C.-in-C. South Eastern Command. In recommending the raid, Lord Louis Mountbatten wrote.

Apart from the military objective given in the outline plan, this operation will be of great value as training for Operation "Sledgehammer" or any other major operation as far as the actual assault is concerned. It will not, however, throw light on the maintenance problem over beaches.

On 13 May the Chiefs of Staff approved the Outline Plan as a basis for detailed planning.

No Canadian officer had anything to do with the scheme until after the completion of the Outline Plan. On 30 April General Montgomery visited General McNaughton at his headquarters and told him of the project. The troops were to come from South Eastern Command, and Montgomery said that while he had been "pressed to agree to a composite British-Canadian force, he had replied that it was essential to maintain unity of command, and that in his opinion the Canadian troops were those best suited. He had spoken of the operation to General Crerar, whose Corps was under his own operational command; and Crerar had recommended the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division for it. These arrangements General McNaughton, in his capacity as Senior Combatant Officer of the Canadian Army Overseas, now confirmed, subject to the plans being satisfactory and receiving his approval.<sup>1</sup> From this time, accordingly, Canadian officers participated in the detailed planning.

The opening paragraphs of the Outline Plan ran as follows:—

*Object*

I. Intelligence reports indicate that Dieppe is not heavily defended and that the beaches in the vicinity are suitable for landing Infantry, and Armoured Fighting Vehicles at some. It is also reported that there are forty invasion barges in the harbour.

II. It is therefore proposed to carry out a raid with the following objectives:—

- (a) destroying enemy defences in the vicinity of Dieppe;
- (b) destroying the aerodrome installations at St. Aubin;
- (c) destroying R.D.F.<sup>2</sup> Stations, power stations, dock and rail facilities and petrol dumps in the vicinity;
- (d) removing invasion barges for our own use;
- (e) removal of secret documents from the Divisional Headquarters at Arques-la-Bataille;
- (f) to capture prisoners.

*Intention.*

III. A force of infantry, Air-borne troops and Armoured Fighting Vehicles will land in the area of Dieppe to seize the town and vicinity. This area will be held during daylight while the tasks are carried out. The force will then re-embark.

IV. The operation will be supported by fighter aircraft and bomber action.

The opinion that Dieppe was "not heavily defended" requires comment. It was believed that the town was held by a single low category

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<sup>1</sup> General McNaughton, who already possessed authority to commit Canadian forces to "minor" enterprises, at once dispatched to Ottawa a Most Secret cable explaining that something larger was afoot and asking that his authority be widened accordingly. This was done, subject to his being satisfied in each case that the project concerned was practicable and valuable. In the interest of secrecy, no information as to the time or place of the raid was requested by or sent to Canada; but before it finally took place General Stuart visited England and was presumably fully informed.

<sup>2</sup> Radio Direction Finding (now called Radar).

battalion, though this was known to be supported by a considerable number of guns. This opinion was not in fact seriously at fault, for the force in the town itself on the day of the actual operation was only one battalion with attached troops (although the "Dieppe Strongpoint" garrison as a whole, embracing also the Puy and Pourville areas, was two battalions). In the light of that day's events, however, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the planners underrated the influence of topography and of the defensive works known to be numerous in the target area.

The naval force employed was to comprise about six small destroyers of the "Hunt" class, a shallow-draught gunboat, seven infantry landing ships, and a great number of small craft. The military forces were to be two infantry brigades with Engineers, and "up to a battalion of Army tanks".<sup>3</sup> The air forces were to include "sufficient bombers to produce extensive bombardment on selected areas and targets".

The plan provided for two infantry flank attacks, at Puy and Pourville, the force landing at the latter having the special task of capturing the aerodrome. Simultaneously with these attacks, parachute troops would be dropped to attack the German Divisional Headquarters and the coastal and anti-aircraft batteries in the area. The possible use of glider-borne troops was also envisaged. Half an hour after the flank attacks, the frontal assault would be put in at Dieppe itself by up to two infantry battalions and up to thirty tanks. During the night preceding the raid, a heavy bombing attack was to be delivered against the dock area, ceasing not later than an hour and a half before the flank landings. In addition, Hurricanes would attack the beach area of the town immediately before the frontal assault. The original plan provided also for low-level bombing coming just before the Hurricane attack; but this was eliminated from the scheme on 15 May.

The Canadian military authorities could, if they chose, have rejected the Outline Plan and allowed some British formation to undertake the operation. Those who have followed the story thus far, however, will realize how loath any Canadian officer, in 1942, would have been to reject any plan, proposed by competent authority, which promised action; they will realize, too, how violently resentful the ordinary Canadian soldier would have been had an enterprise like the Dieppe raid been carried out at this time without the participation of the Canadian force which had waited so long for battle. A Canadian staff "appreciation" of the Outline Plan which is extant betrays initial doubts

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<sup>3</sup> Army tanks (so called because normally, at least theoretically, controlled by an Army headquarters until released to a lower formation) were tanks for the assault role, more heavily armoured and slower than the "cruisers" used in armoured divisions. They were also known as "I" (infantry) tanks.

about the desirability of landing tanks on the Dieppe waterfront, but proceeds to adduce its possible advantages. Among these were the fact that, if successful, such action would place the tanks "in easy striking distance of the most appropriate objectives" (including the aerodrome); it would produce surprise; and it would have "a terrific moral effect" on both Germans and French. The plan was considered to have "a reasonable prospect of success", and its acceptance was recommended.

The same meeting of the Chiefs of Staff Committee which approved the Outline Plan agreed to the employment of Canadian troops and appointed Military and Air Force Commanders: Major-General J. H. Roberts, commanding the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division, and Air Vice-Marshal T. L. Leigh-Mallory. The Naval Force Commander (appointed subsequently) was Rear-Admiral H. T. Baillie Grohman.<sup>4</sup>

### TRAINING AND PLANNING FOR DIEPPE

The operation (known at this stage as "Rutter") entailed intensive combined training by the Canadian units. This was carried out in the Isle of Wight. The brigades designated were the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, commanded by Brigadier Sherwood Lett, and the 6<sup>th</sup>, commanded by Brigadier W. W. Southam. The tank unit chosen was the 14<sup>th</sup> Canadian Army Tank Regiment (Calgary Regiment), of the 1<sup>st</sup> Army Tank Brigade. The force also included large numbers of Engineers, chiefly from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, artillery detachments to man captured guns, and the necessary medical and other units.

The syllabus was designed to "harden" the troops as well as train them. Training on a battalion basis having gone as far as it could be carried in the time available, a large-scale exercise, which was, in fact, a dress rehearsal for the raid, took place on 11-12 June near Bridport, Dorset, on a stretch of coast resembling the Dieppe area. The result was far from satisfactory; units were landed miles from the proper beaches, and the tank landing craft arrived over an hour late. In these circumstances, Lord Louis Mountbatten decided that further rehearsal was essential and that no attempt, therefore, would be made to carry out the operation during June, as had been the intention. The troops remained in the Isle of Wight, and the second exercise was carried out at Bridport on 22-24 June. The results were much more satisfactory.

It was now intended that the raid should take place on 4 July or one of the days following. The troops were accordingly embarked on 2 and 3 July, and thereafter remained "sealed" on board their ships. So far, only officers had known that an actual operation was to be undertaken;

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<sup>4</sup> When the operation was revived in mid-July, Admiral Baillie-Grohman was no longer available, and Captain J. Hughes-Hallett, who had been associated with the planning of the operation from the beginning, was appointed instead.

now, however, General Roberts and Admiral Mountbatten visited the various ships and spoke to the men on the task ahead of them. All the troops were fully "briefed".

On 3 July the weather was unsuitable for launching the enterprise that night, and it was postponed for twenty-four hours. The next day, conditions still being unfavourable, it was again put off. On 5 July a conference agreed upon modifications of plan with a view to carrying it out on a shorter time-table on 8 July, the last day on which tide conditions would permit it.

The concentration of shipping about the Isle of Wight had not escaped the notice of the enemy, and at 6:15 on the morning of the 7<sup>th</sup> four of his aircraft struck at vessels of the force lying in Yarmouth Roads near the west end of the Solent. Two landing ships, "Princess Astrid" and "Princess Josephine Charlotte", were hit. The troops on both were mainly from the Royal Regiment of Canada. Fortunately, in the words of the unit's War Diary, "the bombs passed completely through the ships before exploding", and the Royals suffered only four minor casualties. This attack in itself was not enough to cause cancellation of the operation, for arrangements were hastily made to embark the Royals in another ship. The Naval decision, however, was that the weather was still too bad to permit of attempting the operation on 8 July. It was accordingly cancelled; the bitterly disappointed soldiers were disembarked and the force which had spent so long in the Isle of Wight was returned to the mainland and dispersed. As the troops had been fully informed of the objective of the proposed raid, and once they left the ships it would no longer be possible to maintain complete secrecy, General Montgomery recommended that the operation should now "be off for all time".

During the weeks of training and rehearsing, the plan for the operation had been materially altered. In particular, the heavy bombing attack had been deleted. This was not done merely to avoid the inevitable casualties to the French population; for while normally it was the rule that targets in Occupied France could be bombed only when weather permitted a very high degree of accuracy (and this had prevented bombing in support of the St. Nazaire raid), Mr. Churchill agreed on 30 May that coastal raids (only) might be an exception. On 5 June, however, a meeting attended by the three Force Commanders and presided over by the G. O. C.-in-C. South Eastern Command accepted the recommendation of the Air Force Commander to eliminate the high-level bombardment. This was done for a number of reasons. It was thought that bombing, if not overpowering, might only serve to warn the enemy; the Air Force Commander was quite unable to guarantee the degree of accuracy which would ensure the destruction of the row of houses facing the sea front; and in these conditions the Military Force

Commander feared that destruction within the town would be such as to block the streets with debris and prevent the tanks from getting through to their objectives to the southward.

The operation, abandoned on 8 July with every appearance of finality, was nevertheless revived about one week later. Written evidence concerning the revival is limited, and the account which follows is based to some extent upon the recollections of officers who were closely concerned.

The Dieppe project had, as already noted, been an important element in the programme looking towards a future invasion of the continent; and its cancellation was a setback to that programme as well as a disappointment to the Canadian troops. Apart from these considerations, there were obviously others which made a major raid expedient at this moment. The public in the Allied countries, we have seen, was calling loudly for action, and considerations of morale suggested the desirability of meeting the demand as far as it was practicable to do so. At the same time, the German successes in Russia rendered it essential to give any diversionary aid possible to our Soviet allies. There is no evidence that the Russian situation was actually an important factor in the decision to revive the Dieppe project, but the news that a large distracting raid in the west was again in prospect was welcomed by the British Prime Minister, who shortly after the decision was taken found himself faced with the somewhat formidable task of informing Marshal Stalin that there was to be no Second Front in Europe in 1942.<sup>5</sup>

For an early operation, such as was desirable for so many reasons, the Dieppe scheme was the best possibility: it offered a ready-made plan and a force already trained. It was now subject, however, to serious objections on grounds of security, for the possibility had to be accepted that, with so many thousands of men in the secret, the enemy might have got wind of our plan. It could only be revived, therefore, if we could be more than reasonably certain that information of the revival would not reach the Germans. A satisfactory formula was found by Captain J. Hughes-Hallett, Naval Adviser at Combined Operations Headquarters.

With the military force ready trained as it was, he suggested, it was possible to re-mount the attack in a manner which would make it very difficult of detection in advance; for it was not necessary to concentrate the force beforehand. Instead, the various units could move direct from

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<sup>5</sup> The revival of the project was not a result of the abandonment of "Sledgehammer". The chronology should be carefully noted. The decision to revive the Dieppe operation was taken by Combined Operations Headquarters by 14 July and approved by the Chiefs of Staff Committee on 20 July. On 25 July the Anglo-American conferees in London decided to invade North Africa (thus finally rejecting for 1942 the Second Front in France). On 12 August Mr. Churchill arrived in Moscow.



their stations to their different ports of embarkation, and embark there on the same evening on which they were to sail. Moreover, whereas for "Rutter" all units had been embarked in infantry landing ships with a view to transferring to small craft only in the vicinity of the objective, it was now suggested that three units might be carried all the way in personnel landing craft. This made further dispersion possible; Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal, in the event, embarked at the small port of Shoreham in Sussex, and the Cameron Highlanders and No. 3 Commando at Newhaven. There would be no noticeable assembly of shipping. This new basis proved acceptable to all parties; and Hughes-Hallett himself was now designated as Naval Force Commander.

Although in essentials the actual attack plan was the same as before (it had to be if the operation were to be launched without long delay), certain modifications were introduced. In particular, since the use of paratroops demanded ideal weather conditions and also required considerable time for briefing, it was decided to eliminate this element of the force, substituting Commando units, who would have the task of neutralizing the coastal batteries on either side of Dieppe, which if left alone would make it impossible for our ships to lie off the coast.<sup>6</sup>

The "chain of command" was also different. For "Rutter" the responsible military authority had been the G.O.C.-in-C. South Eastern Command, and the G.O.C.-in-C. First Canadian Army had held only an undefined watching brief. For "Jubilee" -the name by which the raid was now to be known — the C.-in-C. Home Forces, on General McNaughton's recommendation, made the Canadian Army Commander the responsible military authority. General McNaughton delegated this responsibility to General Crerar. General Montgomery thus ceased to have any further connection with the operation; and before it actually took place he had left for Egypt to assume command of the Eighth Army.

Before the plan was made "firm" there was further discussion of the question of aerial bombardment. The Air Force Commander again advised against it, and the Military Force Commander, for the same reasons already given, concurred. General Roberts wrote later:

The original plan for bombing envisaged two or three minor bombing raids on Dieppe, prior to the operation. As these had not been carried out, it was felt that a large scale attack, probably inaccurately placed, would merely serve to place the enemy on the alert. This was a considerable factor.

At all stages it was insisted that bombing could only be carried out by night, and inaccuracy, rather than accuracy, was guaranteed.

The elimination of the air bombardment had removed from the plan

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<sup>6</sup> This change was facilitated by the availability of two new infantry landing ships which had not been ready in time for the earlier scheme.

the one element of really heavy support contained in it. The assault would now be backed by nothing stronger than 4-inch guns and Boston bombers. Surprise, rather than striking power, was to be the chief reliance in this operation. In the main attack much would also depend upon the most exact co-ordination between the attack by cannon-firing fighters, the landing of the infantry and the arrival of the first flight of tanks.

The utmost precautions were taken to maintain secrecy. Even the senior officers of the units concerned were told of the revival of the project only a week or so before the operation; the men learned of it only after they arrived at the embarkation ports on 18 August. Those carried in landing ships were briefed on board; those crossing the Channel in small craft were briefed in specially-guarded buildings just before embarkation. The infantry units moved to the ports by motor transport the afternoon before the raid, the move being represented as a "movement exercise".

The total of ships and craft employed in the operation (including vessels of two minesweeping flotillas which cleared the way) was 253. The military force embarked amounted to approximately 6100 all ranks, of whom 4963 were Canadians and about 1075 were British. In addition there were some 50 all ranks from the 1<sup>st</sup> U.S. Ranger Battalion (dispersed among various units as observers) and 18 all ranks of No. 10 (Inter-Allied) Commando.

About 9:30 on the evening of 18 August the first ships slipped out of Portsmouth and Southampton; and, as darkness fell, the various groups drew into formation and shaped their pre-arranged courses towards the French coast.

## CHAPTER V

### THE RAID ON DIEPPE, 19 AUGUST 1942

#### THE PLAN AND THE CROSSING

The plan for the attack on Dieppe must now be described in greater detail. It entailed assaults at five separate points.

Four simultaneous flank attacks were to go in at 4:50 a.m., British Summer Time.<sup>1</sup> This was calculated as “the beginning of nautical twilight”; it was intended that the craft would touch down while it was still dark enough to make it difficult for enemy gunners to see their targets. These attacks, from right to left, were as follows: upon the coastal battery near Varengeville by No. 4 Commando, commanded by Lt.-Col. Lord Lovat; at Pourville by the South Saskatchewan Regiment, commanded by Lt.-Col. C. C. I. Merritt; at Puys by the Royal Regiment of Canada, commanded by Lt: Col. D. E. Catto; and upon the battery near Berneval by No. 3 Commando, commanded by Lt.-Col. J. F. Durnford-Slater. Half an hour later,<sup>2</sup> the main attack was to go in at Dieppe itself, delivered on the right by the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry (Lt.-Col. R. R. Labatt) and on the left by the Essex Scottish (Lt.-Col. F. K. Jaspersen). Here, the leading tanks of the 14<sup>th</sup> Canadian Army Tank Regiment, commanded by Lt: Col. J. G. Andrews, were to land simultaneously with the first wave of infantry. The Military Force Commander had available as “floating reserve” one infantry battalion, Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal (Lt: Col. D. Ménard), and the Royal Marine “A” Commando (Lt: Col. J. P. Phillipps).

Half an hour after the initial assault at Pourville, the Queen’s Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada, under Lt.-Col. A. C. Gostling, were to land there and push inland to join up with the tanks moving southward from Dieppe and deliver a joint attack against the aerodrome. Speaking broadly, the scheme of the operation was to capture Dieppe and establish around it a perimeter within which extensive demolitions would be carried out by the Engineers. Outside the perimeter the Camerons and

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<sup>1</sup> All times in the narrative that follows are B.S.T., except in direct quotations from German documents. The Germans were operating on the equivalent of British Double Summer Time, one hour in advance.

<sup>2</sup> The reasons for the half-hour’s delay were naval. Had the frontal and flank assaults been simultaneous, there would not have been sea-room for all the ships and craft involved; moreover, this would have entailed the infantry landing ships leaving harbour half an hour earlier, and they would almost certainly have been sighted by the German evening air reconnaissance.

the tanks would operate against the aerodrome and the German Divisional Headquarters which was mistakenly believed to be located in Arques-la-Bataille, some four miles south-east of Dieppe. We now know that it had moved on 27 April to Envermeu, six miles farther east.

Command was organized as follows. Capt. Hughes-Hallett was in the headquarters ship, the destroyer "Calpe"; with him was General Roberts. Air Vice-Marshal Leigh-Mallory was at Headquarters No. 11 Fighter Group, at Uxbridge, Middlesex, which was the best point for controlling his squadrons; he was represented in "Calpe" by a senior R.A.F. officer. To provide against destruction or disablement of "Calpe", a duplicate headquarters was provided in the destroyer "Ferme"; the senior military officer here was Brigadier C. C. Mann, who had played a leading part in the Canadian staff work for the operation. Admiral Mountbatten and General Crerar were to "watch" from Uxbridge; for, once the operation had begun, it could be materially influenced only by air intervention.

Throughout the night the flotillas, shrouded in darkness and maintaining wireless silence, sailed towards their objective. The force passed in safety an enemy minefield, through which passages had been duly swept and marked. All went well until 3:47 a.m., but then misfortune struck. At eight o'clock in the evening, we learn from Field-Marshal von Rundstedt's report, a small German coastal convoy, consisting of five motor or motor sailing vessels escorted by three submarine-chasers, had cleared Boulogne harbour for Dieppe. This convoy now ran into the extreme leftward group of our force, "Group 5", consisting of 23 personnel landing craft, accompanied by three small escort craft and carrying No. 3 Commando. Two destroyers were covering our eastward flank, but these ships were not in close company with No. 3 Commando's craft, and, in fact, took no part in the action which now ensued, their commander believing that the gunfire came from the shore. It is interesting to note that the movements of the convoy had been detected by shore radar stations in England, and two warning signals were sent out by the Commander-in-Chief, Portsmouth (at 1:27 and 2:44 a.m.). Some vessels of our force received them; others evidently did not, and among those which did not, it appears, were these destroyers. The result was that the British escort vessels fought a violent short-range battle with the Germans, and were seriously damaged; and the craft carrying the Commando were completely scattered. One of the enemy submarinechasers was sunk.

In view of the danger of complete loss of surprise which this encounter represented, the question has sometimes been asked: Why was the operation not abandoned at this point? There were definite reasons.

The operation order specified, "If the operation is to be cancelled after the ships have sailed, the decision must be made before 0300

hours.”<sup>3</sup> This was because this was the time fixed for the infantry landing ships concerned with the flank attacks to lower their landing craft, which would immediately start in towards the beaches. In order to avoid the landing ships being detected by the German radar, it was necessary to lower the craft some ten miles from the shore and allow almost two hours for the run-in. As no satisfactory means existed of recalling a large number of assault craft travelling in darkness, it was impossible to call off the operation at the time of the encounter with the convoy, nearly an hour after the deadline fixed in the order.

The planners, it is of special interest to note, had striven to provide against precisely the sort of eventuality which had now taken place. The naval orders directed that wireless silence might be broken “by Senior Officer of Group 5 if by delays or casualties it is the opinion of the senior military officer that the success of the landing at ‘Yellow’ beach is seriously jeopardized”. But the Group Commander was quite unable to report his misfortune, for in the fight with the German vessels the wireless installations on his steam gunboat were destroyed, and wireless traffic congestion foiled a subsequent attempt to signal from a motor launch. The consequence was that the Force Commanders in “Calpe”, although sight and sound had advised them that there had been some contact with the enemy, received no actual account of the events until about 6:00 a.m., when both the flank attacks and the frontal attack had gone in. The whole episode was a remarkable example of how, in war, the most careful calculations may be upset.

### THE ENEMY AT DIEPPE

German documents now in Allied hands afford a very detailed picture of the enemy’s strength and dispositions in the Dieppe area. Only a brief outline, however, can be given here.

The highest German military authority in France was the Commander-in-Chief West, Field-Marshal von Rundstedt. Dieppe was in the sector controlled, under him, by the Fifteenth Army. The Corps concerned with it was the 81<sup>st</sup>, with headquarters near Rouen; and the Division directly responsible for the Dieppe area was the 302<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division, commanded by Lieutenant-General Conrad Haase. This Division was not regarded as of particularly high quality; it had a certain number of foreigners in its ranks, and its transport was horse-drawn. Its heavy weapons were largely of foreign type — Czech, French or Belgian; but for this very reason it had been possible to equip it on an unusually lavish scale.

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<sup>3</sup> 3:00 a.m.

The Dieppe area was organized as an independent strongpoint (Stützpunkt) capable of "all-round defence" and girded on the land side with a continuous barbed-wire obstacle. The strongpoint area included Puys and the high ground immediately east of Pourville. The latter village itself lay outside the wire, but the troops holding it were clearly considered part of the strongpoint garrison. The garrison was controlled by the headquarters of the 571<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment (equivalent to a British brigade), located on the West Headland at Dieppe. It consisted of two battalions of this regiment (with headquarters on the West and East Headlands respectively); a battalion of the 302<sup>nd</sup> Divisional Artillery, with four four-gun batteries; the headquarters of the divisional engineer battalion with two of its companies; and various minor units, including Luftwaffe anti-aircraft artillery, in considerable strength. The remaining battalion of the 571<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment was in Ouville-la-Rivière, south-west of Dieppe and outside the strongpoint, as regimental reserve.

The sector was very strong in artillery. The sixteen 10-centimetre field howitzers of the divisional artillery battalion were in four battery positions, two on each side of Dieppe and all but one within the wire barrier. In addition, eight French 75-millimetre guns were emplaced on the front of attack to sweep the beaches. There were 30 anti-aircraft guns, including six heavy ones, in the area of battle. Finally, there were three coastal batteries in the sector attacked: that at Varengeville with six 15-centimetre (5.9-inch) guns, that at Berneval with three 17-centimetre and four 105-millimetre guns, and one near Arques-la-Bataille with four 15-centimetre howitzers. A fourth battery at Mesnil Val, west of Le Tréport, mounting four 15-centimetre guns, was close enough to intervene effectively in the Berneval area.

The enemy had large reserves to hand. The 302<sup>nd</sup> Division's own reserve consisted of an infantry regiment with two battalions under command and headquarters at Eu, near Le Tréport. The Corps Reserve was another regiment with its headquarters at Doudeville, south of St. Valery-en-Caux, plus a tank company at Yvetot; while in Army Reserve there were four rifle battalions north-west of Rouen and some motorized and self-propelled artillery. A still more formidable factor was the 10<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division, forming part of Rundstedt's Army Group Reserves. This division, we knew, was in the Amiens area and would certainly be thrown in against any large-scale landing. We counted upon completing our operation before it could get into action.

Our troops who returned to England after the raid were in general convinced that the enemy had known in advance that it was going to take place and had strengthened Dieppe accordingly. Those who became prisoners were even more strongly of this opinion, having been told by the Germans that they had been "waiting for us" for days past. Today, however, with all the enemy's records at our disposal, we can say with

complete certainty that he had no fore-knowledge whatever of our operation. The events preceding it are thus outlined in the report of the German Commander-in-Chief West, dated 3 September 1942:

From the middle of June onwards, information accumulated at G.H.Q. West as the result of photographic and visual reconnaissance by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Air Fleet and reports from agents, of an *assembly of numerous small landing craft on the South Coast of England.*

A further reconnaissance flight, flown only at the end of July because of poor weather conditions, confirmed the assembly of vessels which had become still more numerous since the large number observed in June.

No further data—except from agents' reports of an English operation, which could not be checked—could be obtained up to 15 August. *In spite of this, G.H.Q. West appreciated the situation from the middle of June to be such that it had to reckon with the possibility of an enemy operation, even a major undertaking, at any moment, and at any point on its extensive coastal front.* The U-Boat strong-points and defence sectors were therefore strengthened as much as possible, both by manpower and by construction (the landward fronts not being neglected), and the organization of the forces was repeatedly checked so that all reserves—local, divisional, corps, and army—would be ready for immediate employment...

On 15 August, a sudden change took place in the English wireless procedure which made our interception service much more difficult. Numerous flights toward the Channel Coast suggested the possibility that these were briefing flights, and frequently aircraft shot down were found to have American crews. No further change in the enemy picture appeared until 0450 hours on 19 August, not even as a result of the early reconnaissance of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Air Fleet.<sup>4</sup>

The reports from agents vaguely referred to by Rundstedt were evidently not considered significant; and his references to “briefing flights” and changes in wireless procedure are somewhat discounted by a later passage in this same report which observes that wireless interception, and observation of Allied air activity, gave no indication of the impending raid. The Germans' solid information was limited to the knowledge that during the summer landing craft in considerable numbers had been assembled on the English south coast; and this, coupled with their general estimate of the strategic situation, led them to intensify their defensive measures along their whole front, including of course the Dieppe area.

Special precautions were prescribed for periods when moon and tide were particularly favourable for landings. On 20 July the G.O.C.-in-C. Fifteenth Army issued an order calling attention to three such periods: 27 July-3 August, 10-19 August, and 25 August-1 September. On 8 August, accordingly, the headquarters of the 302<sup>nd</sup> Division ordered a state of “threatening danger” for the ten nights from 10-11 to 19-20 August. The enemy coastal garrisons were thus under a special

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<sup>4</sup> Italics represent underlining in the original document. The time mentioned (3:50 a.m. B.S.T.) is that of the encounter with the German convoy.

alert at the moment of the raid.

In the Germans' eyes, the situation in Russia provided a special reason for precautions on the Channel coast. On 10 August, at the outset of the period of alert just mentioned, the G.O.C.-in-C. Fifteenth Army sent out an order beginning, "Various reports permit the assumption that, because of the miserable position of the Russians, the Anglo-Americans will be forced to undertake something in the measurable future"; his troops were warned that such an attack would be a grim business and were urged to do their duty. A month earlier, on 10 July, Headquarters 81<sup>st</sup> Corps had told the 302<sup>nd</sup> Division that the C.-in-C. West had ordered precautions because of the Russians' reverses and the fact that they were believed to be "again" demanding of the British government the establishment of a second front. It added that there was no information of actual preparations for an attack, but that the Division was nevertheless to be brought up to full strength forthwith. This decision had considerable effect before the raid. The 302<sup>nd</sup> received two drafts of untrained reinforcements (1353 and 1150 men) on 20 July and 10-12 August respectively and its establishment was full on 19 August. Other divisions on the coast were similarly reinforced.

How far did the collision with the German convoy serve to put the enemy on shore on the alert and thereby contribute to the defeat of our enterprise? Even today, this is not a simple question to answer. Certain German reports state categorically that the effect was decisive. Thus that of the 81<sup>st</sup> Corps says that as a result of the engagement "the entire coast defence system was alerted". There is a similar remark in the report of the C.-in-C. West. Yet detailed analysis of the German documents, and collation of them with our own information, do not wholly support these statements.

The noise of the fight at sea did cause immediate precautions at some places. In particular, the Luftwaffe men staffing the radar equipment at Berneval manned their strongpoint within ten minutes of the fight beginning; from that moment the attack intended for that place had little chance of succeeding. We do not know when the defences were manned at Puy; but we do know that at Pourville our first wave of infantry landed without a shot being fired at them; and we know also, from the report of the 302<sup>nd</sup> Division, that the 571<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment in Dieppe itself did not actually order "action stations" (Gefechtsbereitschaft) until exactly 5:00 a.m., when it had already heard of the landing at Pourville a few minutes before. The Division ordered "action stations" one minute later. Notable also is the fact that about an hour after the contact with the convoy, at 4:45, the Commander Naval Group West expressed to G.H.Q. West the opinion that the affair was only a "customary attack on convoy". It would seem that the convoy escort had made no report of landing craft. The conclusion to which we are forced



is that the convoy fight did not result in a general loss of the element of surprise; and while it diminished our chances of success in the eastern sector off which the encounter took place, it is questionable whether it affected the main operation one way or the other.

### THE FORTUNES OF THE COMMANDOS

In telling the story of the raid it is best, perhaps, to relate separately the fortunes of the units engaged on the different beaches, beginning with the extreme left, where the plan of attack was disrupted as a result of the encounter with the convoy.<sup>5</sup>

As we have seen, the craft carrying No. 3 Commando were completely scattered. Most of the unit never reached the shore, and Lt.Col. Durnford-Slater returned to England without knowing that any part of it had done so. In point of fact, however, seven of the 23 craft landed their troops; and thanks to the determination of these men, the attack on the Berneval battery was not wholly ineffective.

Part of No. 3 Commando had been ordered to land on "Yellow I" beach, at Petit Berneval, east of the battery, and part on "Yellow II" beach to the west of it. Of the seven craft which touched down, six landed their men (numbering perhaps 120) later than planned at Yellow I beach. The defenders were fully on the alert; and not only did they outnumber the small force put ashore, but they were soon reinforced by the equivalent of three companies more. By about 10:00 a.m., after bitter fighting, the British were overwhelmed. The Germans claim to have taken 82 prisoners here.

At Yellow II beach, from which access inland was by a narrow gully, a single craft landed 20 officers and men under Major Peter Young. This little party, with magnificent effrontery, advanced against the battery. To take it was out of the question, but the Commando men got within 200 yards and sniped it for about an hour and a half, preventing the guns from firing against our ships. (A German artillery report indicates that between 5:10 and 7:45 a.m. the battery fired no shots, except over open sights at the snipers; it was thus neutralized for over two and a half hours. The actual period may well have been longer.) Major Young and his men then withdrew without loss to the beach, where they were taken off by the same faithful craft that had put them ashore. The bold action and extraordinary good fortune of this one boatload of men is a very bright spot in the gloom which otherwise

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<sup>5</sup> This account of the operation has been developed from one by the present writer which was published in the *Canadian Geographical Journal* for August, 1943. As to sources, several hundred personal accounts were written by individual Canadians immediately after the raid. In addition, the Historical Section interviewed many soldiers, including repatriated prisoners. Our accounts of unit operations derive in great part from this personal evidence.

pervades the eastern flank beaches.

In striking contrast with the ill-luck of No. 3 Commando on the extreme left were the fortunes of No. 4 at Varengeville on the extreme right. Lord Lovat's attack went precisely according to plan. His unit landed in two parties on different beaches ("Orange I" at Vasterival, north of the enemy battery, and "Orange II", the longer beach near Quiberville). The first party put in a "holding" attack against the battery, firing on it with mortars. A mortar bomb (or, according to German accounts, shots from low-flying R.A.F. aircraft) hit and set fire to the charges stacked ready for use beside the German guns. Then, at 6:20 a.m., the main party, having moved inland successfully, attacked the battery with the bayonet. In a short time, the enemy positions were cleared and the garrison cut to pieces. In this attack Capt. P. A. Porteous particularly distinguished himself. Although three times wounded, he took command of a troop which had lost its officers and led it in the final rush across open ground swept by machine-gun fire. He was subsequently awarded the Victoria Cross.

The strength of the battery's garrison is variously stated by the Germans as from 93 to 112 men; its losses, which vary only slightly in different accounts, were about 30 killed and 30 wounded. Four prisoners were brought back to England. Lord Lovat's force suffered 45 casualties, including two officers and 10 other ranks killed, but its success was complete. The menace of this battery to our shipping off Dieppe was wholly removed, for its guns were blown up before the Commando withdrew according to plan. No. 4 Commando was the only unit engaged in this operation to capture all its objectives. Its proceedings are a model of boldness and effective synchronization.

#### THE CANADIAN FLANK ATTACKS: PUYS

The ill-fortune which struck No. 3 Commando extended to the Canadian unit closest to it: the Royal Regiment of Canada at Puy. The beach here, and the gully behind it in which the little village lay, were both extremely narrow and were commanded at very short range by lofty cliffs. Success depended entirely upon surprise and upon the assault being made while it was dark enough to hinder the aim of the German gunners. Neither of these conditions was achieved. The German garrison at Puy was only two platoons; in the circumstances it was quite enough.

The Royals were to land in three waves: three companies in the first, the remaining company and battalion headquarters in the second ten minutes later, and a special force, composed mainly of three attached platoons of the Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada, in the third. The naval landing arrangements, however, ran into

bad luck. There was delay in forming up after the landing craft were lowered from the ships, and during the run-in certain craft became separated from the main body. The result was that the first wave landed, according to naval reports, 17 minutes late (when it was much lighter than had been intended); the second wave, or the second main group of craft, seems to have touched down some 20 minutes later; and at least two craft came in independently. The Germans were fully on the alert, and opened fire on the first craft before they touched down.

At the head of the beach was a sea-wall, with heavy wire upon it and behind it. As the Royals leaped ashore and rushed towards this wall, intense machine-gun fire came down, and many men fell. Halfway up the east cliff, flanking the beach, was a prominent house which had in its front garden, as we now know, a strong concrete pillbox, whose main slit had a murderous command. The platoons took shelter against the wall while breaches were blown in the wire; but they were still enfiladed from the left, and there were further casualties. Shortly, mortars began to drop bombs upon the beach. "Bangalore torpedoes" were exploded in the wire to cut it; gallant officers and men rushed through the gaps, and many were shot down in the attempt to come to grips with the invisible enemy.

The third wave was to land when "called in" by the men on shore. No signal being received, the senior military officer, in its absence, took the decision to land. The Black Watch platoons went ashore under the cliff to the west of the sea-wall, where the main body of survivors of the earlier waves were gathered. It was too late for these reinforcements to achieve anything, and most of the Highlanders subsequently became prisoners.

The only party of the Royals of any strength to get off the beach comprised about 20 officers and men commanded by Lt.-Col. Catto. It cut its way through the wire at the western end of the sea-wall, reached the cliff-top and cleared two houses there; but machine-gun fire coming down on the gap in the wire cut it off from support. The party lay up in a nearby wood until it was obvious that the raiding force had withdrawn and that there was no hope of being taken off. At 4:20 p.m. they surrendered.

In the face of the German fire (a troop of four howitzers in position only a few hundred yards south of Puy's fired 550 rounds during the morning at craft offshore) it was impossible to organize any systematic evacuation of the beach, although valiant attempts were made by the Navy; and very few of the Royals got back, to England. Their casualties from mortar and machine-gun fire had been very heavy, and when the remnant on the beach surrendered, which German logs indicate must have been about 8:30 in the morning, not many can have been unwounded. The enemy states that over 150 dead were counted at Puy's; along the fatal sea-wall the men of the Royals lay in heaps. It was the

most tragic single episode of the entire operation.

This setback had a decidedly adverse effect upon the raid as a whole, for the Royals had had the task of clearing the commanding headland immediately east of Dieppe, and their failure to do so meant that the numerous weapons there were able to enfilade the main beaches in front of the town at close range. For the Essex Scottish in particular this was a most serious matter.

#### THE CANADIAN FLANK ATTACKS: POURVILLE

The other Canadian flank attack, at Pourville, west of Dieppe, met with somewhat better fortune. The beach here was longer than that at Puits, but nevertheless dominated by cliffs on both sides. The Navy put the South Saskatchewan Regiment ashore at the time planned, or a very few minutes later; and there was no opposition until the unit had landed, although heavy fire broke out as the Canadians scaled the sea-wall and went forward into Pourville. In the semidarkness, however, the craft had not been able to strike the precise parts of the beach intended. This largely nullified the effect of the degree of surprise that had been achieved, for whereas the intention had been to land the unit *astride* the mouth of the River Scie, which flows into the Channel near the middle of the beach, almost the whole of it seems to have been actually landed *west* of the river. This meant that those companies charged with the vital task of gaining possession of the high ground to the eastward immediately overlooking Pourville had first to penetrate into the village and cross the river by the bridge carrying the main road towards Dieppe. The delay thus caused was probably fatal.

The company operating to the west of Pourville duly occupied all its objectives, including positions on the high ground immediately south-west of the village, and killed or captured a good many Germans in the process. The companies working to the eastward had no such success. Before they could reach the enemy positions on the heights, these positions were manned and firing. The eastern part of the village, and the bridge, were completely dominated by them; soon the bridge was carpeted with dead and the advance of the South Saskatchewan was held up.

At this point, Lt.-Col. Merritt, who had established his headquarters near the beach, came forward to take charge. Walking calmly into the storm of fire upon the bridge, waving his helmet and calling, "See, there is no danger here!", he carried party after party across by his example, and thereafter led a series of fierce attacks which took several of the positions commanding bridge and village. But in spite of his unwearying exertions and dauntless courage, and the best efforts of his men and of the Camerons who were now mingled with them, the posts

on the summit, including the trench system of Quatre Vents Farm and the fortified radar station which was one of the raid's objectives, could not be cleared. The enemy had every approach covered by mortar and machine-gun fire; and our thrusts were all beaten back, although small parties got very close to the heavily-wired radar station and one reached the edge of the Four Winds position.

The Cameron Highlanders, who, as we have noted, were to pass through the Pourville bridgehead and operate against the aerodrome in conjunction with the tanks from Dieppe, were landed rather late. As they came in, it was apparent to them that the South Saskatchewan had not succeeded in opening up their bridgehead in the full manner expected; fighting was clearly in progress in the outskirts of Pourville, and shells were bursting in the water offshore. But the Highlanders pushed on, and as the landing craft drove into the shallows their pipes answered the whine of the shells and the rattle of the machine-guns.

The moon has arisen, it shines on that path  
Now trod by the gallant and true;  
High, high are their hearts, for their Chieftain has said  
That whatever men dare they can do.

As the craft neared the shore, Lt.-Col. Gostling was calling cheerfully to his men, identifying the types of fire that were coming down upon them. The boats touched down; he leaped on to the shingle and went forward; then there was a burst of fire from an uncleared pillbox at the east end of the beach, and he fell dead. The command devolved upon Major A. T. Law. To advance to the aerodrome by the route east of the Scie, while the enemy held the high ground there, was out of the question, and Law decided to move by the west bank. This he did with the main body of his battalion, leaving behind him one company and parts of two others, which had landed east of the river, to assist the South Saskatchewan.

The column pushed rapidly inland, destroying small parties of Germans who sought to bar the way. After covering two miles or more, it reached Petit Appeville (where the main crossroads is called today "Carrefour des Canadiens") and overlooked the bridges across the Scie here, which it must pass to reach the aerodrome. But the tanks which should have been in evidence east of the river were not to be seen; the crossings were held by the enemy, who had brought up into this area his reserve battalion from Ouville; and time was growing short. Major Law had already decided to fall back to Pourville when a wireless message arrived ordering this action. The unit withdrew, suffering and inflicting casualties on the way. It had penetrated further inland than any other battalion engaged that day.

The South Saskatchewan and the Camerons lost heavily during the

final evacuation; for the enemy was able to bring fierce fire to bear upon the beach from his lofty positions east of the village, and from the high ground to the west, from which the South Saskatchewan company in possession had retired as the result of a misunderstanding of orders.<sup>6</sup> But the naval craft came in through the storm of steel with self-sacrificing gallantry (one Cameron wrote afterwards, "The L.M.G. fire was wicked on the beach, but the Navy was right in there"); the enemy's troops, who showed little stomach for really close fighting, were kept at arm's length by a courageous rearguard under Lt. Col. Merritt; and the greater part of both units was successfully re-embarked, though many of the men were wounded. The rearguard could not be brought off. It held out on the beach until towards half-past one, and surrendered only when ammunition was running low and it was clear that there was no possibility of evacuation or of doing further harm to the enemy. Lt.-Col. Merritt subsequently received the Victoria Cross.

#### THE FRONTAL ATTACK ON DIEPPE

At 5:20 a.m., the exact time appointed, or within a minute or two of it, the infantry units charged with the main attack touched down on the long beach in front of Dieppe's Promenade — dedicated once to fashionable idleness and pleasure. The assault was covered by the guns of four destroyers. The Air Force also played its part exactly as scheduled; as the boats approached the shore, five squadrons of cannon-firing Hurricanes poured shells into the beach defences and the houses fronting the sea. Their attack ended just as the Essex Scottish on the left and the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry on the right leaped from their assault craft and began to make their way through the wire obstacles towards the town.

Here there was further bad luck. The craft carrying the first nine tanks should have touched down simultaneously with the infantry, so that the Churchills' 6-pounders might assist in beating down the defences; but through a navigational error they were from ten to fifteen minutes late. During this period, between the cessation of the naval and air bombardment and the arrival of the tanks, there was no support for the infantry; and the enemy, returning to his guns, whose fire had evidently been temporarily checked by the Hurricane attack, was able to bring destructive fire upon the beaches.

At the west end of the Promenade, in front of the town, stood the large isolated Casino. It had lately been partly blown up by the enemy as an anti-invasion precaution, but explosives had been lacking to

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<sup>6</sup> The order from the headquarters ship for the battalion to withdraw and re-embark was apparently passed on to this company and was understood as an executive order from the Commanding officer, although it was not so intended.

complete the job. The building and pillboxes near it were strongly held, and clearing them took time: but the R.H.L.I. shortly broke into the Casino and rounded up the snipers lurking in it. Lance-Sergeant G. A. Hickson of the Royal Canadian Engineers distinguished himself in the fighting here. Parties of the R.H.L.I. pushed on through the Casino and some got across the bullet-swept boulevard at the rear into the town. One group, boldly led by Capt. A. C. Hill, penetrated into the centre of Dieppe and fought the enemy in the streets south of the Church of St. Remy, afterwards withdrawing to a theatre behind the Casino and maintaining itself there for some time.

On the open eastern section of the beach the Essex Scottish could make no progress. The enemy was able to sweep this sector both from the houses and from the East Headland, and the Essex were subjected to particularly fierce mortar-fire. Attacks made across the sea-wall immediately after the landing were beaten back with loss so heavy that further offensive action became impossible. So far as is known, only one party of the battalion got across the Promenade and into the buildings. This consisted of about a dozen men led by C.S.M. Cornelius Stapleton, who, as reported in a letter from Lt.-Col. Jaspersen, "accounted for a considerable number of enemy in transport and also enemy snipers". C.S.M. Stapleton was fortunate enough to escape injury, but became a prisoner of war.

### CHURCHILLS ON THE BEACH

The Calgary Regiment, whose tank landing craft were now approaching the Dieppe beaches, was the first unit of the Canadian Armoured Corps ever to go into action. This was, moreover, the first battle of the Churchill tank, as well as the earliest test of tank landing craft under fire.

When the craft touched down, they immediately attracted a veritable inferno of fire. Several were badly damaged, and of the first six to land two could not be brought off the beach. Yet the tanks duly went ashore, and their guns instantly came into action.

It was believed at the time that the sea-wall forming the seaward edge of the Promenade had proved a very serious obstacle to the tanks. German propaganda pictures revealed many of them crowded on the beach, and it was assumed that they had never got off it; in fact, however, as we now know, a considerable number crossed the sea-wall and subsequently returned to the beach. The wall was not passable in the centre, where a mechanical excavator had been digging a ditch in front of it; but at either end it rose less than two feet above the shingle, and the Churchills, aided by a device developed by the Engineers for laying chestnut paling to give them traction, had no great difficulty in surmounting it.



#### DIEPPE RAID

From a painting by Major C.F. Comfort

The scene of this artist's reconstruction is "White Beach", on which the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry landed. The large building at the right is the Casino; immediately in front of it men are sheltering along the low sea-wall. In the background is the East Headland, topped by the chapel of Notre Dame de Bon Secours. The Calgary Regiment's waterproofed Churchill tanks are coming ashore from their tank landing craft.



Ten tank landing craft touched down, and of the 30 Churchills they carried only one remained on board. Two tanks were “drowned” by going off into deep water; one of these was that of Lt.-Col. Andrews, whose craft went in with the second wave. The Commanding Officer is believed to have been shot down as he came ashore. Of the 27 tanks that landed, about half crossed the wall. Officers of the Calgary Regiment say that certainly 13, and probably 15, did so; and their testimony is supported by the report of the German 81<sup>st</sup> Corps, which states on the authority of eyewitnesses that “probably 16” tanks reached the Promenade.

More serious obstacles than the sea-wall, however, were the heavy concrete road-blocks barring the streets leading out of the Promenade. To breach these with explosives was the business of the Engineers; but some of the demolition parties had not succeeded in landing, while others had had their equipment destroyed. Those who could get within reach went forward gallantly, in spite of deadly fire from the lofty old Castle above the Casino. But none of the blocks was breached, and although it was reported after the operation that three or four tanks had penetrated into the town, this was not the case. No tank got further than the Promenade.

The tanks immobilized by damage continued firing, operating, in effect, as pillboxes, and effectively supporting the infantry, who speak in the warmest terms of the manner in which they were fought. The skill and courage of the tank-crews certainly contributed to the withdrawal of many of the infantrymen. Determined to cover the infantry to the last, the crews did not leave their vehicles until 12:25. By this time evacuation had virtually ceased, and of the tank-crews who landed only one individual is known to have returned to England. Thanks to the staunchness of the Churchills, however, the regiment had very few fatal casualties. The enemy’s anti-tank guns were mainly 37-millimetre, against which the tanks’ armour gave complete protection. About nine o’clock he brought into action an anti-tank company armed with 75-millimetre guns; but the road-blocks prevented these from firing on the beach at close range.

### THE LANDING OF THE RESERVES

The assault once delivered, General Roberts’ only means of influencing the battle was by committing his small floating reserve and by requesting air action from Uxbridge.

In handling the reserve, the General was hampered by the fact that throughout the action information reaching him about events on shore was limited and frequently quite inaccurate. We have seen that he heard of the disaster to No. 3 Commando more than two hours after it took place. Information about events at Puy was equally bad. For a long

time no report whatever was received; then, about 6:20, information came in that the Royal Regiment had been *unable to land*. Just how this false report originated is not clear; it was probably a garbled version of a radio message recorded elsewhere: "Impossible to land any more troops on Blue Beach". Reports concerning the main beach were almost equally misleading. About 6:10 a message is recorded: "Essex Scottish across the beaches and in houses". This appears to have originated in a signal from the Essex to the R.H.L.I. describing the penetration made by C.S.M. Stapleton's little party. Reaching the Military Force Commander in this extremely exaggerated form, it was responsible for his decision to land the floating reserve. Believing that the Essex had made a penetration suitable for exploitation, and strongly convinced of the overmastering necessity of getting control of the East Headland, General Roberts issued orders for the Royal Regiment (which he believed to be still afloat) to come to "Red Beach", on which the Essex had landed, and support them. About the same time he ordered Les Fusiliers MontRoyal to land on the same beach, and at 7:00 a.m. they went in.

Their craft were received with withering fire. The unit was landed along the whole extent of the main beaches, and a considerable part of it was put ashore on the narrow strip of shingle under the cliffs west of the town. The men landed here could accomplish nothing, and most of them became prisoners. Of the remainder of the unit, some were active in and around the Casino, while others were pinned down on the beach along with the greater part of the R.H.L.I. and the Essex. Small parties are reported to have penetrated into the town. Lt.-Col. Ménard was severely wounded immediately after landing.

About an hour after the Fusiliers went in, reports reaching "Calpe" indicated that the tanks were making progress and that we were in control of the western section of the main beach; while it was known that the Casino had been captured: It appeared that if additional forces could be brought to bear, an important success might yet be obtained here. General Roberts accordingly decided to land the Marines (who had been originally intended for cutting out the enemy craft in Dieppe Harbour) near the Casino, with a view to their passing around the town and attacking the eastern cliff from the south. The reports received had been over-optimistic, and a most destructive fire met the Marines as they approached the shore. Pushing on with great gallantry, they suffered very heavy losses both before and after landing. Lt.-Col. Phillipps was killed while signalling the rear craft to turn back and abandon the attempt.

The men on the beach were being ceaselessly pounded by small arms, mortars and artillery. Many were sheltering along the front of the sea-wall. Casualties were constantly mounting. Among those who distinguished themselves in assisting the wounded during these grim

hours on the beach, one stands out: Honorary Captain J. W. Foote, Chaplain of the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry. Captain Foote laboured without remission, giving first aid to the casualties in the improvised aid post, bandaging and giving morphine injections until supplies ran out, and repeatedly leaving the post to cross the fire-swept shingle and carry back a wounded man. When the time for withdrawal came, Captain Foote helped carry the wounded to the boats, but himself made no attempt to embark; he freely chose to remain behind and carry on his work of mercy as a prisoner. After the end of hostilities, when full reports of events on the beaches were received, he became the first Canadian Chaplain to receive the Victoria Cross.

### THE WITHDRAWAL FROM THE MAIN BEACHES

About nine o'clock, when it was apparent that the landing of the reserves had been without effect, and that the enemy still held both headlands and was sweeping the beaches with fire, the Naval and Military Force Commanders consulted together on the time for withdrawal. This was first fixed for 10:30, but was later postponed for half an hour to make sure of contact with the Camerons, who were known to have moved inland, and because the extra time would ensure more effective air cover. At eleven o'clock, accordingly, the landing craft began to go in, covered by naval fire and R.A.F. fighters.<sup>7</sup> The fighter force over Dieppe had been increased from three squadrons to six; this was vital, as enemy bombers had for some time past been striking heavily at our shipping. The Germans on the cliff tops continued to pour down shells and bullets, taking toll of boats and men alike. On the Essex Scottish beach, not many craft came in, and of those that did, a very high proportion (six out of eight mentioned in one naval report) were lost. More men were brought away from the western than from the eastern section of the main beach. While somewhat less than half the whole strength of the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry (217 all ranks out of 582 embarked) returned to England, the proportion of the Essex Scottish was much smaller; out of 553 all ranks, it brought back only 52, of whom 28 were wounded.

Brigadier Lett, commanding the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade, had not landed. The tank landing craft carrying his headquarters was heavily hit on touching down, and the Brigadier was badly wounded. Of the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade's headquarters, Brigadier Southam himself was the only officer to get

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<sup>7</sup> The arrangements for the withdrawal had largely to be improvised. The intention had been to take most of the troops off in tank landing craft, but in the conditions actually existing it was out of the question to send these large and vulnerable vessels in, and assault landing craft (small bullet-proof boats capable of carrying about a platoon of infantry apiece) had to be used. These circumstances merely increase the credit due the Navy.

ashore. Although wounded, he was indefatigably active on the beach and set an infectious example of courage and cheerfulness. During the withdrawal he was in close touch with "Calpe" by radio telephone, reporting progress and giving guidance.

The Force Commanders were determined to do everything possible to bring off the men remaining on shore. At 12:48 "Calpe" went very close to the beach and shelled posts whose fire was believed to be preventing men from reaching the water. Other destroyers had previously gone close in to assist; H.M.S. "Brocklesby" actually grounded by the stern for a moment as she turned away. As a last expedient, Capt. Hughes-Hallett was preparing to send in the shallowdraught gunboat "Locust" when at — ten minutes past one a final message was received from Brigadier Southam's rudimentary headquarters: "Our people here have surrendered".

The conditions of evacuation were probably without parallel in the history of warfare; yet thanks to the boundless skill and courage of the Navy a considerable proportion of the force was successfully brought away. The most appropriate comment, perhaps, is that of a Canadian soldier who was there: "Some of the bravest and best are the boys in the Navy and I take my hat off to them". Of the 4963 all ranks of the Canadian Army embarked, 2211 returned to England;<sup>8</sup> 589 of these were wounded but survived, while in 28 cases wounds proved mortal. No less than 1944 Canadian officers and men, however, became prisoners of war, at least 558 of them wounded. At Dieppe, from a force of fewer than 5000 men engaged for only nine hours, the Canadian Army lost more prisoners than in the whole eleven months of the later campaign in North-West Europe, or the twenty months during which Canadians fought in Italy. Sadder still was the loss in killed. As now computed, the total of fatal casualties was 56 officers and 851 other ranks; these include seven officers and 64 other ranks who died in captivity. Canadian casualties of all categories aggregated 3369. Of the seven major Canadian units engaged, only one (Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal) brought its commanding officer back to England. Little was left of the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade, not much more of the 6<sup>th</sup>. Months of hard work were required before the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division became again the fine formation that had assaulted the beaches.

At two minutes to two the German artillery finally fell silent. Its meticulous returns indicate that it had fired 7458 rounds during the battle, not counting anti-tank -and anti-aircraft shell. Our ships returned to England little molested by the Luftwaffe, which could not pierce the shield maintained above them by the R.A.F. Throughout, the work of

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<sup>8</sup> Of these, however, it seems likely that nearly 1000 had never landed. Only about 500 men appear to have been evacuated from the main beaches in front of the town. It is of interest to note that the little destroyer "Calpe" herself brought back 278 wounded soldiers.

the Allied Air Forces had been beyond praise; General Roberts' word is "magnificent". The R.A.F. had used 69 squadrons; of these, six Fighter Squadrons and two Army Co-operation Squadrons were from the Royal Canadian Air Force. The United States Army Air Forces also played a part. The American day bomber force, which later grew so large, was just beginning its career, and at 10:23 twenty-three Flying Fortresses effectively attacked the enemy fighter aerodrome at Abbeville to keep it inactive for the time of the withdrawal.

Thanks to the air umbrella, the enemy had been able to do, on the whole, remarkably little damage to our shipping off Dieppe. Only one major naval vessel was lost, the destroyer "Berkeley", which was hit by a heavy bomb during the withdrawal and had to be sunk by a British torpedo. The raid had produced a tremendous aerial battle. The enemy's air effort was slow in getting under way, but he ultimately threw into action the whole of his available resources in the west. Losses on both sides were heavy. The R.A.F.'s gallant and successful fight in support of the operation against the highly organized air defence of the enemy cost 106 aircraft, of which 9.8 were fighters or tactical reconnaissance aircraft. The enemy's losses, as now determined from captured German documents, were 48 aircraft destroyed and 24 damaged.

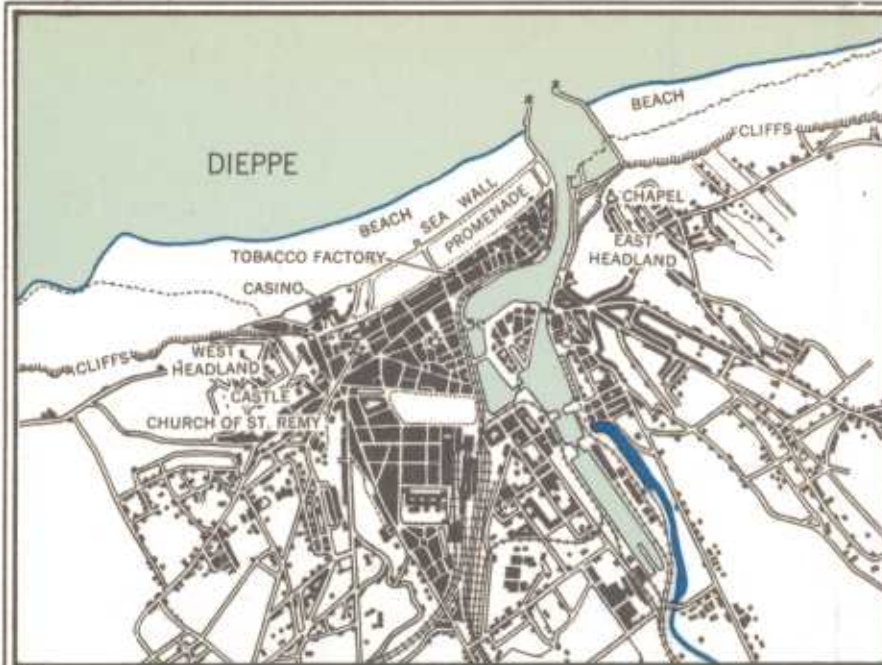
#### AS THE GERMANS SAW IT

The German Army's losses at Dieppe, though not inconsiderable, were much smaller than our own. The High Command communiqué issued after the action admitted 591 casualties suffered by all three services. Figures in German reports now in our hands vary from this in detail but not in the broad picture they present. The 302<sup>nd</sup> Division reported the Army losses as five officers and 116 other ranks killed, six officers and 195 other ranks wounded, and 11 other ranks missing.

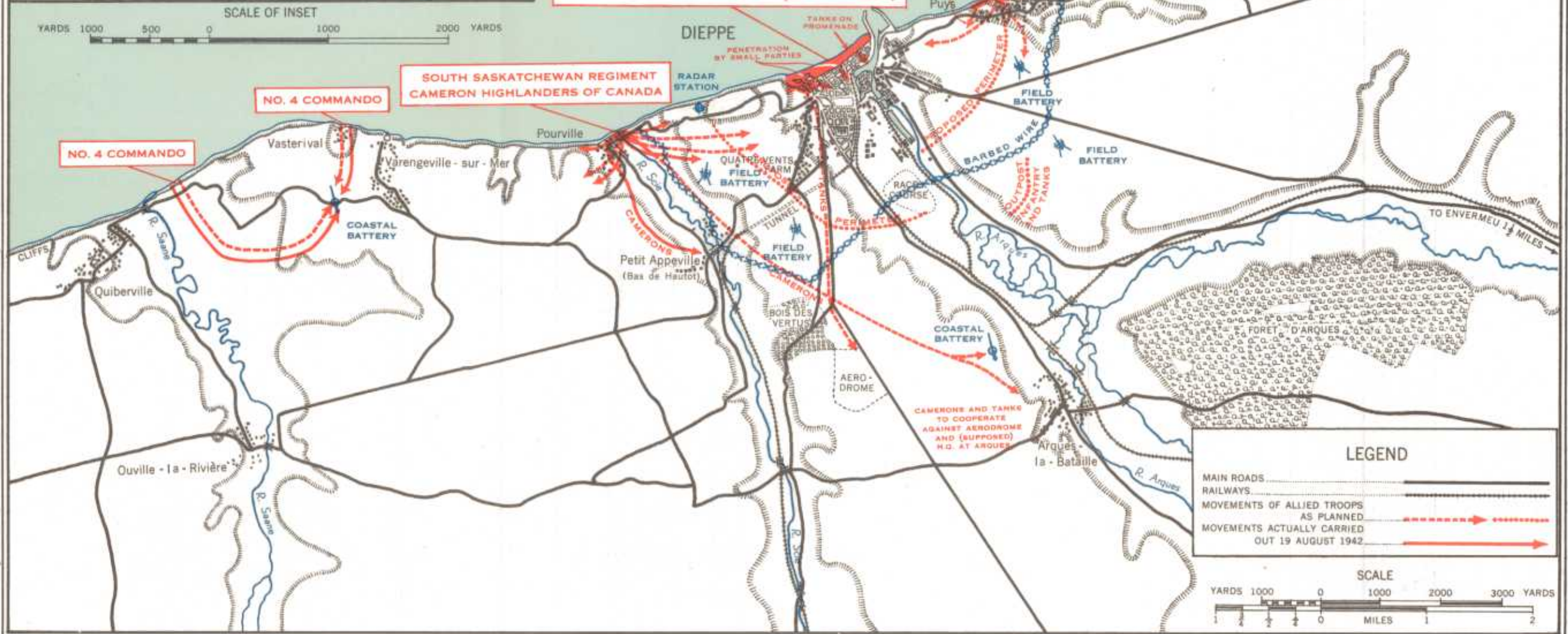
The raid had given the German command a *severe* temporary shock. Great forces had been put in motion towards Dieppe. In addition to the action of local reserves which we have noted, a battalion of the 302<sup>nd</sup> Division's reserve was brought up to the vicinity of Arques and held in readiness to deal with any unfavourable development at Dieppe or a possible parachute drop. The regiment in Corps Reserve was moved up towards Pourville and was about to attack there when the operation came to an end. The battalions of the Army Reserve also moved forward. And shortly before nine in the morning Field-Marshal von Rundstedt issued orders for the 10<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division to be committed under the 81<sup>st</sup> Corps to clean up the situation at Dieppe. Its advanced guard reached Longueville-sur-Scie, ten miles south of Dieppe, at 1:55 p.m. By this time fighting was over, but had the raid been of longer duration the division could have been in action before evening. The Corps Commander had

# THE DIEPPE OPERATION

## 19 AUGUST 1942



SCALE OF INSET  
YARDS 1000 500 0 1000 2000 YARDS



**LEGEND**

MAIN ROADS	—————
RAILWAYS	—————
MOVEMENTS OF ALLIED TROOPS AS PLANNED	----->
MOVEMENTS ACTUALLY CARRIED OUT 19 AUGUST 1942	----->

SCALE  
YARDS 1000 0 1000 2000 3000 YARDS  
MILES 1 2

intended to use it against the Pourville bridgehead, which throughout seemed to the enemy the point of greatest danger.

The Germans had taken even more far-reaching precautions. Shortly after nine o'clock their air reconnaissance reported sighting off Selsey Bill a convoy of 26 ships, with "decks closely packed with troops". This report was highly inaccurate. Admiralty records indicate that the only convoy the German observer can have seen was "C.W. 116", which consisted of 14 small merchant vessels en route from the Thames to the Isle of Wight. However, when the report reached G.H.Q. West it was taken to indicate that the "Second Front" was in immediate prospect; and at 10:30 a.m. Rundstedt ordered readiness for instant action for the whole of the Seventh Army (guarding the coasts of Lower Normandy and Brittany) and the greater part of his Army Group Reserves. This state of alert was maintained until the morning of 20 August.

Even after the operation was over and a copy of the greater part of our Detailed Military Plan was in their hands,<sup>9</sup> the Germans persisted in believing that it had actually been intended as the opening phase of an invasion of France. The fact that the 26-ship convoy had been reported as returning to Portsmouth convinced them that the failure at Dieppe had caused the cancellation of the main operation. Rundstedt's staff found it particularly hard to believe that we would really sacrifice "29 or 30 of the most modern tanks" for a mere raid. His report suggests that if Dieppe had fallen new orders would have been issued and the full-dress invasion launched. For this supposition there was, of course, no basis whatever; as we have seen, the Allied strategic planners had finally turned their backs on France (as far as 1942 was concerned) on 25 July.

A word must be said of the Germans' opinion of the qualities of our troops. The 81<sup>st</sup> Corps report drew a comparison between the Commandos and the Canadians which was unflattering to the latter. As this report has been published,<sup>10</sup> it is well to note that its statements in this respect were repudiated by the Headquarters of the Fifteenth Army, whose remarks ran in part as follows:

The large number of English prisoners might leave the impression that the fighting value of the English and Canadian units employed should not be too highly estimated. This is not the case. The enemy, almost entirely Canadian soldiers, fought—so far as he was able to fight at all—well and bravely.

The observations of the 302<sup>nd</sup> Division, the formation in actual contact with our force, are not less worthy of quotation:

The main attack at Dieppe, Puys and Pourville was launched by the 2<sup>nd</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The order provided that two copies might be taken ashore by each brigade headquarters. The Germans state that this copy was found on the body of a dead major on the Dieppe beach.

<sup>10</sup> *Maclean's*, 1 March 1946.

Canadian Division with great energy. That the enemy gained no ground at all in Puy, and in Dieppe could take only parts of the beach not including the west mole and the western edge of the beach, and this only for a short time, was not the result of lack of courage, but of the concentrated defensive fire of our Divisional Artillery and infantry heavy weapons. Moreover, his tank crews did not lack spirit. In Puy the efforts made by the enemy, in spite of the heavy German machine-gun fire, to surmount the wire obstacles studded with booby traps on the first beach terrace are signs of a good offensive spirit...

At Pourville, the enemy, immediately after landing, pushed forward into the interior without worrying about flank protection...

The operations against the coastal batteries were conducted by the Commandos with great dash and skill. With the aid of technical devices of all sorts they succeeded in clambering up the steep cliffs at points which had seemed quite inaccessible.

These comments of a brave and skilful enemy render any further remark unnecessary.

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DIEPPE

The raid on Dieppe was perhaps the most hotly-discussed operation of the war. Tactically, it was an almost complete failure, for we suffered extremely heavy losses and attained few of our objectives. After the Normandy landings of 6 June 1944, however, the raid appeared in a new perspective; and historically it is in the light of the events of that later day that it must be judged.

It is in order to glance first, however, at its immediate consequences within the Canadian Army Overseas, and in Canada. There is no doubt whatever that in the Army it produced a new sense of pride. After nearly three years of disappointment and frustration, it had been demonstrated that this Canadian Army could fight in the manner of that of 1914-18; and the bad luck and the losses did not diminish the confidence thus engendered.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, the experience of Dieppe undoubtedly led Canadian soldiers to view the question of their own employment more soberly. There was less demand now for immediate assault upon the Germans in the west; the magnitude of such an enterprise was more clearly apparent than before, as was the need for the most detailed preparation, the most careful training, the most exacting discipline.

At home in Canada the effects were different. Soldiers and civilians look at such things from widely separate points of view. Canadian civilians, particularly those who had lost relatives, saw only the casualty lists and the failure. It was quite impossible, without helping

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<sup>11</sup> It was the present writer's observation, however, that the operation's favourable effects upon morale were at least partly undone, as time passed, by the influence of the reports of continued criticism in Canada.



the enemy, to make any announcement of the actual lessons learned; and as the raid was followed by another long period of inactivity by the Canadian forces, public opinion continued to dwell upon it for months, and comment, frequently very ill-informed, continued in the press and elsewhere. Although, as has been made apparent, the responsibility for the tactical plan was widely distributed, and the Canadian share was limited, it was declared with the utmost assurance, in at least one respectable publication, that the project for a raid on Dieppe and the plan for it were almost exclusively the work of Canadian officers and proved the bankruptcy of Canadian generalship; and there can be little doubt that such criticism did something to undermine the hitherto unassailable prestige of General McNaughton with the public.

So much for the Canadian results of the operation. More important was its influence on future planning.

Needless to say, it was closely analysed at Combined Operations Headquarters, and a detailed report was prepared incorporating the official "lessons learned". It is unnecessary here to state these lessons in full, but the most important should be summarized. One of them was that in future, "assaults should be planned to develop round the flanks of a strongly defended locality rather than frontally against it" unless overwhelming close support was available. Another was 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 desirability of training Army formations intended for amphibious assaults in close co-operation with such Naval forces. (This was subsequently done, we shall see, before the Normandy landing, and with the happiest results). Still another was the importance of maintaining flexibility in the army plan, by providing the commander with a strong reserve to be available to "exploit success" at the points where it may be achieved. (It might have been added that unless means can be found for ensuring that the commander receives early and accurate information of events ashore, his reserves will be no use to him.) But the paramount lesson was "the need for overwhelming fire support, including close support, during the initial stages of the attack". This, it was recommended, should be provided "by heavy and medium Naval bombardment, by air action, by special vessels or craft working close inshore, and by using the fire power of the assaulting troops while still sea-borne". The Naval Force Commander, incidentally, had reported that in his opinion a battleship could have operated off Dieppe during the first hours of daylight without undue risk and would probably have turned the tide ashore in our favour.

Two other lessons, not so specifically stated in the official document, decidedly affected our later planning. First, it had been made pretty clear that the classical plan of securing a beach by landing

infantry at dawn was not practicable in the face of well-organized defences. A new technique of landing and support was required, and largely on the basis of the Dieppe experience it was developed before the Normandy assault of 1944. Secondly, it had been shown that the military plan in such operations must not depend upon precise timing of the landings. Although in general a very high standard of precision was attained at Dieppe, we have seen that in at least two cases relatively slight inaccuracies in timing had most serious results. This possibility was avoided in planning the 1944 assault.

Some of these lessons were obviously not new. Others there might have been considerable difficulty in deducing from earlier history. However this may be -and as explained above Combined Operations Headquarters had been keenly conscious of the pressing need for a large-scale modern experiment — these tactical conclusions do not perhaps wholly exhaust the effects of the Dieppe operation.

On 7 June 1944, the day following the momentous landings in Normandy, General Crerar “briefed” a large group of Canadian officers on the operations which had just begun. He spoke in part as follows:

To commence with, I think it most important that, at this time, all of you should realize what a vital part the gallant and hazardous operation of the raid in force on Dieppe, by 2 Cdn Inf Div, has played in the conception, planning and execution of the vast “Overlord” operation. I shall, therefore, give you in briefest outline this important background.

Until the evidence of Dieppe proved otherwise, it had been the opinion in highest command and staff circles in this country that an assault against a heavily defended coast could be carried out on the basis of securing tactical surprise, and without dependence on overwhelming fire support, in the critical phases of closing the beaches and over-running the beach defences.

If tactical surprise was to be the basis of the plan, then bombardment, prior to imminent “touchdown” obviously required to be ruled out. Dependence on tactical surprise also implied an approach under cover of darkness and landing at first light. Adequate air superiority, after surprise had been achieved and throughout the operation, was, of course, considered essential, and required to be assured.

Very briefly, such were the conceptions held by those on the highest levels concerned with planning the operation against Dieppe, and however hazardous the operation, it was natural, and proper, that after nearly three years of war, without any fighting by Canadian troops, the responsibility for carrying out this essential preliminary to future large scale invasion should come to a Canadian Division.

I am not going to take up your time by analysing the results and lessons of Dieppe. I will, however, make it clear that from the study of those experiences emerged the technique and tactics first demonstrated by the 3 Cdn Inf Div in “Pirate” exercise last October, and that this technique and these tactics, were those adopted for the vast combined operation which took place yesterday.

One more point in the nature of a personal opinion. Although at the time the heavy cost to Canada, and the non-success of the Dieppe operation seemed hard to bear, I believe that when this war is examined in proper perspective, it will be seen

that the sobering influence of that operation on existing Allied strategical conceptions, with the enforced realization by the Allied Governments of the lengthy and tremendous preparations necessary before invasion could be attempted, was a Canadian contribution of the greatest significance to final victory.

The contrast between the plan of the Dieppe assault and that followed on 6 June 1944 is, indeed, most striking. For the puny bombardment by four destroyers which covered the Dieppe frontal attack, the "Overlord" plan substituted the fire of a tremendous naval force including six battleships; in place of the brief attack by cannon-firing Hurricanes, we have the combined efforts of the British and American Bomber Commands, dropping more than 11,000 tons of bombs in twenty-four hours; we have engineer assault vehicles, amphibious tanks, new support craft of many types (including rocket bombardment ships); and we have the army helping to clear the way for its own assault with self-propelled artillery firing from tank landing craft. These devices and techniques, in many cases, stemmed directly from the experience of Dieppe, although the lessons of many later amphibious operations also helped to shape them. The casualties sustained in the raid were part of the price paid for the knowledge that enabled the great operation of 1944 to be carried out at a cost in blood smaller than even the most optimistic had ventured to hope for. The assault on the famous Atlantic Wall was regarded as a most perilous and uncertain enterprise. When in the course of a week or so after D Day it became fully clear that the thing which men had hoped for, but scarcely expected, had really come to pass — that General Eisenhower's armies had smashed the barrier at a single blow and established themselves solidly in France — the name of Dieppe was suddenly on many lips. That much-criticized undertaking had made an essential contribution to the success of the most momentous operation of war ever attempted.

The Allies were not the only people to extract lessons from the Dieppe raid. The Germans likewise studied it with care; and it clearly had considerable influence upon their subsequent system of defence in France. The evidence indicates that it convinced them that any attempt at invasion could be destroyed on the beaches. Their efforts, they decided, should be concentrated upon preventing landings and particularly the landing of armour. This was reflected in the arrangement of their coastal defences, which in Lower Normandy were simply a thin line along the beaches, almost entirely without "depth".

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NOTE: Laymen may not appreciate fully the difficulties of the Dieppe raid on the Naval side. All experience shows that no operation of war is harder than landing troops in darkness with precision as to time and place. In this, the first large combined operation of 1939-45, thirteen groups of craft sailed from three ports at varying speeds. The assault craft, we have seen, had a 10-mile run-in. As noted above, a high general standard of precision was attained in spite of these difficulties; but the plan was such that relatively minor inaccuracies had serious

Dieppe served also to confirm the Germans in the belief that a basic consideration in the Allies' minds at the very outset of an invasion would be the capture of a major port, and thus encouraged them to devote their best efforts to developing heavy defences about such places. Thus the Germans were, as a result of the raid, centring their defence upon the ports when simultaneously the Allies, also in part as a result of the raid, were increasingly turning their attention to the possibility of invading over open beaches without immediately gaining a major port. The great conception of the prefabricated harbour owes something to the lessons learned at Dieppe concerning the difficulty of capturing a German-held port.

An uncovenanted result of the Dieppe raid was thus to warp the Germans' system of defence in North-West Europe to our advantage.

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consequences. In other respects the plan for handling the naval assault force was an almost complete success, and served as a model for later and larger operations.

## CHAPTER VI

### CANADIAN TROOPS GO TO THE MEDITERRANEAN

#### CANADIANS IN NORTH AFRICA

On 8 November 1942 came the Allied landings in French North Africa. No Canadian units as such took part in this great operation; the British troops sent from the United Kingdom were the First Army, commanded by Lieutenant-General K. A. N. Anderson. Clearly, however, the campaign in Tunisia which followed offered an opportunity for giving battle experience to selected Canadians, and this General McNaughton seized.

An arrangement was made for the immediate attachment to the First Army of 78 officers and 63 non-commissioned officers, who reached Algiers early in January 1943. They were treated as though they had been normal British reinforcements, and were "posted" to appropriate units. That is to say, a Canadian infantry Captain or Major might (and often did) find himself commanding a company of a British battalion; a Canadian medical officer might be placed in charge of a section of a Field Ambulance of the R.A.M.C.; while a Sergeant of the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals might be found performing the responsible duties of his rank in a Brigade Signal Section. At the time when these Canadians arrived, the First Army was hard pressed. It consisted, essentially, of only two British divisions, the 78<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and the 6<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division. Most of the Canadians were assigned to these formations, and they saw plenty of service, for there were many casualties to be replaced. At one point an infantry unit of the 6<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division had a Canadian second-in-command and three Canadian company commanders.

Further groups of Canadians were subsequently dispatched to Africa, the procedure continuing until the end of the campaign. In all, 201 officers and 147 N.C.Os. were sent out for three-month periods, and what they learned was invaluable. However sound mere training may be, there is no final substitute for battle experience. These men, returning to England, brought a most useful leaven of such experience to the Canadian Army. The active manner in which they had been employed was reflected in their losses. Fourteen officers and 11 other ranks became casualties during the North African campaign. Four officers and four other ranks lost their lives.

It was not junior leaders only who profited by African experience. In February of 1943 General Crerar, with a group of British generals,

flew out from England and attended a four-day study period at General Montgomery's headquarters. In April, Brigadier G. G. Simonds went out similarly and watched the Wadi Akarit battle from the headquarters of the Eighth Army and of the 10<sup>th</sup> Corps. Immediately after his return, he was appointed to command the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division in succession to General Roberts (who now assumed command of the Canadian Reinforcement Units); but a few days later, following the death in an aircraft accident of Major-General H. L. N. Salmon, who had succeeded General Pearkes in the command of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division, General Simonds was transferred to that Division and found himself a prospective divisional commander in the Eighth Army, which he had so lately visited.<sup>1</sup>

### THE TRAINING GOES ON

For the Canadian Army in the United Kingdom the business of making ready for battle went on until battle was actually joined; and the attachment of individuals to gain field experience in Africa was only one of the expedients adopted to ensure that when Canadian formations as a whole were committed to action they would go in as fully prepared as was humanly possible. Training processes were constantly reviewed, and with the improvement of equipment and the constant application of battle lessons from active theatres their realism and general effectiveness steadily improved. A notable development in this connection was the new system of "battle drill training", which first began to attract attention in the autumn of 1941.<sup>2</sup>

On 17 December 1942, the third anniversary of the landing of the first flight of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division in the United Kingdom, a demonstration took place which showed how one raw infantry division, armed mainly with the weapons of the last war, had evolved into an army of five divisions, equipped in the most modern manner and trained to the last detail. Thirty units and sub-units with their equipment, representing virtually every arm and service, rolled past a group of distinguished observers on a Sussex road. The display was symbolic of the extraordinary complexity of a modern army; of the impressive standard of efficiency which the Canadian Army Overseas had reached; and, not least, of the contribution which Canadian factories were making to winning the war. For a country possessing no pre-war munitions industry, industrial mobilization had inevitably been a painfully slow process, but now, more than three years after the outbreak of war, the fruits of the effort were apparent. With few exceptions, the equipment

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<sup>1</sup> The new commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was Major-General E. L. M. Burns, formerly commanding an armoured brigade of the 4<sup>th</sup> Division.

<sup>2</sup> For an account of battle drill training, see *The Canadians in Britain, 1939-1944*, pages 56-59.

seen in this display had been made in Canada. The infantrymen's No. 4 rifles, Sten machine-carbines, Bren guns and 2-pounder anti-tank guns (the last a recent addition to infantry equipment) were all products of Canadian factories, as were the artillery 25-pounders, the Ram tanks of the armoured units and an almost infinite variety of vehicles and special equipment. Most of this material was of British design; but certain items developed in Canada were also shown, the most notable weapon being the "Sexton", the self-propelled 25-pounder on a Ram chassis, which was to play a useful part in the final phase of the war.

Only one unit — the last — passed the saluting base on foot: it was a company of marching riflemen. How fitting it was that the foot-soldier should have a place of honour even in this parade of mechanized and armoured might, two long and bitter campaigns were amply to show.

A significant incident of this final period of preparation was Exercise "Spartan", the great army manoeuvres conducted in March of 1943. In this exercise Headquarters First Canadian Army was termed "Headquarters Second Army"; and General McNaughton directed an army of three corps (1<sup>st</sup> Canadian, 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian and 12<sup>th</sup> British). The 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps, commanded by Lieutenant-General E. W. Sansom,<sup>3</sup> had finally come into existence only on 15 January, and its headquarters was thus committed to this extremely important exercise before it had had time to shake down and before its Corps Signals was fully equipped or adequately trained. The exercise consisted, for the Canadians, of an advance from a theoretical bridgehead on the south coast of England, which represented the enemy-held coast of Europe. In the opening phase things were made difficult for the Second Army by a surprise action of G.H.Q. Home Forces, which was directing the exercise: the opposing "German" army, was thrown forward twenty-four hours before the time previously notified to General McNaughton for his own advance, and for some hours after the enemy moved the "British" army was tied to its ground by orders from "G.H.Q. B.E.F." The two armoured divisions under the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps on General McNaughton's left flank did not get forward, when released, as rapidly as had been hoped, and very extensive "demolitions" by the "enemy" slowed the general advance of the Army. In the centre General Crerar's Corps gave an excellent account of itself. Despite its difficulties, the "Second Army" by the end of the exercise had advanced deeply into enemy territory and was in position on a line running north-west from London towards Rugby.

By the spring of 1943 the Canadian field army in the United Kingdom had reached, in broad outline at least, its final form. It consisted of an army headquarters, two corps headquarters, two armoured divisions,

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<sup>3</sup> General Sansom was succeeded in the command of the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division by Major-General C. R. S. Stein, formerly Brigadier General Staff at Army Headquarters.

three infantry divisions, and two independent army tank brigades. The force was trained to the nines.<sup>4</sup> The future employment of this army continued to be a matter of deep official and public interest.

Uncertainty on this point was closely related to problems of organization which can be treated here only in a most brief and inadequate fashion. It is sometimes not realized that the fighting divisions, the parts of an army most in the public eye, are in fact only the smaller portion of it. Corps Troops and Army Troops, G.H.Q. and L. of C. Troops, together amounted in 1939-45 to more than the strength of the divisions they backed; it was calculated that, while the actual strength of an infantry division was only about 18,000 all ranks, keeping such a formation in the line required an actually larger total of men in these other categories. The overall strength of troops in a theatre of war could in fact be calculated on a rough basis of 40,000 all ranks per infantry division, with proportionately smaller totals for armoured divisions and armoured brigades. These rearward units were of many types. Among them were numerous artillery units (particularly medium and heavy regiments) available for commitment in situations to which the normal resources of divisional artillery were not equal. Many engineer units were likewise required. As for administrative units designed to serve and supply the front-line troops, their name was legion.

Canadian manpower resources were not equal to providing all the Army, G.H.Q. and L. of C. Troops required for an army of five divisions and two armoured brigades; and some of these ancillary troops were furnished by the British forces. What it boiled down to was that Canada would provide a high proportion of forward fighting troops, while the United Kingdom would find a considerable proportion of the men required for the support and the services of the First Canadian Army. The War Office had manpower problems of its own, and the matter required much detailed negotiation and calculation; but in December of 1942 the British authorities agreed to provide a proportion of up to 9000 Army, G.H.Q. and L. of C. Troops for each Canadian division.<sup>5</sup> As a result of later modifications, the number finally provided was actually rather higher. This is not to say that Canada did not find a great many; the establishment strength of the Army Troops she finally provided for the 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group was over 28,000 all ranks, that of the G.H.Q. and L. of C. Troops and Base Units over 24,000. And she of course provided all her own Corps Troops, amounting to nearly 8000

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<sup>4</sup> The 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division, the last formation to arrive from Canada, was not however sufficiently far on to take part in "Spartan".

<sup>5</sup> This of course has nothing to do with the fact that during the whole campaign in North West Europe British divisions in varying numbers fought under the command of the First Canadian Army.



for each of the two Corps.

The clarification of the manpower situation, coupled with the considerable likelihood that it would be necessary for some Canadian formations to operate, at least for a time, detached from the main Canadian force and as parts of a British Army, produced a basic decision. Whereas the Canadian Army had hitherto taken a somewhat independent line in matters of organization, conforming to British practice generally, but not in detail, it was now resolved to adopt British war establishments throughout.<sup>6</sup> It was anticipated that this would lead to some economy of manpower while also facilitating co-operation with British formations. In many cases the alterations were minor, but in others they were important; there were, in particular, extensive changes in the Ordnance services, and the Royal Canadian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers shortly came into existence in imitation of British organization. During the early part of 1943 this reorganization was actively in progress, and the composition of the Canadian field force was settled on a firmer basis than ever before: the arrangement by which the War Office provided a proportion of G.H.Q. and L. of C. troops; the adoption of British organization; and a "manpower ceiling" which was now fixed by the Canadian Government as indicating what Canada could provide — a figure of 232,100 all ranks (covering total establishment strength overseas and reinforcements equal to three months estimated battle casualties) plus a flow of 5000 men per month from Canada as replacements subsequent to 1 September 1943.

Meanwhile discussion of the future role of the Canadian formations had continued, and had had its due effect on these decisions on organization. From July through September 1942 much of General McNaughton's attention, and the energies of some of his best staff officers, were devoted to a project which he undertook to study at the request of the British authorities: the possibility of a large-scale military operation directed against the airfields in Northern Norway from which German aircraft were striking at our convoys to Russia. The scheme was a hazardous one, but it was finally abandoned only after long discussion and study. It was never specifically suggested that Canadian troops should be employed in the operation, should it take place, but this was obviously a likely development. And the Norwegian plan was not the only one proposed and cancelled at this period; 1942 was a year prolific of strategic projects, and some to which considerable Canadian thought and effort were devoted came in the end to nothing.

On 31 December 1942 General Brooke told General McNaughton that the Chiefs of Staff Committee were considering the possibility of

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<sup>6</sup> An "establishment" is "the authorized composition of a unit" as expressed in terms of numbers and ranks of personnel and numbers and types of weapons and transport.

mounting an operation against Sardinia or Sicily, and suggested that one Canadian division might take part. After further discussions the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division was earmarked for this possible employment and its brigades were consequently despatched in succession to Scotland for training in combined operations. As it turned out, this project also, for the moment, led nowhere. The Sardinian operation was cancelled, and the plan approved in January 1943 for Operation "Husky" (the invasion of Sicily) did not at first provide for the Canadians' participation. Nevertheless, in due course they were brought into it.

### THE DIVISION OF THE ARMY AND THE CHANGE IN COMMAND

In a volume which is primarily an account of the operations of the Canadian Army, it is not possible to discuss fully the changes in command which from time to time occurred within the Army. Mention is made of the retirement of General McNaughton as Army Commander in so far as that retirement was related to the Army's overall operational role.

For some time there had been a growing divergence of view on this question between the G.O.C.-in-C. and the political and military authorities at Ottawa. General McNaughton, while willing to authorize operations by detachments if and when it could be demonstrated that they would advance the common cause, was in general convinced of the desirability of the Canadians operating as far as possible as a national entity, and envisaged as their great task an important share in the ultimate invasion of North-West Europe. The Canadian Government, on the other hand, was being plied with reasons for getting its forces into action as soon as possible. It was urged that considerations of self-respect, as well as regard for Canada's influence in the post-war world, which would be based largely upon her contribution to victory, dictated such a policy; while the powerful argument of the desirability of gaining large-scale battle experience before committing the army as a whole to operations was also employed. In due course the authorities became convinced that it was important to end the long inactivity; and inevitably their views prevailed over those of their field commander. It was as the result of discussions conducted directly between the two governments in Ottawa and London that a decision was made in April 1943 to detach the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division and the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Army Tank Brigade to take part in the assault on Sicily.

At this time it was considered likely that when the Sicilian campaign was over the Division and attached troops would be brought back to the United Kingdom so that the knowledge and experience they had acquired might be disseminated through the First Canadian Army.

Early in October, however, a further and far-reaching decision was taken, when it was arranged that not only should these troops remain in Italy, but that the Headquarters of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps and the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division should move thither. The Canadian Army was divided. Army Headquarters, one Corps Headquarters, three Divisions and an Armoured Brigade remained in the United Kingdom; the other Corps Headquarters, two Divisions and the remaining Armoured Brigade were to operate in Italy.

General McNaughton's retirement came soon after the abandonment of the policy of concentration of national effort for which he had stood. It was arranged as the result of an exchange of telegrams between himself and Mr. King in mid-November, but it was agreed that he should remain in command until his successor could take over. Shortly, however, the state of the General's health forced him to the conclusion that he could not continue, and he asked for earlier release. On 26 December 1943, accordingly, General Stuart took over from him, in an acting capacity, the command of the Army, combining these duties with the new appointment of Chief of Staff, Canadian Military Headquarters.<sup>7</sup> General McNaughton returned to Canada a few weeks later. The restless and incisive intelligence and the singularly compelling personality that had dominated the Canadian field army so long thus passed from the overseas stage. Melancholy as was the turn of events that deprived him of the opportunity of commanding the First Canadian Army in the field, McNaughton nevertheless had the satisfaction of knowing that that great fighting force was to a very large extent his own creation. In May, 1945, after victory was won, Field-Marshal Montgomery recalled how he first came to know the Canadian Army, "when General McNaughton was forging the weapon — and right well he did his job". To draw an analogy from the American Civil War, it was McNaughton's fate to play McClellan to Crerar's Grant.

In March of 1944 General Crerar returned from Italy, where he had commanded his Corps in the line for several weeks, and took over the Army. The first Canadian senior officer to reach England in 1939 thus succeeded to the chief Canadian field command, and proceeded to apply to the decidedly complex problems of that appointment the resources of his ripe experience and his remarkably sound and certain judgement.

## THE END OF THE LONG WAIT

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<sup>7</sup> Lieutenant-General J. C. Murchie (formerly vice-Chief of the General Staff) succeeded General Stuart at Ottawa as C.G.S. It is interesting to note that, during the period in which General Stuart acted as Army Commander, he, by his own decision, was *not* kept advised of the development of our invasion plans. The object was to minimize the number of officers "in the know".

The history of the Canadian Army in the War of 1939-45 was curiously different from that of its participation in the First Great War. During the years 1914-18 the British Isles were a base for operations which were continuously in progress on the continent. The Canadian division which arrived in England in the autumn of 1914 went to France within a few months, and from that time onwards the main Canadian field force was actively engaged there.

In 1939-45, on the other hand, circumstances condemned the Canadian Army in the European theatre to a largely static role for more than three and a half years. Save for a few minor enterprises and the one day's bitter fighting at Dieppe in 1942, its task was garrison duty. For this army of volunteers, many of them enlisted in 1939 in the hope and expectation of early fighting, the many disappointments and the long inaction were an exacting and difficult experience. The years in England were in fact as severe a test of morale as has been faced by any Army in this generation; that the Canadian soldier surmounted it as he did, and that his fighting spirit when the day of battle came was as high as it had been when he first landed in the United Kingdom, are facts which redound to his lasting credit and that of his commanders. And the long delay served to turn the force into an exceptionally well-trained army.

The factors which maintained Canadian morale during the long wait cannot be analysed here. The active labours of the Auxiliary Services, the unremitting devotion of the Canadian Chaplain Service, a well-organized scheme of army education, all played their part along with other influences. General McNaughton's remarks to President Roosevelt may be recalled in this connection.<sup>8</sup> Among the many generous and active benefactors of the Canadian soldier during these years the Canadian High Commissioner and Mrs. Massey were always particularly conspicuous. Perhaps the strongest force at work, however, was the limitless friendship and hospitality of the British people, who in the midst of many perils and embarrassments still found time and means to be kind to the strangers within their gates.

In the later phases of the war, those in which the Allies passed to the offensive and destroyed Adolf Hitler's guilty empire in a series of great campaigns, the Canadians had their fill of fighting. The divide between the years of waiting and the years of achievement was the tenth of July 1943: the day of the assault on Sicily. From that day forward Canadian troops went into battle in growing numbers, until the summer of 1944 found the Dominion's whole field army in action, part of it among the Italian mountains, part of it on the plains of France.

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<sup>8</sup> See above, page 47. These matters are discussed at greater length in the booklet *The Canadians in Britain, 1939-1944*.

## OFF TO SICILY

From the day in April 1943 when the decision was taken to substitute a Canadian formation for the 3<sup>rd</sup> British Division which had formerly been slated for the Sicilian enterprise, until the convoys sailed from the River Clyde in June, there were busy and inspiring days for the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division and the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Army Tank Brigade. There was final training and much re-equipping to be done; and the Canadian planners had an exacting task, arranging the loading of each ship in a succession of convoys in such a way as to ensure that in Sicily every article of cargo would be available precisely at the time and place where it was required. Major-General Simonds and several of his officers flew out to Cairo for a brief visit at the beginning of May,<sup>9</sup> and the General was able to have useful discussions with Lieutenant-General Sir Oliver Leese, the commander of the 30<sup>th</sup> British Corps, under which his Division was to be committed to battle.

Planning the Sicilian operation was a singularly complicated matter, for the various elements of the assaulting forces were drawn in literally from the ends of the earth. Most of the Americans embarked at the ports of Algeria and Northern Tunisia; the British came from the ports of the Eastern Mediterranean (particularly Egypt), Malta, and Southern Tunisia; but because of the limited facilities of the Mediterranean harbours it was necessary to bring one division (the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian) direct from the United Kingdom, and one American division was brought direct from the United States. The whole enormous armament was to be concentrated at sea on the eve of the assault; and when the Canadians went ashore into their first battle they would find themselves part of an Army — General Sir Bernard Montgomery's all-but-legendary Eighth Army — which they had never seen before.

The plan, which had originally called for a double assault directed at the Palermo and Catania areas, had been altered to provide instead for a single concentrated blow at the south-eastern corner of the island. A significant feature of the scheme was the fact that it did not depend upon the immediate capture of a major port.<sup>10</sup> The assault forces would be maintained in the first instance over open beaches, the process being facilitated by the many novel types of landing ships and craft now available. The successful attack on Sicily has been called a landmark in the development of the technique of combined operations, signalling the transition from the belief in the absolute essentiality of obtaining a port at the earliest possible moment (which, as we have seen, was to a large

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<sup>9</sup> It was at the outset of a flight undertaken for the same purpose that Major-General Salmon was killed on 29 April.

<sup>10</sup> The plan, did, however, include the capture of Syracuse and Licata on D Day.

extent at the bottom of the plan for the Dieppe raid) to the conception of "beach maintenance" which was adopted with such brilliant success in Lower Normandy in 1944.

The project as finally settled comprehended landings upon the section of the Sicilian coast extending from just south of Syracuse on the right to Licata on the left. It was to be carried out by two Task Forces. On the right, the Eastern or British Task Force would assault between Syracuse and Pozzallo; the military element in this force would be the Eighth Army. From Pozzallo to Licata the attack was delivered by the Western or American Task Force, in which the military element was the Seventh U.S. Army under Lieutenant-General George S. Patton, Jr. Both armies would be directed by General Sir Harold Alexander as Commander-in-Chief 15<sup>th</sup> Army Group. The attack was to be made before dawn on 10 July. The Canadian Division, forming the extreme left wing of the Eighth Army, was to go in on the beaches at the base of the west side of the Pachino Peninsula. Its first important objective was Pachino airfield.

Moving the Canadian Division and attached troops from the United Kingdom to Sicily was a task of quite extraordinary complexity. It took 92 ships (exclusive of naval escorts) to carry the force. They were organized in a fast assault convoy, a slow assault convoy (carrying the bulk of the transport and stores required to support the first attack) which was itself subdivided into two groups, and two "followup" convoys, which carried the Tank Brigade, except for one regiment intended for the assault, various portions of the Division not required for the assault itself, and the greater part of the transport and stores. The convoys left the United Kingdom in succession from 19 June onwards; the fast assault convoy, which carried the bulk of the troops, was the last to sail, leaving the Clyde on the evening of 28 June — D minus 12.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE ITALIAN CAMPAIGN: SICILY AND SOUTHERN ITALY, JULY - NOVEMBER 1943

#### ALLIED STRATEGY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

The decision to attack Sicily was taken by the Combined Chiefs of Staff at the Casablanca Conference in January 1943. At that time the conquest of the island was considered simply as a continuation and completion of the North African strategy, designed to open the Mediterranean to our shipping and provide a base for future attacks on Southern Europe. Before the Sicilian invasion actually took place, however, the strategic concept had developed further.

The "Trident" Conference of the Allied leaders at Washington in May 1943 reaffirmed the decision -to attack Germany in NorthWest Europe, and fixed the date, for planning purposes, as the spring of 1944. At the same time, however, the resolve was taken to go on from Sicily with a view to knocking Italy out of the war: to "carry out such operation in exploitation of 'Husky' (the conquest of Sicily) as would be best calculated to eliminate Italy from the war and to contain the maximum number of German Divisions". The first object defined by this directive was soon achieved; the second continued in effect until the defeat of Germany as the basis of the Italian campaign.

It had thus been decided, before a single Allied soldier set foot on the soil of Italy, that the forthcoming campaign there would be a subordinate enterprise. It was to play second fiddle to the great project in North-West Europe; its long-term strategic function was to contribute to the success of that project by tying down German forces in the south. The extent to which, from the conquest of Sicily onwards, the Mediterranean was to become a secondary theatre, was emphasized by another decision of the "Trident" Conference. The Supreme Commander in the Mediterranean was instructed to dispatch to the United Kingdom in the autumn of 1943 seven (finally eight) veteran divisions. "It was our purpose", writes General Marshall, "to avoid the creation in Italy of a vacuum into which the resources of, the cross-Channel operation would be dissipated as the Germans had bled themselves in the North African campaign".

#### THE ASSAULT ON SICILY

The enemy undoubtedly suspected that the Allies, having liquidated his African armies by the splendid victory in Tunisia in May, were

planning some new offensive move in the Mediterranean; but he could not fathom with certainty either its time or its objective. His strategists, we now know from captured documents, disagreed on the question of where we were likely to strike next. He completely failed to interfere effectively with the gigantic concentration of forces which was taking place. The fast assault convoy from Britain had no casualties during the long passage. The slow assault convoy, it is true, did suffer by enemy action. On 4-5 July three of its ships fell victims to submarines off the North African coast; and in the sinkings 55 Canadians lost their lives. With these ships we lost also more than 500 vehicles and some artillery, and this considerably embarrassed the Canadians during their early operations.<sup>1</sup>

On 9 July the various assault convoys of the Eastern and Western Task Forces gradually drew together, precisely as the plans made so many months before had provided, in the rendezvous areas south and west of Malta; then they sailed northwards, each convoy towards its own assigned beach. The enemy still made no sign.

During the day, the weather, which had been hot and cloudless, changed suddenly for the worse. A gale blew up; there seemed every likelihood that an assault landing would be impossible and that the whole great project would be ruined at the last moment; and a Canadian officer saw General Simonds standing by the rail of the headquarters ship "Hilary" watching the turbulent sea with a serious and calculating eye. In the evening, however, the wind fell, and although a heavy swell persisted it appeared that landing would be practicable. In the event, the gale proved à blessing in disguise; for it apparently led the naval adviser of General Achille d'Havet, commanding the 206<sup>th</sup> Italian Coastal Division, which was charged with the defence of this sector of Sicily, to assure his chief that landings were impossible that night. This doubtless softened the effect of the news, when it came, that our armada was approaching. The operations log of the German Commander-in-Chief South indicates that at 4:30 p.m. on 9 July Axis aircraft reported convoys steering towards Sicily. By 6:40 p.m. "all troops in Sicily had been alerted".

Even this much warning would have had serious effects had we had to do with troops who were determined to fight hard; but we were to find that few Italians, whether soldiers or civilians, now had their hearts in the war against the Allies. D'Havet's men showed very little disposition to resist the invasion, and the Canadian assault before dawn, which was covered by strong naval and air bombardment, proved to be

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<sup>1</sup> The story of the Canadian campaign in Sicily and Southern Italy in 1943 is told in the booklet *From Pachino to Orton* in somewhat greater detail than can be presented here. Some new information is however incorporated in this chapter.



an almost bloodless operation. The arrangements were considerably disrupted by the swell; some units were landed late, and some in the wrong places; but there were no grave consequences.

The Canadians, and a Special Service Brigade comprising two Royal Marine Commandos under Brigadier R. E. Laycock which was operating on their left under General Simonds' command, took all their objectives with little trouble and few casualties; and that night Simonds reported that his whole force, including the Marines, had suffered not more than 75 killed and wounded. The enemy's one flicker of offensive spirit, a counter-attack in the Commando area in the afternoon, had been repulsed without great difficulty.

The assault had been successful all along the front. The 13<sup>th</sup> Corps on the British right did well, and was able in fact to take Syracuse late on D Day and Augusta on 13 July. The Americans likewise met little opposition in the beginning. On 11 July, however, the situation momentarily became critical about Gela, in the centre of their front, where German forces put in a fierce armoured counterattack. But the U.S. troops showed their quality, and had good naval support; and after a few anxious hours the menace was scotched. Thereafter the German regiments made a rapid lateral withdrawal from the western and central portions of the island; in the next phase, while the Americans rounded up the seldom-resisting Italians in these regions, the Germans concentrated upon defending their own vital line of retreat to the mainland against the Eighth Army.

A letter written to General Simonds by General Leese on 10 June, exactly a month before the assault, indicates that at this time the Eighth Army planners hoped that a vigorous stroke by the Army's right wing might enable it to "dominate the Messina Straits" at an early date, thus cutting off the enemy in Western Sicily and opening the way for invasion of the Italian mainland. If this idea was still entertained at the time of the invasion, it was frustrated by the swiftness of the German counter-measures. Before the landings, the German garrison in the island consisted mainly of the Hermann Goring Panzer Division and the 15<sup>th</sup> Panzer Grenadier Division. These formations were widely distributed, from the Catania Plain in the east to Marsala in the west. As soon as the pattern of the Allied attack was clear, they re-grouped with great rapidity to their left flank, collecting their strength in the Catania area to baulk the British northward thrust along the coast. At the same time considerable German reinforcements were put in motion from the continent towards Sicily, and in the later stages of the fighting the enemy had available there large parts of the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Division (one of his very best formations) and of the 29<sup>th</sup> Panzer Grenadier Division. His air support, always inferior to ours, was steadily reduced by Allied air action; but in the opinion of the Chief of Staff of the 14<sup>th</sup> Panzer

Corps, which defended Sicily; this was compensated for in some degree by his strength in anti-aircraft artillery.

It may be well at this point to note the successive changes in Allied tactical plans which affected the Canadians' employment and lent increasing significance to the operations of the left wing of the Eighth Army of which they were a part. General Leese on 10 June had thought it possible that this wing would have, in the beginning at least, a relatively static role; but this did not prove to be the case.

On 13 July, three days after the landings, General Alexander issued to his two Armies a directive which instructed the Eighth to advance on two "axes", one directed upon Catania and the adjacent airfields, the other (on the Canadian flank) upon "the network of road communications within the area Leonforte-Enna". It was considered at this time that it might be desirable for the 30<sup>th</sup> Corps to drive on to the north coast. On 16 July a further directive ordered the Eighth Army to continue the movement on three axes: northward towards Catania, eastward from Leonforte towards Adrano, and on the far left through Nicosia and Troina upon Randazzo. This would have directed the Canadian Division in a wide sweeping movement north of Mount Etna. By 20 July, however, it was clear that the Germans had withdrawn into the north-east corner of the island and that their main force was holding up the British south of Catania. Here General Montgomery had won a bitter battle about Primosole Bridge, but it was apparent that further ground could be gained on this flank only at a very heavy cost in lives. The sweep north of Etna by the Eighth Army's left was now abandoned; instead, the Canadians were to drive on Adrano (also called Aderno), which lies at the foot of Mount Etna about twenty miles north-west of Catania. Between them and the north coast the Seventh U.S. Army was to come into line and join in a combined offensive to break through to Messina. In this phase, the Eighth Army must be content to "hold" on the right and would make its main effort on the left, where the Canadians were; to strengthen this flank, and to strike the final blow at Adrano, the 78<sup>th</sup> Division was ordered over from Africa.

### ACROSS THE SICILIAN MOUNTAINS

On 11 July the Canadians had begun the advance inland prescribed in the pre-invasion plan. The weather was extremely hot, the roads extremely dusty, and there was little transport; the troops were fresh from a temperate climate and a long voyage in crowded ships; and even though for a time there was scarcely any opposition, mere marching was a very exhausting experience under these conditions. The Sicilian countryside, with its strange semi-tropical vegetation, its picturesque hill-towns and its squalid rural slums, was constantly presenting new

sights and sounds (and smells); but the men were too tired to be interested tourists. In Modica on 12 July men of Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry captured General d'Havet. On the same day a patrol of the Royal Canadian Regiment established, at Ragusa, the first contact with the United States forces (the 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division) advancing on the left. That night the Division's advanced troops were in the vicinity of Giarratana, some thirty miles, as the crow flies, from the point of landing. The Canadians badly needed a rest; and so General Montgomery, to quote his own words, "pulled them out of the fighting for two days."

They resumed the advance on the night of 14-15 July, moving on Highway No. 124, which runs along the rocky backbone of Sicily's southeastern peninsula, directed through Vizzini upon Caltagirone and Enna. On the 15<sup>th</sup> they had their first encounter with the Germans, at Grammichele; after a stiff little fight, a detachment of the Hermann Goring Division was driven out of the town and the advance continued. This was the first of many similar actions. The Germans made the most of the rugged terrain of Sicily. In general, advance was limited to the narrow and tortuous roads, and these were constantly cut or obstructed by mines and demolitions; while every few miles along the route the enemy had available to him a commanding defensive position. He defended these with increasing determination as the campaign proceeded, and the Canadians, pushing forward in the sweltering July heat, were forced to storm or outflank a long succession of rocky hills and ridges at a steadily mounting cost in casualties.

It was essential to make all possible speed, for as we have seen the Eighth Army's left flank was taking on increased importance. On 15 July General Montgomery wrote to General Leese, advising him that operations were "a bit slow and sticky on the right" and that everything indicated that the Germans were pulling their troops eastward from the central area of Sicily with a view to doing all they could to keep us from getting the airfields about Catania. The letter proceeded:

As we are held temporarily on the right, it is now all the more important to swing hard with our left; so push on with all speed to Caltagirone, and then to Valguarnera — Enna — Leonforte...

The Division occupied Caltagirone on 16 July. The next day it took Piazza Armerina, after clearing a strong enemy position on the lofty hills to the south. The 18<sup>th</sup> was a day of confused and expensive fighting on the craggy approaches to Valguarnera; but that night this place too fell into Canadian hands.

In the meantime the Americans to the west were making rapid progress; and it was now agreed that Enna would be left to them, while the Canadian Division would be directed upon the hill-towns of

Leonforte and Assoro to the north-east. These two places stand on a commanding ridge rising about 2500 feet above sea-level and about 1200 above the valley of the Dittaino River, across which the attackers had to approach them. Eastward from Leonforte runs Highway No. 121, leading through Agira to Adrano. This town appeared to be the western anchor of the German position in front of Etna; and in accordance with General Alexander's plan General Montgomery now directed that the Canadians, after taking Leonforte and Assoro, should swing eastward and drive towards Adrano "without restraint".

The 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, on the right facing Assoro, and the 2<sup>nd</sup>, on the left facing Leonforte, both got across the dry bed of the Dittaino on 20 July. The next two days brought violent and dramatic action.

Brigadier H. D. Graham, commanding the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, detailed the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment for the attack on Assoro. This place stood on the western side of a jagged and lofty mountain peak — about 3000 feet high — which was crowned by an ancient Norman castle. The Hastings' Commanding Officer, Lt.-Col. B. A. Sutcliffe, was killed by a shell as he reconnoitred this extraordinarily formidable position; and the command devolved upon a son of a former Governor-General of Canada, Major Lord Tweedsmuir. The new commander decided that a direct frontal attack towards Assoro along the single tortuous road which led towards it would be a hopeless proposition; instead, he adopted the bold and original course of a silent night march across country and an assault upon the mountain's steepest face — that fronting the east. His enterprise had the success which it deserved. Dawn of 21 July found the men of the Hastings, almost ready to collapse from exhaustion after the march and the desperate climb, ensconced on the mountain-top beside the castle determined to hold against all comers this vantage-point which they had seized in the midst of the enemy's positions. And hold it they did, in spite of artillery fire, counter-attack and snipers, until the Germans on 22 July withdrew from the town below. It is not surprising that the 15<sup>th</sup> Panzer Grenadier Division, the victim of this exploit, should write of its late antagonists in its subsequent "experience report", "In fieldcraft (Indianerkrieg) superior to our own troops. Very mobile at night, surprise break-ins, clever infiltrations at night with small groups between our strongpoints".

In the meantime the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, commanded by Brigadier C. Vokes, had been dealing with Leonforte. This town, perching below the crest of a steep hill on the further side of a deep ravine spanned by a bridge which the Germans had of course demolished, was as tough a proposition as Assoro, and there was very hard fighting before it was taken. On the evening of 21 July the Edmonton Regiment, their way

prepared by a heavy artillery concentration, clambered down into the ravine and up into Leonforte, while sappers, working under fire, began to replace the bridge. There was a fierce struggle in the town's dark streets, and the situation was mastered only the next morning, when a flying column of tanks and anti-tank guns with men of Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry clinging to them ran the gauntlet of fire, across the now completed bridge, followed by the rest of the Patricias, to reinforce the hard-pressed Edmontons. The heights overlooking Leonforte were cleared that afternoon, after further bitter fighting and a good many casualties. The Germans were contesting every yard of ground; and still harder battles lay immediately ahead.<sup>2</sup>

### THE FIGHTING FOR AGIRA

The next objective was Agira, which barred the way to Adrano. Athwart the highway leading to Agira from Leonforte stood a succession of formidable hill positions; and the resistance offered by the Germans on these positions upset the Canadian time-table. It was hoped to break through them in one continuous operation, the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade carrying the attack in the initial stage and the 2<sup>nd</sup> taking over thereafter. On the afternoon of 24 July the Royal Canadian Regiment, supported by tanks of the 12<sup>th</sup> Canadian Army Tank Regiment (Three Rivers Regiment), assailed the enemy about the village of Nissoria. The village itself was taken without trouble, but two commanding hills beyond it, one on either side of the highway, were different matters. The infantry and tanks were beaten back from them with heavy losses; among the R.C.R.'s fatal casualties was the Commanding Officer, Lt.-Col. Ralph Crowe. That night the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment attacked the hills with a similar result; and the third battalion of the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, the 48<sup>th</sup> Highlanders of Canada, had no better fortune when it went forward in its turn on the following evening. Only when the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade took over and sent the Patricias in on the 26<sup>th</sup> behind a very heavy barrage moving in 100-yard lifts were the positions overlooking Nissoria finally cleared. Possession of them had been purchased at a heavy cost.

The second enemy position, a mile or so to the east, was in our hands by noon of the next day; and that afternoon the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada attacked the third, lying immediately west of Agira. South of the road they gained a foothold on the summit of the hill, and cleared this part of the objective in a dashing attack on the morning of the 28<sup>th</sup>. The same day the Edmonton Regiment, not without

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<sup>2</sup> During the Sicilian operations the Canadian divisional artillery was reinforced at various times by attached British units. In particular, the 7<sup>th</sup> Medium Regiment and the 142<sup>nd</sup> (Self-Propelled) Field Regiment R.A. served the Division long and well.

some fierce fighting, took the portion of the objective north of the road. Subsequently the Patricias cleared Agira itself, one of the most imposing of Sicily's innumerable hill-towns.

While the Canadians fought their way towards Agira from the west, the 231<sup>st</sup> British Infantry Brigade, operating under General Simonds' command, had been attacking from the south to threaten the enemy's communications running eastward from the town. On three successive nights they had got across the highway, only to be withdrawn each time when the main attack failed to gain ground. The Germans, fighting with their usual obstinacy, refused to be coerced by this threat into giving up their positions west of Agira until actually driven off them. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, commanded by Brigadier M.H.S. Penhale, had also been pursuing an independent role, advancing down the Dittaino Valley on the right of the Division's main axis and parallel to it. This brigade too had heavy fighting, and was now able to make a valuable contribution to the 30<sup>th</sup> Corps operation which finally drove the enemy from his Adrano position.

The Corps plan for Operation "Hardgate" provided for an attack against Adrano by two divisions. On the left the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division would continue its thrust along Highway No. 121 through Regalbuto and clear the country north of the highway; on the right, the fresh 78<sup>th</sup> Division, brought in secretly from Africa and now ready for action, would strike north-eastward against Centuripe and then launch the main assault on Adrano. On 29 July the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade passed temporarily under the 78<sup>th</sup> Division's command and was given the task of gaining for it a bridgehead across the Dittaino at Catenanuova. The West Nova Scotia Regiment duly took Catenanuova on the 30<sup>th</sup>,<sup>3</sup> the 78<sup>th</sup> went through and on 2 and 3 August captured the singularly commanding town of Centuripe. The Canadian brigade then reverted to its own Division and returned to the main divisional axis, Highway No. 121.

In the meantime the 231<sup>st</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Brigades had been battling hard under the scorching sun for Regalbuto, about five miles east of Agira. The Hermann G&Rings held the place with great determination, using their tanks as pillboxes among the ruins. Only on the night of 1-2 August did they withdraw from it. The Germans still held Catania and their line running north-west from it in front of Etna; but its right flank was threatened by the advance of the Canadian and 78<sup>th</sup> Divisions, while moreover the Seventh U.S. Army was now coming into line to share in the final drive into the Messina Peninsula. The Americans were to push forward along the coast road and the parallel inland route through

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<sup>3</sup> Here there occurred a rare event: a German battalion (the 923<sup>rd</sup> Fortress Battalion) failed to fight, and fled "in a shameful manner without enemy pressure". The unit was dissolved and the Commanding officer and other officers court-martialled.

Troina; on the far right, on the other coast, the 13<sup>th</sup> Corps would seize any opportunity to take Catania and advance through the defile between Etna and the Straits; in between, the 30<sup>th</sup> Corps, including the Canadians, would break through the enemy's centre and take Adrano.

During the first days of August the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade was engaged in clearing the rugged tract of country north-west of Adrano and north of the River Salso, whose course parallels that of Highway No. 121. On the 5<sup>th</sup>, after a difficult approach across a roadless wilderness of rocky hills, the Edmontons rushed "Hill 736", which dominates the angle formed by the Salso and Troina rivers; and on the same day a striking force of the Three Rivers Regiment and the Seaforth with some artillery and other elements attached went forward across the Troina to attack German paratroopers holding the high ground between this river and the Simeto, which joins the Salso just west of Adrano. This operation was brilliantly successful, providing a particularly fine example of infantry-tank co-operation; the paratroops' losses were heavy, but the Canadians' were small.

The final Canadian blow towards Adrano was struck by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade. By 6 August the Royal 22<sup>e</sup> Régiment had a bridgehead across the Simeto and was pushing on towards the town. Orders from Corps, however, directed that it should be left free for the passage of the 78<sup>th</sup> Division. One patrol of the 22<sup>e</sup> did, nevertheless, reach the outskirts of Adrano and found no enemy therein. The enemy had now been levered out of his main line of resistance before Etna; on 5 August the 13<sup>th</sup> Corps had finally got into Catania; on the 6<sup>th</sup> the Americans cleared Troina, where they had had very bloody fighting; and the whole Allied front was on the move. The Canadian Division was withdrawn into Army Reserve on 6 August; a few days later it passed under the command of the 13<sup>th</sup> Corps and moved southward to plan and train for the next great enterprise, the invasion of the Italian mainland. It thus took no part in the last phase of the Sicilian campaign, and was not present when American and British forces entered Messina on 16 and 17 August, completing the conquest of the island after thirty-eight days' fighting.

### THE SICILIAN BALANCE-SHEET

The four weeks fighting in Sicily was the first occasion during the War of 1939-45 when Canadian troops in large numbers were committed to a lengthy campaign, and accordingly warrants some comment.

In some respects, the 1<sup>st</sup> Division's introduction to active operations took place under almost ideal conditions. The assault landing at Pachino, though not quite bloodless, was a far less costly operation than those who planned it had thought probable; and the advance

through Sicily thereafter had begun with slight opposition which had developed gradually into the fierce resistance encountered in front of Agira. The Division was thus able to gain battle experience by relatively easy stages, in a manner vouchsafed to comparatively few formations in this war. Yet the campaign as a whole was not an easy one. Climate and terrain presented exceptional difficulties, and the Canadians had been thrust by circumstances into a more active role than that originally planned for them. They had marched further than any other division in the Eighth Army, and for more than a fortnight had had a very large share of the total fighting on the Army front. The stubbornness of the opposition at this time was grimly reflected in the figures of Canadian casualties, which for the whole of the Sicilian campaign, including the losses at sea, amounted to 2434 of all categories; 38 officers and 447 other ranks had been killed or had died.

It was a fine performance for a "green" division (and it should be emphasized that the Division could not have done as well as it did but for its exceptionally sound and careful training during the years in England). General Leese's comments, in a letter written to General Simonds on 6 August, the day the Canadians passed from under his command, were detailed and generous:

Now that you are shortly to leave 30 Corps I would like to write and congratulate you and the Division on your magnificent fighting since you landed in Sicily.

The landing operations went extremely smoothly and reflect the greatest credit on your planning and training before you sailed. The Division then marched many miles inland to the Ragusa area, fighting its way forward in great heat, to which your men were unaccustomed. This reflected particular credit on the infantry, who had only just finished a long sea voyage. You then took up the forefront of the Corps battle from Vizzini. For three weeks, with the Malta Bde under your command, you have fought continuously against a stubborn German resistance.

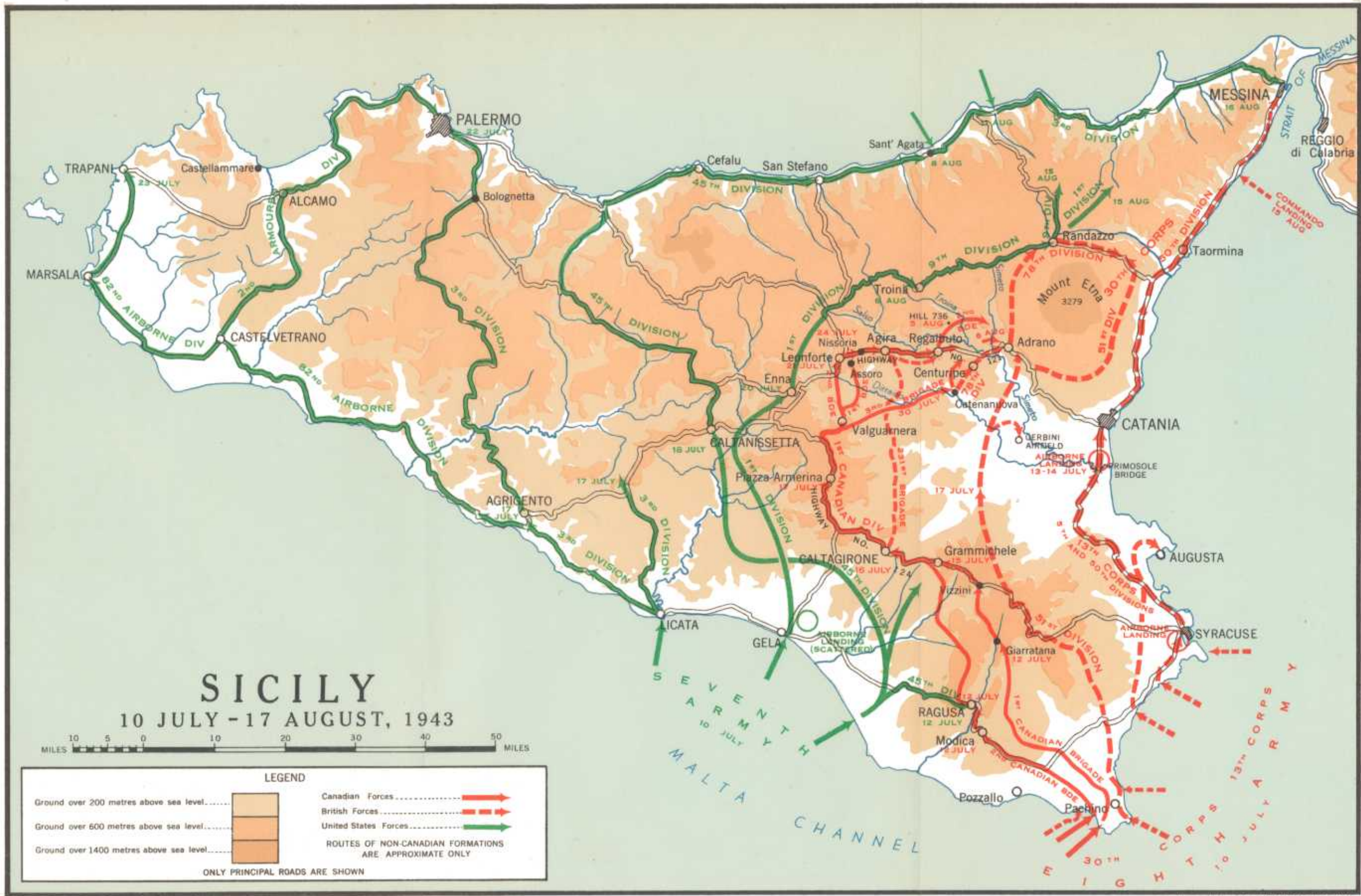
Your battle training has stood up extraordinarily well to the high tests demanded in the constant advances and attacks, both by day and night. The gunners have supported their infantry closely and well and the Divisional concentrations have proved the adequacy of your training. The sappers have worked with great devotion to duty, to establish tactical routes and to maintain your supplies. Finally, you forced your way from Regalbuto to the River Salso and joined up under the most difficult physical conditions with the 78<sup>th</sup> Division in time for the attack tonight. I cannot thank and congratulate you enough on all these performances.

I would like to add one personal word of thanks to you for your unfailing help during these operations; and to congratulate you on the manner in which you handled your Division.

My whole Staff tell me how extraordinarily well their opposite numbers in your Division have done and how much they have enjoyed working with them...

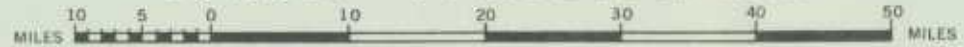
## FIRST ON THE CONTINENT





# SICILY

## 10 JULY - 17 AUGUST, 1943



LEGEND	
Ground over 200 metres above sea level.....	Canadian Forces.....
Ground over 500 metres above sea level.....	British Forces.....
Ground over 1400 metres above sea level.....	United States Forces.....
ROUTES OF NON-CANADIAN FORMATIONS ARE APPROXIMATE ONLY	
ONLY PRINCIPAL ROADS ARE SHOWN	

One very satisfactory consequence of the invasion of Sicily had been the eclipse on 25 July of Benito Mussolini. The fallen dictator was replaced by a government headed by Marshal Badoglio, which announced that it would continue the war but was soon engaged in negotiations with the Allies behind the Germans' backs. Italy, it was clear, would soon be "eliminated from the war", and one of the main objects of the Combined Chiefs of Staff would be achieved. These negotiations proceeded concurrently with planning for the advance from Sicily into Italy, and the new situation inevitably affected the nature of the plans.

The project for this first invasion of the mainland of Europe, as finally settled after much discussion and many changes, was as follows. The Eighth Army would lead the way, sending the 13<sup>th</sup> Corps (commanded by Lieutenant-General M.C. Dempsey and consulting for this operation of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division, the 5<sup>th</sup> British' Division and the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Army Tank Brigade) in to the attack by way of the short jump across the Strait of Messina to the toe of Italy. This enterprise (Operation "Baytown") would serve to open the Strait to Allied naval forces; and General Montgomery was instructed, in the event of the enemy's withdrawing, to follow him up, bearing in mind that the greater the extent to which he could engage enemy forces in the "toe" the more assistance he would be giving to the main attack further north. This (Operation "Avalanche") was to be delivered a few days later, simultaneously or nearly simultaneously with the announcement of the Italian surrender. The Fifth United States Army, commanded by Lieutenant-General Mark Clark and consisting of one American and one British corps, was to assault in the Gulf of Salerno, south of Naples and at the northern limit of operation of fighters working from Sicilian airfields. "Avalanche" had for its object the capture of Naples, which was to be followed by an advance on Rome. At the same time the 1<sup>st</sup> British Airborne Division would land by sea in the Taranto area and seize the heel of the Italian peninsula.

D Day for Operation "Baytown" was 3 September, 1943: the fourth anniversary of Britain's declaration of war. The Canadian Division would attack on the right, its objectives including the town of Reggio di Calabria; the 5<sup>th</sup> would go in on the left opposite Messina. The Canadian assault was to be led by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade with the Carleton and York Regiment and the West Nova Scotia Regiment in the van. The operation would be covered both by the massed artillery of the Eighth Army firing from Sicily and by a powerful naval force.

Before dawn on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, as the landing craft moved silently across the Strait, shells from 655 guns began to crash down on the Italian shore. In the darkness and the smoke many groups of craft failed to find the proper beaches. As in the case of the Sicilian landings, however, these inaccuracies had no serious consequences, for there was even less

resistance at Reggio than there had been at Pachino. The Italian troops in the area had no intention of fighting, and the Germans did not propose to defend Calabria. On 17 August General von Vietinghoff, who was then about to take command of the Tenth Army, had had an interview with Hitler and been told that "the centre of gravity" was to be in the Naples-Salerno area. Calabria was to be evacuated, though "only under enemy pressure"; in the face of superior strength, "delaying action by fully mobile forces" was the order for this area. Thanks to this German policy, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade had no difficulty in occupying Reggio and its environs; and before the evening of D Day the units of the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade had already pushed forward into the mountainous interior. The British division had done equally well on the left. Allied forces from the West once more had a lodgement on the European continent.

The phase of the campaign now beginning was difficult and arduous, if not for the Canadians particularly hazardous. The Calabrian peninsula is nothing if not rugged; its Aspromonte range is among the highest in the Apennine system. The battalions, struggling forward in the September rains along the poor mountain roads in the face of German rearguards and constant painstaking demolitions, found this land of splendid pine-clad hills with its frosty nights a peculiar and rather uncomfortable contrast to Sicily where, only a few weeks before, they had been campaigning in tropical heat. After some days of slow advance through the mountains, the Canadian brigades were ordered to switch their axis of advance to the better highway running along the east coast of Calabria. By 10 September their advanced patrols were in Catanzaro, far up this coast, and some 75 miles from Reggio even as the crow flies.

On 9 September the Fifth Army had assaulted the beaches of Salerno, delivering the main blow of the invasion plan. This operation developed into one of the fiercest battles of the whole Mediterranean campaign, fought in part on the ground about the famous temples of Paestum. The radio announcement of the Italian surrender, made the night before the landing, had warned the Germans of their danger. They had already taken some precautions (notably in the Rome area); now they took others. Italian troops were disarmed and coast defences taken over. German documents prove that the enemy had no actual advance information of the Salerno attack, but we have already seen that he had long regarded the Salerno-Naples area as a likely Allied target. During 8 September he sighted our convoys and drew the inference that a large operation was about to take place in this sector, "or possibly further north". When the assault was made, he reacted to it with speed and vigour, rushing to Salerno reserve formations which he had been too prudent to commit against the Eighth Army in the south. Through several days of vicious fighting the fate of the Anglo-American bridgehead hung in the balance. The Allied Navies backed the land forces with all their

strength; British battleships went in close to the beaches to bombard the counter-attacking Germans, and a major lesson learned from this operation was the tremendous value of naval fire in support of troops ashore. But it was clear that no other form of assistance would be so useful to the hard-pressed Fifth Army as a rapid advance of the Eighth to threaten the rear of the Germans assailing the bridgehead.

It was not easy for the Eighth to get forward in the required manner, for the 13<sup>th</sup> Corps had already outrun its supplies. General Montgomery, indeed, had to call a halt at the Catanzaro isthmus to give "administration" a chance to catch up. While the main bodies stood fast the light forces continued to push on to the north; the Canadian Division's reconnaissance unit (the 4<sup>th</sup> Princess Louise Dragoon Guards) occupied the port of Crotona on 11 September. The general advance began again on the 14<sup>th</sup>; and on the 16<sup>th</sup> the leading patrols of the 5<sup>th</sup> Division, which throughout had been driving forward along the western coastline, made contact with the Americans fighting on the right flank of the Salerno bridgehead. By that time the worst was already over at Salerno. The Germans, who had counter-attacked very heavily on the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> and greatly reduced the bridgehead, continued to attack on the 14<sup>th</sup> only to be stopped in their tracks, and on the 15<sup>th</sup> the battleships took a hand very effectively. But it was important to strengthen and extend at the earliest possible moment the contact made between the two Allied Armies.

With this in view, General Simonds was ordered to seize Potenza, an important road centre some 55 miles due east of Salerno and the same distance inland from the Gulf of Taranto. The task fell to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, and primarily to a strong mobile advanced guard organized for the purpose and known (from the name of its commander, Lt.-Col. M. P. Bogert of the West Nova Scotia Regiment) as "Boforce". Rushing forward through the mountains, this force met no opposition until it was close to Potenza itself, and after some fighting and artillery action the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade took the city on 20 September. Lieutenant-General Richard Heidrich of the 1<sup>st</sup> German Parachute Division had seen the importance of Potenza and sent off reinforcements to forestall us there; but they arrived too late. The airline overland distance to Potenza from Reggio, where the Canadians had landed less than seventeen days before, is less than 200 miles, but the actual road distance by the route followed is computed at 457 miles. The disparity in the figures reflects the nature of Italian roads and throws some light on the conditions under which the war in Italy was waged.

In the meantime, the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade had been operating to the eastward, joining hands with the Airborne Division in the Taranto region and patrolling boldly inland far to the north and north-west. In this work the Princess Louise Dragoon Guards were

invaluable. Canadians at home, anxious for news of their troops, were annoyed in these days by the almost total absence of reference to them in the daily reports of the progress of operations. There was, however, good reason for this reticence. It was essential that the enemy should not realize that a single infantry division was covering the whole wide front from west of Potenza to the vicinity of Taranto.

By the end of September the Fifth Army, its grim experience in the bridgehead now only a memory, had driven the Germans back beyond Naples; Allied troops entered the city on 1 October. The 5<sup>th</sup> British Corps, concentrated in the heel of the Italian peninsula, had come under General Montgomery's command and had pushed light forces rapidly northward to seize the extremely important group of airfields in the flat plain of Foggia. From these the Allied Strategic Air Forces would soon be striking at centres of Axis war production heretofore safe from their attentions. The operations accompanying the Italians' change of policy had not brought all the results that had been hoped for. The Germans had disarmed the Italian Army with little difficulty, and their hold on northern and central Italy was unshaken. But the Allies had rapidly overrun a vast and valuable tract of the south. They now faced the difficult task of capturing the capital, an objective of great political importance. "Whoever holds Rome", said Mr. Churchill, "holds the title deeds of Italy".

#### CAMPOBASSO AND TERMOLI

The Fifth and Eighth Armies now stood on a line running across Italy from sea to sea, with the Eighth on the Adriatic flank. In his share of the joint operations designed to take Rome, General Montgomery decided to use the 13<sup>th</sup> Corps in advance, with two divisions (cup": the 78<sup>th</sup> operating along the coast and the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian fighting forward from the plain of Foggia into the mountain mass to the north and west. The Canadians' immediate objectives were the upland cities of Vinchiatturo and Campobasso, which lie close to the centre line of the peninsula. The Division's main body moved from Potenza at the end of September, and concentrated with the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade near Foggia. Then it moved on towards the menacing mountains edging the plain. At Motta Montecorvino, on the edge of the escarpment, the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade bumped into the Germans — men of the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Division; and there was a fierce all-night fight (1-2 October) before the Canadians established themselves and were able to push on to Volturara. From here the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade carried the advance onwards, and on 8 October it took Gambalesa. In the meantime the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, advancing on the left, forced its way into the hills further south.

The Germans' resistance had stiffened materially by comparison with that encountered by the Canadians during September. The battle was

approaching the narrowest and most rugged part of the Italian peninsula, highly favourable to defensive tactics; and on 27 September Heidrich had issued to his paratroopers a directive prescribing a definite technique of delaying action, designed to make us pay for every mile gained and to slow the speed of our advance to the minimum. Mines and demolition were now supplemented by a policy of fighting for ground, based on holding a succession of positions and refusing to give up any one of them until we had been forced to deploy our strength and develop a deliberate attack. In this manner the Germans fell back slowly and stubbornly towards the Sangro. Along this river on the eastern side of the peninsula, and along the Garigliano in the west, they had developed a defensive position which they hoped to make good as a Winter Line.<sup>4</sup>

So the advance proceeded, mile after mile across the sullen Apennine highlands in the autumn mist and rain, the battalions fighting for a commanding height here and an important mountain village there, with the divisional artillery bringing its full weight to bear in support as occasion required and circumstances allowed. Among these engagements, that fought by the Seaforth on 6 October for possession of the crossroads at Decorate was particularly fierce and costly. Finally, on 14 October, the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade was able to occupy Campobasso, while the 2<sup>nd</sup> on the following day took Vinchiaturò, a significant roadcentre overlooked by the great 6000-foot mass of the Matese Mountains. It was desired to develop Campobasso (a provincial capital of some 17,000 people, dominated, like so many Italian towns, by an extremely unlikely castle on a highly improbable hill) as an administrative centre. As it and Vinchiaturò were still under shellfire it was necessary for the Canadians to spend some days driving the Germans from the villages on the near side of the Biferno River and thus pushing their guns back out of range. Thereafter, during the last ten days of October, the brigades extended their operations beyond the Biferno and, in a series of actions among which the attack on Colle d'Anchise by the Edmonton Regiment was conspicuous, cleared the villages on the far bank also. From these bases active patrolling was carried on in the course of November to drive the enemy still further back. During this month as many men as possible were given short leave to enable them to enjoy the clubs and theatres which had been set up in Campobasso; and the pleasures of life in "Maple Leaf City" were an agreeable memory for a long time to come.

While the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division was pushing forward to Campobasso, one unit of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Army Tank Brigade was playing a

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<sup>4</sup> This position is called on German maps the Bernhard Line. Can it perhaps have been named for one of the Allied commanders whom it was intended to stop?



## CAMPOBASSO

From a painting by Major C. F. Comfort

Campobasso, “dominated by an extremely unlikely castle on a highly improbable hill”, was developed as a leave centre for the Canadians in Italy in the autumn of 1943, and was known as “Maple Leaf City”. In the foreground are Canadian troops and carries.

distinguished part in a dramatic incident on the Adriatic coast.

In warfare in the narrow and mountainous Italian peninsula the expedient that offered the best hope of rapid advance and the encirclement of considerable enemy forces was the "seaborne hook" the utilization of Allied naval supremacy to put troops ashore on the coast at points well in rear of the line which the enemy was defending from the Tyrrhenian Sea to the Adriatic. In practice, the Allies' employment of this device was painfully circumscribed by the limitations of their naval resources and in particular by a chronic shortage of landing craft. As we have seen, however, it was employed at Salerno in September; and General Montgomery now used it on a lesser scale, on the opposite side of the country, in October. By the beginning of that month the Eighth Army's advance up the Adriatic coast was approaching the port of Termoli, just north of the Biferno. The plan now was to loosen the enemy's hold on this whole area by striking at Termoli from the sea with a Special Service (Commando) brigade and two brigades of the 78<sup>th</sup> Division while the balance of this Division drove forward overland to make contact with them.

The Commandos landed successfully on the morning of 3 October; and while the 78<sup>th</sup>'s seaborne units came in behind, the overland force duly struck across the mouth of the Biferno and joined hands with the men from the sea. So far all had gone well. Now, however, the enemy took a hand, hurling his 16<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division against the still unconsolidated and unsupported bridgehead in a violent and determined counter-attack. The British infantry were forced to give ground. Only one armoured unit (the County of London Yeomanry) was on the spot, and if disaster was to be staved off it was essential to get additional armour up at once. It was in these circumstances that the Three Rivers Regiment, whose tanks had arrived at Manfredonia by sea from the west coast in the very nick of time, was ordered north into the fight; and the sight of the Shermans rumbling across the Biferno bridge must have been a very pleasant one for the 78<sup>th</sup>.

On 6 October British infantry and Canadian and British tanks went over to the attack. Through the day the battle swayed back and forth among the olive groves on the rolling plain west of Termoli. On this terrain tank could fight tank in a manner very rare in the Italian campaign. By evening the 16<sup>th</sup> Panzer had been worsted and the situation saved. The Three Rivers Regiment recorded that it had knocked out eight of the enemy's Mark IV Special tanks for a loss of five Shermans, of which at least two were recoverable. Fortunately, Canadian losses in men were light.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Hitler, who had asked to be kept specially informed about events at Termoli, must have been acutely displeased by the result. A few weeks later the 16<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division's commander,



In this smaller Salerno the Three Rivers Regiment had given a very good account of itself. The 78<sup>th</sup> Division, and particularly the 38<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Brigade, had many kind things to say; and General Dempsey wrote to Brigadier R. A. Wyman of the Canadian Tank Brigade in terms calculated to warm any commander's heart:

I have been speaking during the last two or three days to several of the units of the 78<sup>th</sup> Division and the S.S.<sup>6</sup> Brigade which took part in the operations at Termoli. Wherever I have been I have heard nothing but praise of the way in which Lt.-Col. Booth's regiment fought. There is no doubt that they played a very important part in bringing about the defeat of the 16<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division.

All the accounts go to show that not only did they fight with tremendous spirit but, also with considerable skill. It must be a great satisfaction to you to know that whenever a unit of your Brigade gets the opportunity of taking part in a battle it invariably does so with the greatest credit.

On the Canadian Division's front November was, on the whole, as we have seen, a quiet month; it witnessed, however, an independent operation on the upper Sangro River by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, now commanded by Brigadier T. G. Gibson. General Montgomery, having successfully crossed the line of the Trigno early in the month, was now preparing for the attack on the Winter Line along the Sangro. He proposed to deliver his main thrust along the Adriatic coast; but with a view to concealing this fact from the enemy it was desirable to make a show of activity in the inland mountains.

Moving the Brigade north-westwards from Vinchiatturo through the mountains was itself a considerable operation, involving herculean toil by the Engineers to clear routes which the enemy had demolished with his usual thoroughness. But it was done; and on 16 November we pushed the Germans out of Carovilli. At the village of Castel di Sangro we found the dominant rock pinnacle overlooking the place held by paratroopers who beat off the first attack upon it and then withdrew. Brigadier Gibson now undertook long-range patrolling, one object of which was to convince the enemy, if possible, that the whole 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division was operating in these bleak uplands. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade remained active on the upper Sangro until the time came to rejoin the Division for the next great offensive. Throughout this area Italian refugees were a special problem, for the Germans had ruthlessly "scorched the earth" to deny our troops winter accommodation, burning the — villages and driving the miserable inhabitants out into the freezing mountains.

The three months of September, October and November, 1943, were less costly in Canadian lives than either the Sicilian campaign

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Maj.-Gen. Sieekenius, was removed.

<sup>6</sup> Special Service.

which preceded them or the bitter fighting above the Sangro which followed. Fatal casualties for the three months were 22 officers and 294 other ranks; non-fatal, 67 officers and 812 other ranks. October, with a total list of 44 officers and 639 other ranks, of whom 13 officers and 166 other ranks were killed or died, was by far the most expensive; and the majority of these losses were suffered in the series of stiff combats during the advance to Campobasso in the first fortnight of the month. It should be added that during this period there was also a good deal of sickness.

Great changes were impending in the Canadian force in Italy. As we have seen, the British and Canadian governments had agreed to build up a Canadian corps in that theatre. The Headquarters of General Crerar's 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps left England late in October, and on arrival in the Mediterranean was set up in the first instance in Sicily. The 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division began to come ashore at Naples during the first week of November. But it was to be a long time before the 5<sup>th</sup> saw any action. Shortage of shipping space had made it necessary for them to leave their heavy equipment in England; it was to be replaced by that of the 7<sup>th</sup> British Armoured Division, which was moving from Italy to the United Kingdom. The "Desert Rats", however, had been fighting in the Mediterranean theatre from the very beginning; their equipment and vehicles proved to be ancient and much worn, and reequipping the Canadian Division was consequently a slow process, not carried out without many complaints from units which remembered with some poignancy the new vehicles they had left behind in Britain.

General Simonds, who had commanded the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division so successfully during its long advance from the Sicilian beaches to the Sangro, was now transferred to the 5<sup>th</sup> Division; he was succeeded by Brigadier Vokes, who had already had experience of divisional command during September and October when Simonds was ill. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, General Vokes' old command, passed to Lt.Col. B. M. Hoffmeister, formerly Officer Commanding the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada. These changes became effective before the 1<sup>st</sup> Division moved off from Campobasso in the last week of November to play its part in the Sangro battle.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE ITALIAN CAMPAIGN: THE BATTLES OF THE WINTER LINE, DECEMBER 1943 — APRIL 1944

#### THE BATTLE OF THE SANGRO

The *object* of the Allied Armies in Italy continued to be to contain as large a German force as possible; their *objective*, in the winter campaign of 1943, was Rome. The actual capture of the city would naturally be the task of the Fifth Army, operating on the western flank. The function of the Eighth was to assist by breaking through the Winter Line on the east, advancing to the great lateral road running across the peninsula from Pescara through Avezzano to Rome, establishing a bridgehead across the Pescara River and if possible getting troops into the Avezzano area to threaten the flank of the defenders of the capital.<sup>1</sup>

As we have seen, General Montgomery had decided to strike his main blow against the Bernhard Line on the coast rather than in the interior, where the Canadians still were. The 5<sup>th</sup> British Corps, commanded by Lieutenant-General C. W. Allfrey, was to deliver it, with the 78<sup>th</sup> British and 8<sup>th</sup> Indian Divisions and the 4<sup>th</sup> British Armoured Brigade under command in the first phase. In mid-November the 78<sup>th</sup> established a bridgehead across the lower reaches of the Sangro; this foothold was limited to the broad flat valley floor, but it was to form a springboard for the attack against the bold escarpment lining the valley on the north. The weather now broke, and persistent rain obliged Montgomery to make successive postponements of the assault and also to abandon his conception of a single great break-through operation carrying the Eighth Army straight to the Pescara Lateral. He now planned a more gradual advance and limited objectives. The main attack — the “colossal crack” referred to in his message to the Army — finally went in on the night of 28-29 November, with the 2<sup>nd</sup> New Zealand Division taking part on the left flank. By dark on the 30<sup>th</sup>, after most violent fighting, the whole commanding ridge above the Sangro was firmly in British hands. But though the Eighth was now through the Winter Line proper, its troubles were far from ended.

In this Adriatic sector the country presents almost unlimited

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<sup>1</sup> The sequence of events in General Alexander's plan, as outlined at a conference on 8 November, was as follows: first, the Eighth Army offensive; secondly, an offensive on the Fifth Army front directed up the Liri and Sacco valleys to capture Frosinone; thirdly, a landing from the sea south of Rome — which ultimately materialized as the Anzio operation.

difficulties to an army attacking up the peninsula. The so-called "coastal plain", some fifteen miles in width, lying between the great Maiella Range and the sea, is in fact no plain at all, but a plateau whose flat normal surface is carved into a succession of deep steep-sided valleys by the numerous streams and rivers which run north-eastward on parallel courses into the Adriatic. The loss of the Sangro Ridge was thus not particularly damaging to the Germans; they had behind them a long series of almost equally formidable obstacles on which to continue their defence. Between the Sangro and Pescara the main river lines are those of the Feltrino, the Moro, the Arielli and the Foro; but smaller streams also lay across the attackers' path. No sooner had the men of the Eighth Army evicted the enemy from the ridge overlooking one of these than they immediately found themselves obliged to begin the process over again, attacking across another exposed valley bottom against an enemy strongly posted on another ridge. It was an intensely discouraging form of warfare, rendered very much the worse by the cold rains of early winter and the all-pervading mud.

The gallant 78<sup>th</sup> Division, which had borne much of the brunt of the fight for the Sangro Ridge, and had largely destroyed the 65<sup>th</sup> German Division in the course of it, had itself lost heavily and now required relief. To take its place, General Montgomery brought the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division down from the mountains. The Canadians moved from the Campobasso area on 29 November; their leading elements crossed the Sangro on 1 December and passed temporarily under command of the 78<sup>th</sup>. Relieving the latter, brigade for brigade, while in close and heavy contact with the enemy was an extraordinarily ticklish process. On 2 December command of the battle on the right flank above the Sangro passed to General Vokes, who retained under his direction for the moment the 78<sup>th</sup>'s Irish Brigade and the 4<sup>th</sup> Armoured Brigade; and on the evening of the 3<sup>rd</sup> the Irish took the lofty little town of San Vito Chietino, on the coast above the Feltrino valley, and pushed on across the valley to the opposite ridge. Next day the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade relieved them there. The Canadians had now taken over the whole right flank of the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps battle, except that the British armour remained in the line until the 6<sup>th</sup>, when the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade (the old Army Tank Brigade, now rechristened) began to move in.

The forward battalions, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of December, stood on the ridge forming the south side of the deep and formidable valley of the little River Moro. The similar ridge facing them on the north side was known to be strongly held by the enemy. Vokes' immediate task was to force the Moro line and possess himself of the port of Ortona, about two miles beyond it. Achieving these objects cost three weeks hard fighting, the bitterest and costliest the 1<sup>st</sup> Division had yet experienced; as bitter fighting, indeed, as any to be found in the long grim chronicle of this war.

## THE CROSSING OF THE MORO

There were two main roads across the Moro on the Division's front: one on the coast, crossing the river near its mouth; and one roughly a mile and a half further inland, which wound up the further ridge to the village of San Leonardo and thence onwards to intersect the main lateral road from Ortona to Orsogna at a point half a mile or so east of a prominent house known as Casa Berardi. A third and lesser road crossed on the extreme left of the Canadian front. All bridges, of course, had been demolished. General Vokes resolved to make his main effort astride the centre road, but to feint on either flank. The attack began on the evening and night of 5 December, the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment crossing the river near its mouth while Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry slipped across some four miles inland and assailed the commanding hamlet of Villa Roatti, which sits on the northern ridge overlooking the valley. At the same time the Seaforth attacked astride the road to San Leonardo.

The Hastings' attack, intended as a mere diversion, met heavy opposition and the companies were withdrawn according to plan. The next day, however, the decision was taken to establish a permanent bridgehead on the coastal flank, and the Hastings crossed again early in the afternoon and made their lodgement good in spite of fierce fire. As for the Patricias, they had had hot work. Their night attack took the Germans in Roatti by surprise, and they seized the place without very great trouble; but they had to fight hard to hold it against the violent counter-attacks with infantry and tanks which the enemy threw in during the 6<sup>th</sup>. A major factor in the successful defence was the resolution of British tank men (a squadron of the 44<sup>th</sup> Royal Tank Regiment) who showed infinite resource and determination in getting eight Shermans up a steep mule-track from the river to aid the Patricias in the village.<sup>2</sup>

The main attack had made very little progress. The Seaforth met violent opposition immediately after crossing the river below San Leonardo, and daylight of the 6<sup>th</sup> found them with only three companies over, holding a shallow bridgehead overlooked by the enemy entrenched on the heights. Tanks had failed to get across at this point, and were limited to supporting the infantry by fire from the south escarpment. The appearance of enemy armour in San Leonardo prevented advance during the 6<sup>th</sup>, and that evening the Seaforth companies were withdrawn to the south bank. General Vokes was now disposed to shift his main effort to the Roatti bridgehead, where things had gone so well; but the

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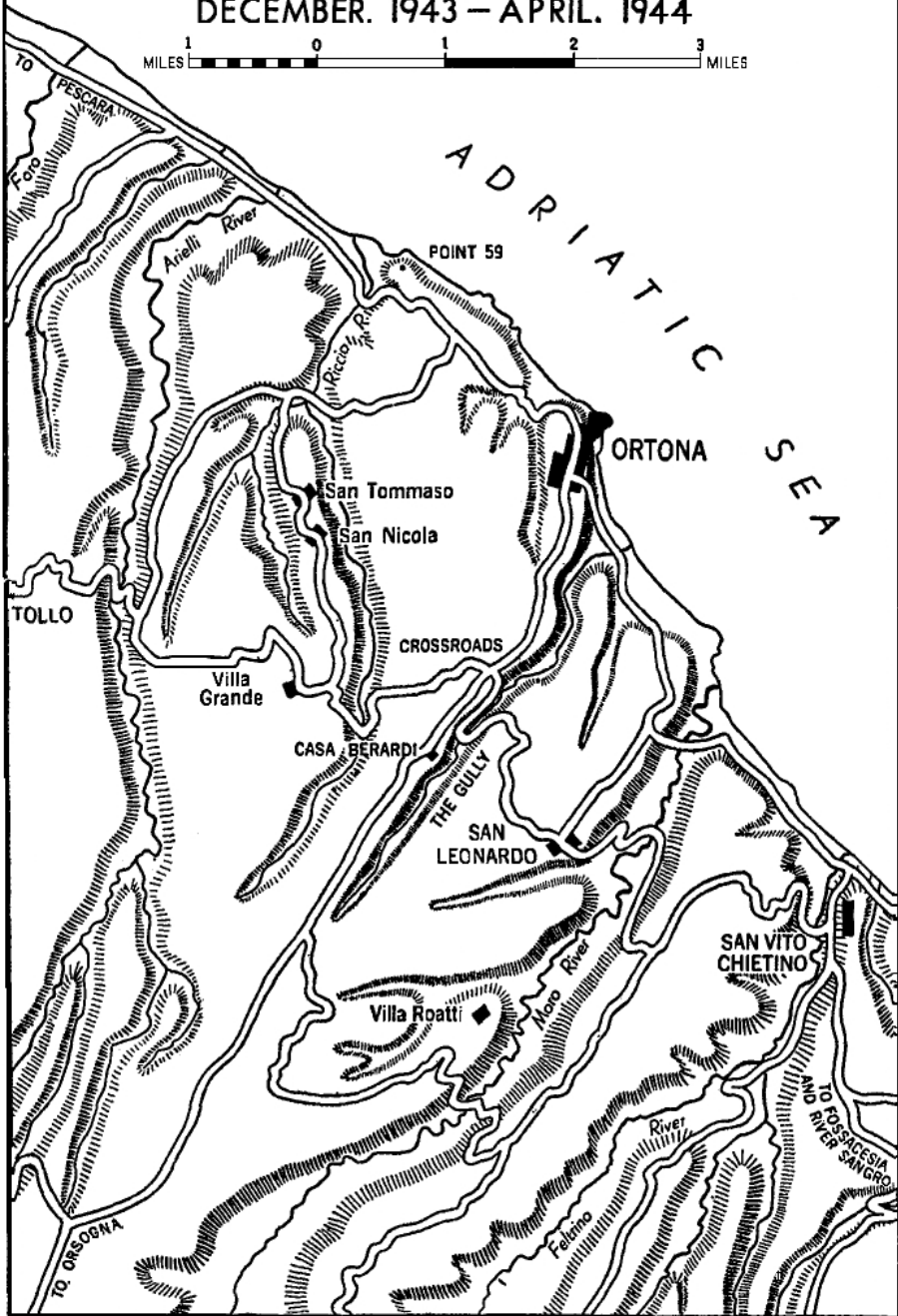
<sup>2</sup> The German tanks involved came from the 26<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division. An entry in its war diary comments on "the excellent fire discipline of the enemy, who let our tanks approach to within 50 metres and then destroyed them".

Corps Commander, deciding that the Canadian front was too extended, ordered the 8<sup>th</sup> Indian Division to take over the Roatti area. The Patricias handed the town to a battalion of that division on the night of 7-8 December; their withdrawal to the south shore left only one Canadian unit — the Hastings in the coastal sector — across the Moro. Planning continued for a renewal of the attack in the vicinity of San Leonardo. The first two days had shown beyond all doubt that the Germans' 90<sup>th</sup> Panzer Grenadier Division, the fresh and formidable formation which had replaced the decimated 65<sup>th</sup>, intended to fight for the Moro line tooth and nail.

The new plan called for the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade to take San Leonardo, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> to exploit thence to the lateral road. The 1<sup>st</sup>'s attack, on the afternoon of 8 December, would be double; the 48<sup>th</sup> Highlanders were to attack directly across the Moro and establish a bridgehead, while the Royal Canadian Regiment broke out of the existing bridgehead on the coast road and moved south-west to occupy San Leonardo. Heavy shelling by our artillery prepared the way. The 48<sup>th</sup> attack went well and took all its objectives. The R.C.R. had no such good luck. At the very outset their movement was struck by a vicious enemy counter-attack, intended for the Hastings' bridgehead, which considerably disorganized it and began a period of bitter and confused fighting along the edge of the ridge above the Moro. The gap thus left between the 48<sup>th</sup> and the R.C.R. constituted a grave danger to the possibility of constructing a vehicle crossing near the demolished bridge below San Leonardo. The Engineers nevertheless went to work, and laboured under fire throughout the night. Thanks to their efforts, tanks and anti-tank guns were able to cross into the bridgehead in the morning; the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade went forward, and the Seaforth and tanks of the Calgary Regiment fought their way into San Leonardo, beating down desperate resistance which cost us many men.

The enemy still apparently believed that our main effort was being made astride the coast road, and it was here, in consequence, that he counter-attacked most fiercely. On the afternoon of the 9<sup>th</sup> the Royal Canadian Regiment, trying to complete its movement to San Leonardo, bore the brunt of a particularly heavy and determined attack. An incident on this unit's left tells something of the bitterness of the fighting. One of its platoons held a farmhouse on the edge of the escarpment against a succession of violent assaults. "An Oberleutnant was shot in the act of forcing a stick grenade through the bars of one window and a soldier wearing the ribbon of the Iron Cross was killed within four feet of the same window while giving the Oberleutnant covering fire." When the fight was over, thirty Germans lay dead around the walls of the platoon's improvised fortress. The Hastings also had very heavy fighting this day; but the enemy gained nothing from his attacks but casualties. Our bridgeheads held above the Moro.

# THE ORTONA AREA DECEMBER, 1943 – APRIL, 1944



## THE FIGHT FOR THE GULLY

With the consolidation of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division's bridgehead the first phase of its December battle ended. The next centred about what might have appeared a minor impediment: a gully, carrying a tiny watercourse, which ran across the front just south of the lateral road from Ortona to Orsogna. This "feature", scarcely visible on the map, was turned by German resistance into a military obstacle as formidable as the Moro Valley itself; and there were ten days of singularly bloody fighting before the Division fought its way across it and captured the crossroads just beyond. The enemy had dug deep shelters in the nearer bank of the gully, and in these he was largely safe from the bombardments with which our artillery smothered the area.

Repeated attacks by the battalions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade having failed to evict the Panzer Grenadiers from these positions, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade was brought up for a new attempt. The whole grim countryside was now deep in mud; vineyards and olive groves still further hampered the attacking infantry; and the soggy ground was thick with mines. Frontal attacks having had little success, efforts were made to get forward on the left flank. After both the Carleton and York Regiment and the West Nova Scotia Regiment had suffered heavily, Brigadier Gibson on 14 December committed the Royal 22<sup>e</sup> Régiment to an attack on this inland flank directed towards Casa Berardi, which stood on the far side of the gully. The French Canadians fought their way across the gully high up, and after desperate encounters, in which both sides lost many men, captured Casa Berardi and held it.

In this gallant action "C" Company of the Royal 22<sup>e</sup>, commanded by Capt. Paul Triquet, and their partners of "C" Squadron of the Ontario Regiment (Tank) were particularly conspicuous. Throughout the struggle in and about the head of the gully Triquet set his men an example of reckless gallantry, himself accounting for numbers of the enemy. When the company reached the vicinity of the farmhouse, Triquet was the only officer left on his feet, and only two sergeants and fifteen men remained; while the squadron was down to four tanks. With this remnant Triquet took up the best defensive position available and when German tanks and infantry counter-attacked they were beaten off, not once but repeatedly. During the night the main body of the unit made contact with Triquet's party and reinforced it; next day, further fierce counter-attacks were repulsed. In the fighting of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>, the regiment added new lustre to its laurels of the First Great War. "Le vieil esprit de Vimy et de Courcellette avait soufflé sur le 22<sup>e</sup>." The Victoria Cross which Capt. Triquet subsequently received was the first won by a Canadian in the Mediterranean campaign.

Although the Canadians now had a foothold beyond the gully and



were able to threaten the flank and rear of the enemy holding the lower sections of it, the Germans in those positions showed even more than their customary tenacity. No mere threat would make them budge. The 90<sup>th</sup> Panzer Grenadier Division had in its turn been reduced to a shadow in the fighting above the Moro; the survivors were withdrawn and it was Heidrich's Parachute Division — fresh, skilful and fanatical — who now faced the tired Canadians. By the evening of the 15<sup>th</sup>, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade was so exhausted and had suffered so many casualties that it was necessary to suspend major operations for two days. This time was devoted to preparing a new effort, to be supported by every element of power which could be brought to bear. The fire of thirteen artillery regiments was to open the ball. Thus covered, the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade would attack on the left flank and drive through to the crossroads.

“Morning Glory” was the code designation of the bombardment which struck the Germans at eight a.m. on 18 December, “filling the air with the screams and sighing of passing shells and laying down a wall of bursting H.E. 1000 yards long by over 300 yards deep”. Close behind the barrage the 48<sup>th</sup> Highlanders advanced in close concert with tanks of the Three Rivers Regiment. The terrific shellfire had momentarily stunned the enemy; the Highlanders took their objectives and many prisoners with them; and the Royal Canadian Regiment moved in to continue the advance. Complaints that shells were falling among our own men<sup>3</sup> now caused the cancellation of part of the artillery programme, and this unfortunately led to the R.C.R. meeting increased opposition. They suffered very heavy losses and did not attain the crossroads. On the 19<sup>th</sup>, however, the battalion put in a second attack; artillery and tank support was flawless, and this time the infantrymen reached the objective with only three casualties. The enemy had at last pulled out of the gully.

### CHRISTMAS IN ORTONA

The second phase of the battle was over; the third, the struggle for the town of Ortona, began at once. On 20 December the Loyal Edmonton Regiment moved up the lateral road from the crossroads towards the town. On the right, a Seaforth company gave them effective aid by a diversionary attack along the coast, over very steep ground and in the face of fierce resistance. By nightfall the Canadians were in Ortona's western outskirts. But the paratroopers who held the place, it soon appeared, were determined to fight for it street by street, house by house and room by room.

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<sup>3</sup> It subsequently appeared that they were in fact enemy shells; the Germans were cleverly lobbing them in behind our barrage.

At first light on 21 December the Edmontons and the Seaforth company began the reduction of Ortona. It was clearly to be a difficult task, for the narrow Old Town on its bluff above the sea could be approached only from the south-west, and its constricted streets and tall strongly-built houses provided excellent cover for the enemy. Ortona had not been bombed, for the Navyy wished if possible to obtain the harbour undamaged; and the combatants were locked too closely together to permit us to make much use of artillery. Thus the struggle which now began was primarily an infantry fight. It proved to be one of unexampled bitterness. Heidrich's men were past masters of the art of defensive warfare, and they possessed great numbers of automatic weapons admirably suited to street fighting. They had prepared the town for defence by blowing houses into the street and covering the resulting rubble-piles with fire from machineguns carefully sited in the neighbouring buildings. They also made free and skilful use of mines. Their scheme was to shepherd our troops along the main street to the central square (the Piazza Municipale) which they aimed to use as a "killing ground".

The methods developed during the next few days became "the form" for town-clearing operations in Italy. The Canadian infantrymen soon found that movement in the streets, in the face of such an enemy, was not a paying proposition; and accordingly they took to "mouse-holing" — using explosive charges to blast their way through the connecting walls from one house to the next. Thus the Edmonton Regiment clawed forward, suffering and inflicting many casualties. During the first day the balance of the Seaforth Highlanders was brought in to assist. The two Commanding Officers partitioned the town between them, dividing it into sections which they set about clearing systematically. The tanks of the Three Rivers Regiment gave invaluable support, their 75-millimetre guns blowing the paratroopers out of their positions in the houses. They were largely responsible for enabling the infantry to gain and clear the Piazza Municipale without the enemy being able to turn it to the grim purpose which he had intended.

High explosive was the master weapon in this battle. Not only did it open the way from house to house, but it was used repeatedly to destroy whole buildings and their occupants. During the night of 26-27 December an officer and 23 men of the Edmontons were buried when a house in which they were distributing ammunition was blown up. Only five men were saved from the ruins, including one who was rescued after 72 hours. But the Edmontons shortly took a grim revenge, blowing up simultaneously two houses full of the enemy.

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<sup>4</sup> Why did the Germans fight so hard for Ortona? The answer seems to be that it had become a symbol. In a recorded telephone conversation of 25 December, Kesselring remarked that the Germans did not want to defend the place to the last extremity, "but the English have made it appear as important as Rome".



### CANADIAN FIELD GUNS NEAR ORTONA

From a painting by Major C.F. Comfort

A 25-pounder of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Field Regiment, Royal Canadian Artillery (1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division) in action in the Ortona Salient during the dismal winter of 1943-44

Artillery, as we have said, could play only a limited part; but a British heavy battery was brought up so that its 7.2-inch howitzers might deal with the massive walls of the ancient castle which stood at the seaward end of the Old Town, and the Canadian Division's 17-pounder anti-tank guns were used to good advantage against the enemy in the houses on the seafront. In the town itself, both sides used infantry anti-tank guns, the Germans siting theirs in the cross-streets to snipe our advancing tanks from the flank; even so, the Three Rivers lost only three tanks in Ortona. Our own 6-pounders proved excellent weapons for dealing with the enemy in buildings.

So the struggle went on, day after day, for a full week, at the season which Christians normally dedicate to peace and goodwill. It was a bloody Christmas in Ortona. The Edmonton War Diary remarked on 25 December, "Today is our fifth Christmas on Active Service and the fiercest fighting so far encountered continued throughout the day". Yet both Canadian battalions contrived to provide real Christmas dinners for the fighting men of their rifle companies. The Seaforth had lately captured a church which they now used for their observance of the day. Tables were actually laid with white cloths, and the four rifle companies were relieved in succession, each for two hours, for the festivities. The Pipe Major made music while the meal was served, and carols were sung to the accompaniment of the church organ, played by the Signal Officer.

While Edmontons and Seaforth fought onward through the town, the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, now commanded by Lt.-Col. Spry, was ordered to push forward to the west of it with a view to cutting the coast road and the enemy's communications. This move began on 23 December. It was hampered by rain, mud and mines, yet in the first phase good progress was made; the Hastings and Prince Edward reached their objectives, and the 48<sup>th</sup> Highlanders took over the advance. They too reached their goal, the high ground just northwest of Ortona. There, however, they were wholly cut off. They maintained their position over Christmas Day, going hungry because supplies could not be got forward; while the mud prevented tanks from coming up in support. That night a carrying party of the Saskatoon Light Infantry got up to them with rations and carried their wounded back. The Saskatoons' commander received a warm note of thanks from his opposite number of the 48<sup>th</sup>. "It was a hazardous, wearisome job to perform on Christmas Night", wrote Lt.-Col. Johns-ton, "but you may be assured this unit and in particular the casualties you carried out will be forever grateful." The next day three Ontario Regiment tanks got through, and they and the Highlanders proceeded to kill large numbers of Germans.

This threat to his communications, reinforcing the effect of his very heavy losses, doubtless helped to convince the enemy that he must give up such parts of Ortona as still remained to him. The 27<sup>th</sup> was the final

day of fighting in the town. The Patricias were brought forward to relieve the Edmontons, but they were not required; during the night of 27-28 December the paratroopers relinquished their last footholds and retreated along the coast road, leaving about one hundred of their dead comrades lying unburied in Ortona.<sup>5</sup>

### WINTER IN THE SALIENT

The offensive beginning with the crossing of the Sangro had been a battle against time as well as against the enemy; for pretty clearly if Rome was to be taken it would have to be before winter set in in earnest. This fight against the calendar had now been lost. The Allied Force Headquarters summary of operations covering the last two days of 1943 and the first two of 1944 begins, "Adverse weather continued to hamper all operations". Ground conditions were appalling all across the front; and in the mountains roads were blocked by snow.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, the Eighth Army's formations were thoroughly exhausted. The 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division was much the worse for the continuous desperate fighting of December. On 3 January General Vokes reported to the commander of the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps that during the month his Division had suffered battle casualties amounting to 176 officers and 2163 other ranks, including 35 and 467 known to have been killed, while casualties from sickness had totalled more than 1600. Battle casualties had been particularly heavy in the rifle companies of infantry battalions.<sup>7</sup> Beginning late in December the Division had received reinforcements amounting to 150 officers and 2258 other ranks. These required to be effectively absorbed before the units could regain their old efficiency, and General Vokes considered that his infantry would not be fit for further offensive operations until the battalions had had a period of rest to allow them to carry out intensive training.

Such being the condition of things, the advance in the Adriatic sector simply could not go on; it was necessary to renounce the plan to

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<sup>5</sup> The extravagant cost of defending Ortona was repeatedly canvassed by German commanders and staff officers during the fighting. On 29 December the Chief of Staff of the 76<sup>th</sup> Corps reported that "all the battalions" of the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Division were down to the strength of companies.

<sup>6</sup> Supplying the battle north of the Sangro had thrown a heavy burden upon the Army Service Corps and upon the Provost troops charged with traffic control. The 1<sup>st</sup> Division's Provost Company, recruited in 1939 from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, had several men killed by shellfire while on point duty in or around Ortona.

<sup>7</sup> The fighting power of an infantry battalion lies chiefly in its rifle companies, whose strength however is only a little more than half that of the battalion as a whole. The vast majority of casualties are suffered by the rifle companies. Thus when a battalion of 800 men is reduced to 500, the *rifle companies* are probably down to about 100; there is no cutting edge left on the weapon, and the unit is unfit for offensive fighting.

push on up the coast and take Pescara. The Canadians' last gains before the offensive finally languished were the hamlets of San Nicola and San Tommaso, just west of Ortona, which fell to the 48<sup>th</sup> Highlanders on 31 December, and the height known as Point 59, overlooking the sea about two miles above the city. This latter position was a hard nut to crack. After two attempts had failed, and a particularly vicious enemy counter-attack on the last night of the Old Year had caused us more than 50 casualties, it was finally taken from the entrenched paratroopers by the Carleton and York Regiment on 4 January, the assault going in after an intense and complicated artillery programme which served to bewilder the defenders. Forty Germans were buried on the hill.

Here, then, the Eighth Army's offensive finally ground to a stop. The Canadians now held a long salient, their front running from the sea at Point 59 along the little stream called the Riccio, taking in San Nicola and San Tommaso, and on to Villa Grande, north-west of Casa Berardi. This line they were to maintain for three miserable winter months, in circumstances of cold, rain and mud which those who experienced them will never forget. Even Divisional Headquarters, located in a muddy orange-grove on the hill-side above the coast road just north of San Vito, was extremely uncomfortable; and the forward infantry battalions, always in contact with the enemy, existed under the most wretched conditions imaginable.

Before offensive operations were wholly abandoned an attempt was made to keep the front moving with the aid of the fresh Canadian troops who had lately arrived in Italy. As we have seen, the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division had landed early in November. Its infantry component (Brigadier G. Kitching's 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade) was now considered ready for action. It was accordingly brought forward from the Division's concentration area (about Altamura, not far from Bari); and on the night of 13-14 January it relieved the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade in the right sector of the Ortona salient, passing under the 1<sup>st</sup> Division's command. On the morning of the 17<sup>th</sup> the 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade put in a limited attack with the object of pushing the enemy's line back to the valley of the Arielli, which runs into the Adriatic a mile or so beyond the Riccio.

This enterprise was unsuccessful. The Perth Regiment made some progress in the beginning, but was then struck by extremely heavy fire, lost heavily and could get no further. The Cape Breton Highlanders were subsequently sent in, but they too accomplished little. The two units were withdrawn that night, and in accordance with plans made before the operation the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade relieved the 11<sup>th</sup>. The latter brigade had suffered about 200 casualties in its first operation. The front line positions remained unchanged.

A final and still more limited offensive effort was made on the left of the Canadian front by the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment on

30 and 31 January. The battalion, attacking along the road leading to Tollo, met the same sort of opposition from the paratroops that had stopped the 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade, and after losing many men killed and wounded was obliged to fall back to its original positions. From this time onward the tasks of the forward battalions were limited to patrolling. Just what this involved was explained at the time by an officer of the Division:

The laconic announcement of “patrolling” in *sitreps* and *commu-niques* has become so usual that this work is generally regarded as synonymous with inactivity. Nevertheless, a good proportion of an infantry company in forward positions is committed nightly, and frequently during the day, to a form of warfare which requires a soldier to crawl on his belly for considerable distances through the mud, and to run the gauntlet of “S” mines, flares, machine-gun and mortar fire in order to take prisoners or to *recee* an enemy position.<sup>8</sup>

The weather continued to be malicious. The same officer wrote, “With very little respite the weather in February remained bad. The heavy clay of the coastal sector, in which we have tried to fight, has been converted into a morass, and the condition of our forward slit-trenches can be imagined more easily than described. It was not until 27 February that the sun made more than a fitful appearance.” And the improvement at the end of February was only temporary, for during the early days of March “the elements raged with unexampled fury”.

It was under such conditions that General Crerar’s 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps was introduced to operations. His Corps Headquarters relieved the 5<sup>th</sup> British Corps in the coastal area on the night of 31 January — 1 February. In the first instance it had under command the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian and 8<sup>th</sup> Indian Divisions. Simultaneously the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division, now commanded by Major-General E.L.M. Burns, who had succeeded General Simonds on the latter’s departure for England to assume command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps, relieved the 4<sup>th</sup> Indian Division in the Orsogna area further to the left. It thus entered the line as a division 85 days after its arrival in Italy. On 9 February Burns’ Division exchanged with the 8<sup>th</sup> Indian Division, and from this time Crerar had under his command the two Canadian Divisions as well as the 1<sup>st</sup> Army Group Royal Canadian Artillery. The 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade was with the 13<sup>th</sup> Corps.

The Canadian Corps remained in the line in the Ortona sector for five weeks. During this time there were no offensive operations of any moment, although planning continued, and the general situation reminded the Corps Commander of the position warfare with which he had been well acquainted on the Western Front in 1914-18. On 7 March

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<sup>8</sup> “*Sitreps*”: situation reports. “*Rece*”: reconnoitre. The “S” anti-personnel mine was a particularly unpleasant product of German ingenuity. When the mine was trodden on, its inner body leaped into the air and exploded, scattering ball-bearings over a wide area.

the sector reverted to the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps, and the Canadian Corps Headquarters moved south to Larino to plan for operations beyond the Apennines. At the same time General Burns took over the Corps from General Crerar, who returned to England to take command of the First Canadian Army for the approaching campaign in France. The 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division, which was now taken over by Major-General B. M. Hoffmeister, was likewise withdrawn for training and planning; the 1<sup>st</sup> Division remained in its all-too-familiar positions in the Ortona salient until 21 April, when it too moved southward.

At this period the Canadian force in the Mediterranean theatre had reached its peak of strength. On 31 March 1944 Canadian Army personnel there numbered 4676 officers and 71,148 other ranks. With a larger force engaged, casualties had continued to mount throughout the winter, even in the absence of large-scale operations; and by 11 May, when the next phase of the Italian campaign began, the cumulative Canadian total for the theatre (including "ordinary deaths" as well as battle casualties) was 9934 all ranks. Of these casualties, 2119 had been fatal.

In the spring of 1944 all eyes were turned towards North-West Europe. The coming invasion there was probably the best-advertised operation in military history: only the really essential points — notably the actual time and place — remained secret. General Dwight D. Eisenhower had left the Mediterranean to assume the supreme command of the Allied Expeditionary Force assembling in Britain for the invasion of France; General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson succeeded him as Supreme Commander in the Mediterranean, with General Sir Harold Alexander as Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies in Italy. On the last day of 1943 General Sir Bernard Montgomery handed over the Eighth Army to Lieutenant-General Sir Oliver Leese, and flew back to England to take command of the 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group. Within the Canadian force, the departures of Generals Crerar and Simonds have already been noted. These events emphasized the fact that henceforth Italy would be a secondary theatre. "The scene changes and vastly expands", wrote Mr. Churchill in General Montgomery's autograph book on New Year's Day. "A great task accomplished gives place to a greater..." Canadian officers from the United Kingdom who visited Italy in the early months of 1944 found their compatriots there looking rather wistfully towards England, where the First Canadian Army was readying for battle; they felt themselves condemned to participation in what seemed to have become a "sideshow", conducted in a country which most of them disliked. But a year was to pass, and many bloody actions were to be fought, before the two segments of the army were reunited; and Canada's greatest Italian battles still lay ahead.





## CHAPTER IX

### THE ITALIAN CAMPAIGN: THE LIRI VALLEY OFFENSIVE, MAY - JUNE 1944

#### “TO DESTROY THE ENEMY SOUTH OF ROME”

With the abandonment at the New Year of 1944 of the Eighth Army's plan to take Pescara and Avezzano, the main Allied attempts to break through the Winter Line and reach Rome were concentrated west of the Apennines. Apart from the narrow strips of lowland along either coast, the only break in the mountain mass that fills the interior of the peninsula is the entrance to the valley of the Liri River at its junction with the Gari. The long flat Liri corridor, flanked by parallel ranges of hills, extends north-westward into the Sacco Valley to form an inviting avenue to Rome. Along its northern edge ran two communication links of strategic importance — Highway No. 6 and the Naples-Cassin-Rome railway. But its entrance was forbiddingly guarded by a town destined to be remembered above all others in Italy for the stubbornness of its defence — Cassino with its Monastery Hill.

This sector now became the scene of the main Allied thrusts. American and French troops launched fierce assaults along the Rapido and the Gari<sup>1</sup> during January, but although bridgeheads were made good north of Cassino, further progress was slight. The heavy fighting continued during February and March, with British, New Zealand and Indian troops taking over the front; Saint Benedict's famous Monastery on Monte Cassino was destroyed by a tremendous air attack (15 February); but we failed to take the hill or secure the town. It was apparent that a still heavier assault was needed to drive the enemy from his tenaciously-held positions.

Rome was still an objective of prime importance, not only in the design of the Italian campaign, but within the larger pattern of the whole Allied strategy of Europe. The airfields that lay north of the Alban Hills provided in themselves a strong military incentive for the early capture of the city; while, as we have seen, its political connotations rendered Rome itself an even more significant prize. The resolution with which the enemy clung to his defences at Cassino, and the determined counter-attacks which he launched against our Anzio enterprise in February, demonstrated the lengths to which he was

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<sup>1</sup> The river, called the Rapido in the vicinity of Cassin, becomes the Gari lower down, before joining with the Liri to form the Garigliano.

prepared to go to retain possession of the city. A Special Order of the Day from Hitler himself had been read to all ranks of the German Armies in Italy: "The Gustav Line must be held at all costs for the sake of political consequences which would follow a completely successful advance. The Führer expects the bitterest struggle for every yard." The Allied commanders were not sorry to find the Germans resolved to fight so hard for Rome; for this meant that the Allied Armies in Italy were carrying out effectively what was now their great strategic task — to contain in the peninsula as many German divisions as possible.

The failure of the 15<sup>th</sup> Army Group to reach Rome was however a source of some uneasiness to the planners of the overall Allied strategy. The approaching invasion of North-West Europe — Operation "Overlord" — would require the closest co-ordination of operations in the Mediterranean with the supreme effort in Normandy, and plans were under consideration for a full-scale invasion of Southern France, to be launched during May 1944. If Operation "Anvil", as this project was named, was to succeed, dislodging the enemy from his position below Rome and pushing him back well to the northward was desirable if not essential. From the Tunis Conference on Christmas Day 1943, where Mr. Churchill met the principal Mediterranean commanders, the British Prime Minister cabled to his Deputy: "We cannot leave the Rome situation to stagnate and fester for the three months without crippling amalgamation of 'Anvil' and thus hampering 'Overlord'. We cannot go to other tasks and leave this unfinished job behind us." The immediate consequence was the mounting of an amphibious assault behind the enemy's right flank. This was delivered in the vicinity of Anzio on 22 January, by the 6<sup>th</sup> U.S. Corps of the Fifth Army, with both British and American divisions under command. The assault was covered and supported by strong Anglo-American naval forces. But although we initially obtained complete surprise the bridgehead was contained by the German Fourteenth Army before we could develop it, and a Fifth Army offensive which had started five days earlier along the Garigliano was held by the German Tenth Army with little gain. During the remaining winter months, the primary concern of the Allied forces in Italy was to effect a junction between these two fronts, and so advance on Rome.

On 26 February General Wilson received a directive from the Combined Chiefs of Staff granting the Italian campaign until further orders "overriding priority over all existing and future operations in the Mediterranean." Plans for proceeding with "Anvil" temporarily receded into the background. In the circumstances it was decided that the best contribution which the Mediterranean Theatre could make to the success of the invasion of Northern France would be to concentrate all resources on a continuation of the offensive in Italy. The entire direct support which the Allied Armies could give to "Overlord" depended first on

their ability to destroy the enemy south of Rome.

Regrouping for an all-out spring offensive was outlined at a conference of Army Commanders on 28 February. It was decided that for ease in administration all British-equipped divisions in Italy, which included Dominion, Indian and Polish forces; would return to the Eighth Army, and American-equipped United States and French formations would remain with the Fifth. General Alexander's intention was to continue to enlarge the Anzio bridgehead and to strike at Cassino once more, while at the same time redispersing his armies to the west of the Apennines for a full-scale attack through the Liri Valley which would link up with a projected breakout from Anzio and give us Rome. The grand assault would not however be launched at once, for the troops of both Allied Armies were exhausted and needed time for rest and refitting.

In the regrouping which began at the end of March, the "interarmy boundary" within the 15<sup>th</sup> Army Group was shifted westward from the centre of the peninsula to a line following the north bank of the Liri River north-westward from its junction with the Gari below Cassino. The transfer of formations was carried out by degrees. By the second week in May, the Fifth Army on its reduced front between the Liri and the Tyrrhenian Sea had two corps — the 2<sup>nd</sup> United States Corps and the Corps Expéditionnaire Français. The bulk of the Eighth Army was concentrated opposite the mouth of the Liri Valley. From the Liri to Cassino was the 13<sup>th</sup> Corps, with four divisions and an armoured brigade (the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade);<sup>2</sup> to its right, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Polish Corps (two divisions and an armoured brigade) faced Cassino. Behind the 13<sup>th</sup> Corps, ready to pass through or come into the line on the left, was the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps, comprising the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Division, the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division and the 25<sup>th</sup> British Tank Brigade. This concentration, eight divisions and three brigades on a front of less than ten miles, was to be the Eighth Army's striking force. Its right flank, in the mountainous sector of the peninsula, was thinly held by the 10<sup>th</sup> Corps; the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps, under direct command of Headquarters, Allied Armies in Italy, remained in the Adriatic sector, now completely dormant.

### THE GREAT DECEPTION

It was, of course, scarcely possible to conceal from the enemy the fact that the weight of the Eighth Army was being transferred west of the Apennines; and it must have seemed to him very probable that the resumption of the Allied offensive in the south would take the form of a

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<sup>2</sup> During April the Three Rivers Regiment had supported the 78<sup>th</sup> Division in the "ghost town" of Cassino, two tanks being driven into the "Crypt" only a few yards from the enemy.

thrust up the Liri Valley — the only front on which a decisive result could be expected. What he sought to know was the degree of concentration that was taking place in the danger area and the timing of the impending attack. There is no doubt, too, that he was concerned about the vulnerability of his long coastal flank: he might well look for another Salerno or Anzio landing behind his lines. To keep the enemy uncertain about our intentions on the southern front, the Allied Command deliberately played upon his sensitivity along the coast.

An elaborate “cover-plan was devised to lead Field-Marshal Kesselring into the belief that an amphibious assault was to be made on 15 May at Civitavecchia, north of Rome. It was intended to convey the impression that the initial landing would be made by the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps — consisting of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Division, the 36<sup>th</sup> United States Infantry Division and the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade — and that subsequent reinforcing divisions would come from among those opposite the German southern front.

To this end, such a force was represented as having assembled about the Gulf of Salerno for amphibious training. The deception was carried on by means of dummy signal traffic. Between 22 and 27 April Canadian wireless detachments began operating near Salerno, while the actual formations that they represented went off the air completely in their true locations. For the benefit of possible enemy agents on the spot, a detachment of Canadian Provost Corps men planted a small forest of signposts bearing the Maple Leaf to mark assembly and embarkation areas on the Salerno coast. On 2 May wireless signals painted a vivid picture of the “rehearsal” of a landing being carried out in conjunction with the Royal Navy at a site which bore a remarkably close topographical resemblance to the coastal area immediately north of Civitavecchia. Between a “notional” Force Headquarters and imaginary divisional and brigade headquarters cipher messages based on a carefully written script passed to and fro, as the phantom assault force practised its theoretical landing behind the German lines. To carry the illusion further, units of the Allied Air Forces began a programme of daylight reconnaissance at frequent intervals over the beaches of Civitavecchia, and bombed radar stations in the vicinity of the town. It is worth noting that the inclusion of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division enhanced the plausibility of the deception scheme, for that formation was known to the enemy as having played a part in two successful assault landings, in Sicily and Calabria.

It was essential to the success of the cover-plan to persuade the enemy that the expected offensive in the Cassino area would not be launched until some time after the threatened landing had taken place on the Tyrrhenian coast. Unusually elaborate measures were therefore taken to conceal the arrival of the forces of the Eighth Army in the

concentration area. A comprehensively planned and skilfully executed camouflage programme effectively masked the transfer of the Canadian formations from their training areas. All travel was carried out under cover of darkness and the break of day always found units inconspicuously settled in their bivouac areas with their vehicles carefully hidden under natural cover or ingeniously disguised by great mottled green and brown camouflage nets garnished with foliage. In the maintenance areas experts in the art of camouflage supervised the concealment within the olive groves and along the roadsides of the tremendous reserves of ammunition, petrol and Engineer equipment and the great variety of stores necessary for the approaching battle. Special precautions were taken to prevent the creation of tell-tale tracks in and about the headquarters areas. During daylight hours local movement was restricted to a minimum, except in some rearward area where prying eyes might perhaps observe a mere three tanks innocently engaged in rehearsal with a handful of infantry — while the regiment's remaining half-hundred tanks lay concealed somewhere in the vicinity under a protective covering of leafy boughs and netting.

These painstaking ruses deceived the enemy to a marked degree. Captured Intelligence files of the German Fourteenth Army later revealed that on 11 May, the day of the attack, his picture of the Canadian dispositions was extremely confused. On that date he believed the 1<sup>st</sup> Division to be in the Salerno area — it was actually at Sant' Agata, east of Caserta; instead of placing the 5<sup>th</sup> Division correctly at Capua, he imagined it to be under Polish command at Acquafondata, north-east of Cassino (its 11<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade had held the mountainous sector of the front in that vicinity from 12 April to 5 May, successively under the 4<sup>th</sup> British Division and the 2<sup>nd</sup> New Zealand Division); the whereabouts of the Headquarters of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps, which was established three miles south of Mignano, was a blank in the enemy's location statement.

The Germans' misappreciation of the Canadian picture was paralleled in greater or less degree by their misconception of the dispositions of the other Allied formations. The enemy's underestimation of the size of our forces in the main area of attack led him to credit us with a large number of reserve formations in the rear — a mistaken assumption which made him regard our coming frontal attack as diversionary, and intensified his fears of a seaborne landing. His own dispositions on 11 May seem clearly to have been based on this belief; he had the minimum number of divisions in the line, while his reserves were grouped around the Anzio bridgehead or strung out along the western coast.

Three fortified lines barred the avenue of approach to Rome through the Liri-Sacco Valley. The first of these was the rearward

position of the Winter Line which had survived so many furious Allied attacks. Its most strongly fortified sector, anchored on Cassino and following generally the course of the Rapido — Garigliano southwards to the sea, the enemy had named the Gustav Line. The swiftly-flowing river — itself no mean obstacle — was flanked on its eastern bank by a thick and continuous network of wire and minefields. On the German side carefully-sited weapon positions on the valley floor and in the mountains to north and south allowed the enemy to sweep the whole of the fortified zone with fire, while deep shelters protected the defenders against our air and artillery bombardment.

Although he had good reason to trust the strength of these proved defences, Kesselring had ordered the construction during the winter of a second series of fortifications some nine miles to the rear. The Adolf Hitler Line, designed to bar the passage of any force which might succeed in penetrating the Gustav Line, crossed the Liri Valley from Mount Cairo (where it hinged on the main Winter Line) to Pontecorvo on the bank of the river, and thence southwards through Sant'Oliva across the Aurunci Mountains to the Gulf of Gaeta. Designed after the fashion of the famous Todt-constructed West Wall defences, the line depended for its strength upon a formidable barrier of concrete and steel structures especially designed as nodal points for anti-tank action. A number of these were miniature fortresses; each housed a solidly-emplaced Panther tank turret<sup>3</sup> mounting a long 75-millimetre gun, and each was flanked by additional fixed and mobile anti-tank guns manned by crews whose living quarters were secure concrete burrows twenty feet below ground. Anti-tank ditches across all favourable approaches and an almost continuous belt of wire stretching from Aquino to Sant'Oliva completed this formidable secondary line of the German Tenth Army.<sup>4</sup>

The enemy's need for a third defensive position south of Rome was dictated by the threat from the Allied corps in the Anzio bridgehead, where a break-out to cut Highway No. 6 would render the Hitler Line useless. Early in March he therefore began to construct the Caesar Line, a last-ditch defence to which the Fourteenth and Tenth German Armies might retreat when and if the Allies forced a junction with the bridgehead. The western end of this Line was designed to block the gap,

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<sup>3</sup> On German tank types, see below, p. 183.

<sup>4</sup> The actual German designation of the position which the Allies called the Adolf Hitler Line was "Führer-Riegel" (Führer Switch Line). Hitler, however, evidently thought this name decidedly inappropriate for a position which might be broken at an early date; and on 23 January 1944 Kesselring's Chief of Staff told the Chief of Staff of the Tenth Army on the telephone, "we may not call the Führer-Riegel by that name any more, the Führer has forbidden it". The next day an order was issued changing the name to "Senger-Riegel". General von Senger and Etterlin was commander of the 14<sup>th</sup> Panzer Corps.

between the Alban Hills and the Prenestini Mountains, through which Highway No. 6 emerged from the head of the Liri — Sacco Valley; the eastern sector, on which very little work had been done, was planned to extend to the Adriatic coast west of Pescara.

To the Canadian formations poised for the attack across the Gari, only the two southernmost of these German defence lines were to be of great moment. Forthcoming events would associate the names of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps and the Adolf Hitler Line as long as either should be remembered.

### “THE HONOUR TO STRIKE THE FIRST BLOW”

The task allotted by General Alexander to the Eighth Army was to break or turn the Gustav and Hitler Lines and advance on the axis of Highway No. 6 towards Valmontone. The Fifth Army was initially to launch an attack on the left through the Aurunci Mountains and along the coastal road (Highway No. 7). When the Hitler Line had been penetrated, the 6<sup>th</sup> U.S. Corps would commence operations to break out of the Anzio bridgehead in a thrust to close the gap at Valmontone. The assault on the Gustav Line was to be carried out by the 13<sup>th</sup> Corps attacking across the Gari, while the 2<sup>nd</sup> Polish Corps on the right pushed through the mountains to isolate Cassino and turn the line from the north. In the centre of the peninsula the 10<sup>th</sup> Corps was to secure the right flank and make demonstrations with the object of deluding the enemy into expecting an attack from that quarter. The Canadian Corps' part would depend upon the initial success achieved by the Eighth Army attack. General Leese considered it most probable that its task would be to come up on the left of the 13<sup>th</sup> Corps, after the establishment of the first bridgehead in the Liri Valley, and carry the battle against the Hitler Line.

Among the troops awaiting the signal to attack, morale was high, for the men knew that the operation about to begin would decide the future course of the campaign in Italy, if not, indeed, that of the war as a whole. From General Alexander on the eve of battle came a message addressed to the “Soldiers of the Allied Armies in Italy”

The Allied armed forces are now assembling for the final battles on sea, on land, and in the air to crush the enemy once and for all. From the East and the West, from the North and the South, blows are about to fall which will result in the final destruction of the Nazis, and bring freedom once again to Europe and hasten peace for us all. To us in Italy has been given the honour to strike the first blow.

We are going to destroy the German armies in Italy. The fighting will be hard, bitter, and perhaps long, but you are warriors and soldiers of the highest order, who for more than a year have known only victory. You have courage, determination and skill. You will be supported by overwhelming air forces, and in guns and tanks we far outnumber the Germans. No armies have ever entered



battle before with a more just and righteous cause.

So with God's help and blessing, we take the field — confident of victory.

At 11 o'clock on the night of 11 May the battle for Rome began, as 1000 guns thundered out in a violent bombardment of the defences of the Gustav Line. On the 13<sup>th</sup> Corps front a storm of shell swept through the heavy ground-mist in the Liri Valley, before midnight beach parties launched the first assault boats on the swirling waters of the Gari, while the bridging sappers began their vital race against the clock.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade had been assigned the task of supporting the brigades of the 8<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Division, which was attacking in the Sant'Angelo sector. As the infantry struggled across the river in their light craft, three troops of tanks of the 12<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Regiment (The Three Rivers Regiment), drawn up on the east bank, covered their passage with high explosive and machine-gun fire. It was an unorthodox use of tanks, but one which was in due course to become accepted doctrine. In their forward assembly areas squadrons of the 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Regiment (The Ontario Regiment) and the 14<sup>th</sup> (The Calgary Regiment) awaited the completion of the bridges that would carry them over to join the infantry.

By half-past eight on the morning of 12 May, the gallant efforts of hard-working Indian sappers had completed the first of these — "Oxford" Bridge, a mile south of Sant'Angelo. Within another hour the river had been spanned a second time, by what must be considered a triumph of mechanical improvisation. A thousand yards downstream from "Oxford" Bridge, on a site code-named "Plymouth", Canadian mechanics and Indian engineers had succeeded in launching across the 50-foot river a Bailey bridge, borne on the back of one Sherman tank and thrust into position by a second in the rear. Over these bridges rumbled troops of Canadian tanks, camouflaged with green boughs as though decked for a May Day festival. No other tanks crossed the Gari that day on the Army front, for no other bridges were completed.

To the infantry, pinned down in their precarious bridgeheads by deadly fire, and expecting every moment the arrival of German panzers, the advent of the armour was welcome. Although the treacherous boggy ground on the west bank of the Gari entrapped a number of our tanks, holding them immobile for several hours, at least one squadron (of the Calgary Regiment) relieved the pressure by plunging forward half-a-mile through the enemy positions, knocking out many anti-tank and self-propelled guns as it went. It reached its objective with only four tanks left, and held it until nightfall.

During the greater part of 13 May there was hard and bitter fighting to expand the Corps bridgehead. At midday, following bombardment by the guns of seven field regiments, Ontario Regiment tanks supported a

Gurkha battalion in an attack upon Sant'Angelo. After sixty minutes of savage fighting the town was taken, and the way lay clear for exploitation forward. On higher ground the tanks now found a solid footing and a chance to manoeuvre with the infantry, and many a lurking German armoured vehicle and self-propelled gun succumbed to the skill acquired by Canadian tankmen and Indian foot-soldiers in their earlier combined training on the Volturno. Late that afternoon Panaccioni on the left of the divisional front fell to a combined assault by the Calgary Regiment and the 6<sup>th</sup> (Royal) Battalion, Frontier Force Rifles. On the Indians' right the 4<sup>th</sup> British Infantry Division had likewise fought its way across the Gari. With the bridgehead firmly established to a depth of 1500 yards on a 3000-yard front, there was room now for reinforcing formations. On the night of 13-14 May the 78<sup>th</sup> British Infantry Division crossed the river in rear of the Indian Division and swung north to cut Highway No. 6 and isolate Cassino and the Monastery.

For the main effort of 14 May squadrons of the Three Rivers Regiment supported the remaining and previously uncommitted Indian Brigade in a drive to cut the lateral Cassino — Pignataro road. Early in the morning a bitterly-contested advance began over the scrub-covered ridges of the high ground called the Sant'Angelo "Horseshoe" — terrain little favourable to infantry-tank co-operation. On three separate occasions Canadian tanks fought their way forward alone for 1000 yards, only to find that they had by-passed in the close country hidden German strongpoints whose fire forced the accompanying infantry to ground. Not until noon on the 15<sup>th</sup> did the attackers cut the road west of the "Horseshoe". That evening Pignataro fell to a twilight charge of Pathan frontiersmen supported by tanks of the Calgary Regiment.

The breaking of the Gustav Line in the Indian sector was complete, a success that had been paralleled along the greater part of the front. After only four days of fighting the enemy's forward defences had been overrun from Cassino to the Tyrrhenian Sea. In the coastal sector the 2<sup>nd</sup> United States Corps was launched along Highway No. 7, while on the Fifth Army's right the tough, hill-trained Moroccan troops of the French Expeditionary Corps were making incredible gains through the precipitous Aurunci mountains. Only in the rubble that had been Cassino did German paratroopers still cling tenaciously to their battered defences; but to the north the Polish Corps was poised to cut Highway No. 6 and so cut off this stubborn bastion of the Gustav Line. The collapse of the enemy's right flank and his lack in the forward area of available reserves with which to deliver any concerted counter-attack compelled a withdrawal towards the fortified positions of the Hitler Line. Here Field Marshal Kesselring hoped to bring the Allied advance to a halt; and it was at this stage that the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps entered the Battle of the Liri Valley.

## BREACHING THE HITLER LINE

General Leese had correctly appreciated the course that events would take in the opening days of the offensive. The greatest progress on the 13<sup>th</sup> Corps' front had been made on the left, between Sant'Angelo and the Liri River. On the right, Cassino and Highway No. 6 were still unachieved objectives. On 15 May, therefore, he issued orders for the offensive to continue on a three-corps scale. The 13<sup>th</sup> Corps, shifting its weight to the right, was to concert with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Polish Corps an attack that should encircle Cassino and open to our use the highway to Rome; the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps was ordered to move up on the left of the 13<sup>th</sup>, take over the 8<sup>th</sup> Indian Division's front and continue the westward advance.

Carrying out these instructions, General Burns ordered the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Division to relieve the Indians at first light on 16 May and then to advance and make contact with the Hitler Line. Under cover of darkness the exchange with the tired Indian troops began, as Brigadier Spry's 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade took over the line from Pignataro south to the Liri. On the evening of the 16<sup>th</sup>, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, now commanded by Brigadier J. P. E. Bernatchez, crossed the Gari and moved into position north of Pignataro to form the divisional right flank. With the Indians into 13<sup>th</sup> Corps reserve went two regiments of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade for a much-needed but all-too-brief period of refitting. The Three Rivers Regiment remained in the forward area in temporary support of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade. That night General Vokes took over command from the 8<sup>th</sup> Indian Division and immediately issued orders for an advance to begin at dawn. To the men of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division the prospect of renewed action was welcome. In the words of one unit diarist: "A long miserable winter of rain, snow, mud and the inevitable patrolling was at last but a memory in the minds of the Regiment. Now, after three weeks of hardening training, away from the nerve-shattering noise and tumults of front line service, the men of the Carleton & York unit were ready for new tasks ahead. Our Allies had crossed the Gari River; the defences of the Gustav Line had been bent and broken and the Eighth Army was on the march again."

Early on the morning of the 17<sup>th</sup> both brigades attacked across the Cassino — Pignataro road, the 3<sup>rd</sup> on the right, the 1<sup>st</sup> on the left. They met continual resistance throughout the day, but by nightfall they had fought forward some three miles to the *Forme d'Aquino* — a deep transverse gully which formed the only natural tank-obstacle between the Gari and the Melfa. Their progress had been matched by great advances all across the Allied front. By the morning of the 18<sup>th</sup>, the jaws of the joint pincer attack by the 13<sup>th</sup> and the Polish Corps had clamped shut behind Cassino, though not before the survivors of the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Division had contrived to make good their escape along

Highway No. 6. British units were at last in full possession of the devastated town, and over the ruins of the Monastery the Polish standard was flying. Across the Liri the gallant divisions of the French Expeditionary Corps had continued their spectacular onrush and their leading troops were now directly south of Pontecorvo, where they were threatening to turn the right of the Hitler Line.

These reverses on both flanks precipitated a further enemy withdrawal on the whole Liri Valley front. On the 18<sup>th</sup> the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigades advanced without re-establishing contact with the retiring Germans. By the afternoon they were within a mile or so of the Aquino-Pontecorvo road; but now heavy fire from machine-guns, mortars and artillery gave warning that the retreat had come to a halt. It was sternly apparent that the enemy intended to fight for the Adolf Hitler Line. On the 19<sup>th</sup>, troops of the 78<sup>th</sup> Division, supported by Ontario Regiment tanks, put in a "quick attack" at Aquino in the hope of getting through the defences while his forces were disorganized. This was a costly failure, the Ontarios losing 13 tanks and having almost every other tank hit. The same day the 1<sup>st</sup> Division made an unsuccessful attempt to pierce the Line, the Royal 22<sup>e</sup> Régiment getting right up to the wire before they were stopped by fire which inflicted heavy loss. There was nothing for it but a set-piece attack.

The intention expressed by General Burns in his order of 20 May was terse and to the point: "The 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps will breach the Hitler Line and exploit towards Ceprano." The next three days were spent in preparations for the forthcoming operation, which was euphemistically given the code name "Chesterfield". The 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, now commanded by Brigadier T. G. Gibson, was brought up from divisional reserve and allotted a sector on the right of the 3<sup>rd</sup>. A preliminary "softening up" by artillery began immediately, with 400 guns pouring shells upon known enemy strongpoints. For seventy-two hours the unremitting bombardment went on, while from their hastily-dug positions on the very verge of the German defences Canadian patrols, defiant of mortar and machine-gun, probed vigorously forward through the mines and wire to reconnoitre tank routes and take prisoners. It was from one such foray that Canadian Intelligence learnt of the presence in the line of the 90<sup>th</sup> Panzer Grenadier Division — old antagonists of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division in Moro River days. An advance south of the Pignataro Pontecorvo road by the Princess Louise Dragoon Guards on the night of 20-21 May, and a determined thrust on the 22<sup>nd</sup> by the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade with the 48<sup>th</sup> Highlanders, opposite Pontecorvo, met strong resistance and did not achieve sufficient penetration to justify putting in another brigade here to "exploit".

Operation "Chesterfield" was to be executed in two main phases. In the opening one the 1<sup>st</sup> Division, supported by the 25<sup>th</sup> (British) Tank

Brigade, was to break through the Hitler Line and secure the high ground some 1000 yards beyond, with a view to fanning outwards and destroying the enemy on the flanks. Through the gap thus made the 5<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division would, in the second phase, drive forward to seize crossings over the River Melfa and push on towards Ceprano.

As the hour of the attack drew near, the unfolding pattern of events on either flank of the Canadian Corps was determining the course of future operations and underlining the significance of the Canadian undertaking. Along the axis of Highway No. 6, the 13<sup>th</sup> Corps had, as we have seen, failed to “bounce” a way through the Hitler Line at Aquino; and General Leese assigned this Corps a holding role during the initial stages of the new offensive. Across the Liri River the rapid French advance had, by the 21<sup>st</sup>, cut the Pontecorvo-Pico road, and from their mountain positions General Juin’s forward troops could overlook the rear of the Hitler Line in the valley below. But the powerful spring of the French offensive was now almost uncoiled and their tenuous supply lines through the mountains were dangerously extended. Their long right flank west of Pontecorvo was exposed to the enemy, and that afternoon artillery of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division was called on to help drive off a counter-attack delivered against the French salient by some fifty German tanks. On the evening of 18 May General Alexander had predicted, “If we get held up in front of the Hitler Line, and we are unable to turn it from north or south, a full-scale mounted attack will be necessary to break it.” This frontal blow was now to be delivered.

At five o’clock in the hazy morning of 23 May the tempo of the bombardment against the German lines quickened to a fullscale cannonade of 800 guns, and an hour later the assaulting battalions crossed the start line. The first major operation by a Canadian Corps in the Second Great War was under way. Behind a protective barrage which stretched across the 2000-yard front the leading units of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigades moved forward through the tall grain into the enemy wire. The main burden of the attack and the fullest force of the enemy’s savage countering fire fell upon the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade on the right flank. For denial of Highway No. 6 to the Allies was of supreme importance to the enemy, and from the direction of Aquino, still held by Heidrich’s battle-skilled paratroops, vicious machine-gun and mortar fire seared the Canadian flank. By mid-morning, at the cost of very heavy casualties, the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada, leading the attack on the brigade’s left front, had fought their way through the line to their first objective on the Aquino-Pontecorvo road. But on the right Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry, exposed to the fierce blast in front and flank, were perilously situated and unable to move a yard. So violent was the storm of fire assailing these two battalions that neither could be reached by their supporting tanks or anti-tank guns. In the afternoon the forward companies

of the Seaforth, thus unsupported and with their PIAT<sup>5</sup> bombs exhausted, were badly cut up by enemy tanks. The brigade's third battalion, the Loyal Edmonton Regiment, attempting to pass through the Patricias, was helplessly pinned down in the wire and suffered grievously from mines and fire. Many of the tanks of the North Irish Horse were lost on mines or knocked out by the deadly anti-tank guns about Aquino.

The fortune of battle was more favourable to the 3<sup>rd</sup>, Brigade on the left flank. Within an hour of the opening of the assault, the Carleton and York Regiment had driven through the relentless hail of fire to the lateral road and cleared the way for the advancing squadrons of the 51<sup>st</sup> Royal Tank Regiment, whose Churchills suffered heavily in a desperate battle with enemy tanks and anti-tank guns before the objective was consolidated. The Carleton and Yorks were now speedily joined by the West Nova Scotia Regiment, whose pre-arranged role it was to exploit forward in the second phase of the divisional attack.

Soon after noon, General Vokes decided to reinforce the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade's success by committing his divisional reserve in the Carleton and Yorks' sector. The new attack struck the enemy at a critical moment and turned his defeat into a rout. Two squadrons of the Three Rivers Regiment, together with the Royal 22<sup>e</sup> Régiment, moved up through "a graveyard of burning Churchills" and silenced enemy pillboxes to join the "West Novies" for the final burst. A little before five o'clock, in heavily falling rain, the attack went in. "Leaning on the barrage", the infantry pushed rapidly through to their goal. Fierce resistance from Panzer Grenadiers caught in the open while preparing a counter-attack was crushed with equal fierceness. Within an hour the battle was over. The breach was securely held.

Meanwhile, on the left, along the north bank of the Liri, the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade and the Princess Louise, although not participating in the main attack, had forged slowly ahead amid bitter fighting. By daylight on the 24<sup>th</sup> they had driven the enemy from Pontecorvo. There were still Germans in Aquino, but they were subdued in due course by the British troops on our right. Shortly after dawn, while mopping-up parties combed the grisly ruins of the broken line, the impatient tank squadrons of Major-General Hoffmeister's 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division began to roll through the hard-won gap. The Army Commander signalled warmly to General Vokes:

Many congratulations to you and your Division on your brilliant action to storm the Adolf Hitler Line; it was a very fine performance. Our grateful thanks and the best of luck to you all.

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<sup>5</sup> "Projector, Infantry, Anti-Tank": this weapon, firing a two-and-a-half-pound hollow-charge projectile, had replaced the Boys rifle as the infantry anti-tank arm.



### THE HITLER LINE

From a painting by Major C.F. Comfort

The artist here represents a party of infantrymen of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division over-running one of the deadly Panther-turret anti-tank positions of the Adolf Hitler Line, 23 May 1944. The long 75-millimetre German gun now points skyward; in the background are the Shermans and Churchills which it knocked out before being itself destroyed. The soldier in the centre, presumably the section leader, has a Thompson machine-carbine; the one at the right carries a Bren. The flat-topped mountain is the Monte-d'Oro.

But for the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division it had been a costly victory. Fifty-one officers and 838 other ranks were recorded as casualties in the day's fighting. The heaviest losses had fallen upon the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, whose battalions were reduced to an average rifle strength of 150 men. The Seaforth comment was, "the grimmest battle this Brigade has known" — a weighty remark, coming as it did from one of the battalions that had taken Ortona. The supporting armour had also suffered severely. The 25<sup>th</sup> Tank Brigade lost 60 tanks — 41 of them Churchills of the valiant North Irish Horse.

The Germans had taken a very hard knock. They had not had a very large infantry force in the Hitler Line in our sector—our intelligence estimated it afterwards as less than 1000 strong—but what they had they lost. In the operation as a whole we took some 700 prisoners, and in addition several hundred Germans were killed. This accounted for the greater part of two grenadier regiments, and a good many men of supporting arms.

#### THE PASSAGE OF THE MELFA

The second phase of "Chesterfield" the break-out by the 5<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division — began with the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade, commanded by Brigadier J. D. B. Smith, driving forward to the Melfa River, the first obstacle behind the Hitler Line on which the enemy might be expected to make a stand. While the 9<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Regiment (British Columbia Dragoons), supported by the Irish Regiment of Canada, secured and held a firm base midway between Aquino and the Melfa, the main striking force, consisting of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Armoured Regiment (Lord Strathcona's Horse) and the Westminster Regiment (Motor),<sup>6</sup> was directed against the river. With the remnants of his infantry withdrawn in disorder across the Melfa, the enemy relied on his artillery and delaying squadrons of armour to check our advance. In the angle between the railway and the east bank of the Melfa the Strathconas fought a sharp tank battle which ended in the destruction or dispersal of the German Panthers and self-propelled guns. During this fight Lieutenant E. J. Perkins of the Strathcona reconnaissance troop pushed on and got some of his light tanks across the river. He was shortly joined by "A" Company of the Westminsters, commanded by Major J. K. Mahony.

The precarious bridgehead on the far bank was now heavily counter-attacked by German infantry and tanks, but with PIATs, mortars and grenades Mahony and his men kept the enemy at bay even after half

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<sup>6</sup> The organization of an armoured brigade included a motor battalion, a unit of motorized infantry capable of working with or ahead of the armoured regiments.



the Canadians had fallen. The little group took 50 prisoners, killed numerous Germans and accounted for three selfpropelled guns and a Panther. Although wounded in the head and twice in the leg, the Company Commander continued to control the fight with undiminished energy and determination. "The enemy perceived that this officer was the soul of the defence and consequently fired at him constantly with all weapons from rifle to 88-mm guns." The bridgehead, "vital to the whole Canadian Corps action", -held firm in spite of all the Germans could do. Major Mahony's distinguished gallantry brought him the Victoria Cross.<sup>7</sup> Two months later His Majesty the King, travelling incognito as "General Coilingwood", visited Canadian units in the Volturno Valley and invested him with the decoration.

By midnight a special composite force from the 1st Division, consisting of the Princess Louise Dragoon Guards, the Carleton and York Regiment and supporting armour from the Royal Canadian Dragoons and the Three Rivers Regiment, after carrying on a running fight along the banks of the Liri, had reached the confluence of the two rivers. At first light on the 25<sup>th</sup>, this group succeeded in establishing a second bridgehead across the Melfa about 3000 yards downstream from the Westminsters. Later that same morning the Irish Regiment of Canada (drawn from Brigadier T. E. Snow's 11<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade) attacked across the river to reinforce the Westminsters, and by midday the 5<sup>th</sup> Division bridgehead was firmly established on a two-battalion front. In spite of continued heavy shelling and mortaring of the whole area of the crossings, two bridges, vital to the passage of the armour, were thrust across the stream.

During the armoured division's advance from the Hitler Line flank protection had been provided by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment (Governor General's Horse Guards). All three squadrons fought almost continuously throughout the twentyfour hours, undergoing very severe shell and mortar fire. Rear parties of the enemy lingering along Highway No. 6 experienced the sting of the "recce" squadrons' thrusts; and the regiment's score for the day was half a dozen self-propelled guns knocked out, more than a hundred Germans killed, and as many taken prisoner.

With the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division across the Melfa, the main battle of the Liri Valley was over. The operation now was a pursuit. The 6<sup>th</sup> United States Corps had broken out from the Anzio bridgehead on 23 May, and two days later had linked up with troops of the Fifth Army advancing from the South. With his escape routes through Rome

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<sup>7</sup> Lieut. Perkins received the Distinguished Service Order (very rarely conferred upon a subaltern) and his troop-sergeant, Sergeant C. N. Macey, was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal.

dangerously threatened, the enemy might attempt one more stand, on the Caesar Line; but his immediate concern was to get out of the Liri Valley as rapidly as possible, while at the same time seeking to delay the advance of the Eighth Army. To speed him on his way the 5<sup>th</sup> Division was directed to carry the Canadian pursuit on to Ceprano.

During the afternoon of the 25<sup>th</sup>, the 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade passed through the armoured brigade's bridgehead to take up the chase. Resistance now mainly took the form of shelling from the enemy's rear artillery positions and machine-gun fire and sniping by isolated groups on the wooded high ground north of the railway. On the morning of the 27<sup>th</sup> the brigade reached Ceprano. Here the Liri flowed across our front, and beyond it the Sacco Valley led on towards Rome. Only one boat was to be found, but the Perth Regiment used it to ferry successive parties across and so cleared the town. General Burns now named Frosinone, well up the Sacco Valley, as the Canadian Corps' next objective, and a race developed between the two brigades of the 5<sup>th</sup> Division to re-establish contact with the retreating enemy.

A valuable day was lost in getting the armoured brigade across the Liri, for the Engineers had bridging trouble and the diminishing front was crowding together the pursuit formations of the 13<sup>th</sup> Corps and the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps. The narrow Liri-Sacco corridor, with few roads and those in general bad, offered very inadequate facilities for the advance of two corps abreast. To make matters worse, it was necessary for the 78<sup>th</sup> Division of the 13<sup>th</sup> Corps to use the 5<sup>th</sup> Division's bridge when it was completed. By the afternoon of the 29<sup>th</sup>, however, both General Iloffmeister's brigades were within five miles or so of Frosinone. That night the Perths took Pofi, climbing the steep hill on which the town is built in the face of shellfire and sniping. Early next morning they entered Arnara. In this region the long level of the valley came to an end, as the ground broke into a series of razor-back hills lying athwart the line of advance. Extensive tank deployment was impossible, and the Corps Commander therefore ordered the infantry division to take the lead. The relief of the 5<sup>th</sup> Division was effected successively by brigades in order that there might be no sudden halt in the advance. On the afternoon of the 30<sup>th</sup>, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Brigade relieved the 11<sup>th</sup>, and next day the Loyal Edmonton Regiment entered Frosinone unopposed.

The 5<sup>th</sup> Division, its part in the Canadian Corps' victory completed, now withdrew into reserve. Its casualties — 63 officers and 631 other ranks — reflected the bitterness of the past week's fighting. General Leese sent hearty congratulations on its success in its first major action. "I am very proud", he wrote, "to have the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division in the Eighth Army".

The end of May also brought the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade a

very brief rest after three exacting weeks of fighting. While the Three Rivers Regiment had continued to support the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division as far as the Melfa, in the 13<sup>th</sup> Corps sector the remaining units of the brigade had assisted the 78<sup>th</sup> Division's pursuit up Highway No. 6 to Ceprano. By 29 May all three regiments had been withdrawn to a harbour area near Aquino to refit for coming tasks; but the Three Rivers Regiment was in action again as early as 4 June. The Brigade was destined once more to be separated from the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps, and was to fight under other commands for months to come.

### THE END OF THE BATTLE FOR ROME

From Frosinone, the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Division advanced along the axis of Highway No. 6 for three more days, against rapidly decreasing resistance. During the final phase, the 6<sup>th</sup> South African Armoured Division was cooperating with it, under Canadian Corps command. All roads led to Rome, but with three Corps of the Fifth Army pressing down them to the capital there was no room for the pursuit divisions of the Eighth. On 4 June, when forward brigades of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division had reached the Anagni area, the Canadian Corps was withdrawn into Army Reserve, and took no further part in the fighting. By that time the success of the offensive in all sectors was assured. On 2 June, Fifth Army units from the Anzio bridgehead had taken Valmontone; on the 3<sup>rd</sup> they joined hands with the French Expeditionary Corps. With the whole area of the Alban Hills in Allied hands, the German High Command was forced to give up hope of a further stand on the Caesar Line, and to abandon Rome. On the morning of the 4<sup>th</sup>, Fifth Army reconnaissance troops entered the splendid and almost unscarred City the first European capital to be liberated by the Allies. So ended an important phase of the Italian campaign. To the men of the Canadian Corps it was a bitter disappointment to have no part in the entry into Rome. However, Canada was well represented in the occupying force — by the Canadian component of the First Special Service Force, which had distinguished itself in the break-out from Anzio and the advance to the capital (below, page 298).

The successes gained by the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps in its first operations as a Corps were gratifying. It had broken through a very formidable position and had advanced “a distance of 64 kilometres in a straight line”; and it had inflicted heavy losses on the enemy, although as the Corps Commander observed the decline in the “bag” of prisoners indicated that the pursuit phase had not been so successful as the assault. But our own losses had not been light. The total casualties of Canadian troops in Italy during the month of May were reported as 3742 in all categories, 717 being fatal.



### THE GOTHIC LINE

From a painting by Capt. G.C. Tinning

This painting shows soldiers of the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division examining a German Panther-turret pillbox near the village of Tomba di Pesaro. It illustrates the hilly terrain which was the scene of the fierce fighting of 1 September 1944.

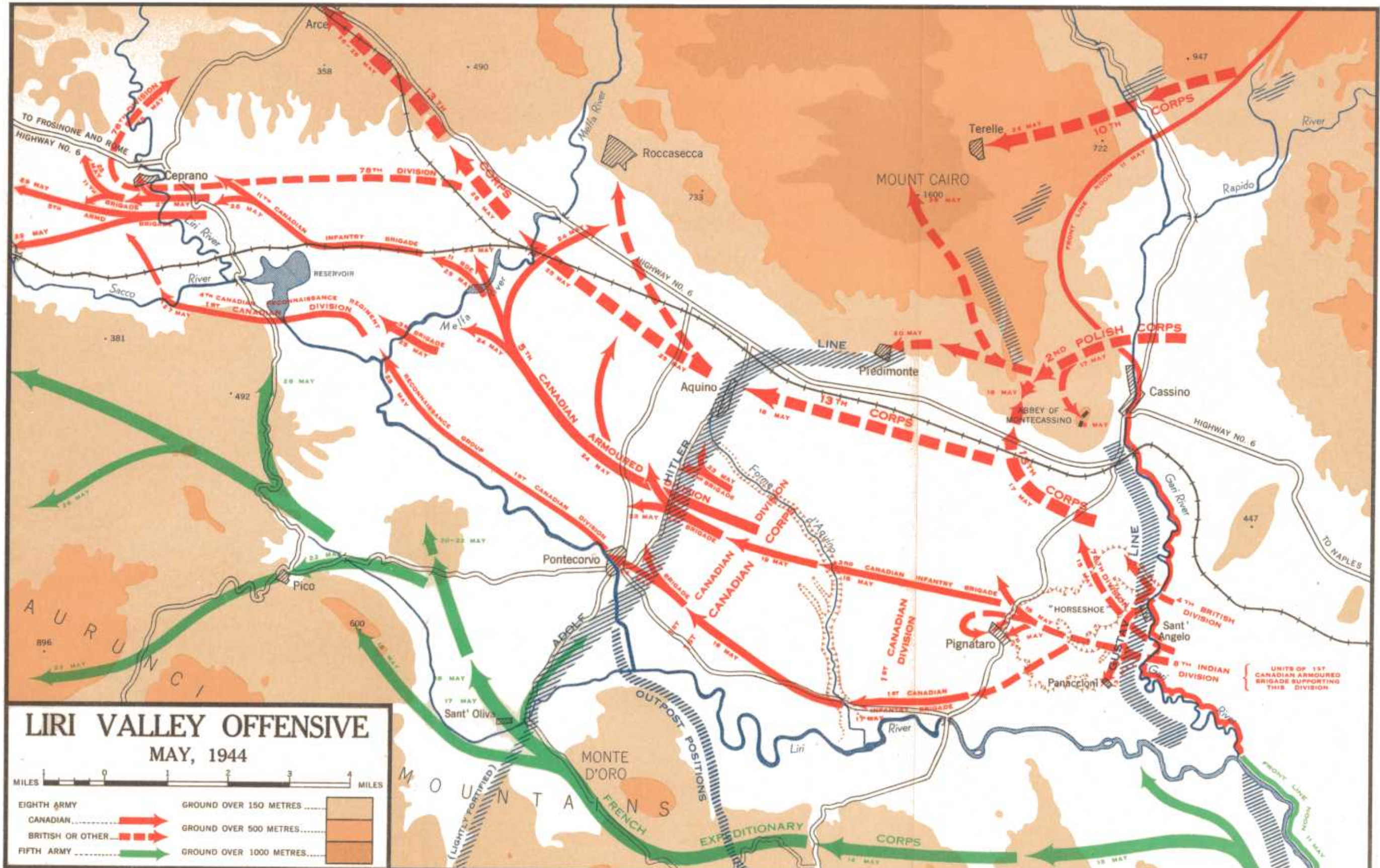
Two days after the fall of Rome, Allied armies struck in Normandy the long-awaited blow against the western defences of Hitler's European fortress. The launching of Operation "Overlord", however, was not considered to detract from the urgency of the Italian campaign. "My object", wrote General Alexander to General Wilson on 6 June, "is to complete the destruction of the German armed forces in Italy, and in the process to force the enemy to draw to the maximum on his reserves, whereby I shall be rendering the greatest assistance to the western invasion of which my Armies are capable." There seemed little doubt that Field-Marshal Kesselring would attempt a firm stand behind the strong system of defences that he was known to be building along the Northern Apennines roughly from Pisa to Rimini — the "Gothic Line".<sup>8</sup> But the morale, organization and training of the Allied Armies in Italy had reached their highest peak; "neither the Apennines nor even the Alps should prove a serious obstacle to their enthusiasm and their skill."

These armies were now directed to advance with all possible speed — the Eighth up the valley of the Tiber to Arezzo and Florence, the Fifth along the west coast to Pisa and Pistoia. They would then be in a position to launch an attack north-eastward through the Apennines against Bologna in the Lombard Plain, from which the seizure of Turin and Genoa would provide bases for a drive into Southern France, or the Venice and Padua area for operations against Austria. Such were the possibilities which now presented themselves to the Allied Italian Command.

The Eighth Army's exploitation role northward from Rome was assigned to the 13<sup>th</sup> Corps, and under this Corps the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade was immediately plunged into action once more. In the latter part of June the Ontario Regiment supported the 78<sup>th</sup> Division, and the Three Rivers Regiment the 4<sup>th</sup> British Infantry Division, in the difficult country west of Lake Trasimene, giving and taking hard knocks. Thereafter the chase led through the vineyards and maize fields of eastern Tuscany. The Canadian tanks were continuously in action. During the second week of July they were used west of Arezzo to break through the hills along the left bank of the Arno. Resistance was strong, for the enemy was playing for time with which to strengthen his line further north. Strong delaying rearguards clung to every rocky point of vantage, and the trails along which our squadrons made their way were hazardous with mines and broken with demolitions. The Brigade now came once more under the 8<sup>th</sup> Indian Division, an affiliation which brought mutual satisfaction, for of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Brigade's atta-

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<sup>8</sup> This name, found on a captured map, was apparently the Germans' first name for the position, and was generally used by the Allies. The enemy, however, subsequently called it the Green Line.



chments to non-Canadian formations in Italy, none produced a warmer relationship than that with the Indians. (Indeed, it is said that when given other armour the Sepoys were wont to inquire feelingly, “Where are our own tanks?”) Early in August, the Indian Division reached the Arno east of Empoli, and the latter half of the month found the Ontarios helping to “ease” enemy stragglers out of Florence without damaging the treasured fabric of that famed and beautiful city. Just beyond Florence lay the Etruscan Apennines and the Gothic Line.

## CHAPTER X

### THE ITALIAN CAMPAIGN: THROUGH THE GOTHIC LINE TO THE LOMBARD PLAIN, JULY 1944 — FEBRUARY 1945

#### BACK TO THE ADRIATIC: THE ATTACK ON THE GOTHIC LINE

During the summer of 1944 the course of operations in Italy again felt the impact of the Allied grand strategy. On 5 July General Alexander was advised that overriding priority would be transferred from the battle in Italy to Operation “Anvil”, the landing in Southern France, which was now to take place on 15 August.<sup>1</sup>

The new project required the withdrawal from the Fifth Army of three United States and four French divisions. The loss of this strength — particularly of the trained mountain troops of the French Expeditionary Corps — and intelligence of increased enemy concentration north of Florence forced a reconsideration of the plan to assault through the central part of the great Apennine barrier. General Alexander now decided to employ his favourite strategy of “a twohanded punch”. On 4 August he directed the Eighth Army to attack on a narrow front on the Adriatic coast in a surprise thrust which would swing north-west once the mountains had been passed; the Fifth Army, with the 13<sup>th</sup> British Corps filling the gap left by the French, would mount a subsidiary attack north-eastwards from Florence to close with the Eighth Army’s “right hook” in the Bologna area, and the German Tenth Army would be trapped.

The plan devised by General Leese for Operation “Olive” — the code name given to the Eighth Army’s forthcoming assault — provided for a simultaneous attack by three corps on a thirty-mile front. The date set was 25 August, and under a cloak of closest secrecy regrouping began immediately. The trans-peninsular migration of the previous spring was now reversed, as the weight of the Eighth Army was swiftly and silently transferred once more to the Adriatic. During the general German withdrawal the Poles on the Army’s right flank had driven north of Ancona, and the front now followed roughly the southern bank of the Metauro River, — the “Metaurus” famous as the scene of that battle of ancient times in which the Romans defeated and killed Hannibal’s brother Hasdrubal. Behind a screen of Polish troops holding the forward line

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<sup>1</sup> Limited resources in landing craft had compelled the abandonment of the idea of an assault simultaneous with the Normandy landings.



eleven Allied divisions and four armoured brigades slipped unobtrusively into position on this classic battleground. The eve of the attack found the Canadian Corps seven miles from the sea, concentrated on a narrow threemile front between the Polish Corps along the lower Metauro and the 5<sup>th</sup> British Corps, whose line extended for twenty miles to the west. As the Eighth Army was completing its preparations, news had come of the successful launching of Operation "Dragoon" (formerly "Anvil") on the appointed date (below, pages 209, 298).

It was part of the Allied deception that the Fifth Army should carry out ostentatious preparations to simulate an imminent offensive by both armies in the Florence area--in fact, the original plan of attack. Through force of circumstances Canadian troops had already contributed to the creation of such an impression. At the end of July the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps, after nearly two months' recuperation and training in the Volturno Valley, secretly moved northward to the Foligno area preparatory to re-entering the offensive; on 5 August the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Division joined the 13<sup>th</sup> British Corps in the line at Florence. On the sudden change in operational intentions, the men of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division threw off their camouflage, put up their divisional signs and once more pinned on their distinguishing patches. It was a useful revelation, for experience had taught the enemy to interpret the presence of the "red patch division" as the prelude to the launching of an Eighth Army offensive. After three days in the southern outskirts of Florence, the identifying insignia came down again as the Division was spirited away in anonymity back to Perugia.

Not the least remarkable feature of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps' transfer from the centre of Italy to the Adriatic was the construction by Corps Engineers, by the improvement of trails and local roads, of an alternative track to relieve from tank traffic the only available State highway through the mountains. The herculean task was completed in seven days, and along the 120 tortuous miles over the spine of Italy 280 carriers and 650 tanks of the Canadian Corps, as well as many tracked\* vehicles of other formations, crawled safely through the darkness to their destinations.

The Italian campaign was more an infantryman's than a tankman's war; and we may note here that, because its single infantry brigade had been seriously overworked in the difficult Italian terrain against the close type of defence employed by the enemy, the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division, like other armoured divisions in the Eighth Army, had recently been authorized to increase its infantry component to two brigades. During July the 12<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade was organized by using the Westminster Regiment (Motor) and converting into infantry battalions the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Reconnaissance Regiment (4<sup>th</sup> Princess Louise Dragoon Guards) and the 1<sup>st</sup> Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, R.C.A. (later designated the Lanark and Renfrew Scottish

Regiment). The new brigade was commanded first by Brigadier Spry and subsequently by Brigadier J. S. S. Lind.

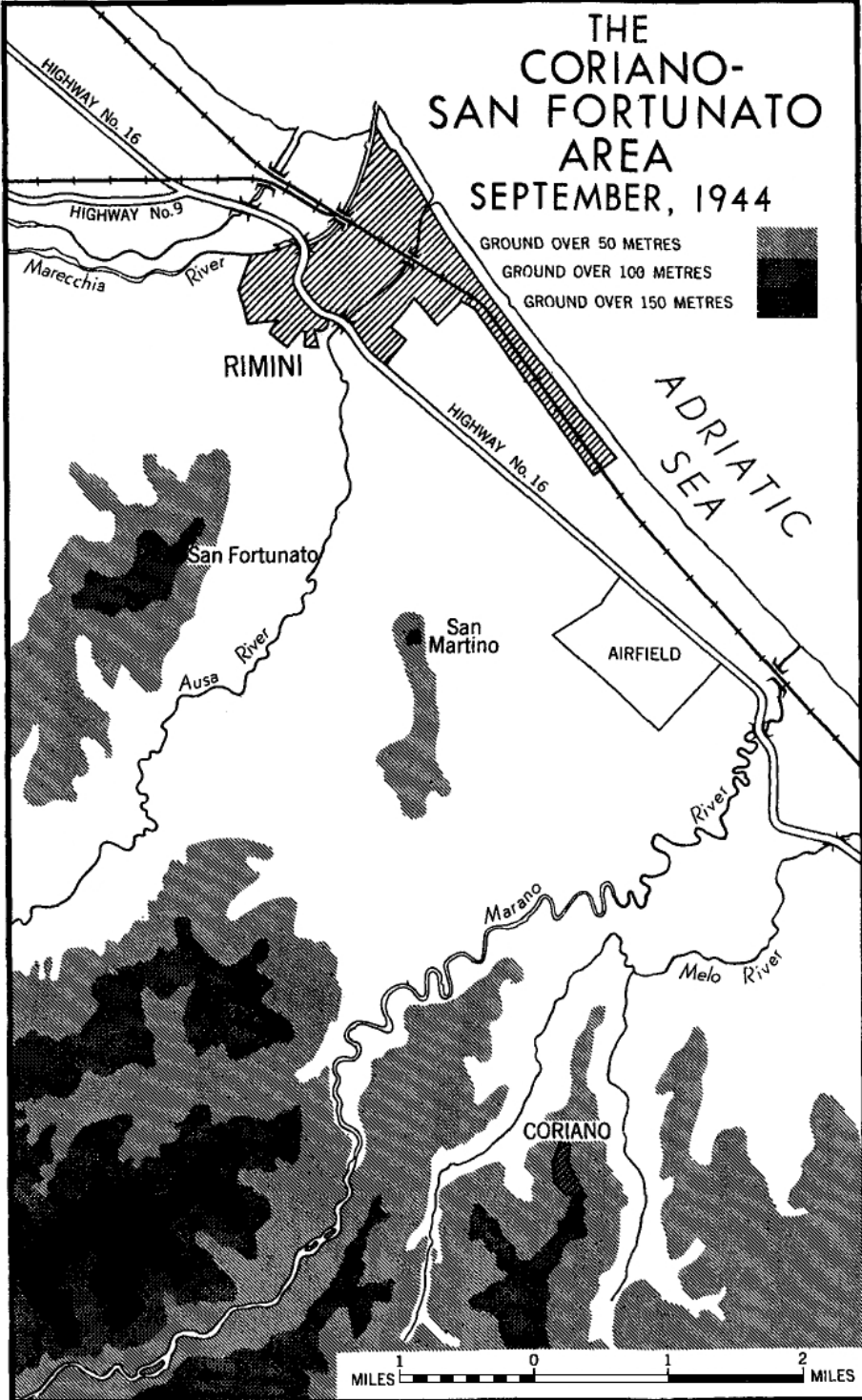
Although Allied planners often referred to Kesseiring's northern defences as "the Pisa-Rimini line", the Gothic Line in the Adriatic sector actually had its anchor some twenty miles down the coast from Rimini, at Pesaro. From the mouth of the Foglia a multitude of defensive works spread over the low bills north of the river as they climbed westwards to merge, a dozen miles inland, into the mountain spurs that jut out from the main backbone of the Apennines. Prepared defences were thickest on the north bank of the Foglia; they bore the familiar trade-mark of the Todt organization — Panther turrets in concrete emplacements, reinforced dugouts and slit trenches, and on the north edge of the river flats an anti-tank ditch and a belt of wire. The whole flat was thickly sown with mines. The key to the defences of the coastal sector was the Tomba di Pesaro — an irregular elevation rising above the rolling hills some eight miles west of Pesaro, and culminating in the 950-foot peak of Monte Luro. This was the focal point of the Eighth Army attack.

The Canadian Corps' part in Operation "Olive" was planned by General Burns to take place in four phases: an assault across the Metauro, an advance thence to the Foglia, the penetration of the Gothic Line and the final exploitation to Rimini. At 10:35 p.m. on 25 August four battalions of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Division silently began to ford the shallow Metauro, and occupied their first objectives as the thunder of artillery behind them heralded the opening of the battle across the Army front. This blow fell largely on the air; for the enemy had evacuated his front positions. It was the first of a score of river crossings for the Canadians in their fight up the northern Adriatic coast, and the ease of it gave little warning of the grim actions ahead. Our troops assumed that the enemy's retirement was due to his having got wind of our attack. Actually, however, he was merely carrying out a planned withdrawal into his Gothic works, and had no inkling whatever of what we had concentrated against him. Late in the afternoon of the 26<sup>th</sup> the Tenth Army's Chief of Staff reported to Kesselring by telephone, "It seems that it is going to be quite an affair on the Adriatic coast. The English have appeared on the front of the 71<sup>st</sup> Division and at this very moment I have received the report that the Canadians have appeared at the joint between the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute and the 71<sup>st</sup> Infantry Divisions."

In spite of this complete surprise, trouble began at once: not for the first or last time, the German fighting soldier redeemed, in part at least, the shortcomings of German Intelligence. It took the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigades four days to clear the dozen miles of broken hills, between Metauro and Foglia of the stubborn enemy, and not until 30 August were

# THE CORIANO- SAN FORTUNATO AREA SEPTEMBER, 1944

GROUND OVER 50 METRES  
GROUND OVER 100 METRES  
GROUND OVER 150 METRES



were their relieving formations, the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Brigades, able to come to grips with the Gothic Line proper. That afternoon they crossed the Foglia, losing many men among the minefields of the river flats, and attacked uphill against the German positions along the lateral road linking Pesaro with Urbino. These had been heavily bombed by our air forces during the past few days. In spite of this the enemy resisted fiercely, and it was with difficulty that we drove him from the villages of Borgo San Maria and Montecchio on the road. The Corps Commander now ordered rapid exploitation northwards, with the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division and the 5<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division directed respectively along axes right and left of the Tomba di Pesaro.

The twin drives succeeded, but only after bitter fighting. On the left the 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade were heavily counter-attacked and held up in the high ground north of Montecchio. During 31 August the 9<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiment (British Columbia Dragoons) had a dozen tanks knocked out and two dozen more temporarily disabled. In the early hours of 1 September, the Princess Louise Dragoon Guards came forward from the 12<sup>th</sup> Brigade and fought their first infantry action against Point 253, a commanding abutment of the Tomba mass. They suffered 129 casualties but, in the words of their Commanding Officer, Lt: Col. W. W. G. Darling, "the main thing was that we had taken our ground". In the fields below the ridge supporting tanks wrought havoc with their machine-guns; German dead in great numbers were buried here in common graves. On the right, during the same afternoon, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade cleared the eastern spurs of the Tomba feature and the Loyal Edmonton Regiment stormed the peak of Monte Luro. That evening the Irish Regiment occupied the town of Tomba di Pesaro. General Burns could now report, "The Gothic Line is completely broken in the Adriatic sector and the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps is advancing to the River Cones."

#### THE CORIANO RIDGE AND THE FORTUNATO FEATURE

The battle for the Apennines had not opened auspiciously for the Germans. The Eighth Army's unexpected blow had robbed them of twenty thinly-held miles of their Gothic Line and they had yielded 3700 prisoners, besides suffering proportionate losses in killed and wounded. "Fighting desperately to avert a break-through to Rimini", they steadily built up their forces on this flank by moving divisions from other parts of the line. Kesselring's best hope now was to stabilize on the "Coriano Ridge", an important hill spur commanding the country down to the coast. To the defence of this feature he assigned some of his best troops; while opposite the Canadian sector east of it was (almost inevitably) the familiar 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Division, now weakened by successive battles to less than half its original strength but as tough as ever.

On 3 September the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade (now commanded by Brigadier J. A. Calder) established bridgeheads over the Conca. The Polish Corps had been “pinched out” on the right, and the Canadian boundary here was the sea. In two days the brigade had cleared to the Melo River and the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Car Regiment (The Royal Canadian Dragoons) — now the reconnaissance regiment for the 1<sup>st</sup> Division — had occupied Riccione. Further left, on the 5<sup>th</sup> Division front, the 12<sup>th</sup> Brigade took and held the high ground around Misano. Inland the 5<sup>th</sup> British Corps, fighting through the most difficult terrain of the Army’s front, had kept pace across the Conca but was now meeting bitter resistance from the Coriano obstacle. The enemy’s retention of this stronghold seriously compromised the western flank of the Canadian advance, and the inter-corps boundary was therefore shifted westwards to allow the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division to operate against the ridge.

But now the long period of hot Italian summer weather broke and steady rain came to the assistance of the defenders. The Canadian advance had been made over secondary roads and bulldozed trails, which the passage of wheel and tank-track had pulverized into troughs of powdery dust; overnight these became impassable quagmires. The streams which crossed the axis of advance, formerly mere trickles across wide beds of firm gravel, turned into fierce racing torrents, the bridging of which made heavy demands upon the Engineers. Off the roads the intensively-cultivated vineyards were quickly water-logged, and tank-going became virtually impossible. The wider tracks of the enemy Panthers and Tigers gave them a relative advantage of mobility over the Allied Churchills and Shermans. The offensive slowed to a standstill, and the enemy gained a week to put his defences in order. Along his excellent lateral communications he brought two more divisions to his Adriatic positions. But in so doing he still further weakened his central front and fixed the moment for General Alexander to unleash the second punch of his two-handed attack. On the night of 12 September the Eighth Army reopened the offensive with renewed vigour, and early next morning, to the north of Florence, the Fifth Army began the assault of the main Gothic Line positions in its sector.

The 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division’s attack on the northeastern end of the Coriano Ridge was made by the 11<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade and the Westminster Regiment, in conjunction with an assault by two British divisions on the southern end. Both were successful, and they cost the enemy over 1000 prisoners and many men killed and wounded. On the right of the Canadian Corps sector the 1<sup>st</sup> Division, newly reinforced by a Greek Mountain Brigade, fought their way across the Marano and moved towards Rimini. On the left the 4<sup>th</sup> British Infantry Division carried the

Corps battle forward. But in our path lay one final hill position of which the enemy was quick to take advantage. This was a finger of high ground pointing north-eastwards at Rimini and topped by a formidable height which bore on its crest the village of San Fortunato. On the left the Eighth Army's line of advance was obstructed by the rugged territory of the tiny republic of San Marino, "the sole survivor of the innumerable sovereign cities which nursed the free and vigorous life of Mediaeval Italy". Beyond stretched the fabulous plains over which the Canadians, so long hill-bound, hoped to race their tanks towards Bologna and the Po.

The week that followed brought to the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division its fiercest fighting of Operation "Olive". Midway between the Marano and the Fortunato "feature" the village of San Martino — itself on the northern slope of a low knoll, but overlooked defensively by San Fortunato's higher ridge-held out for three days against fierce frontal attacks by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade. Our battalions suffered severely, for enemy troops in San Martino could remain unscathed in their deep dugouts while the guns of San Fortunato rained an inferno of shells on the village and the attackers. Not until 18 September, when the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade had outflanked the place to storm the south end of the Fortunato position, did the paratroopers here withdraw from another skilful defensive action. San Fortunato itself, battered by artillery fire and smitten by an air bombardment of an intensity comparable to that which fell on Caen, was finally cleared in a full-scale divisional assault by the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigades during the night of 19-20 September. From the shambles of the shattered strongpoints and dugouts amid the rubble the consolidating battalions took out 500 prisoners, dazed but in many cases still defiant.

With the last bastion of the Apennines behind them, the 1<sup>st</sup> Division pushed forward and established bridgeheads across the Marecchia River. On the right the Greeks entered Rimini on 21 September and raised their flag over that ancient Roman city. The 2<sup>nd</sup> New Zealand Division now relieved the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Division, which retired into Corps Reserve for a short three weeks rest; and the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division came back to relieve the 4<sup>th</sup> British Infantry Division. The Eighth Army was now in the North Italian Plain. General Burns reported Canadian battle casualties as approximately 2500 for the 1<sup>st</sup> and 1500 for the 5<sup>th</sup> Division.<sup>2</sup> Through the Corps prisoner-of-war cages there passed, between 25 August and 25 September, 48 German officers and 3035 other ranks. "You have won a great victory", the Army Commander signalled to Burns on 21 September. "By the bitterest fighting since El Alamein and Cassin you have beaten eleven German

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<sup>2</sup> September 1944 was the deadliest month of Canada's Italian war. Total Canadian Army casualties in the theatre for the month amounted in all categories to 256 officers and 3853 other ranks.

Divisions and broken through into the Po Valley. The greater part of the German armies in Italy were massed against us and they have been terribly mauled. I congratulate and thank you all.”

### MUD TO THE HELP OF THE ENEMY

To many Canadian infantrymen it must now have seemed that their work in Italy was almost done. The tired man with the red patch on his arm, standing on San Fortunato ridge on 21 September and waving the armour and vehicles of the New Zealand Division onward as they pressed to the north, might well believe that the Shermans and Churchills would now sweep across the plains carrying all before them. Back home, civilians studying small-scale maps of the theatre of operations certainly nourished the same hope. But more detailed maps showed, not merely a succession of rivers flowing from the mountains across the flats in our front, but innumerable canals and drainage ditches of which every one would become a tankobstacle in a time of rain. And now the rains had come. On the very eve of the San Fortunato victory they set in, and mud replaced high ground as the enemy's main ally on the eastern flank. During the weeks that followed, tanks and wheeled armour bogged down in the reclaimed swamp lands of the Romagna, and the infantry were called on again and again to force the passage of brimming watercourses, whose subsequent bridging for vehicular traffic was to tax to the utmost the ingenuity and equipment of the Canadian sappers.

September waned, and with it the Canadian Corps' hopes of quickly debouching into the valley of the Po. A special engineer force, set up by the Eighth Army to bridge the great river, “stood down” on 3 October. The 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division, using each of its two infantry brigades in turn, advanced on the left of the New Zealand Division, crossed the Uso in the face of heavy shelling and mortaring, and by the end of September had reached the Fiumicino, which disputes with the Uso the honour of being Caesar's Rubicon. A bridgehead established by the Irish Regiment of Canada was wiped away by a counter-attack, and during ten days of heavy rain -that made tank operations impossible our troops were held to the south bank of the swollen river. On 11 October the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Division returned to the line as the armoured division retired into Corps Reserve.

At the beginning of October General Sir Oliver Leese gave up the command of the Eighth Army on departing for the Far East. He was succeeded by Lieutenant-General Sir R. L. McCreery, formerly commanding the 10<sup>th</sup> British Corps. As the Eighth Army's axis bent westwards in the “right hook” designed by General Alexander, the new Army Commander extended the Canadian Corps front to the left to include the Rimini-Bologna highway. The New Zealand Division side-

stepped away from the seaward flank and their former front was taken over by "Cumberlandforce" — a composite battle group led by Brigadier I. H. Cumberland, Commander of the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade, and consisting of the Greek Mountain Brigade, the Royal Canadian Dragoons and some New Zealand reconnaissance and artillery units operating as infantry.

Enemy withdrawals on 10 October made possible a resumption of the advance across the water-laced ground. Four days later the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade re-established contact on the north bank of the Scolo Rigossa, and on the 18<sup>th</sup> the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigades crossed the Pisciatello on an ever-widening divisional front. By the 20<sup>th</sup> troops of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade had cleared the northern half of Cesena, while British infantry of the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps worked into the southern suburbs. Along the coastal flank "Cumberlandforce" had taken Cesenatico and were making extensive gains in the flat country south of Cervia.

### THE SAVIO CROSSING

The Savio River, along whose winding bank Canadian infantry were now temporarily halted, presented the most formidable obstacle yet encountered. Rising high in the Apennines, its waters are affected by weather conditions over a wide area, and are liable to sudden violent spates. All bridges in Cesena had been blown and their piers partly demolished by the retreating Germans. Elsewhere along the river the soft banks and approaches made construction so difficult that no civilian bridges had ever been built. The enemy had mined the steep slopes to the water, and on the west bank he was awaiting us in strength with armoured support.

Nevertheless, we set about crossing. On the afternoon of 20 October, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry attacked north of Cesena. One company succeeded in fording the river, gained a precarious footing on the far bank and held it in the face of heavy counter-attacks. On the night of 21-22 October the Edmontons and Seaforth crossed, and expanded the holding beyond the river to a depth of 500 yards. But behind them the Savio, swollen by rain, changed "from a placid stream to a raging torrent", its width increasing from 45 feet to 300 within twenty-four hours. It could not be bridged; the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade recorded afterwards, as something without precedent, "for once the word impossible was used by the engineers". But if the sappers could not bridge, they could ferry; and by tremendous exertions they rafted several 2-pounder anti-tank guns across to help the infantry in the desperate struggle that was going on beyond the stream. Only on the night of the 23<sup>rd</sup> was a folding-boat bridge finally completed. Before it was swept away more guns crossed over to end the threat of further



counter-attack by enemy armour.

During the Seaforth defence of their hard-won bridgehead, there occurred a very notable act of individual heroism. As the right forward company was consolidating its objective, it was suddenly counter-attacked by a group of three Panther tanks, supported by two self-propelled guns and a platoon of infantry. With extraordinary coolness, Pte. Ernest Alvia Smith, a member of the Seaforth tank hunting platoon, let one of the Panthers approach to a range of 30 feet before he fired his PIAT and put it out of action. "Ten German infantry immediately jumped off the back of the tank and charged him with Schmeissers<sup>3</sup> and grenades. Without hesitating Pte. Smith moved out on to the road and at point blank range with his tommy gun killed four Germans and drove the remainder back." Another tank opened fire and more infantry closed in on Smith's position, but he fought them off, protecting a wounded comrade, until they withdrew in disorder, hesitating to risk further armour against this indomitable and apparently indestructible infantryman. Pte. Smith's gallantry brought him the Victoria Cross — the second V.C. won by a soldier of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division in the Italian campaign.

In the meantime, midway across the peninsula, the Fifth Army was nearing the climax of two months of bitter fighting across the Apennine backbone in abominable weather, through the most difficult terrain and against resolute enemy resistance. On 22 October General Clark's foremost troops were less than ten miles from the heart of Bologna. In a desperate-and successful- attempt to halt the advance, General von Vietinghoff, now Supreme German Commander (Field-Marshal Kesselring had been seriously wounded in an air attack) snatched from his Adriatic flank the 90<sup>th</sup> Panzer Grenadier and the 1<sup>st</sup> Parachute Divisions. This necessitated a sudden enemy withdrawal from the Savio, which gained the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division another half-dozen miles of waterlogged ground and placed the left of our front on the line of the Ronco River. On the right, flooding of low areas in their path held the "Cumberlandforce" advance to a narrow penetration across the Bevano along Highway No. 16.

The weight of the Eighth Army's attack was now being delivered on the left, where the 2<sup>nd</sup> Polish Corps had re-entered the line and with the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps was thrusting northwards on Forli. General McCreery took advantage of the temporarily reduced importance of his right flank to withdraw the Canadian Corps into Army Reserve. The flooded plains from the foothills to the sea were taken over by "Porterforce" — a group of dismounted British and Canadian armoured and artillery regiments — and by 1 November the tired Canadian divisions were experiencing the comparative luxury of dry billets. Where the tide of

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<sup>3</sup> The German machine carbine.

battle had flowed weather-proof buildings were hard to find; as a result, accommodation for the Canadians was scattered over a forty-mile area — from Urbino to Cervia.

Throughout November, while “Porterforce” continued to edge forward across the sodden flats towards Ravenna, the Canadian formations in reserve recuperated from the effects of ten weeks continuous fighting, and turned to intensive training for the battles which still lay ahead. As might be expected, emphasis was placed on developing improved river-crossing techniques. New types of equipment which had proved their effectiveness in the North-West European theatre claimed special attention; among a weirdly-named menagerie of accessories to the assault our infantry welcomed the advent of the amphibious “Weasel”, and the “Wasp” and “Crocodile” flamethrowers.<sup>4</sup> Changes in command took place before the Corps returned to the line. On 5 November Lieutenant-General Burns relinquished the command of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps, and was succeeded by Lieutenant-General Charles Foulkes, who had formerly commanded the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division in North-West Europe and had acted as commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps during the Scheldt operations. Major-General Vokes left for Holland to exchange appointments with Major-General H. W. Foster, Commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division.

### TANKS IN THE MOUNTAINS

Before dealing with the resumption of the Canadian Corps’ offensive we must turn to the central part of the Italian front and the activities of Brigadier W. C. Murphy’s 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade during the autumn and early winter. As we have seen, throughout August the brigade was operating with General Clark’s Fifth Army along the line of the Arno. Its three armoured regiments were then assigned to support formations of the 13<sup>th</sup> Corps in the forthcoming assault through the mountains. During the second week of September, as the enemy slowly and methodically fell back to his prepared defences in the Gothic Line, the Corps closed up to Borgo San Lorenzo and the line of the Sieve River.

On 13 September, as we have seen, General Clark opened the Fifth Army counterpart of Operation “Olive”. The objective was the Bologna-Faenza-Forli road (Highway No. 9), with the main blow being delivered by the 2<sup>nd</sup> United States Corps on the left, while the 13<sup>th</sup> British Corps advanced in support on the right. After heavy fighting the 2<sup>nd</sup> United States Corps had broken through the Gothic Line and had pushed down

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<sup>4</sup> The “wasp” (mounted on a carrier) was in part a product of Canadian development; it was first used in Normandy. The “Crocodile” was a converted Churchill tank.

the Santerno Valley to threaten Highway No. 9. Costly efforts to reach Imola, however, had failed, and at the beginning of October the Corps axis of attack was shifted westward to the main Florence-Bologna road. In the path of the British Corps on the Fifth Army's right wing stood the great wall of the "San Benedetto Alps", whose crests rise 5000 feet above the valley of the Sieve. On the forward or south-western slopes of this barrier, was the elaborate net-work of pillboxes, anti-tank walls and ditches, minefields, wire defences and fire trenches that made this the strongest section of the Gothic Line.

The Corps advanced on three axes. On the left the 1<sup>st</sup> British Infantry Division, supported by, the Ontario Regiment, thrust along the narrow mountain road which ran from Borgo San Lorenzo through Marradi to Faenza; on the right the 6<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division followed Highway No. 67 towards Forli; the 8<sup>th</sup> Indian Division, with the Calgary Regiment under command, attacked over the trackless watershed between, to outflank the defence of the passes on either road. The remaining armoured regiment of the Canadian brigade — the Three Rivers Regiment — remained temporarily in 13<sup>th</sup> Corps reserve. It was not the terrain for armoured manoeuvre. Unable to keep pace with the forward infantry, the Canadian tanks assisted the attack by delivering neutralizing fire against enemy positions on the dominating heights. The first stages of the assault went well. Paced by the dauntless hill troops of the Indian brigades, in five days of fierce fighting the divisions overran the Gothic Line defences and reached firm positions on the mountain divide.

But the pattern of the region ahead was just as uncompromising as that over which the Corps had just fought its way. From the height of land the ground fell grudgingly away in a confused series of gradually descending spurs separated from each other by the deep valleys of swift rivers draining into the Lombard Plain. The narrow mountain roads following these natural routes were the only possible lines of advance against a foe skilled to seize every topographical advantage.

In the Fifth Army strategy the 13<sup>th</sup> Corps now adopted a policy of "leaning on the enemy", and the Canadian tank squadrons saw little action. A shifting of the divisional axes at the end of September found the Ontario Regiment crawling down the restricted gorge of the upper Senio, while on the right the Calgary tanks followed the narrow ravine of the Lamone. Further west, the Three Rivers Regiment came into the line under the 78<sup>th</sup> British Infantry Division on 3 October, and supported an attempted thrust between the Santerno and the Sillaro Rivers directed on Imola. An entry in the unit war diary furnishes the best explanation for the stalemate in which the division and the armoured regiment soon found themselves.

To appreciate the slowness of the advance, and the terrific difficulties

which the troops — infantry in particular — are encountering, these mountains and Italian rains must be seen. The peaks are very irregular, many of them sheer and rocky; all of them steep and mainly trackless. They rise to as high as 700 metres. Their rocky composition offers poor comfort to an assaulting infantry, who must fight positions dug into the rock and try to dig in when the enemy counter-attacks with shells and mortars.

The gorges and gullies are precipitous and run into narrow, canyon-like valleys. The one, and sometimes two, third class roads follow the valley down, cross and re-cross the river and so present excellent opportunities for demolitions. The enemy has carried out these demolitions with a devilish proficiency, and made the advance one for Engineers alone.

The heavy rains of October changed the unmetalled tracks into slippery channels of mud, sent landslides crashing down from the loosened hillsides, and filled every stream bed with a swirling torrent which ruthlessly washed out laboriously-constructed bridges. The continual precipitation dispelled all hope of the overburdened roads drying out before the ice and snow of winter claimed them. On 27 October, with the 2<sup>nd</sup> United States Corps halted nine miles short of Bologna, the Fifth Army Commander decided to suspend the offensive. Through the wet, cold weeks that followed, the Canadian armour was almost completely immobilized and detachments could only contribute indirect fire support to the small-scale infantry attacks that continued to probe into the enemy defences.

### THE ADVANCE ACROSS THE RIVERS

Winter brought to the Allied Armies in Italy no protracted respite from active operations. The Supreme Allied Commander in the West, General Eisenhower, had decided that it would be necessary to fight a winter campaign on his front, and the Italian theatre was called on to make its contribution. The offensive was therefore pressed forward despite all difficulties of climate and terrain and a growing deficiency of manpower and material. At a conference between General Alexander and his Army Commanders on 26 November, it was revealed that the Eighth Army had only enough artillery ammunition for a sustained-three-weeks effort. Plans were laid for a final drive to reach the line of the Santerno; should weather conditions permit, the Fifth Army would launch one more offensive against Bologna in the hope of securing winter accommodation in that city.

On the night of 1-2 December the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps returned to the line, which now, thanks to the advance made by the varied elements of "Porterforce" during November, ran along the southern bank of the River Montone and the Fiumi Uniti. The same rivers whose upper valleys had provided the 13<sup>th</sup> Corps with avenues of approach towards the plains ran in their lower reaches directly across the Canadian Corps'

path. The dykes that confined their waters when in spate had been converted by German labour into strong fortifications. Within these high steep flood-banks, which rose thirty to fifty feet above the level plain, galleries had been burrowed, accommodating nests of machine-guns whose fire could sweep the long ranges of open fields stretching back to the next preceding river barrier. The usual fringe of wire and mines along the outer face of the forward rampart added to the strength of each position. Needless to say, all vehicle bridges had been demolished by the time we reached them. The garrisons crossed from bank to bank on temporary footbridges which could be readily destroyed when withdrawal demanded. Such was the unpleasant pattern of the obstacles over which the Corps had now to force its way.

In the plan for Operation "Chuckle" General Foulkes assigned the assault role to the 1<sup>st</sup> Division, temporarily commanded by Brigadier J. D. B. Smith (General Foster did not arrive from NorthWest Europe until 7 December). The Division was directed initially to attack north-west and to force a passage of the River Lamone east of Lugo; the 5<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division was to thrust right and cut off Ravenna. At nine o'clock on the morning of 2 December the assault went in, aided by heavy artillery support. Fast Desert Air Force Typhoons — employed for the first time in support of Canadian troops in Italy — raked the enemy's line with rocket fire and sowed it with bombs. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, leading the infantry attack over the Montone against moderate opposition, crossed the canal Scolo via Cupa by midnight, and finding Russi abandoned, reached the Lamone on the morning of the 4<sup>th</sup>. Here the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade took over the advance and early on the 5<sup>th</sup> the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment and the Royal Canadian Regiment succeeded in forming a bridgehead, five companies strong, on the western bank. But savage enemy counter-attacks from either flank inflicted severe casualties — the R.C.R. lost 108 men — and threw us back across the river.

In the meantime the 5<sup>th</sup> Division was making important advances. Led by the 4<sup>th</sup> Princess. Louise Dragoon Guards Battalion, the 12<sup>th</sup> Brigade broke out of the Montone bridgehead on the right of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade and, overcoming strong initial resistance, cleared Godo on the night of 3-4 December. The successful thrust continued north-eastward to Highway No. 16, outflanking Ravenna. Early on the 4<sup>th</sup> the versatile troops of "Porterforce" crossed the Fiumi Uniti in assault boats and entered the sometime capital of the Western Roman Empire. Most of the German garrison had made good their escape, but from the surrounding district some 800 partisans hurriedly gathered to assist in mopping up those that remained. To the self-styled "forgotten men" of the Allied Armies in Italy the capture of Ravenna brought heart-warming

recognition from all quarters. General Crerar sent personal congratulations to General Foulkes:

Desire you convey all ranks 1 Cdn Corps the interest, support and congratulations of all ranks First Cdn Army on results of 1 Cdn Corps recent operations vicinity Ravenna. Keep it up. Drive on and finish him off.

Continuing the 5<sup>th</sup> Division's exploitation north-west, Brigadier I. S. Johnston's 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade reached the Lamone at Mezzano and cleared the eastern bank of the river, linking up on the left with troops of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division. Fog and rain once more delayed progress, but on the night of 10-11 December formations of both divisions made assault-boat crossings of the river. Beyond the Lamone the water obstacles athwart the line of advance were more thickly concentrated than any previously encountered. The strongly-dyked Canale Navi glio, which linked Faenza with the sea, was flanked by small drainage canals (the Fosso Vecchio and the Fosso Munio); further to the northwest was the Senio with its formidable flood-banks; all these paralleled one another within three miles. Passage of the first three was only achieved at great cost to the Canadian divisions; the fourth marked the limit of their advance in Italy.

From the 5<sup>th</sup> Division's Lamone bridgehead in the vicinity of Villanova the 12<sup>th</sup> Brigade launched a two-battalion assault against the Canale Naviglio on the night of 12-13 December. It was a bloody operation. Both units, achieving surprise, reached the main canal shortly before midnight. Three companies of the Princess Louise, in the face of increasing mortar and machine-gun fire, fought their way over the high dykes to the western bank; but enemy reaction was too fierce, and the whole battalion was forced to fall back before daylight to the Fosso Vecchio. It had suffered 88 casualties. On the left the Lanark and Renfrew Scottish Regiment secured exposed positions on the near bank. Here, during the daylight hours of the 13th, they were vigorously counter-attacked but held doggedly on in spite of heavy losses.

Further inland the 1<sup>st</sup> Division's attack across the Lamone met with more success. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, with the 48<sup>th</sup> Highlanders under command, went across on the night of 10-11 December; next day the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade passed through and crossed the Vecchio that night. Twenty-four hours later the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment and the Carleton and York had forced bitterly opposed crossings of the Naviglio 3000 yards north of Bagnacavallo; before daylight on the 13<sup>th</sup> they had linked their bridgeheads and expanded them to a depth of 1000 yards. Both units were ordered to hold firm, and hold firm they did, though the enemy launched against them that day no fewer than thirteen counter-attacks. When darkness fell the Edmontons and the Seaforth of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade followed through and consolidated the 1<sup>st</sup> Division's bridgehead. Through this foothold within the enemy's defences the

Westminster Regiment was passed on the morning of the 14<sup>th</sup>, to strike northwards along the far bank and relieve the pressure in front of the other battalions of the 12<sup>th</sup> Brigade. It was a sound tactic, and that night the Lanark and Renfrew attacked successfully over the Naviglio. By late afternoon on the 15<sup>th</sup> the 12<sup>th</sup> Brigade was firmly established on the west bank, having linked up with the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division on the left, and a limited amount of exploitation became possible. During this fighting our troops had received most helpful close strafing support from the air. "It was so close", the Lanark and Renfrew recorded, "that empty cartridges from the planes fell in our positions".

### CLEARING THE SENIO LINE

Two obstacles now lay between the Canadians and the Senio — the town of Bagnacavallo, which was still in enemy hands, and on the right the water barrier of the Fosso Munio, which ran across the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division's front 600 yards beyond the Canale Naviglio. But for some of the German infantry defending the Munio an unpleasant surprise was in store — the dubious honour of being the first enemy troops in Italy to experience Canadian flamethrowers in action. On the afternoon of 16 December a company of the Westminsters, using "Wasps" that spurted long jets of shriveling flame on the machine-gun positions on the far bank, broke readily across the canal and gained a base from which to launch subsequent operations.

There remained for the Canadian forces one more formal operation in 1944 — the final advance to the Senio River. After an unsuccessful essay on 18 December, it began on the evening of the 19<sup>th</sup> with a silent breakout from the Naviglio bridgehead—the 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade on the right and the 2<sup>nd</sup> on the left. Enemy resistance along the Fosso Munio checked initial progress. His defence was organized in depth; in the open fields our infantry came under withering fire from scattered farmhouses — an unpleasant foretaste of what the Senio's fortified flood-banks held in store. But the good services of the Engineers in speedily throwing bridges across the Munio provided the forward troops with much-needed tank support. By the morning of the 21<sup>st</sup> the enemy had been driven back to the river and Bagnacavallo had been occupied without resistance. Right through Christmas Eve mopping-up operations continued on the Canadian side of the Senio, and many a troublesome strongpoint was flamed into ready submission with "Wasp" or "Crocodile". Soon our troops held a nine-mile front along the river, from a mile south of Alfonsine to just south of Cotignola on the Corps' left boundary.

On Christmas Day, in striking contrast to the bloody Ortona fighting of the previous year, the line was very quiet. Let a Corps diarist

describe it:

The 1<sup>st</sup> Cdn Corps sector was the only part of the Italian front where there was not a white Christmas. A wary truce was observed on both banks of the Senio, except on the 2 Cdn Inf Bde front. The Germans serenaded Seaforth of C. with carols on Christmas Eve and one Jerry put his head over the river dyke long enough to wish the Canadians a guttural "Merry Christmas". Our troops replied with their version of "Frübliche Weihnacht". Encouraged, the Germans tried a little prop-ganda, calling on our troops to surrender. Our counter-propaganda was an artillery "stonk" on the German positions. . .

At the 1<sup>st</sup> Division's headquarters an officer wrote rather wistfully of the Christmas lull: "Tomorrow we return to the cold reality of war and all its ugliness, but we won't forget Christmas 1944 because for twenty-four hours men became human again and war seemed very far away, almost forgotten".

The year ended with Bologna still in the enemy's hands. On 12 December Field-Marshal Alexander<sup>5</sup> had become Supreme Allied Commander, Mediterranean Theatre; General Mark Clark succeeded him as commander of the Allied Armies in Italy, now termed once more the 15<sup>th</sup> Army Group. Winter forced Clark to an inevitable decision: to stabilize the Eighth Army Adriatic front along the line of the Senio. The Canadian Corps was ordered to clear two areas still held by the Germans — a small pocket in front of Cotignola, and, on the other flank, the flats and marshlands adjoining the Valli di Comacchio, the great lagoon famous in Italian history as the scene of the adventurous wanderings of Garibaldi when hunted by the Austrians in 1849.

The Comacchio operation was carried out by the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division with speed and precision. It hit the 114<sup>th</sup> Jaeger Division like a whirlwind and caused Kesselring, newly returned from convalescence, to appreciate that the Eighth Army was about to roll up his left flank and capture Bologna from the east. Striking northeastward on 2 January the 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade rapidly cleared the village of Conventello, east of Highway No. 16, providing a base for the 5<sup>th</sup> Armoured Brigade to leap-frog through to the Canale Bonifica — one more transverse water barrier which paralleled the River Reno below its junction with the Senio. On the night of 3-4 January a counter-attack by units of the 16<sup>th</sup> S.S. Panzer Grenadier Division, which had been thrown in to restore the situation, was resolutely beaten off with heavy losses to the enemy. In the morning the Cape Breton Highlanders pushed troops over the Bonifica and set up a bridgehead large enough to protect the Engineers as they constructed a tank crossing. At the same time, two miles to the east, the 9<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiment (British Columbia Dragoons) joined forces with

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<sup>5</sup> His promotion, announced on 27 November, dated from 4 June, the day of the fall of Rome.



the Perth Regiment to effect a passage of the canal, and enemy resistance quickly crumbled as the tanks drove east and west from each bridgehead to — clear Sant'Alberto and the southern bank of the Reno. In the three-day operation General Hoffmeister's division lost only thirty killed and took three prisoners for every Canadian casualty. They captured 685 Germans, and on one day—4 January — counted 300 enemy dead.

On the opposite flank, Brigadier M. P. Bogert's 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade had little difficulty in clearing the Cotignola pocket. Jumping off from the Canale Naviglio on 3 January the three western battalions quickly sealed off and cleared the town of Granarolo and patrolled forward without meeting serious resistance; across the Corps boundary troops of the 56<sup>th</sup> (London) Division cleared Borghetto in a parallel advance. By dawn of the 5<sup>th</sup> survivors of the enemy had sought shelter in the Senio flood-banks.

### HOLDING THE WINTER LINE

From now on the second Winter Line was held by the 15<sup>th</sup> Army Group with a minimum, of troops, as both sides, bowing to necessity imposed by weather, resorted to a condition of watchful defence. The Canadians held what proved to be their final positions in Italy, running along the Senio and Reno and skirting the south margin of the Valli di Comacchio. Fixed positions, strengthened by dug-in Churchills of the 21<sup>st</sup> Tank Brigade and an elaborate system of wiring, mines, booby-traps and outposts, were established to discourage enemy infiltration and raids, which grew increasingly daring as the static role of our troops became apparent. An Italian formation, the Gruppo Cremona, aided by some hundreds of bold and active partisans, took over the right end of the Corps' 29-mile front, between Highway No. 16 and the Adriatic, relieving the 5<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division, which went into Corps Reserve at Cervia. The 1<sup>st</sup> Division continued to hold the line on the left, assisted by the British 9<sup>th</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Armoured Brigades, which came successively under command as infantry, thereby enabling a welcome cycle of reliefs to be maintained among the Canadian units.

In the mountains to the west the regiments of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade laboriously disengaged themselves from the grip of ice and snow and began to move to the Adriatic sector in readiness for a spring offensive. It was not a good time for travel, but conditions would be still worse when the winter snows were melting. The Calgary Regiment was the first to undertake the hazardous expedition, for the 8<sup>th</sup> Indian Division which it was supporting had been pinched out by the advance of the Polish Corps across the 13<sup>th</sup> Corps front. On 30 December its tanks left Marradi on what its diary called "one of the most prolonged, difficult and dangerous moves this Regiment has ever experienced". In

the first eighteen miles along the glazed, deeply rutted road which wound over the mountain divide, track speedometers registered up to 70 miles; "tracks revolved without the tanks moving more than inches". Members of each crew trudged behind the rear exhaust of their tank for warmth.

Those walking would suddenly stop and hold their breath while tons of steel — with a man inside — slid ponderously, helplessly towards a 300-foot drop. It always gathered speed as it went, like loose wreckage on a ship's deck, but something always held at the last second. A frail bank of frozen mud, a little gravel to grip the tracks, an accidental rock. Then everyone would give a low whistle of relief and walk on.

Miraculously the caravan of frozen steel reached its destination without mishap. "I consider the feat of your regiment one of the finest it has performed," wrote Brigadier Murphy to the Calgary's Commanding Officer, "and I bear in mind in saying so the most outstanding work which it has performed in the face of the enemy from Sicily to the Northern Apennines."

The Calgarys spent the greater part of January near Florence, moving at the end of the month to the Forli area. Here the regiment came under the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps, and was assigned to support the 56<sup>th</sup> (London) Division in its Senio positions south of Cotignola, just across the inter-corps boundary from the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division. It was late January before the two remaining armoured regiments bade farewell to their mountain positions. For weeks troops in the forward gun-lines had literally lived in their immobilized tanks under enemy fire, dependent for maintenance upon the efforts of mule trains and ski and snowshoe teams to conquer the snow-blocked lines of communication. When squadrons of the Three Rivers Regiment began to move back from the 78<sup>th</sup> Division's forward area they were forced to hand over to relieving crews six tanks frigidly fettered to their sites. From the Monte Grande sector — overlooking Bologna a dozen miles to the north-west — the Ontarios jerked and slid their tanks over the treacherous roads to the brigade concentration area, the grim ordeal of their passage matching that of the Calgarys a month before. Preparations were now made for the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade, less the Calgary Regiment, to move to the Adriatic coast, where they would train for what they hoped would be an overwhelming armoured break-out by the Eighth Army. But these orders were cancelled on 4 February. There were different plans now for the Canadian formations.

### THE CANADIANS LEAVE ITALY

The reunion of the Canadians in Italy with those in North-West Europe had for many months been a hope cherished by both groups. It had also been an object of national policy, defined in a directive sent to

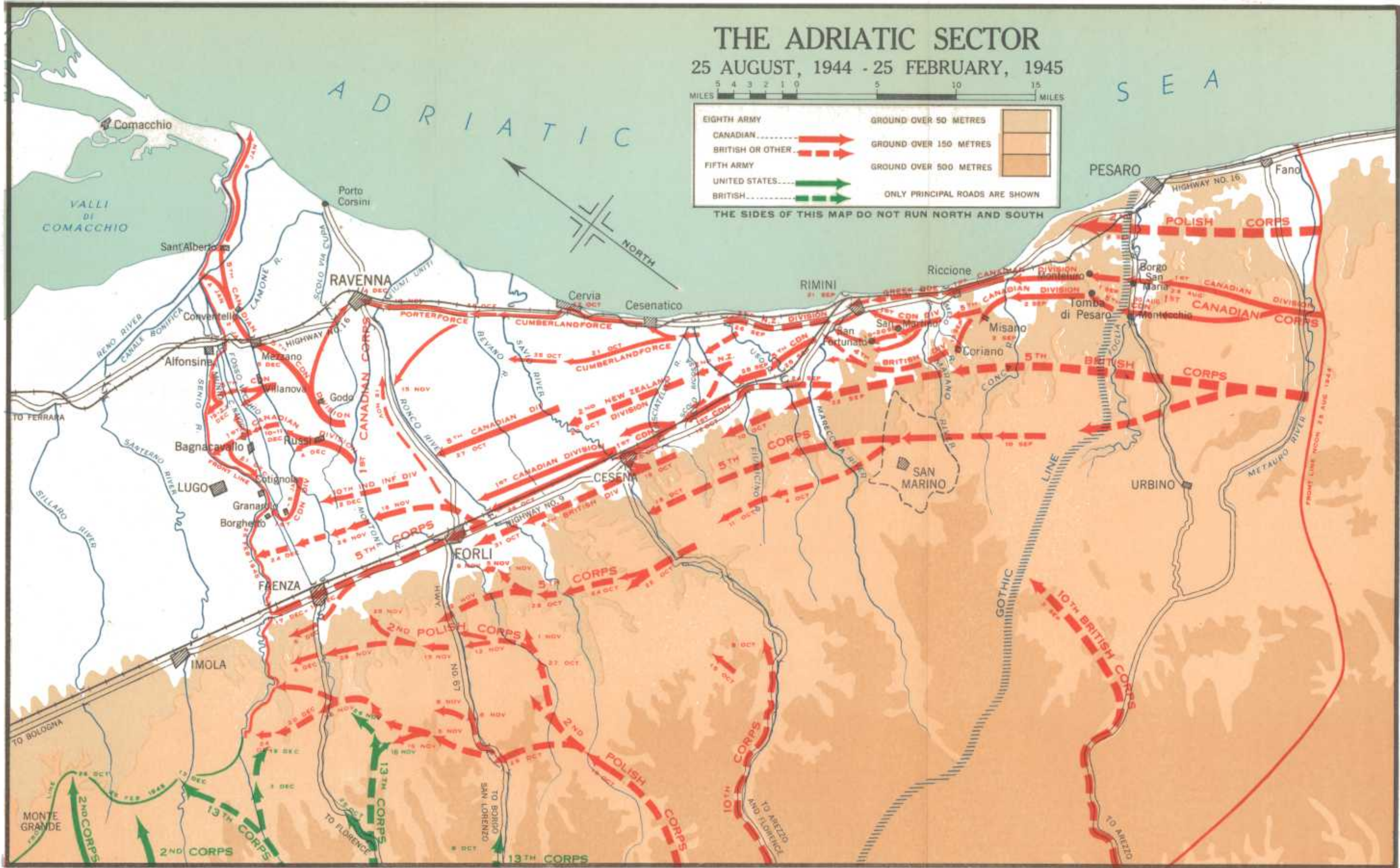
# THE ADRIATIC SECTOR

25 AUGUST, 1944 - 25 FEBRUARY, 1945

MILES 5 4 3 2 1 0 5 10 15 MILES

EIGHTH ARMY	GROUND OVER 50 METRES	
CANADIAN	GROUND OVER 150 METRES	
BRITISH OR OTHER	GROUND OVER 500 METRES	
FIFTH ARMY	GROUND OVER 500 METRES	
UNITED STATES	ONLY PRINCIPAL ROADS ARE SHOWN	
BRITISH	ONLY PRINCIPAL ROADS ARE SHOWN	

THE SIDES OF THIS MAP DO NOT RUN NORTH AND SOUTH



General Crerar by his Government on 25 May 1944. So large a readjustment of forces was not easy to arrange, but now the course of Allied strategy opened the way. At the beginning of February the Combined Chiefs of Staff met at Malta and decided that it was desirable to divert up to five British and Canadian divisions from Italy to North-West Europe; and arrangements were put in hand at once to move the Headquarters of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps, the Corps Troops, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Divisions and the 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Brigade to the First Canadian Army area.

On 9 February General McCreery bade a personal farewell to the senior officers of the Corps in Ravenna, and under the strictest conditions of secrecy the great migration began. First to move were the troops in Corps Reserve — those of the 5<sup>th</sup> Division. On 10 February Corps Headquarters handed over its responsibilities to the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division, which passed under the 5<sup>th</sup> British Corps six days later. The 1<sup>st</sup> Division continued to hold the Senio line until nearly the end of February; relief by troops of the 8<sup>th</sup> Indian Division began on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and was completed on the evening of the 27<sup>th</sup>, the last Canadian formation in the line being Brigadier Bernatchez's 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade. The 1<sup>st</sup> Division had handed control of the sector over to the Indian Division on the 25<sup>th</sup>. The only unit of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Brigade still forward — the Calgary Regiment — had been withdrawn on 20 February.

The movement (Operation "Goldflake") was carried out by motor transport to Italian ports — most of the units moved through Leghorn — thence by sea to Marseilles, and thence again by road up the Rhone valley through France into the Low Countries. Tanks were moved by rail both in Italy and France. Organizing the move was an enormous task, calling for the most careful planning and co-ordination, for it involved passing across the lines of communication of both the armies in Italy and of two army groups during the journey through France. The speed and precision with which it was carried out was a striking testimony to the efficiency of the Movement Control staffs. Not the least important contribution was made by Canadian officers formerly charged with the operation of the port of Dieppe, who directed the movement at Marseilles. At noon on 15 March 1945 the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps, with the 49<sup>th</sup> (West Riding) Division under command pending the arrival of its own divisions, took over the Nijmegen area under First Canadian Army. On 31 March the 5<sup>th</sup> Division came into the line; and on 3 April (35 days after its last battalion left the Senio area) the 1<sup>st</sup> Division concentrated in the Reichswald Forest of Germany, ready to share in the final battles in this decisive theatre.

## TWENTY MONTHS IN ITALY

From the day in 1943 when General Simonds' men first splashed

ashore in Sicily, a total of 91,579 officers and soldiers of the Canadian Army had served in the Italian theatre. Not a few remained there when the Canadian formations withdrew; recalling the Brigade's fine fighting record with justifiable pride, the war diary of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Brigade observed, "All personnel of the Brigade remembered, as they left, that in gaining such a record and name many stalwart- and stout-hearted comrades had fallen — they remained in Italy, not forgotten, as the Brigade moved on". In all, the Army had suffered, during the twenty-month campaign, casualties amounting to 1626 officers and 23,638 other ranks; of these, 420 officers and 5379 other ranks slept in Italian soil.

The strategic utility of the long Italian campaign will be debated for years to come, and this is not the place to discuss the question. We may note, however, that the campaign deprived Germany of her chief ally, assured to us the firm control of the Mediterranean, — opening up its vital sea route to the Middle East, India, and beyond — and gave us bases which greatly increased the effectiveness of our strategic bombing of the German homeland. In the later stages, perhaps, its benefits were less clearly apparent; yet Italy was one of the bases for the liberation of France, and the fighting there was until the end a steady drain upon the enemy's resources and the means of tying down in a secondary theatre some of his best fighting formations. At the beginning of 1945 Allied Force Headquarters calculated that there were in Italy 27 German divisions, of which only one was reckoned to have "a bad fighting record".<sup>6</sup>

In retrospect, it may seem in some sort unfortunate that the Canadians left Italy with the task there still unfinished; and doubtless some soldiers who were proud to have marched in the ranks of the Eighth Army, and who had shared the glories, perils and miseries of the hard campaign from Sicily to the Senio, regretted that they did not share the final Italian triumph. When they moved to North-West Europe that triumph was only a few weeks away. After so many tribulations, it was singularly splendid and complete. Allied Force Headquarters summed it up in one terse, proud sentence "Operations initiated by Fifth and Eighth Armies 9 April resulted in complete disintegration of German forces and culminated in their unconditional surrender 2 May". To this final result the Canadians had made no small contribution; but it was not Canadians who reaped the iron harvest upon the Lombard Plain.

There were other and even deeper satisfactions, however, for the

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<sup>6</sup> There had been even more divisions in the country earlier. The identified total in October 1944 was 28. When the final round began in April 1945, Field-Marshal Alexander had 17 divisions, plus nine independent brigades and four Italian combat groups, against 23 German and four Italian divisions in Italy. In estimating the value of the campaign one should also, perhaps, take account of the German forces in the Balkans and (until our invasion in August 1944) in Southern France; in some degree, at least, these forces too were being contained by the threat of the Allied Armies in Italy.

men of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps. The news of the intended transfer to North-West Europe and the reunion with the First Canadian Army was received with unanimous acclaim, not only because it meant release from a subsidiary field of action and a country which few of them found agreeable, but because it satisfied national aspirations and emotions which were no less real for being largely inarticulate. On the day of the announcement, the 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Brigade's diarist wrote, "It was always hoped that it could happen but never thought that it would happen. Now, however, that the reunion after nearly two years with our own people was to become an actuality it seemed to leave one in a daze, still wondering if it could be true. . ." The separation had been long, but all the Canadians were together again before the end, and there can have been few men of any rank in the Army who did not feel the symbolic fitness of the re-establishment of its unity on the eve of the final struggle. And the men who had fought in Italy had behind them the consciousness of a long hard task well done. Many of them must have remembered with pleasure the words of Field-Marshal Alexander's farewell message to General Foulkes

It is with great sorrow and regret that I see you and your famous Canadian Corps leaving my command.

You have played a distinguished part in our victories in Italy, where you leave behind a host of friends and admirers who will follow your future with the liveliest interest.

Good luck and Godspeed to you all in your coming tasks in the west, and may victory crown your new efforts as it has done in the past.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE CAMPAIGN IN NORTH-WEST EUROPE: THE PLAN AND THE INVASION OF NORMANDY, JUNE 1944

#### THE “OVERLORD” PLAN

Throughout the years of waiting in England the Canadian Army had looked forward to an assault on the German-held shores of the Continent as the fulfilment of its destiny. In their own eyes, and to a certain extent in the eyes of the British people among whom they had lived so long, the Canadians had more and more become *par excellence* the men of the Second Front.

We have seen General McNaughton and General Eisenhower in Washington in 1942 looking forward to an offensive “launched from the United Kingdom across the narrow seas.” This offensive was long deferred — and in retrospect the deferment appears to have been very sound policy; but on 6 June 1944 the attack was finally delivered. Soon after that day the whole Canadian field force was in action, though its effort was not concentrated in one theatre but divided between France and Italy.<sup>1</sup>

There is space here for only a brief outline of the development of the Allied plan for the invasion of North-West Europe. A complete history of this project would necessarily begin shortly after Dunkirk; and the vast extension of the war during 1941, when both Russia and the United States were drawn in, meant that the return of Allied forces to the Continent was likely to become practicable in the not too distant future. We have seen that in April of 1942 the British and American Governments agreed that a cross-Channel invasion should be the principal Allied effort in the defeat of Germany. In June of that year General Eisenhower arrived in England to begin the preparations for United States participation in this enterprise. As already noted, however, a decision was soon taken that major operations in Western Europe were out of the question in 1942. The available Allied resources were in great part diverted to the Mediterranean theatre, and Eisenhower became Supreme Allied Commander there. Before his forces invaded French North Africa the Dieppe raid had underlined the perils of the cross-Channel attack and convinced any who might have been in doubt

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<sup>1</sup> The Normandy campaign and its preliminaries will be found described in rather greater detail in the booklet *Canada's Battle in Normandy*. This chapter and the following one, however, incorporate considerable new material and a few corrections.

that the invasion of France could be undertaken only on an immense scale and after most intensive preparation.

During 1943 the Mediterranean campaign proceeded, and one success followed another. In May the Germans were finally cleared out of Africa, suffering one of the greatest defeats of the war; in July we successfully invaded Sicily; in September we assailed the mainland of Italy; and at the end of the year the whole southern part of the peninsula, as we have seen, was in Allied hands. While these events went forward, planning was in progress on the still greater project of the invasion of North-West Europe. In April of 1943 Lieutenant-General F. E. Morgan began work in London on detailed plans for the operation, under a directive from the Combined Chiefs of Staff, as Chief of Staff, Supreme Allied Commander (COSSAC). The Supreme Allied Commander himself had not yet been appointed. The Combined Chiefs fixed the "target date" for Operation "Overlord", as it was now known, at 1 May 1944. It is of interest that the senior naval and air officers concerned with the planning which now began at COSSAC were respectively the naval and air commanders for the Dieppe raid — Commodore Hughes-Hallett and Air Marshal Leigh-Mallory.

By July, General Morgan and his staff had completed an outline plan. It recommended assaulting on a three-division front on the shores of the Bay of the Seine north of Caen, maintaining the invading force in the beginning by stores landed over beaches with the aid of artificial harbours towed across the Channel in parts and assembled on the French coast. This plan was approved by the political and military leaders of the United Nations during the "Quadrant" conference at Quebec in August. The appointment of a Supreme Allied Commander was long delayed; only on Christmas Eve of 1943 was it announced that General Eisenhower was to come back from the Mediterranean to undertake this greater responsibility. Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder was designated as his Deputy. Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay, the organizer of the Dunkirk evacuation, became Allied Naval Commander, Expeditionary Force, and Air Chief Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory became Air Commander-in-Chief, Allied Expeditionary Air Force. General Montgomery was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the 21<sup>st</sup> Group of Armies, the British component of the ground forces; it was arranged, however, that the ground forces of all nations taking part should be subordinated to the command of this Army Group in the assault phase, during which accordingly General Montgomery would function as General Eisenhower's military commander-in-chief.

Eisenhower and Montgomery both reached England during January 1944. The COSSAC plan was now considerably revised under their direction. The front of assault was widened to either flank, so as to



include both the Ouistreham area on the east and the base of the Cherbourg Peninsula on the west; and the actual force assaulting was increased from three seaborne divisions to five. This meant that more assault craft would be required, and mainly to make another month's production of these available the target date was, by permission of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, postponed to 31 May.

The assault was to be shared by British and American forces, Lieutenant-General Omar N. Bradley's First United States Army attacking on the right or western half of the front and the Second British Army under Lieutenant-General M.C. Dempsey on the eastern sector. Two American airborne divisions were to land on the far right flank, and one British airborne division on the left. The seaborne landings were to be preceded by the most tremendous bombardment by sea and air which the allied air and naval forces could deliver.

### THE CANADIAN ROLE IN THE INVASION

As the "Overlord" plan gradually developed, decisions became possible on the parts which the Canadians would play. The Headquarters of the First Canadian Army had, as we have seen, existed since April 1942, and that of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps had come into existence in January 1943. In the following March Exercise "Spartan" had taken place; and in this exercise, as already described, the Canadian Army had the role of breaking out from an established bridgehead. This, General McNaughton advised Ottawa on 2 January 1943, was the part which it was then anticipated the Canadian Army would play in the forthcoming invasion. Later, however, there was some discussion of the possibility of the Canadian Army Headquarters taking part in the assault, with its own assault divisions under command. Only in January 1944, after the return of General Montgomery from Italy, was it finally confirmed that "The Canadian Army would be used as a follow-up army" as originally planned. The Second Army would have the responsibility for the initial phase; the First Canadian Army would play its part when the time came to break out from the bridgehead.

This, however, did not mean that Canada would not be strongly represented in the first landing. As early as July 1943 it had been decided that at least one Canadian division should take part in it, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division, commanded by Major-General R.F.L. Seller, was selected for training with this in view. The early stages of this training were directed by the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps, whose commander, General Crerar, had initiated, on General McNaughton's instructions, a special programme of study and experimentation in the technique of combined operations. Had this Corps remained in England, it might well have participated in the assault with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian

Division under command; but its departure for Italy in the autumn of 1943 made this impossible. As from 1 December, 1943, therefore, the Division passed, for operational direction and training connected with "Overlord", under the 1<sup>st</sup> British Corps, commanded by Lieutenant-General J. T. Crocker. Under that Corps it landed on D Day and served through the opening phase of the campaign.

During the period of preliminary planning through 1943, the Canadian Army was closely in touch with developments. By arrangement with General Morgan, General McNaughton stationed at COSSAC, as his personal liaison officer, Major-General G. R. Turner, formerly his chief administrative staff officer. The Canadian Army Commander was thus kept fully informed of the growth of the "Overlord" project, and was able to fit his own policy to it.

The training of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division began with preliminary work in combined operations at the Division's stations in Southern England, followed by advanced training at Combined Training Centres in Scotland. In the autumn of 1943 the Division returned to the Channel coast for large-scale exercises with the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force. It now became associated with the naval assault force known as Force "J", which was to put it ashore on D Day. This was the prototype of many assault forces formed later and the embodiment of the Dieppe lesson of the desirability of maintaining such forces on a permanent basis; it was, indeed, the Dieppe ("Jubilee") force, which had been kept in existence and was still commanded at this time by Commodore Hughes-Hallett. Through months of training the Canadians came to know the ships and crews of Force "J" in a very intimate way. Thus was achieved an understanding which was to make a great contribution to the success of the D Day landing. Before D Day Hughes-Hallett left to take an appointment in the Home Fleet, and Force "J" was commanded in the assault by Commodore G. N. Oliver, R.N., who had been commander of one of the naval attack forces at Salerno.<sup>2</sup>

There is no space for a full description of the training programme. Some mention must however be made of Exercise "Pirate", which took place in October 1943 at Studland Bay on the Dorset coast. In this exercise the three Services tested a "combined fire plan" which foreshadowed, on a much smaller scale, the tremendous bombardment of D Day. Although weather compelled the cancellation of the R.A.F. bombing, cannon-fighters attacked the beach defences; the Navy supplied not merely orthodox gun bombardment (provided by destroyers, representing the much heavier vessels that would be

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<sup>2</sup> Hughes Hallett commanded Force "J" both before and after the period (May-August 1943) when he served at COSSAC as principal naval staff officer concerned with the preparation of the "Overlord" outline plan.

available for an actual operation) but also rocket fire. Moreover, the Army itself contributed powerfully to the fire plan, for self-propelled field artillery fired on the beaches from tank landing craft during the approach. Analysing the results of the exercise, those responsible concluded that this fire plan had shown itself practicable and provided a sound basis for planning. A foundation had in fact been laid for the tactical scheme put into practice on the Normandy beaches eight months later. During the intervening period many details were worked out; but it is fair to say that in these early exercises the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division established the technique of the "Overlord" assault, and that they founded it upon the experience so dearly bought by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division at Dieppe.

### THE FINAL STAGE OF PREPARATION

The months preceding D Day witnessed preliminary operations of the deepest significance. The Allied Air Forces were at work over the continent. Chief among their many targets were the rail network of North-West Europe and especially France, airfields in the vicinity of the intended assault area, and strategic objectives in Germany, particularly centres of aircraft production. The bridges across the Seine by which enemy reinforcements from the north could reach the battlefield received very special attention.<sup>3</sup> By D Day the German aircraft industry and other strategic industries had suffered severely; "74 bridges and tunnels leading to the battle area were impassable"; and, perhaps most important of all, the enemy's fighter force had been greatly reduced, particularly by the execution wrought upon it by the United States Army Air Forces, who destroyed vast numbers of fighters in daylight air battles brought on by the American bombing raids. As the British Air Minister said in Parliament in March 1945, the Luftwaffe was "outfought in the air, hammered on its airfields, and smashed in its factories". To these reverses must be attributed its almost total failure to interfere with our invasion concentrations in Southern England, or to offer opposition to our actual assault. "Our D Day experience", wrote General Eisenhower in his report, "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."

During these months the enemy was working feverishly on "secret

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<sup>3</sup> Of course, these bridges would have been equally important if we had landed in the Pas de Calais, so our attacks upon them did not give our plan away. The Loire bridges were left alone until after D Day.

weapons” — flying bombs and long-range rockets — for use against England. His preparations were visible to us, and the Allied Air Forces bombed the launching-sites often and heavily; but it was difficult to estimate with certainty exactly how serious the menace might be. In February of 1944, in consequence, special precautionary plans were made in establishments in the London area. At Canadian Military Headquarters arrangements were made to carry on essential work, if the worst came to the worst, with skeleton staffs operating in the air-raided shelters; the remainder of the staff would have been evacuated from London altogether in the event of really heavy bombardment. The scale of the flying-bomb attack, when it finally materialized after D Day, was fortunately not such as to necessitate bringing these plans into effect.

Although as we have remarked “Overlord” was in its broad aspects an extremely well advertised operation, special precautions were taken to prevent the really important facts from reaching the enemy. On 13 March all travel was suspended between Great Britain or Northern Ireland and neutral Eire. On 17 April a still more drastic measure was taken, diplomatic missions being forbidden until further notice the use of cipher telegrams or uncensored diplomatic bags, while travel out of Britain by individuals, including those enjoying diplomatic immunity, was likewise prohibited. All this served in fact to announce that the great operation could not be far off, and speculation and excitement grew accordingly. “In these parts”, wrote an officer in London in May, “the war of nerves and the air war go on together. Doubtless much history will be made before snow flies.”

It was most important to mislead the enemy as to the direction of our intended thrust: to prevent him, before D Day, from anticipating that we would strike the Normandy coast, and — scarcely less important — after D Day to keep him in painful uncertainty as to whether we did not intend to strike elsewhere as well. Among the steps taken with this in view was the movement of important formations into the toe of Kent, to build up in the eyes of the enemy a threat to the Pas de Calais. In spite of the attractive shortness of the sea passage across the Straits of Dover, we had no intention of assaulting this area, where his defences were at their strongest; but it was very desirable that he should believe that we intended to do so. Accordingly, in April the Headquarters of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps, and a great part of the Corps Troops, moved from Sussex into the Dover area, while the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division made a similar move and set up its Headquarters in Dover itself.

These final months of preparation saw many changes in Canadian command. The accent was on youth and so far as possible on experience of battle. The 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division was taken over by Major-General G. Kitching, lately a brigade commander in Italy. When

General Burns went to Italy to succeed General Simonds as G.O.C. 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division he was replaced in the command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division by Major-General C. Foulkes, formerly Brigadier, General Staff, at Army Headquarters. Many officers who had proved themselves in the Italian fighting came back to give the benefit of their battle wisdom to the unblooded formations in England. To give only a few examples, Brigadier A. B. Matthews, who had been General Simonds' artillery commander in the 1<sup>st</sup> Division, now assumed the parallel appointment in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps; Brigadier G.

Walsh, who had been Commanding Royal Engineer of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division, became Chief Engineer of the Corps; Brigadier R. A. Wyman, who had commanded the 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Brigade in Sicily and Italy, now took over the 2<sup>nd</sup> for the Normandy assault; Lt.-Col. E. L. Booth, whose regiment had so distinguished itself at Termoli and elsewhere, became a Brigadier and took command of the 4<sup>th</sup> Division's armoured brigade (also numbered the 4<sup>th</sup>); while its infantry brigade (the 10<sup>th</sup>) went to Brigadier J. C. Jefferson, who had commanded the Edmontons at Ortona.

During the weeks before the attack many Allied leaders inspected the formations that were to fight the battle. His Majesty the King was one of the visitors, the Prime Minister of Canada another. Generals Eisenhower and Montgomery made it their business to have close contact with the divisions. On 8 March General Stuart cabled the Minister of National Defence describing a five-day tour of Canadian formations which he had just completed with Montgomery, during which the latter had spoken to more than 100,000 troops. He wrote:

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 turnout was excellent but what impressed me most was the very fine type of men we now have throughout the Army.' My impression from the close contacts made on this and other recent visits to formations and establishments and the many conversations I have had with all ranks, is that the morale and spirit of the Army as a whole is almost at its peak...

On 29 May, on the very eve of the operation, Brigadier N. E. Rodger, Chief of Staff of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps, wrote in his diary an account of the Supreme Commander's visit to Canadian divisions that day:

It was a "current commentary" on the state of affairs to which we have fortunately come that we had a 5000-man parade at midday in an open field within sight of the channel off Dover, and without any special A.A. protection) Wonder if Rommel or Kesseiring could do likewise across the way? Eisenhower spoke well to the troops — making the same basic points (Allied team, air cover and "May the Lord be on your shoulder — till we meet again on the Rbjne") but leading up to them in a different way at each place. The troops very much took to him.

These ceremonial observances shared the units' time with final exercises, while commanders and their staffs were engaged in putting

the last touches to plans on their various levels. On 7 April there was an historic meeting at General Montgomery's headquarters at St. Paul's School, London, attended by the Secretary of State for War and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, as well as by Eisenhower, Tedder, Montgomery, Ramsay, Leigh-Mallory, and the British, Canadian and American Army, Corps and Division Commanders. Brigadier Rodger wrote:

(We) found our places by 0900 hours at which time Gen. Montgomery clapped his hands to call us to order. . .

Gen. Montgomery spoke for an hour on the general Army picture and was followed by Admiral Ramsay and Air Chief Marshal Leigh-Mallory to give us the sea and air picture.

After lunch Lt.-Gen. Bradley and his two Corps Commanders gave the details of their part of the initial assault, and then Lt.-Gens. Dempsey and Bucknall and Crocker did the same.

The "pièce de résistance" which Monty had saved for us and before which he released the "No Smoking" ban, was a visit from Winston Churchill who came in with cigar. He talked to us for about ten minutes expressing his confidence in the complete success of the forthcoming operations and wishing us "good luck". His last few sentences were spoken apparently with considerable emotion and all present seemed to realize that it was a moment which would be marked in the history of this war at least.

In the course of May Supreme Headquarters fixed 5 June as D Day. This was the date indicated by conditions of light, moon and tide as most suitable for the operation, although it was considered possible to postpone it to 6 or 7 June if this seemed desirable. As the day approached, the camps of the assault troops near the South Coast were "sealed", and communication with the outside world ceased. On 30 May the move to the "marshalling areas" began, and by 3 June the majority of the men of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade were embarked in their various landing ships and craft in the waters about the Isle of Wight.

There is no need to dwell here on the terrible responsibility which now fell upon General Eisenhower, of deciding whether or not to launch the assault under the dubious conditions which obtained on 4 and 5 June. As is well known, an unfavourable weather forecast forced him to postpone D Day for 24 hours, to the morning of 6 June. Subsequently he decided that the further prospect, though far from ideal, was sufficiently encouraging to justify launching the operation. It went in accordingly on the morning of the 6<sup>th</sup>. We now know that the very circumstances which made the Supreme Commander's decision so painfully difficult proved in fact a great advantage to our enterprise, for the German weather forecasters, less skilful than ours, had not observed the probability of at least temporary improvement which encouraged him to order the assault. They had told their generals that a landing was unlikely if not impossible on the fateful Tuesday. Thus did our good fortune of Sicily repeat itself.

The front to be attacked by the Second Army lay roughly between

Bayeux and the mouth of the River Orne. The 30<sup>th</sup> British Corps directed the right sector, with one division, the 50<sup>th</sup> (Northumbrian), assaulting; the 1<sup>st</sup> British Corps had the left, with two divisions assaulting — the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division to the west and the 3<sup>rd</sup> British Division to the east. The Canadians were thus in the centre of the British front. Their role was to push forward through the gap between Bayeux and Caen, while the British divisions on their flanks took these two towns. It was hoped that by the evening of D Day both would be in our hands, and that the Canadians would be “positioned astride the main road and railway connecting them.

The defences which our troops had to master were formidable. They had been in preparation for years past, but had been considerably strengthened since Field-Marshal Rommel took command of Army Group “B” in February 1944. As we have seen, the “lessons” of Dieppe had done much to shape them. The enemy, assuming that our first object would be the capture of one or more major ports, had directed his efforts primarily to making all such ports impregnable. (It had not occurred to him that we too had learned by Dieppe and subsequent experience and might bring our ports with us.) Yet he had not neglected the intermediate beaches. Although the sands themselves were not mined, there were heavy minefields immediately behind them; and since February they had been encumbered below highwater-mark with obstacles of many types, most of which did carry mines or other explosive charges. The actual defences consisted chiefly of a series of strongpoints comprising heavy concrete gunemplacements (and some open positions) mounting 50-millimetre, 75-millimetre or 88-millimetre guns sited to fire along the beaches in enfilade, supported by mortar and machine-gun positions and with the whole protected by mines and barbed wire. There were four such main strongpoints on the comparatively narrow frontage — between four and five miles — which the Canadians were to assail: on either side of the mouth of the River Seulles at Courseulles-sur-Mer, at Bernières-sur-Mer, and at St. Aubin-sur-Mer. Some distance in rear of these beach defences were heavier batteries varying widely in type, designed for “counter-bombardment” against Allied ships or for fire against landing craft, or troops after landing.

The Canadians were to attack with two brigades forward, the 7<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, commanded by Brigadier H. W. Foster, assaulting on the right sector astride the mouth of the Seulles, while the 8<sup>th</sup>, under Brigadier K. G. Blackader, would land on the left sector, including Bernières and St. Aubin. Each assault brigade was supported by an armoured regiment of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade; two squadrons of each of these regiments were equipped with amphibious “D.D.” tanks, capable of leaving landing craft some distance from the shore and “swimming” in. These were to form the first actual wave of

attack, timed to touch down five minutes before the leading craft.

### BATTLE ON THE BEACHES

The great preliminary aerial bombardment began at 11:31 p.m. on the night of 5-6 June. Until daylight the R.A.F. Bomber Command pounded the ten main coastal batteries in the assault area. Then the British bombers handed over to the United States Army Air Forces, and during the half-hour immediately preceding the ground assault over 1000 American aircraft went for the beach defences. Clouds obliged them to bomb by instruments without direct observation. To avoid the possibility of hitting our landing craft as they closed in, extra precautions were taken which at many points resulted in the bombs falling some distance inland and the enemy positions along the shore escaping their effects.

Soon after the British bombers had left the scene, the naval bombardment began in its turn. Five battleships, two monitors, 19 cruisers, 77 destroyers (60 plus 17 in reserve) and two gunboats fired on the coastal batteries and the beach defences. Then, as the assault flotillas neared the shore and the range shortened, the Army's own artillery added its weight to the storm. On the Canadian front, there were four self-propelled regiments, equipped with 105 millimetre "Priests" (for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division had been given an extra regiment for the assault); each fired at one of the main strongpoints. And just before the first waves touched down, the Navy's rocket craft let go their terrible salvos against the same targets. This close support bombardment was "thickened up" by the fire of destroyers, gun landing craft and support craft; these smaller vessels were responsible for most of the actual damage done by shellfire to the beach defences.

Even this enormous effort by air and sea did not destroy many of the enemy's concrete works. The Royal Navy calculated that, at most, 14 per cent of the positions fired at, were put out of action by its guns. There are on record many complaints from soldiers who hoped to find these defences in ruins and instead found them in action. Nevertheless, there is not the slightest doubt that it was this great bombardment which enabled us to breach the enemy's Atlantic Wall at a cost in casualties far below that which had been generally expected. Some positions were knocked out; others which were left intact were not defended; the majority were defended with less tenacity than would have been the case had it not been for the moral and physical effect upon the German garrisons of the terrific pounding to which their areas had been subjected before the assault.

H Hour (the moment at which the first landing craft were to touch down) varied from west to east along the front of attack according to the



tide. It was calculated at 7:35 a.m. for the 7<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade and 7:45 for the 8<sup>th</sup>. As a result of the roughness of the sea, the two Naval Group Commanders concerned decided to defer H Hour for ten minutes in each case. Even so, the first infantry craft were apparently a little late, but they touched down within a few minutes of eight o'clock. The fact that the assault was made in daylight enabled the Navy to put the units ashore precisely at the points desired; and it increased the accuracy of the naval bombardment.

The state of the sea also interfered with the employment of the D.D. tanks. On the 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade front, indeed, no attempt was made to swim them in, and they landed from their tank landing craft behind the leading infantry. On the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade front, however, the Naval Commander decided at the last moment to launch the tanks offshore. The unit concerned here was the 6<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Regiment (1<sup>st</sup> Hussars); it lost eight Shermans before the shore was reached, but of the rest some at least came up the beach ahead of the infantry and by engaging the defences undoubtedly prevented many infantry casualties. The assaulting battalions warmly acknowledged that the tanks' work had been invaluable.

The beach battle was somewhat fiercer on the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade's front than on the 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade's. The enemy had more artillery in his defences on the 7<sup>th</sup>'s beaches, and to make matters worse the craft carrying the armoured vehicles of the assault engineers whose business it was to clear the beach obstacles, and who should have touched down five minutes before the infantry, were delayed. Both the Royal Winnipeg Rifles, on the right around Graye-sur-Mer, and the Regina Rifle Regiment, on the left at Courseulles, lost many men. The Winnipegs were one of the few units to come under really heavy fire before landing (in most cases the enemy seems not to have recovered from the stunning effect of the bombardment until our leading infantry were ashore). "B" Company of this battalion had the task of clearing the westernmost of the four strongpoints. In due course it joined the main body, its mission completed — "the Company Commander and twenty-six other ranks having survived the assault on the three casemates and twelve machine-gun emplacements". The stubborn resistance of the beach positions did not prevent the beginning of inland advance, and within an hour and a half of the first touch-down the Brigade's reserve battalion (the Canadian Scottish Regiment) had landed.<sup>4</sup>

The 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade had rather less trouble, although here too the enemy's concrete had been relatively little affected by the bombardment and the infantry had to capture the beach strongpoints by a costly

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<sup>4</sup> One company of the Canadian Scottish had taken part in the assault, landing on the extreme right under the command of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles.

process of infiltration and assault. On this sector the right assault battalion was the Queen's Own Rifles of Canada, the left one the North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment. Le Régiment de la Chaudière was in reserve, and the tank support was provided by the 10<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Regiment (The Fort Garry Horse). Some of the Germans in the St. Aubin strongpoint did not surrender until evening, but the attacking units nevertheless got off the beaches rapidly and it was only in villages some distance inland that they met serious delay.

As we have seen, the objectives prescribed for D Day were ambitious. The plan required the Canadians, and the divisions on either flank, to get about ten miles inland by nightfall. It was intended that the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade should drive straight on to the final objectives around Putot-en-Bessin and Bretteville-l'Orgueilleuse; but the 8<sup>th</sup>, closer to Caen, was to halt on an intermediate objective some five miles north of the city, leaving it to the reserve Brigade (Brigadier D. G. Cunningham's 9<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade) to pass through and occupy the left half of the final divisional objective, on high ground just west of Caen.

As it turned out, none of the final objectives was actually made good on D Day, in the Canadian sector or any other. (Two troops of tanks of the 1<sup>st</sup> Hussars did however reach the objective at Bretteville-l'Orgueilleuse, and withdrew after inflicting casualties on enemy infantry.) The time-table was slightly behind from the very beginning. Although the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade made good progress, it did not get beyond its intermediate objective, and consolidated for the night east and south-east of Creully. The story in the left sector was similar. The 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade duly landed about Bernières (where General Keller with his small tactical headquarters also went ashore at 11:45 in the morning); but as a result of the trouble encountered by the 8<sup>th</sup> in the inland villages it was late in the afternoon before Brigadier Cunningham's advanced guard, the North Nova Scotia Highlanders and the 27<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Regiment (Sherbrooke Fusiliers Regiment), could pass through and begin moving southward. It too was delayed by stubborn enemy machine-gun positions, and halted for the night concentrated some four miles north of Caen, with the balance of the Brigade further in rear.

Our losses on D Day, in this great assault undertaken with so many doubts and fears, were inevitably considerable; and yet, in all the circumstances, it must be said that they were gratifyingly few. The plan had provided for landing that day some 14,500 Canadian soldiers; the number actually landed may have been slightly smaller. Of this force, as closely as we can calculate, 946 officers and men became casualties on 6 June. Of these 335 were killed in action or died of wounds.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> All these figures refer merely to the seaborne assault force, and take no account of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Parachute Battalion, which dropped with the 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division. That battalion had

Casualties actually suffered on the beaches cannot be distinguished from those sustained during the subsequent advance inland. There was a remarkable contrast with the Dieppe operation, where a force of just under 5000 Canadians sustained more than 3300 casualties, over 900 of them fatal; it must be remembered, however, that a large proportion of the Dieppe casualties were suffered during the withdrawal, and indeed the majority were men who became prisoners as a result of the impossibility of evacuation. Even so, the difference is notable, and we have suggested that the price of the success of 1944 was paid, in part, by the men of 1942.

Let no one think, however, that the Normandy landing was a cheap or an easy victory. It was an extraordinary military performance. The legendary fortified line upon which a most ingenious and painstaking enemy had lavished so much art during the years of his occupation of France was broken and reduced to nullity in the short hours of a summer morning. This triumph — a triumph so complete that many observers, laymen and soldiers alike, found it for a moment scarcely believable — was the fruit of superlatively skilful and thorough strategic and tactical planning; of the mobilization of organized power by land, sea and air on a scale that still staggers the imagination; and, not least, of inspiring fortitude and determination on the part of the thousands of ordinary Allied soldiers who stormed the beaches. It is well to remember the mental as well as the material hazards which these men faced. Every one of them knew the story of Dieppe, and every one knew that the enemy had greatly strengthened his defences since 1942. Our own engines of publicity had effectively advertised the Atlantic Wall, building it up into a most formidable bogey in the eyes of the public and, inevitably, of our troops; making it, indeed, more formidable in prospect than it proved to be in reality. The long months during which the coming perilous operation was the subject of such constant speculation and discussion had their due effect; and there can have been no man in the assault forces who did not have to face and vanquish terrible unspoken fears within himself. This, perhaps, was an even harder victory than the one later gained against human antagonists on the beaches. To the men who won them both the free world owes a debt too vast for calculation.

The Canadian soldiers who gave their lives in this great enterprise and in the further bloody fighting to which it was the prelude take their rest today north of Beny-sur-Mer. Their place is high, and from beside the Cross of Sacrifice that guards it one looks down over the pleasant green fields and woods of the Bessin to the sea they traversed and the

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117 casualties on D Day; as a result of its being dropped over too wide an area, 91 men became prisoners. There were 20 fatal casualties.

little seaside towns where they waged what was, for many, their first battle and their last. Courseulles, Bernières and St. Aubin — there they lie, marked by their church-spires rising above the trees. Nothing could be more peaceful now, or more unlike that wild June day when devastation rained from the skies and the Allied armies stormed ashore; and the visitor may think, perhaps, of other peaceful little towns, far away, from which these lads came of their own will to fight and die for the freedom of man on the beaches of Calvados.

### THE ADVANCE TO THE FINAL OBJECTIVES AND THE FIRST GERMAN COUNTER-ATTACKS

On the morning of 7 June the Canadian brigades pushed on southwards. On the right, the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade met only scattered and ineffective resistance, and was able to go straight through to the final objectives astride the road and railway between Caen and Bayeux. The Royal Winnipeg Rifles and the Regina Rifle Regiment vied with each other to be first to reach the goal. It was a close finish — so close that the historian, on the basis of the units' own records, finds it impossible to say with certainty which actually won. But one point is clear. A couple of days later General Dempsey wrote to General Keller: "A battalion of 3 Cdn Division was the first unit in the Second Army to reach the final objective. That is something which you will always remember with pride."

In the Canadian left sector the story was different. At this point we must note the nature of the German dispositions. These have been described by Viscount Montgomery in his Dispatch:

Rommel and von Rundstedt were not in agreement on the manner in which invading forces should be dealt with. Rommel, who was no strategist, favoured a plan for the total repulse of an invader on the beaches; his theory was to aim at halting the hostile forces in the immediate beach area by concentrating a great volume of fire on the beaches themselves and to seaward -of them; he advocated thickening up the beach defences, and the positioning of all available reserves near the coast. Von Rundstedt, on the other hand, favoured the "crust-cushion-hammer" plan; this implied a "crust" of infantry manning the coast line, with a "cushion" of infantry divisions in tactical reserve in close in rear, and a "hammer" of armoured forces in strategic reserve further inland. The cushion was designed to contain enemy forces which penetrated the crust, and the hammer was available for launching decisive counter attacks as required. These differing theories led to a compromise; the armoured reserves were generally kept well back, but the majority of the infantry divisions was committed to strengthening the crust. The result was that, in the event, the Panzer divisions were forced to engage us prematurely and were unable to concentrate to deliver a co-ordinated blow: until it was too late.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> This interpretation is in accordance with interrogations of enemy commanders carried out

The coastal defences were held by infantry divisions, usually static formations with limited transport. The whole British front of assault was garrisoned by the 716<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. There were two of the armoured divisions at hand here: the 21<sup>st</sup> Panzer Division and the 12<sup>th</sup> S.S. Panzer Division (Ritlerjugend). The latter, a formation of fanatical young Nazis which was soon to establish a reputation for barbarity by the murder of Canadian prisoners, was in reserve south of Rouen; the former, embodying in itself the unhappy results for the Germans of the compromise above referred to, was divided. Part of its infantry was close to the coast on either side of Caen, but the armour was well to the south near Falaise. It was virtually impossible, in these circumstances, for the Division to deliver a co-ordinated counter-attack. It did in fact get its tanks, or some of them, into action on the evening of 6 June against the 3<sup>rd</sup> British Division, and its commander, Lt.-Gen. Feuchtinger, claims that they actually reached the sea at Lion-sur-Mer; but counterattacks and the excellence of the British anti-tank defence forced them to retire at once.

To make matters worse for the Germans, the actions of Rundstedt as Commander-in-Chief West were severely hobbled by still higher authority. Several armoured divisions were directly under the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces and could not be committed to action without Hitler's approval. Although details of the Allied operations were slow in reaching his Headquarters, Rundstedt asked permission of Berlin to put in these reserves as soon as it seemed clear that an important effort was being made in the Caen area. This request was sent, he says, at four in the morning of 6 June, shortly after the paratroop landings and long before the seaborne assault. But not until four that afternoon was authority received to move the divisions. The consequence was that the immediate armoured counter-attack against the Canadians could not be delivered until the following morning.

It was the 9<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade that received the weight of it. The North Nova Scotia Highlanders and the 27<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiment pushed on again early on the 7<sup>th</sup> to seize the Brigade's final objectives. They met considerable resistance, but before noon they had occupied Buron and driven on to Authie, which stands on the high ground marking the objectives. The village was captured by the leading troops after a skirmish, but it was not held for long. The formidable units of the 12<sup>th</sup> S.S. Panzer Division, which had begun to move even before authority arrived from the Supreme Command, had marched all night

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by Canadian officers. Rundstedt, it is true, declined to admit any disagreement between himself and his subordinate: "Rommel was under my command, you know", he observed. Nevertheless, his Chief of Staff, General Gunther Blumentritt, agreed that there was a difference of opinion and that the result was "an unhappy compromise".

and were now coming into action.

As opposition had stiffened and the advanced guard was now both dispersed and dangerously isolated, it was decided to withdraw the Canadian platoons who had entered Authie and concentrate somewhat to the north. Before this could be done the counterattack struck. A tank battalion and a battalion of Panzer Grenadiers came at Authie from the east. The village was overrun and most of the men in it killed or captured, and a company of the North Nova Scotias in position between Authie and Buron was likewise shot to pieces. In the early evening Buron itself was violently attacked and the single company of Highlanders holding it lost very heavily before the survivors were brought off by a tank attack supported by artillery. Buron could not be held; and what was left of the advanced guard fell back and dug in with the other battalions of the Brigade around Les Buissons, about two miles north of Authie and about three-and-a-half from the edge of Caen.

The impetuous German attack, catching our advanced guard off balance, had inflicted very heavy casualties; the war diary of the North Nova Scotia Highlanders recorded that the regiment had lost 245 all ranks, killed, wounded or missing in the day's fighting; and a decided check had been administered to our operations. Yet this local counter-attack in itself represented no menace to our bridgehead, and the enemy failed to follow it up. The rapid development of our penetration had in fact forced him to throw it in on a limited scale instead of mounting a larger and better co-ordinated operation a little later. He had himself suffered heavy losses in the day's fighting, and according to the evidence of some of his commanders his armoured units were short, of petrol. The Germans had instantly recognized the Caen area as the pivot of their defence against our invasion. By vigorous local efforts they had succeeded in keeping us out of it, but in the absence of infantry divisions (the 716<sup>th</sup> had been virtually destroyed in the assault) they were compelled to use their armoured formations simply to hold the line. By 8 June there were three armoured divisions opposite the British and Canadians from Tilly-sur-Seulles to north of Caen. Had these been available in reserve they could have been utilized for a most formidable stroke against us; as it was, they were committed to the mere holding of ground and to local counter-attacks. But they were able to prevent further progress by our forces on this flank. Caen, which had been one of our D Day objectives, did not fall into British hands for more than a month.

A local armoured attack quite as fierce as that which had hit the 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade on D plus one fell upon the 7<sup>th</sup> on D plus two. In the course of the morning determined infiltration by enemy tanks and infantry encircled and largely cut to pieces the three forward companies of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles in and around Putot-en-Bessin. Brigadier Foster

proceeded to organize a counter-stroke. That evening a most gallant though costly attack by the Canadian Scottish completely restored the situation and recovered Putot, which the Scottish held thereafter.

The Regina Rifle Regiment had heavy fighting later this same day in its positions around Bretteville-l'Orgueilleuse and Norrey-en-Bessin. There was a desperate night-long battle in the former village against Panther tanks,<sup>7</sup> of which twenty-two are said to have been circling about in the vicinity of the Battalion Headquarters. It was a wild night; but the Panthers paid for their temerity, the enemy's infantry failed to gain a foothold, and when dawn came Bretteville and Norrey were still in Canadian keeping.

During 7 June the 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade was engaged in clearing out bypassed snipers who were still troublesome in the rear areas, and in making an unsuccessful attack against the fortified radar station west of Douvres-la-Délivrande, a formidable position which actually held out until 17 June. On the 11<sup>th</sup> an attack was put in in the right sector with a view to seizing commanding ground near Cheux, south of Norrey. The Queen's Own Rifles attacked through the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade positions with strong armoured support. The attack penetrated as far as Le Mesnil-Patry but was then stopped in its tracks by very heavy opposition. The 1<sup>st</sup> Hussars and the Queen's Own both had many casualties. The same day the other units of the 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade assisted the 46<sup>th</sup> Royal Marine Commando in clearing the nearby valley of the little River Mue.

By 11 June the first phase of Operation "Overlord" was at an end. The bridgehead was secure, although in the eastern sector the failure to take Caen meant that it was much more contracted than had been intended. All along the Allied line the assault had been successful. The airborne troops, who began to drop soon after midnight on the night of 5-6, June, had made a most important contribution; on the British flank the fact that they secured bridges over the Orne intact was subsequently of great significance. The 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Parachute Battalion,

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<sup>7</sup> The 45-ton "Panther" (Mark V) first appeared in action in 1943, on the Russian front. It mounted a long 75-millimetre gun, whereas the 56-ton "Tiger" (Mark VI) had an 88. The Panther was faster than the Tiger. The latter appeared in Normandy in a new form — the "Royal Tiger", 67 tons in weight and mounting a still longer and more powerful 88. Although Panthers were numerous in Normandy from the beginning, the Tiger in either of its forms was relatively rare. This was as well, for as a Canadian tank officer wrote feelingly, it was "a hell of a tank". The Panther, however, was quite formidable enough. It was not Allied policy to produce such heavy tanks. The Churchill, the heaviest British tank used in this campaign, weighed just under 40 tons; the Sherman, the American medium tank which was the Allied mainstay of all work and with which Canadian armoured brigades were equipped, weighed 30. The Sherman's armour was not proof against the best German guns. It should be added that in Normandy as elsewhere the enemy used many Mark IV medium tanks — 23-tonners. On this question of Allied versus German tanks, the interested reader is referred to General George C. Marshall's report, *The Winning of the War in Europe and the Pacific* (pages 95-6).

although drop-ped in error over much too wide an area, gave a good account of itself and effectively repulsed a heavy counter-attack on the morning of 7 June.

The bloodiest beach fighting had taken place on the part of the First United States Army front known as "Omaha", north-east of Isigny, where a good German field division had been on the coast. There was a desperate struggle here during the first two days, but the Americans' foothold gradually deepened and on 9 June they were able to take the offensive effectively. By that time the various bridgeheads were linked up all along the front of assault except for a gap between the two American sectors near Carentan, and contact was made across this the next day.

The performance of the Canadian troops had given the deepest satisfaction to their commanders. On the evening of 9 June General Keller had sent to General Crerar a cheerful progress report:

Last two days spent repelling violent counter-attacks. Enemy armour, selfpropelled guns and infantry attacks forced my left back slightly but right has held and necessary adjustments made despite all-out ferocity of enemy and treacherous snipers' attacks. Losses approximately 1400-1500 all ranks. 7<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade particularly stubborn and despite heavy casualties counter-attacked and restored situation in heroic manner. All of us still fighting like mad. Am very proud of them...



## CHAPTER XII

### THE CAMPAIGN IN NORTH-WEST EUROPE: THE BATTLE OF NORMANDY, JUNE — AUGUST 1944

#### THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE BRIDGEHEAD

During the latter part of June the front of the 1<sup>st</sup> British Corps in Normandy saw little heavy fighting. The 30<sup>th</sup> Corps put in a powerful thrust south of Bayeux on the 13<sup>th</sup> of the month and momentarily captured Villers Bocage; but violent enemy reaction, aided by opportune reinforcements, forced our troops back to the vicinity of Caumont. Intensive ding-dong fighting followed in this area without producing any great change in positions. These operations served, however, to pin down a considerable proportion of the enemy's strength and thereby to facilitate General Bradley's advance towards Cherbourg. The American troops had bitter fighting during this advance, but on 26 June the great port city fell into their hands.

General Montgomery was extremely anxious to take Caen, and proposed to do this by "a pincer movement from both flanks"; subsequently however he abandoned this plan in favour of a single blow on the western side. On 26 June, accordingly, the 8<sup>th</sup> British Corps attacked through the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division (which except for its artillery was not itself engaged), captured the high ground near Cheux which the Canadians had tried for on the 11<sup>th</sup>, and on the 27<sup>th</sup> established a bridgehead across the River Odon some seven miles south-west of Caen. Against this grave threat to the city the Germans deployed a great force of their best troops. The 2<sup>nd</sup> S.S. Panzer Corps, with the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> S.S. Panzer Divisions under command, had been hastily brought from Russia and now went into action here, along with parts of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> S.S. Panzer Divisions and other formations. The Germans' effort succeeded in checking the advance but did not eliminate the salient or the bridgehead. Once again the enemy divisions were committed piecemeal as elements became available, and again they failed to achieve a large-scale coordinated counter-attack. An attempt on 29 June to put in such a thrust was broken up by Allied air attacks and artillery and naval fire and never really got under way.

Throughout this period the Canadian front was relatively static and the Canadian role was defence of the bridgehead while it was built up. Offensive operations were planned but postponed. Had the 8<sup>th</sup> Corps made greater progress, it was intended to launch the Canadians against Carpiquet while the other divisions of the 1<sup>st</sup> Corps attacked further

east, but this project was put off as a result of the check.

The Allied force in the bridgehead had grown rapidly. By 15 June half a million men and 77,000 vehicles were ashore in France, and construction of the two artificial harbours was well under way. Four days later, however, an almost unprecedented summer gale seriously threatened our communications. Unloading virtually ceased for three and a half days, the American harbour was so badly damaged that no attempt was made to complete it, and the British one also suffered. But as soon as the gale had blown itself out the "build-up" was resumed. It was some six days behind schedule, but the result was only a slight delay to Allied operations. One month after D Day there were nearly a million Allied soldiers in Normandy.

By the end of June we could take stock. Our "lodgement area" was secure and had been materially enlarged, although the great enemy force assembled on the eastern flank had so far prevented us from taking Caen. On 30 June General Montgomery defined strategic policy for the next phase in a directive addressed to Generals Bradley and Dempsey. This ran in part as follows:

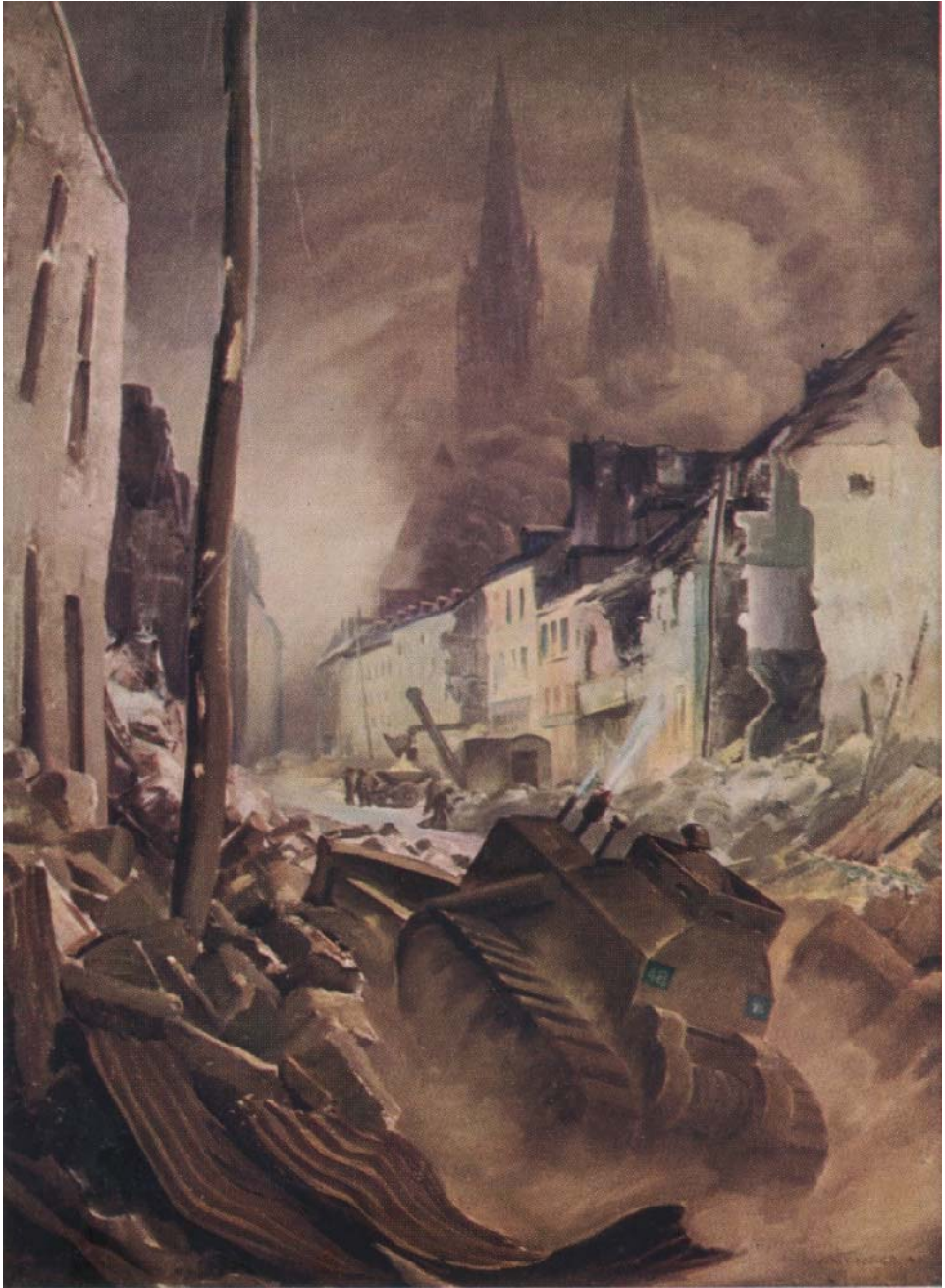
*The General. Situation*

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.

*Plan in Outline*

7. 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. 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 — Alençon would threaten seriously the enemy concentration in the Caen area and its "get-away" south of Paris.

Within this general plan, the task of the Second British Army was to hold the main enemy forces in the area between Caen and Villers



ENGINEERS CLEARING ROADS THROUGH CAEN, JULY 1944

From a painting by Capt. O. N. Fisher

The bulldozer shown belongs to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Field Park Company, Royal Canadian Engineers (3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division). In the background are the imposing towers of the Abbaye aux Hommes, built by William the Conqueror.

Bocage, to have no setbacks, and to develop operations for the capture of Caen as opportunity offered — “and the sooner the better”. The task of the First U.S. Army was, beginning on 3 July, to develop an offensive southwards on the right flank, pivoting on its left about Caumont, and swinging south and east on to the general line Caumont — Vire — Mortain — Fougères. On reaching the base of the Cherbourg peninsula at Avranches, the right Corps was “to be turned westwards into Brittany”, while the rest of the Army was “to direct a strong right wing in a wide sweep, south of the bocage country” towards the lines Laval — Mayenne and Le Mans — Alençon.

On this general pattern the battle was actually fought during the next seven weeks. Much would depend on whether the enemy would continue to fight strongly on the bridgehead line. General Montgomery’s hope and object, as stated in an earlier directive of 18 June, were “to make the German Army come to our threat and to defeat it between the Seine and the Loire”. As it turned out, Hitler enforced precisely the policy which the Allied commander desired.

The Canadian Army Headquarters had as yet played no part. General Crerar himself with his small tactical headquarters had crossed the Channel in H.M.C.S. “Algonquin” on 18 June and established himself in the village of Amblie. The course of operations, however, led General Montgomery to the decision that the arrival of the main Canadian Army Headquarters and Army Troops would have to be postponed. Fighting divisions were the great need, and until the painfully crowded bridgehead could be expanded on the east there would be no room for another body of Army Troops. Crerar was obliged to stand by, awaiting the time when conditions would permit him to take over a sector of the front. In the meantime, however, arrangements were made to bring in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division and the Headquarters of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps; and they arrived in Normandy at the end of the first week in July.

#### THE CAPTURE OF CAEN AND THE ATTACK ACROSS THE ORNE

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division returned to the offensive on 4 July with an attack designed to take Carpiquet village and airfield as a preliminary to the capture of Caen. The 8<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, strengthened by the Royal Winnipeg Rifles, went in with the support of armour, the guns of the fleet and a great concentration of land artillery. The village was taken and held, but after fierce fighting we were able to retain only part of the airfield; and Carpiquet remained a hot and unpleasant spot, subject to constant shelling and repeated counter-attacks, until Caen itself fell.

It was on 8 July that the 1<sup>st</sup> British Corps delivered the final attack against the city. Three divisions took part, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division being on the right, and the R.A.F. Bomber Command was employed to clear the way. The 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade took Buron and Authie, where it had been so stiffly checked on D plus One; the 7<sup>th</sup> drove through to take Cuesy and Ardenne, further east; and the 8<sup>th</sup> completed the conquest of Carpiquet. By evening our troops were on the edge of Caen, and 9 July saw the occupation of the city as far as the River Orne. Caen had paid a tragic price for its liberation, great areas having been ruined by the preliminary air bombardment and many people killed or injured; and yet the reception of our battalions could scarcely have been warmer.

Immediately south of the Orne at Caen are industrial suburbs, Faubourg de Vaucelles and Colombelles. Farther south again lie rich and pleasant fields, stretching away towards the old town of Falaise, the birthplace of William the Conqueror. Falaise stands 21 miles south-east of Caen and is connected with it by Route Nationale No. 158, the "Falaise Road" famous in the annals of this campaign. For a good 15 miles from Caen the ground along this arrow-straight road rises — gradually, sometimes almost imperceptibly, but steadily. Caen is only a few metres above sea-level, but near Potigny, five miles short of Falaise, the hills flanking the road reach an elevation of over 200 metres. Up this long, smooth, dangerous slope the Canadians were to fight their way for weeks to come. It is a formidable glacis. In general the land is open wheatfields, offering painfully little protection to tanks or infantry advancing southward; yet there are few areas which do not have their small patches of woodland, sufficient to conceal the anti-tank guns with which the enemy was so well provided. The waist-high grain, moreover, gave good cover to his lurking machine-guns.

After the fall of Caen, General Montgomery's immediate object on this flank was to break out across the Orne and establish his forces on the high ground to the south. He aimed now to make use of those crossings over the lowest reach of the river which the airborne forces had seized on D Day. Over these the 8<sup>th</sup> Corps, with three British armoured divisions, would pass and strike south. Simultaneously General Simonds' 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps, which had taken over the Caen sector on 11 July with the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Divisions and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade under command, would advance across the Orne from Caen itself and the area immediately east of it and seize the heights west of the great road. The bombers were again to strike a very heavy blow in advance of the ground forces. The British called this operation of which so much was hoped "Goodwood"; the Canadians named their part "Atlantic". It began on the morning of 18 July.

The offensive, as it turned out, added some 35 square miles to the Allied bridgehead, but did not give us the heights. The bombers made

what Air Chief Marshal Leigh-Mallory called in his dispatch "the heaviest and most concentrated air attack in support of ground forces ever attempted," dropping 7700 tons; then the British armour, which had been assembled behind the Orne without arousing the enemy's suspicions, went forward across the bridges. Fanning out over the fields beyond, it made fair progress during the morning. But the Germans were strong on the ground, and their reaction was prompt and violent. On the plain about Cagny, some four miles east of Caen, and on the lower slopes of the rising ground around the village of Bourguébus to the south, the tanks ran into a formidable screen of anti-tank artillery; and in the latter area the 1<sup>st</sup> S.S. Panzer Division (Leibstandarte S.S. Adolf Hitler) came into action. Here the 11<sup>th</sup> British Armoured Division lost over 100 tanks during the day, and the advance came to a stop. Only secondary gains were made by the armour thereafter.

In the meantime, the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Brigades of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division had also crossed the Orne, just below Caen, and set about clearing Colombelles and the neighbouring communities south of the river. This job was done, not without bitter and confused fighting and after some delay. The brigades joined hands with the 7<sup>th</sup>, which had come straight across the river from Caen into Faubourg de Vaucelles, and General Foulkes' 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division passed through and struck towards the high ground. During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> it cleared the area about the junction of the Orne and the Odon and pressed on south in the face of stiffening resistance.<sup>1</sup> The next day the weather broke, and the advance was carried on through seas of mud.

Four miles or so south of Caen, between the Orne and the National Road, stands a kidney-shaped eminence, an outlying foothill of the higher hill-mass closer to Falaise. It is covered with cultivated fields and is usually called, after a hamlet situated upon its northern and eastern end above the road, the Verrières Ridge. It is of no great height—its loftiest point, at the west end above Fontenayle-Marmion, is 88 metres — but it completely commands the ground to the north. For this natural outpost of the new German line there was to be desperate fighting for a fortnight to come, and on and about it much Canadian blood was to be poured out. It was on 20 July that we first set foot on those perilous slopes. That afternoon the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade attacked, with the Essex Scottish under command. The South Saskatchewan Regiment reached its objectives on the central portion of the Ridge, but before it could consolidate and get its anti-tank guns up it was struck by enemy tanks and cut to pieces; the remnants rolled back down the slope. The

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<sup>1</sup> On the 18<sup>th</sup>, the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade's commander, Brigadier Sherwood Lett, who had been wounded while commanding this same brigade at Dieppe, was again wounded and had to relinquish the command. Brigadier J. E. Ganong took over the Brigade a few days later.

Germans, pushing on, hit the Essex and drove them back with heavy loss. At the northeast end of the Ridge, Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal had a similar experience; of two forward companies which obtained a foothold on it, very few men came back. Next day the Germans continued to attack fiercely, and the Essex again suffered severely. This unit had over 300 casualties in the two days' fighting. In the evening an effective counter-attack by the Canadian Black Watch, with tank and artillery support, recovered some of the ground that had been lost. Our forward positions were stabilized on the lower slopes of the north end of the Ridge.

On 18 July, the same day on which "Goodwood" began, the Americans, whose southward offensive commencing on 3 July had been hampered by consistently vile weather, finally captured the shattered remains of the old fortress town of St. Lô, which the Germans had defended with the utmost bitterness. The stage was now set for General Bradley to deliver what General Montgomery called "the main blow of the whole Allied plan" — the attack that was to break through the German defensive system on the western flank, carry the American armies clear into Brittany and launch them on that "wide sweep" to the eastward, prescribed in Montgomery's directive of 30 June, which was to threaten to envelop the great enemy forces massed opposite the British. But if this blow was to have its full effect it was essential that those forces should remain on the eastern flank. To ensure this, continued pressure by General Dempsey's Anglo-Canadian army was of the first importance. General Eisenhower laid great emphasis on this aspect in his discussions with his ground commander; and on 21 July Montgomery issued a further directive instructing Bradley to unleash his offensive (already delayed some days by the weather) and Dempsey to operate intensively to induce the enemy to build up his main strength east of the Orne "so that our affairs on the western flank can proceed with greater speed". This was the origin of Operation "Spring", the attack which the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps launched simultaneously with Bradley's stroke.

#### THE CANADIAN HOLDING ATTACK ON 25 JULY

The battles about Caen had been hard and bloody from the beginning; and the final phase of the campaign there was not to belie its established character. The enemy continued to regard this area as the key to his whole position in Normandy. His line on the high ground astride the great road was very strong by nature. To make our problem harder, Operation "Goodwood" had led him to bring still more troops — and these some of his best — into this region. He had pulled the 2<sup>nd</sup> Panzer Division and the 9<sup>th</sup> S.S. Panzer Division eastward across the

Orne from his central sector, and the 116<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division had, we now know, arrived from the Pas de Calais and was in reserve north of Falaise. There were now, in fact, six enemy armoured divisions in or closely in rear of the comparatively short sector east of the Orne. A more formidable proposition than an attack on this line in these circumstances it would be difficult to imagine; such an enterprise, however, was essential to the success of the Allied plan as a whole, and this "holding attack" designed to pin the enemy's forces to their ground in the east was to be the Canadian contribution to the American success in the west. Lovers of historical coincidence may reflect on the fact that the two operations were launched on the 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Lundy's Lane, the most bitterly contested battle ever fought between American and Anglo-Canadian forces. Those forces were now fighting against a common enemy, and on this 25<sup>th</sup> of July they stood on the threshold of perhaps the greatest climax of the war.

For Operation "Spring" General Simonds had under his command the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Divisions and the 7<sup>th</sup> and Guards Armoured Divisions. His plan was to attack in the first phase with the infantry; if this went well and the enemy's forward line was pierced, the armour would be put in to exploit and seize positions on the high ground east of the Falaise road and well to the south. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was to attack west of the road, its objectives on the right being the villages of May-sur-Orne at the west end of the Verrières Ridge and Fontenay-le-Marmion just below its southern slope; on the left it was to take Verrières itself and the mining village of Rocquancourt beyond. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, east of the road, was to take Tilly-la-Campagne. The attack was to begin at three-thirty in the morning, the troops being aided in finding their way forward by "artificial moonlight" created by searchlights directed on the clouds. Such was the plan; the attempt to carry it out, under the conditions which we have sketched, produced a singularly desperate and costly day's fighting.

At the appointed time the North Nova Scotia Highlanders, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division unit charged with the attack on Tilly, moved off from Bourguébus. At first things went well; the leading troops got into Tilly and it seemed that they would make the village good. But the enemy had no intention whatever of giving it up. He counter attacked in strength with infantry and armour; the tank squadron supporting the Highlanders was virtually wiped out; the platoons in and around Tilly were cut off. After dark on the evening of the 25<sup>th</sup> a good many survivors succeeded in making their way back to Bourguébus. Other parties fought on for hours until overwhelmed. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division's front the ground was particularly unfavourable to the attackers. There was little cover, and the approaches across which the assault had to be delivered were dominated by enemy positions on the Ridge. In addition they were subject to



enfilade from high ground held by the enemy on the far side of the Orne. To make matters worse, the subterranean workings of the large iron mines in this area (there were shafts at Rocquancourt and north of May-sur-Orne, and extensive tunnels) gave the enemy special advantages; they certainly afforded him cover from our gunfire, and probably gave him the means of infiltrating back into positions which had been cleared. Throughout the operation machine-gun fire was reported coming from points well in rear of our own front line.

The attack here was carried by the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade on the left and the 5<sup>th</sup> on the right. In the former sector the most solid success of the whole operation was gained. The Royal Hamilton Light Infantry, storming up the gentle forward slope of the Ridge, took Verrières and held it. Here, however, success ended. The Royal Regiment of Canada, thrusting for Roe, quancourt, on the lower slopes of the next rise, met very fierce fire, lost heavily, and got only a short distance past Verrières before being brought to a stand.

It was, however, on the extreme right flank, closest to the Orne, that the day's grimmest and bravest incident took place. The 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade's attack was to be launched by the Calgary Highlanders, who were to go in from the two neighbouring villages of St. André-sur-Orne and St. Martin-de-Fontenay and capture May-sur-Orne; thereafter the Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada were to take over and push on to Fontenay-le-Marmion. The attack struck snags from the very beginning. The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada, who were to clear the "start line" area in St. André and St. Martin, had great trouble, and indeed these two villages were probably never wholly free of the enemy throughout the day. This helped to dislocate our efforts on this flank. The Calgary Highlanders duly delivered their attack against May, but though elements of the unit seem to have got footholds in the village, or in its outskirts, twice during the morning, they were pushed out again both times.

The Black Watch attack was delayed by the continued presence of enemy troops about the start line. In attempting to finish clearing St. Martin the unit lost a good many men, including its Commanding Officer, Lt.-Col. S. S.T. Cantlie, who was mortally wounded. Major F. P. Griffin took over and was ordered to proceed with the attack against Fontenay. Tank and artillery assistance was arranged, and at 9:30 a.m. Griffin led his four rifle companies forward from St. André. Their line of advance ran straight across the western end of the Verrières Ridge, which at this point is lofty and formidable. There was no cover, and as the companies moved across the wheatfields they came under deadly mortar fire, which was soon supplemented by artillery and machine-guns firing from south, east and west. Nevertheless, this inexperienced battalion — it had been in France only about a fortnight — pushed on with a steady constancy

which no veterans could have bettered. It is estimated that Griffin led some 60 survivors on to the broad crest of the ridge. Here they ran straight into a strong enemy position, carefully camouflaged and strengthened with heavy tanks disguised as haystacks. Now there could be no more advance; the remnant was pinned down by the storm of fire, and after a time Griffin passed the order for men to get back individually if and as they could. Not more than perhaps fifteen soldiers of the rifle companies, however, succeeded in returning to our lines. On 8 August, when we finally occupied the crest of the Ridge, Major Griffin's body was found lying among those of his men. The total casualties of the Black Watch on 25 July, as closely as they can be computed, amounted to 324 all ranks; as many as 120 officers and men lost their lives.

The squadron of the 1<sup>st</sup> Hussars supporting the Black Watch had pushed into May-sur-Orne with a view to assisting the battalion with fire from the flank. Here it immediately became engaged with German tanks and anti-tank guns and lost several of its own tanks; the survivors retired. Later Le Régiment de Maisonneuve tried for May in its turn, but had no better luck than the Calgaries. When it was clear that our attack had struck a stone wall, General Simonds decided not to commit the two armoured divisions, except for ordering the 7<sup>th</sup> to support the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade and ensure that the ground gained in the Verrières area was not lost. Here in the evening an intervention by its tanks and R.A.F. Typhoons broke up a formidable counter-attack and probably saved Verrières. Our gains in this area were important. We now had a firm hold on a section of the Ridge at its eastern end, and though the highest part of it still remained in enemy hands we had materially reduced the Germans' observation, and correspondingly improved our own, by gaining this significant lodgement in their forward line. This was the only territorial advantage we could show for the operation, which had cost us over 1000 casualties.

The real fruits of Operation "Spring" must be sought, however, in its contribution to the development of the plans of the Supreme Allied Commander who had considered it so important to his grand design. It served the purpose of concealing from the enemy, on this all-essential day, the direction of the main Allied thrust and of delaying the movement of German reserves to the American front which was certain to set in as soon as that direction was clear. As it was, the concentration of enemy armour south of Caen began to shift westward only when the American offensive was well launched.

That offensive (Operation "Cobra") had been postponed from 18 to 24 July, and had then been again postponed, on account of deteriorating weather, after the preliminary bombing had actually begun. When it went in next day it proved a shattering success. Steady progress on 25 and 26 July developed on the 27<sup>th</sup> into a complete break-through which

brought the Americans to the vicinity of Coutances. By 30 July they were in Avranches, some 30 miles, as the crow flies, from their starting point; and the ball was at their feet. On 1 August the Third United States Army, commanded by Lieutenant-General Patton, assumed responsibility for this right sector and the continuation of the great encircling thrust.<sup>2</sup>

The Canadian Army Headquarters had by now, at long last, also "become operational". As we have seen, General Crerar had been in France since 18 June. Only after Operation "Atlantic", however, did the bridgehead afford elbow-room for the deployment of his Army. (In the meantime, after the arrival of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps, the Second British Army had been directing the operations of five full corps.) At noon on 23 July Headquarters First Canadian Army took over the extreme leftward sector of the Allied front, from the Caen — Mézidon railway to the coast, with the 1<sup>st</sup> British Corps under command. Plans were made for an attack in this sector which would push the enemy back far enough to enable us to use the inland port of Caen. This project, however, was soon shelved in favour of a much more important one. On 31 July General Crerar took under his command the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps and with it the front south of Caen. He was now responsible for some twenty miles, from the Orne round to the Channel; and the time was at hand for the final breakout from the bridgehead.<sup>3</sup>

### THE STRUGGLE ON THE FALAISE ROAD

After Operation "Spring" another immediate major assault upon the enemy south of Caen was out of the question. "He is so strong there now", wrote General Montgomery in a directive of 27 July, "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". With the enemy's left falling into ruin under General Bradley's blows, and with so much of his armoured strength concentrated athwart the Falaise Road, the best opportunity for a major offensive on the British front was on the Second Army's right sector; and General

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<sup>2</sup> On this, date the 12<sup>th</sup> United States Army Group came into existence, under Lt.-Gen. Bradley. General Bradley's old command, the First U.S. Army, passed to Lt.-Gen. Courtney H. Hodges. For the present, the operations of the 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group continued under the "general direction and control" of General Montgomery's Headquarters.

<sup>3</sup> First Canadian Army was gallantly and effectively supported in its operations by No. 84 Group R.A.F., commanded by Air Vice-Marshal L. O. Brown (and subsequently by Air Vice-Marshal E. C. Hudleston), whose headquarters moved with Army Headquarters throughout. There were fourteen R.C.A.F. squadrons in North-West Europe; but unfortunately all of them, instead of supporting their fellow-Canadians, were assigned to No. 83 Group, with the Second Army.

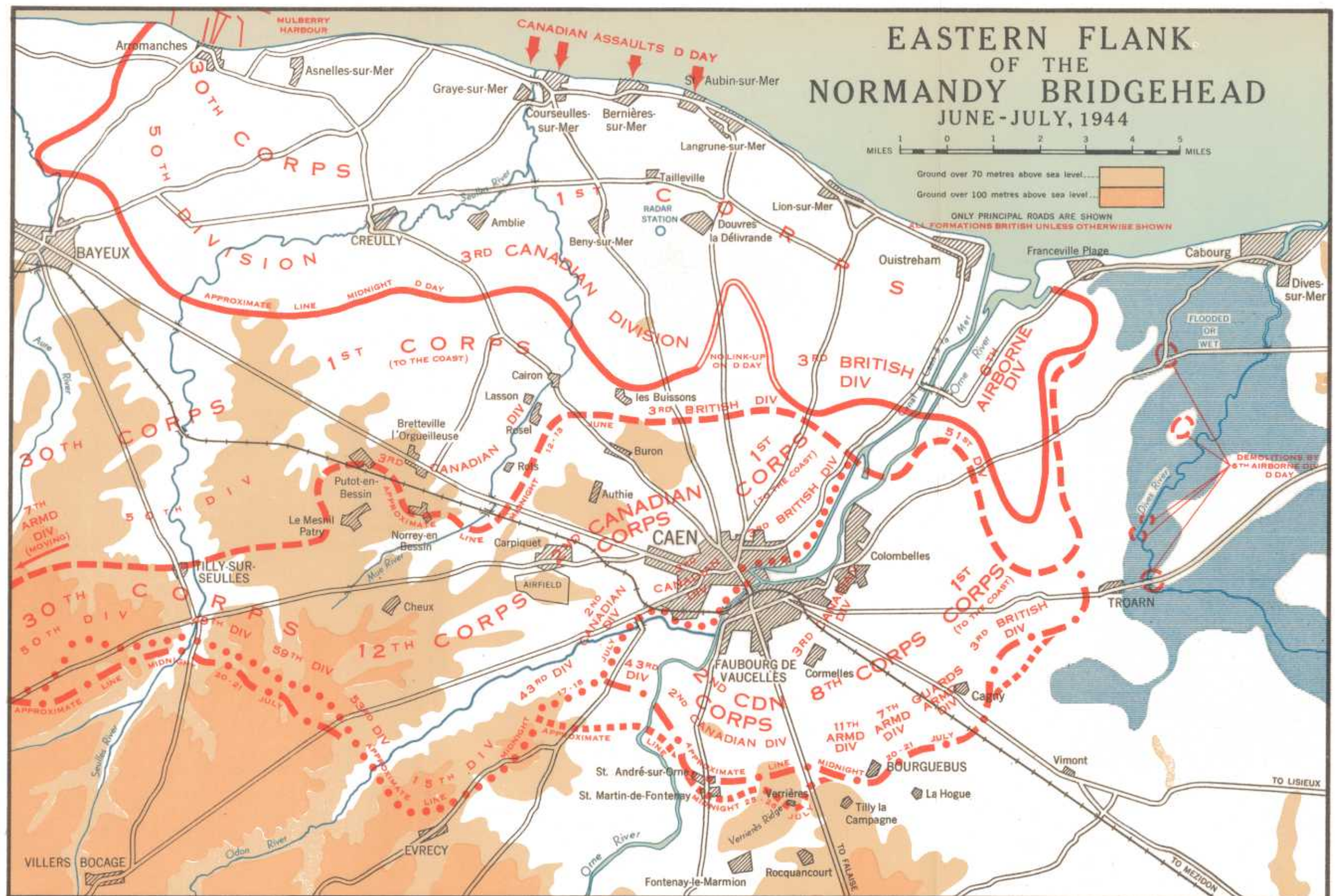
# EASTERN FLANK OF THE NORMANDY BRIDGEHEAD

## JUNE - JULY, 1944



Ground over 70 metres above sea level...  
Ground over 100 metres above sea level...

ONLY PRINCIPAL ROADS ARE SHOWN  
ALL FORMATIONS BRITISH UNLESS OTHERWISE SHOWN



Dempsey was now directed to strike here "in great strength". East of the Orne, pending the resumption of major operations, it was essential to do everything that could be done to pin down the enemy, to keep him from transferring forces across to the western flank to oppose the Americans.

Dempsey's attack, originally planned for 2 August but speeded up with a view to exploiting the American successes, was launched by the 8<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> Corps in the Caumont area on 30 July. In accordance with Montgomery's orders, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps continued to make local attacks. On 1 August, for instance, the Calgary Highlanders tried for Tilly-la-Campagne, only to be thrown back. The 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division, the last Canadian formation to reach France, landed during the final week of July and on the night of 30-31 July relieved the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division, which now withdrew for a short rest after 56 days in the line. On 2 August a unit of the 4<sup>th</sup>, the Lincoln and Welland Regiment, made another unsuccessful thrust at Tilly; and on 5 August parts of two others, the Lake Superior Regiment (Motor) and the 22<sup>nd</sup> Armoured Regiment (Canadian Grenadier Guards), attacked the adjacent village of La Hogue with no better result.

These and other minor enterprises sufficed to establish that the enemy was still present in strength south of Caen and intended to fight hard for his positions there. In the light of the desperate nature of the crisis confronting the Germans in other sectors, however, it is not surprising that these local attacks failed to prevent them from moving to the west a large proportion of the armoured concentration east of the Orne. The enemy had at last decided that we really did not intend to deliver the second seaborne attack, across the Strait of Dover, which we had done everything possible to encourage him to expect. He now began to do what he should have done in June, bringing down across the Seine from the Pas de Calais the infantry of his Fifteenth Army. Some of these troops he put in, as they arrived, opposite the Canadian Army, using them to relieve the armoured divisions which were to try to stem the American tide. He was now able, for the first time, to provide an armoured "mass of manoeuvre" capable of a large-scale counter-offensive. But he had waited too long.

First of the Panzer Divisions to move west were the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 116<sup>th</sup>, both very recent arrivals in the Caen sector. The 21<sup>st</sup> followed before the end of July, and in the first days of August the 9<sup>th</sup> S.S. Panzer Division and then the 1<sup>st</sup> S.S. Panzer Division likewise moved out. Of the former great armoured force, only Meyer's 12<sup>th</sup> S.S. Panzer Division now remained on the Canadian front; and on 7 August Field-Marshal von Kluge<sup>4</sup> ordered it too to move west. But that night things happened

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<sup>4</sup> Kluge succeeded Rundstedt as Commander-in-Chief West early in July, after Rundstedt (according to his own account) had advised the High Command to make peace.

south of Caen which rendered the move impossible.

The Canadians had been planning for some time past for the final assault upon the Caen hinge. Only on 4 August, however, did General Montgomery order General Crerar to "launch a heavy attack from the Caen sector in the direction of Falaise" with a view to cutting the line of retreat of the German divisions engaged with the Second Army. Montgomery was fighting the Battle of Normandy as a whole, turning success on one sector of the expanding front to instant advantage in another. The fact that Operation "Goodwood" had drawn so much enemy armour to the Caen sector had facilitated the American breakthrough on the opposite flank and the subsequent offensive of the Second Army. That offensive had made good progress; by 2 August the British were on the edge of Vire. The left wing of the Army then took up the attack, driving towards the dominating Mont Pinçon massif and the upper reaches of the Orne. With the German armour now draining away from in front of Falaise to oppose the British and Americans, an attack on the enemy's pivotal positions there became both more practicable and more important. The Cs in-C.'s order was that it should go in not later than 8 August, and if possible on the 7<sup>th</sup>.

The events on and after 25 July had made it clear that breaking through the positions athwart the Falaise Road was a tactical problem of extraordinary difficulty. The solution found for it is described by General Crerar in his report of 1 September 1944 to the Minister of National Defence:

My basic tactical plan required that, even though, in view of the obvious requirements of the military situation, it was impossible to disguise our general intentions from the enemy, the attack should secure the maximum of surprise as to means and methods employed. A further important requirement was that the technique of the attack should be such as largely to neutralize the long range and great strength of the enemy's anti-tank defence and to ensure that our infantry got through and beyond the enemy's zone of dense defensive fire, developed mainly by his mortars and machine guns, without heavy casualties. The essentials were the closest integration of fire and movement, and the denial to the enemy of the time to anticipate as well as the ability to see.

With these principles before him, the detailed plan for the attack was drawn up with very great skill by Lt.-Gen. Simonds, Commander, 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps. This Corps plan proposed to solve the problems by (a) attacking under cover of darkness; (b) beginning the forward movement of our troops simultaneously with the commencement of the fire support; (c) the use of heavy bombers to add devastating effect to the fire programme; (d) transporting the infantry through the zone of defensive fire in heavily armoured carriers.

Two innovations in this plan require some comment. Intervention by heavy bombers on the battlefield during the hours of darkness was not acceptable to the R.A.F. unless the targets could be identified beyond the shadow of a doubt. This need was met by the use of red and green flare shells fired at the target villages by our artillery. The other

novelty was the armoured personnel carrier, which now made its first appearance on the battlefield. Some of the carriers required were provided by using American-pattern half-tracked vehicles; but most were improvised from the "Priest" self-propelled guns lately withdrawn from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division. Altering them in time for the operation was a major undertaking, but these "Unfrocked Priests" or "Holy Rollers" were ready to take their places in the columns as they formed up on 7 August for the attack that night.

Before the Canadian attack was delivered, the Second Army's offensive had given it substantial assistance. On the evening of 6 August a bridgehead was established across the Orne north of ThuryHarcourt and some six miles behind the enemy's front facing the Canadians. This development was calculated to shake that front, and in fact it led to at least a battle-group of the most formidable enemy formation still east of the Orne — the 12<sup>th</sup> S.S. Panzer Division, then in reserve — being committed to counter it. On 6 August, too, the British reached Mont Pinçon, and on the 7<sup>th</sup> they cleared it.

The essence of General Simonds' plan was that the carriers should bear the leading infantry straight through the enemy front positions to areas close to their objectives before his second line. Clearing the front positions would be the business of marching battalions coming up in rear. With this in view, each assaulting division formed its advanced group in two tight double columns, each consisting of two infantry battalions or equivalent units in armoured carriers accompanied and covered by tanks and engineer assault vehicles.<sup>5</sup> These columns, guided forward through the night by wireless and by Bofors guns firing tracer shells along their thrust lines, were to by-pass the front-line villages and push far beyond them before halting to "debus" their infantry. West of the Falaise Road the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade led the attack; east of it, the 51<sup>st</sup> (Highland) Division and the 33<sup>rd</sup> Armoured Brigade.

At 11 p.m. on 7 August the aircraft of Bomber Command began dropping their missiles into four villages — May-sur-Orne, Fontenay-le-Marmion, Secqueville-la-Campagne and La Hogue — on the flanks of the attack. At 11:30 the armoured columns rolled across the start line and drove on into the darkness. At 11:45 the great force of supporting artillery which had heretofore kept silence opened with a shattering roar, laying a barrage in front of the attackers. So began Operation "Totalize".

The first phase was completely successful. The armoured infantry

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<sup>5</sup> The "Assault Vehicle, Royal Engineers" (A.V.R.E.) first went into action on the beaches on D Day. It was a converted Churchill tank armed with a "petard" which fired a very heavy projectile for demolishing concrete defences.

went through and, in spite of some errors in navigation, seized their objectives on the high ground astride the road three miles behind the German front line. The marching infantry had trouble in several of the villages, where the newly-arrived 89<sup>th</sup> German Infantry Division fought hard; in some cases the battle went on into the afternoon. But the line which the enemy had held for over a fortnight was smashed. La Hogue, Tilly-la-Campagne, Rocquancourt, Fontenay-le-Marmion, May-sur-Orne — these bloodstained hamlets, or rather their pathetic ruins, were now finally in our hands. The Verrières Ridge, where the bodies of the men of the Canadian Black Watch had lain since the attack of 25 July, had at last passed irrevocably into Allied keeping. And our casualties had been relatively light.

The second phase began early the same afternoon. It was the business of two armoured divisions — both fresh, but both lacking experience of battle: Major-General G. Kitching's 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian, and Major-General S. Maczek's 1<sup>st</sup> Polish. Their task was to break the enemy's second line, which crossed the road some five miles in rear of his front positions, and push on south to seize dominating heights on either side of the highway within five miles of Falaise. A third phase, it was hoped, would see them exploiting to encircle the town itself.

At the outset of the second phase things began to go wrong. Though the enemy got most of the bombs dropped in the preparatory air attack by the day bombers of the Eighth United States Air Force, a good many unfortunately came down in our own rear areas, causing casualties and dislocation. Among the wounded was Major-General Keller of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division. And when the armour lunged forward at five minutes to two its progress was less rapid than General Simonds had counted on. German armoured support was already reaching the front. General Meyer had been on the ground before morning, and had ordered up two battle-groups of his 12<sup>th</sup> S.S. (including that opposing the Second Army's bridgehead over the Orne). A battalion of Tigers and a few assault guns also came into action. All these units were greatly reduced in strength,<sup>6</sup> but desperate though the situation seemed their fighting spirit was still high. Knowing that the fate of the German army in Normandy was in their hands, the young fanatics of the Hitlerjugend Division were prepared to immolate themselves for the Reich in a spirit of Wagnerian tragedy. Small groups of tanks and large numbers of 88-millimetre guns, making skilful use of cover, impeded our armour's deployment and slowed its advance. On the right the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division took Brettevillesur-Laize and the 4<sup>th</sup> made considerable progress; but east of

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<sup>6</sup> Meyer has claimed that the Germans had only 50 tanks available east of the Orne at this time. The estimate of our own intelligence was 90. Enemy documents may yet settle his point more definitely.



the road the Poles were held up around St. Sylvain, and on neither flank did the tanks get through to the heights which were the objectives for the second phase.

Early on the morning of 9 August the attack was renewed. The delay had, however, given the enemy time to occupy and develop a third line on the threatened heights, crossing the highway a couple of miles north of the village of Potigny and running along the northern side of the River Laison, a very insignificant stream whose deep-cut and wooded valley was nevertheless an important obstacle. Digging had been observed here over a week before; now the Germans used their remaining tanks and their very numerous 88s, disposed in woods and copses, to make this position extremely formidable. In assailing it on the 9<sup>th</sup> we lost heavily without making much impression. The 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade suffered especially. The 28<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiment (British Columbia Regiment), with two infantry companies of the Algonquin Regiment attached, set out before dawn to capture "Point 195", the northern summit of a commanding ridge of downland immediately west of the highway. In some way this force strayed from its proper line of advance and ran squarely into the German gun-screen on the hills above the Laison east of the road.<sup>7</sup> Through a long day the B. Cs. and the Algonquins held the ground they had taken up, their position swept by shells and under repeated counter-attacks. During the morning a convoy of vehicles got out with the wounded, including Lt.-Col. A. J. Hay of the Algonquins. In the afternoon the few tanks still capable of movement broke out and withdrew. As evening came on, the attacks grew in violence, and Lt.-Col. D. G. Worthington, the group commander, who had conducted the defence with dauntless courage, was killed by a mortar bomb. After dark the surviving infantrymen and tank crews made their way into the Polish lines. The British Columbia Regiment had lost 47 tanks in its first day's fighting.

That night a daring silent attack by the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada placed Point 195 in our hands; but the slightly higher southern point of the ridge remained to the enemy, who during the next few days rained down a torrent of shells and mortar bombs upon his unwelcome neighbours. A new infantry division, the 85<sup>th</sup>, now arrived from north of the Seine to bolster the German line. On the night of 10-11 August the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division took a hand, launching the 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade at Quesnay Wood, which stands astride the highway abreast of Point 195. This attack netted us nothing but heavy casualties. The

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<sup>7</sup> At 6:55 a.m. the group reported itself on the objective (Point 195). It was in fact some 6500 yards north-east of it. On 9 August 1946, precisely two years later, the writer visited the spot and found it still marked by the rusty hulls of the B.C. Regiment's tanks, shot through and through by the 88s that had lurked in the neighbouring copses.

Germans had succeeded in stabilizing the position; Operation "Totalize" had carried us some eight miles forward, but about the same distance still separated us from Falaise. The fierceness of the resistance indicated the vital importance which the enemy continued to attach to this sector.

### AN ORDER OF THE FÜHRER

To mount another deliberate attack with heavy support, such as was required to break through the enemy's new line, would unfortunately take time; and time had become a matter of the greatest importance. Hitler had made one of his most dramatic strategic interventions. He had directed Kluge to employ his disposable armoured divisions in a great stroke in the west. The object was to cut through to the sea at Avranches and thus sever the communications of the American columns which by 6 August were in Mayenne and Laval and still driving eastward. This scheme, so glittering to the amateur strategist, was less attractive to soldiers; but when Dietrich, the commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> S.S. Panzer Corps, pointed out to Kluge the shortage of petrol, the extreme risk involved in so large an armoured concentration in the light of our complete command of the air, the danger to Falaise if all the armour were sent west, and the possibility that the whole force would be cut off by the encirclement already beginning to take shape, there was only one reply "It is an order of the Führer".

The counter-offensive, known as Operation "Lüttich", was launched, after some delay, in the Mortain area on the evening of 6 August. The force employed included the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> S.S. Panzer Divisions and the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 116<sup>th</sup> Panzer Divisions, with the 9<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division (from southern France) subsequently coming into action. Mortain itself was recaptured by the Germans during the night, and some other gains were made, but on the 7<sup>th</sup> progress came to an abrupt end. The weather was ideal for flying; and by noon, in the words of the War Diary of the German Seventh Army, the main attack "had been brought to a complete standstill by unusually strong fighter-bomber activity".<sup>8</sup> The Allied airmen and the American soldier had dealt with it decisively. Yet, as the same War Diary clearly shows, no German officer was ready to make a frank statement of the failure of the Führer's plan and order withdrawal; and for four days to come the armoured divisions lay relatively inactive in the Mortain area, while the onward rush of Patton's columns placed them in ever-increasing danger of encirclement. During 8 August the Canadian offensive on the Falaise

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<sup>8</sup> Although examination of the battlefield did not reveal as many tanks destroyed by air action as the observations of our air forces had indicated, German documents seem to leave no doubt whatever that the air attacks were a major factor in stopping this counter-offensive in its tracks.

Road frightened Kluge considerably. In a telephone conversation with the commander of the Seventh Army, in which the latter gave a gloomy picture of the prospects of the Mortain operations, the Field-Marshal said:

Everything must be risked. Besides, at Caen we are dealing with a penetration of unprecedented proportions. I draw the following conclusion: First of all, we have to make preparations to reorganize the attack. *Therefore, tomorrow the attack will not be continued, but the attack for the following day will be prepared.*

By the afternoon of 9 August Kluge was less worried about the Falaise sector, but he still would neither abandon the idea of a further offensive at Mortain, nor order it to take place at once:

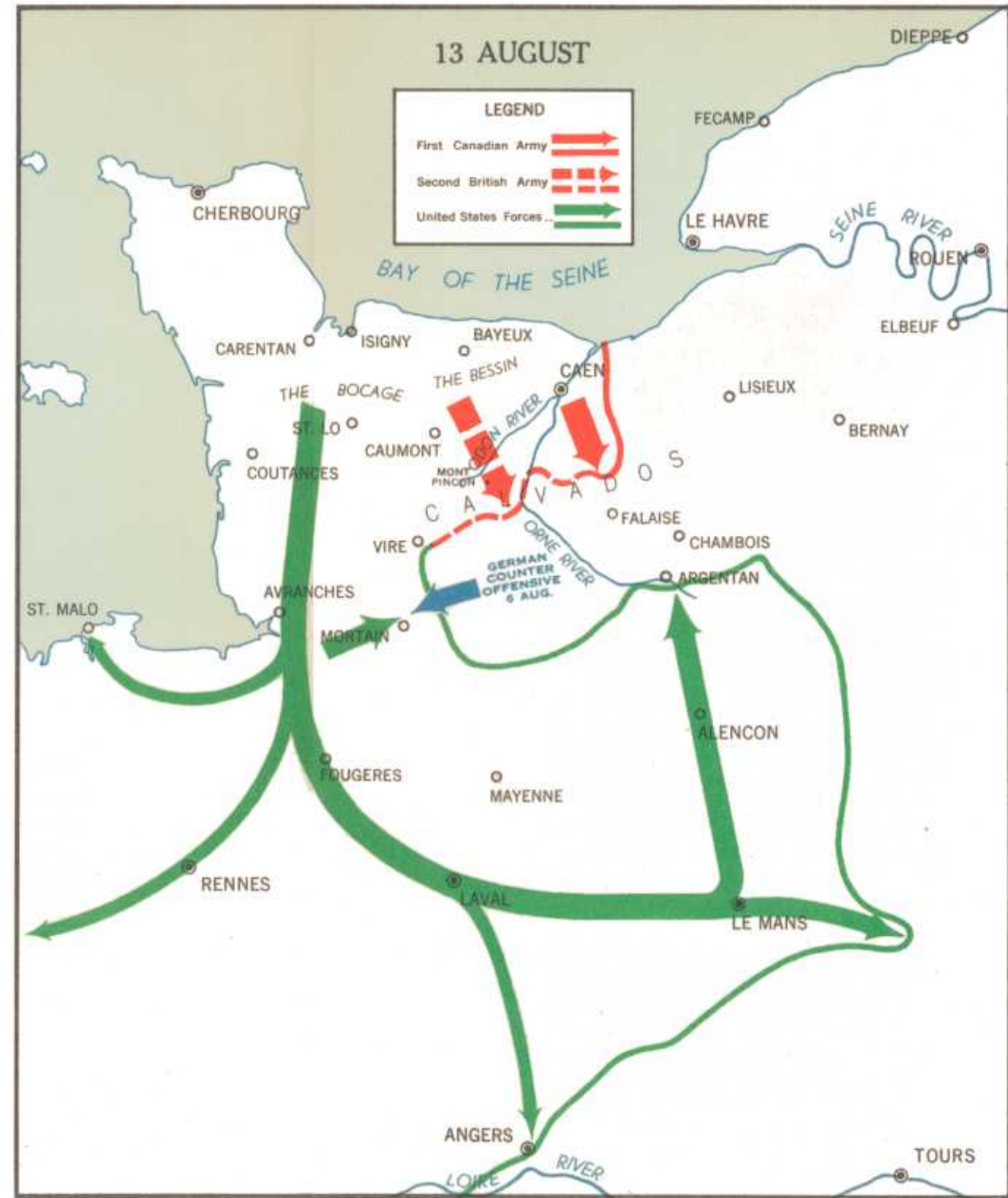
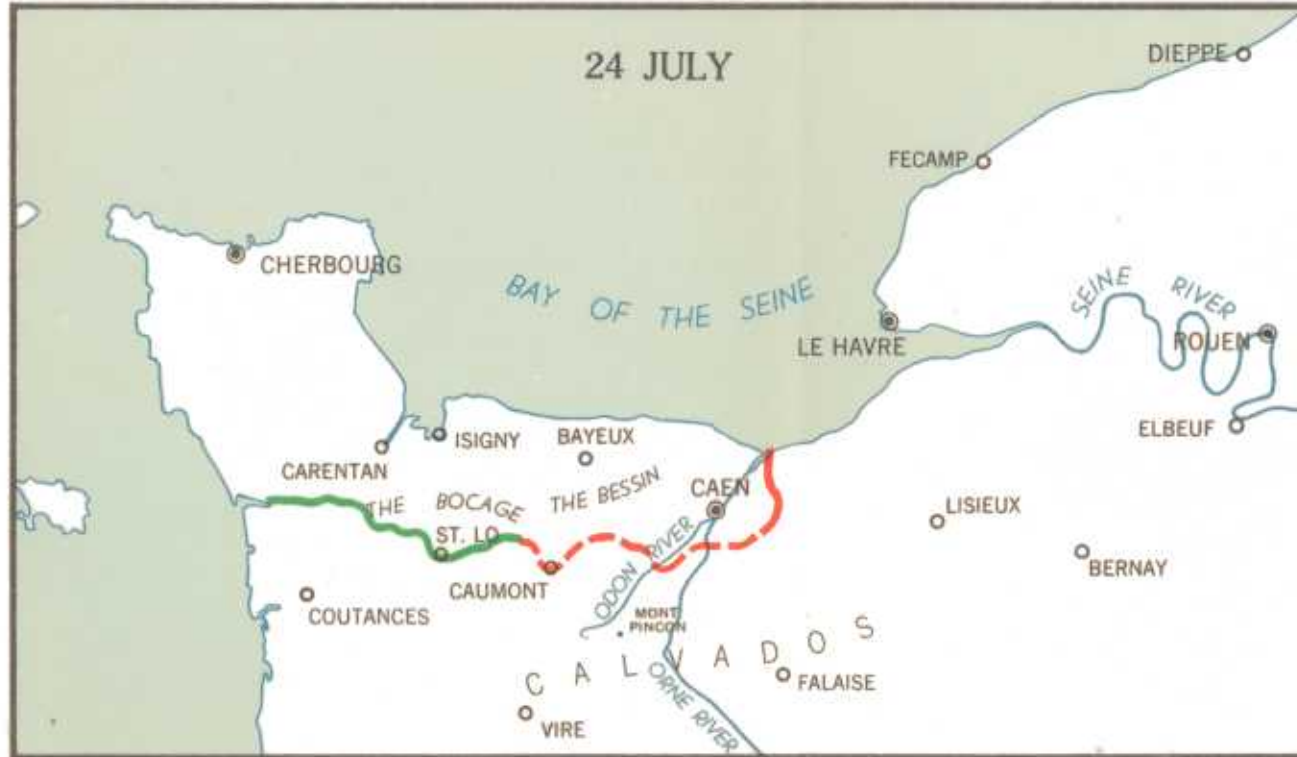
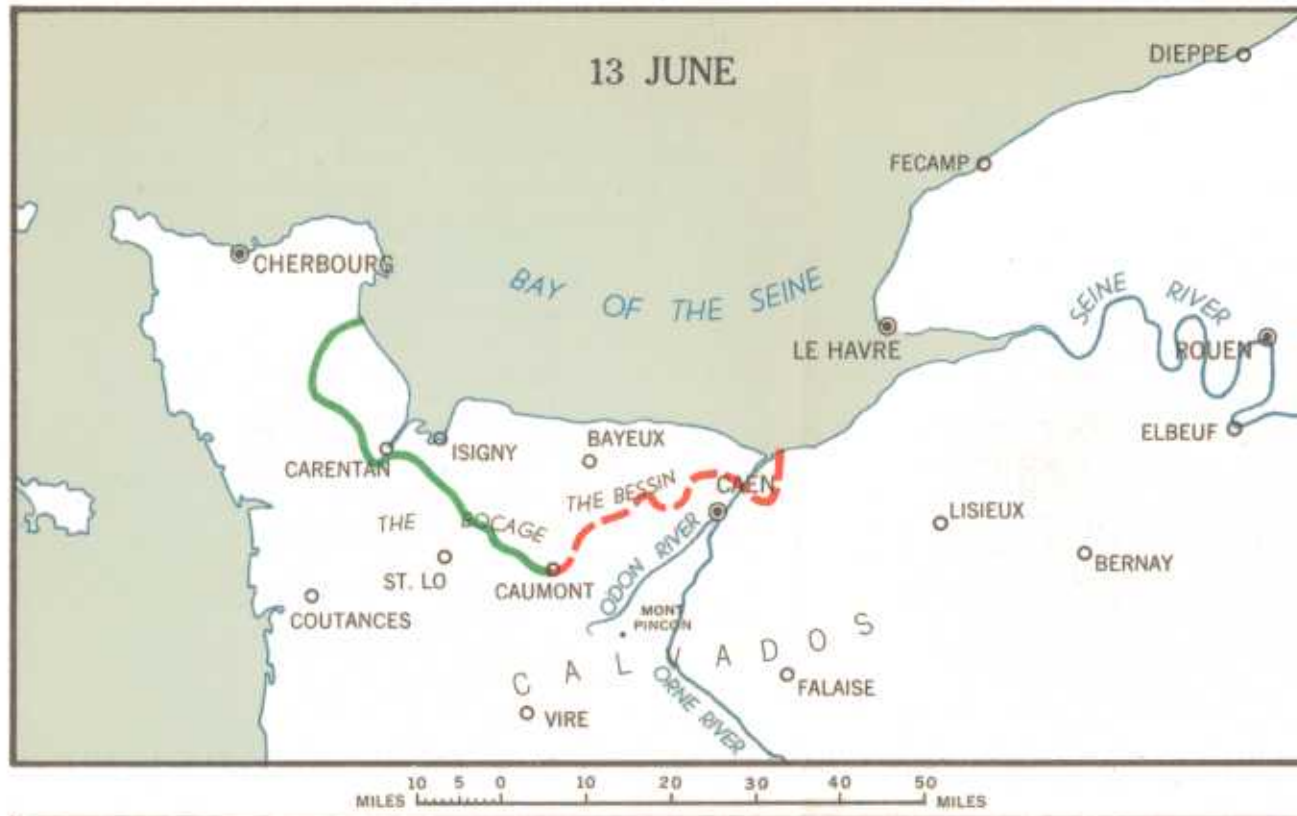
I have just had a decisive conversation with the Supreme Command. In as much as the situation south of Caen has been stabilized again and apparently has not brought about the bad results which were expected, I have suggested that we stick to the idea of attack. *The attack must be prepared and carried out, however, according to plan, and should not be done too hastily.*

The italics have been supplied. These passages throw interesting light upon the plight of a general who serves a dictator.

Until Kluge launched his master's counter-stroke, the encirclement envisaged in General Montgomery's offensive plan had been a "long hook". The Allied commanders had anticipated that the Germans, fleeing from Normandy, would seek to escape through the gap between the Seine at Paris and the Loire at Orléans; and plans had been made to drop a large airborne force in this gap to block the enemy's retreat. The German thrust towards Avranches now led to a change of plan. To turn Hitler's scheme against himself and use it for the destruction of his armies, the Allied command decided to attempt a shorter encirclement, bringing Canadian and American forces together in the Argentan area and thus cutting off the German forces around Mortain. General Patton's Army, originally detailed for clearing Brittany, was to be used for the enveloping movement.

The Americans were already acting on the new orders when Montgomery issued a formal confirming directive on 11 August. It ordered the First Canadian Army to capture Falaise. "This is a first priority", wrote the C.-in-C., "and it is vital it should be done quickly." After taking Falaise, the Army would secure Argentan. The Second British Army would also fight its way into the Falaise area. On the other side of the German pocket, the 12<sup>th</sup> U.S. Army Group, whose vanguard had entered Le Mans on 9 August, was to swing its right flank up to Alençon and then on to the northward. As General Montgomery drily put it, "Obviously, if we can close the gap completely, we shall have put the enemy in the most awkward

# EXPANSION OF THE NORMANDY BRIDGEHEAD



Reproduced by Army Survey Establishment

Compiled and drawn by Historical Section, G.S.

predicament.” He added:

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.

Organizing a large-scale set-piece attack, including arranging the required scale of air support, is a considerable process. General Montgomery's orders reached Canadian Army Headquarters on the evening of 11 August; but it proved, impossible to make the main attack before 14 August. In the meantime, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division was ordered to press on forthwith on the right in a flanking movement aimed at weakening the enemy's positions across the Falaise Road. On 12 August, accordingly, the Division crossed the Laize River at Bretteville. During the next two days it fought its way southward in the face of stiff opposition and by nightfall on the 13<sup>th</sup> had re-crossed the river at Clair Tizon, establishing a bridgehead which constituted a decided threat to the main German line athwart the highway. Unfortunately, the diversionary effect of this advance on our right was nullified when on the evening of 13 August the Germans found, on the body of an officer who was killed when he blundered into their lines, notes taken at a Corps Commander's conference which made it clear that the main axis of our impending attack was to be east of the great road. This enabled the enemy to make effective last-minute preparations against it, and while these were not sufficient to defeat our plan they certainly caused us additional casualties and in the opinion of General Simonds delayed the capture of Falaise by twenty-four hours.

The general scheme of the attack was similar to that used with success in “Totalize”: a concentrated, very heavy blow on a decidedly narrow front, using armoured carriers to protect the infantry during the forward rush. The new operation, designated “Tractable”, differed from the earlier one, however, in that it began in daylight. The cover which darkness had provided for “Totalize” was to be supplied in. “Tractable” by smoke-screens laid by artillery along the front and flanks of our advancing columns. In the interest of surprise, preliminary bombardment was dispensed with.

General Simonds planned to attack in two columns, each led by an armoured brigade with two infantry brigades following. The right column consisted of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division less the 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, but with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade (now commanded by Brigadier J. F. Bingham, Brigadier Wyman having been wounded on 8 August) under command. The left column was the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division plus the 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade. The leading infantry brigade in each case would be borne in armoured carriers. The armoured brigades were to go straight across the River Laison and push south to

the high ground immediately above Falaise. The armour-borne infantry would have the task of mopping up the Laison valley; the other infantry brigades, carried in lorries, would subsequently push forward to hold the ground overrun by the tanks.

Re-grouping for this operation entailed moving nearly every fighting formation in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps to a new location during the twenty-four hours preceding the attack. This was effected without a hitch. The operation commenced with a short fierce stroke by medium bombers at the enemy positions, and punctually at noon on the 14<sup>th</sup> the armoured columns went in. "It was a most impressive sight", wrote the diarist of the 21<sup>st</sup> Armoured Regiment (The Governor General's Foot Guards), describing the attack of the 4<sup>th</sup> Armoured Brigade. "The two leading Regiments were lined up in parade-ground order. At starting time the whole mass surged forward through fields of waving golden grain." The charging columns came under heavy fire and lost a good many men and tanks. Among the dead was Brigadier Booth of the 4<sup>th</sup> Armoured Brigade. The smoke, and still more the dust, made it difficult to keep direction. Nevertheless, the armoured phalanx broke through the enemy front line very rapidly, though in the Laison valley confusion developed and there was delay before the tanks were able to cross and continue the advance. The leading infantry, leaping from their carriers, cleared the valley with little difficulty, and many prisoners were taken. By evening it was clear that the operation had been decidedly successful, though the more distant objectives had not been reached. The armour had not got through to "Point 159", the high hill immediately north of Falaise; but our infantry were well established within about three miles of the town.

Unfortunately, the day's work had been marred by another serious mistake in bombing. The second phase of the air support, beginning at two p.m., was provided by R.A.F. and R.C.A.F. heavy bombers. Several of the later waves went astray, missed the targets and dropped their bombs within our own lines. This bombing went on for considerably over an hour and caused a certain number of casualties and heavy losses in transport and guns to Canadian and Polish troops. Luckily, it had little actual adverse effect upon the progress of the attack, and the large proportion of bombs dropped in the proper areas certainly contributed materially to its success.

When the advance was resumed on the morning of 15 August it went rather slowly, for the enemy still had enough tanks and antitank guns to be able to offer formidable resistance on the strong ground remaining to him north of Falaise. Only on 16 August did we get possession of Point 159. On the same afternoon, troops of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division (Brigadier H. A. Young's 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade), pushing in from the north-west, finally entered Falaise. The centre of the town had been

almost totally destroyed by our preparatory bombing, but enemy rearguards and snipers fought savagely among the tragic ruins. Clearing proceeded systematically and was generally completed by noon of the 17<sup>th</sup>, although some tenacious survivors of the Hitlerjugend Division held out in one strongpoint until after midnight.

### THE GAP AND THE CAULDRON

During 12 August the advance of General Patton's Army had brought it almost to Argentan. Here its progress was checked. The boundary between the 21<sup>st</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Army Groups ran just south of Argentan. About midnight on 12-13 August General Haislip, commanding the 15<sup>th</sup> U.S. Corps in this area, consulted Patton and was ordered to "push on slowly in the direction of Falaise until you contact our Allies". Some twelve hours later, however, this order was countermanded and Haislip was instructed to concentrate his troops in the vicinity of Argentan ready to move north, north-east or east. It is evident that higher authority, fearing that interference with established boundaries between formations might cause confusion, including perhaps attacks by our air forces on our own troops, had directed Patton not to overrun the boundary.<sup>9</sup>

In any case, resistance to the Americans had suddenly stiffened. The Germans had finally begun to withdraw their armour from the Mortain area on 11 August,<sup>10</sup> and formidable elements of it were now being employed around Argentan to hold open the gap which was the only line of retreat for the great German forces still remaining in Lower Normandy. Through this troops and transport were streaming in the hope of reaching safety beyond the Seine. After the capture of Falaise the neck of the bottle was narrowed to a mere dozen miles.

The task of closing this Gap devolved mainly upon General

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<sup>9</sup> This incident, including the origine of the order to Patton, is still obscure. General Patton in his posthumously-published book, *War As I Knew*. It is content to record that the Third U. S. Army was ordered not to take Falaise, "allegedly" because the British had dropped time-bombs in the area. It may be noted that soon after midnight of 12-13 August First Canadian Army was warned (by the 12<sup>th</sup> U.S. Army Group) that delayed-action bombe had been dropped on the Argentan-Falaise road at eight p.m.; the message added, "maximum delay 12 hours". The Historical Section of the R.C.A.F. informs the writer that operational reports for the night of 12-13 August indicate that these bombs were dropped by the United States 9<sup>th</sup> Air Force. For some other suggestions on the reasons for the order to Patton, see Capt. Harry C. Butcher, *My Three Year & with Eieenhower*, p. 641.

<sup>10</sup> The Seventh Army War Diary indicates that at a conference on this date Kluge took the decision to withdraw the armoured group from this area and use it against the American thrust towards Alençon. The decision was "subject to the approval of the Führer", but the movement began at once. The failure of the offensive doubtless explains the sudden removal of Kluge a few days later and his replacement by Model. Kluge committed suicide after losing his command.

Simonds' two armoured divisions, the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian and the 1<sup>st</sup> Polish. On 18 August both were directed south-east in the general direction of Trun, an important road-junction about 12 miles east of Falaise, to cut the enemy's main escape route. On the following afternoon General Montgomery instructed the Canadian Army to push the Poles on as quickly as possible past Trun to Chambois, some four miles farther to the south-east. Early on the 18<sup>th</sup> Canadian troops got into Trun and that day there was violent and bloody fighting by units of both divisions striving to reach Chambois, the Poles from the north, the Canadians from the north-west.

The German withdrawal through the Gap had assumed the aspect of desperation. The enemy's dire circumstances were driving him to attempt something which our superiority in the air had not allowed him to think of for months past: mass road movement in daylight. On 17 August began "three days of the largest scale movement, presenting such targets to Allied air power as had hitherto only been dreamed of". During these bright summer days our fighterbombers struck at the packed roads hour after hour, turning the whole area of the Gap into a gigantic shambles; while our artillery, moving up within range, poured thousands of shells into the killing-ground. In that seething bloody cauldron which the Germans were to remember as "der Kessel von Falaise" one of the haughty armies that had terrorized Europe was perishing miserably.

The American formations had now regrouped. General Patton's columns, meeting little resistance to the eastward, had rushed on through Chartres and Orléans and were soon on the edge of Paris. As early as 17 August his patrols reached the Seine at Mantes-Gassicourt. On 18 August the Argentan front was transferred to the First U.S. Army. On the 17<sup>th</sup> the Americans here had resumed their northward advance. The 90<sup>th</sup> U.S. Infantry Division and the 2<sup>nd</sup> French Armoured Division, beating down fierce opposition, drove slowly forward towards Chambois. At 7:20 p.m. on 19 August came the long-awaited contact between Allied forces north and south of the Gap, when, as a First Canadian Army situation report put it, the 10<sup>th</sup> Polish Mounted Rifle Regiment with the 10<sup>th</sup> Polish Motor Battalion "captured Chambois and were joined by 90 U.S. Inf. Div., forces". It was an historic moment; nevertheless, the story of the Falaise Gap was not yet entirely told. At this moment very considerable parts of the German armoured force from Mortain were still inside the Pocket. Other elements which had escaped from it were available for counter-attack from the outside. During 20 August, in consequence, there was violent fighting along the road between Trun and Chambois, across which the trapped enemy was making desperate efforts to break away to the north-east.

On the evening of the 18<sup>th</sup>, a small mixed detachment of the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division, amounting to about 175 all ranks and com-



posed of tanks, self-propelled anti-tank guns, and infantrymen of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada, had gained a foothold on the outskirts of the little village of St. Lambert-sur-Dives, which lies on the Trun-Chambois road roughly midway between the two places. The force was commanded by Major D. V. Currie of the 29<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment (South Alberta Regiment). On the 19<sup>th</sup>, he fought his way into the village and consolidated his position, and he and his men, weary, grimy and indomitable, held their ground through that day and the 20<sup>th</sup> in the face of a succession of most savage counter-attacks, taking very heavy toll of enemy troops, tanks, guns and transport. During these days St. Lambert was the storm-centre of the incredible drama of the Falaise Gap; and the force there prevented the escape of great numbers of the encircled Germans. This detachment itself is credited with the capture of over 2000 prisoners. Major Currie was later awarded the first Canadian Victoria Cross of the North-West Europe campaign.

In spite of all the efforts of the South Albertas and Argylls and of the gallant Poles to the east of them, a good many of the enemy got away. Currie controlled only the north-west part of St. Lambert; and at the church at the south-east end General von Luttwitz of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Panzer Division and General Harmel of the 10<sup>th</sup> S.S. Panzer Division were busily organizing battle-groups for dashes through the cordon. Early on 20 August a fierce large-scale thrust launched just east of St. Lambert carried a good number of German tanks through, and later in the day another rush extricated still more. It appears that during these attacks the Headquarters of the German Seventh Army and that of the Eberbach Armoured Group, which had latterly controlled the armoured forces about Mortain, both succeeded in breaking out of the cauldron.

The heaviest weight of this fighting fell upon the Polish. Armoured Division, which stood squarely in the path of the German rushes and had to contend both against the tank forces striving to escape from the pocket and against the 2<sup>nd</sup> S.S. Panzer Corps, with the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> S.S. Panzer Divisions under command, which had got out earlier and was now battling to hold the way open for the rest of the armour. For a time the Poles were entirely cut off from the rest of the First Canadian Army, and on the morning of 21 August it was necessary to drop ammunition to them from the air.

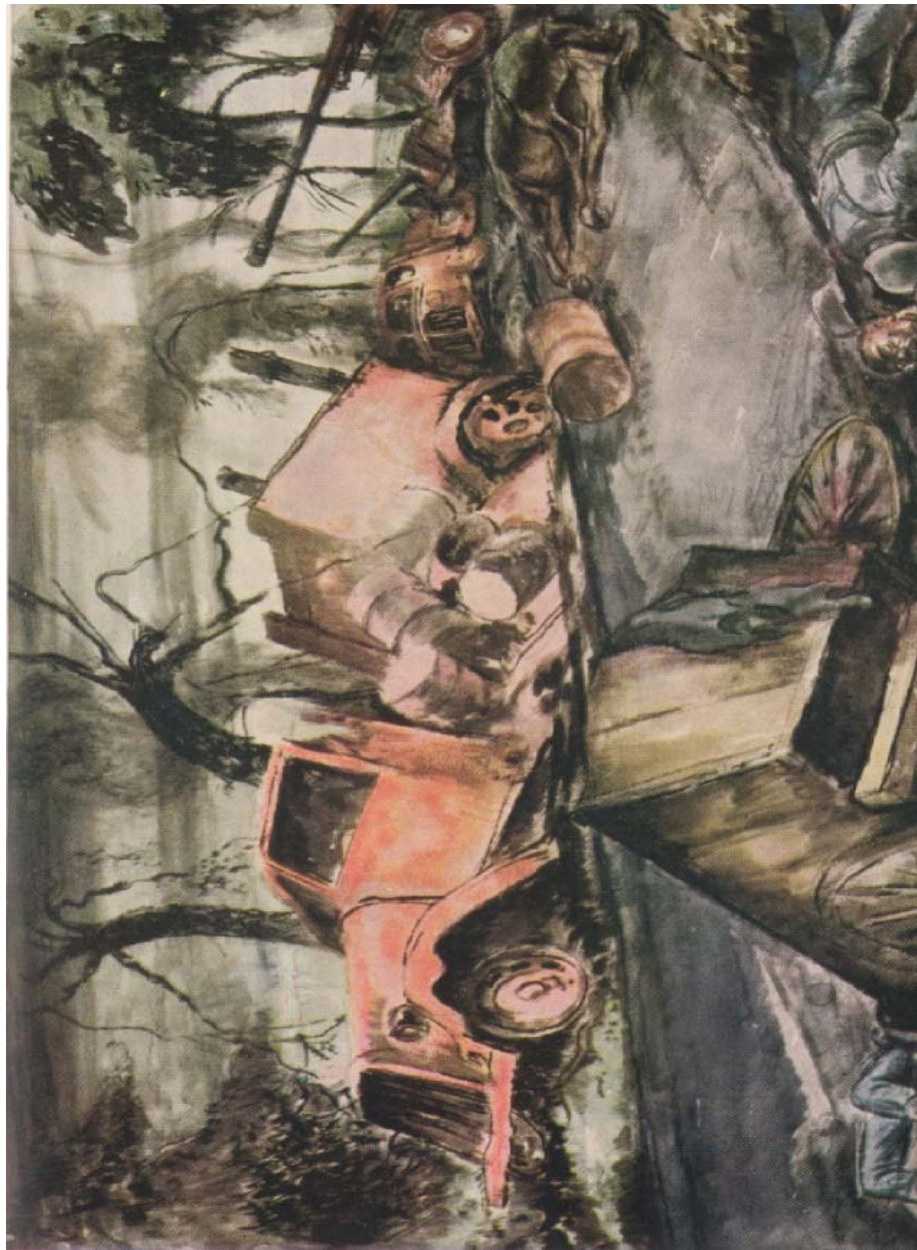
The 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division had now moved into the Trun area to relieve the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division as the latter shifted its weight eastward. In the course of the 21<sup>st</sup> a firm and continuous line was established; and Canadians and Poles held it against the further attempts of German groups in various states of organization and disorganization to break out to the north-east, while the 12<sup>th</sup> British Corps came driving like some giant plunger down the "gun alley" from the direction of Falaise, pushing the Germans into the hands of General Crerar's men.

During the three days 19-21 August, 12,000 prisoners (among them a corps commander and two divisional commanders) were captured by the Canadian Army. Uncounted thousands of other Germans had met death in the blind and desperate combats of these days of slaughter.

By the morning of 22 August fighting had virtually ceased in the area where the Gap had been. The whole vicinity of St. Lambert was covered with the human and material debris of an army which had suffered the greatest disaster in modern military history. At many places the bodies of German soldiers literally carpeted the ground; one observer spoke of "hundreds of dead, so close together that they were practically touching". Masses of destroyed or abandoned tanks, lorries and cars blocked the roads and filled the ditches; while some 8000 dead horses, which had drawn the vehicles of the German infantry divisions, lay offending the air. In the carnage of the Pocket and the Gap at least eight German divisions had been destroyed, and about twice as many more had suffered crippling losses. The remnants of the armoured formations — small remnants in most cases -had saved themselves at the expense of the infantry, who were left to their fate. One armoured formation, however, had actually fought to annihilation. Meyer's 12<sup>th</sup> S.S. Panzer Division had still had a few men left after the fall of Falaise, but the last survivors, 60 strong, were overrun in the Gap west of Trun. One battle-group of a few hundred men had been withdrawn earlier, and served as a basis on which the division was subsequently reconstituted. Apart from this the 12<sup>th</sup> S.S. had literally ceased to exist. Meyer escaped on foot. Captured later, he was condemned to death for complicity in the murder of prisoners. The sentence was commuted to life imprisonment.

On 20 August General Montgomery had issued a new directive. This defined the immediate task of the Allied ground forces as the completion of the destruction of the enemy in North-West France, followed by an advance northward with a view to the destruction of all German forces in North-East France. The British and Canadian forces were to liquidate what was left of the enemy in the Pocket and then push rapidly on to the Seine, while the Americans, whose right wing, as we have seen, was already close to Paris, were to drive northward along the south bank of the Seine to cut off the retreat of the Germans falling back before Crerar and Dempsey. The particular task of the Canadian Army was "to keep the Normandy 'bottle' securely corked", and simultaneously to develop a strong thrust towards Lisieux and Rouen. As soon as the bottle was clear the Army as a whole would advance to the Seine, cross it, and clear the Havre peninsula between the Seine and the Channel. General Montgomery wrote:

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



ESCAPE ROUTE, NORMANDY, AUGUST 1944

From a painting by W.A. Ogilvie, M.B.E.

This painting, based upon contemporary sketches made on the spot in the Trun — Chambois area, records one scene of the terrible destruction wrought upon the retreating German armies in the Falaise Gap.

intact, together with all possible rolling stock.

All Scotland will be grateful if Commander Canadian Army can arrange that the Highland Division should capture St. Valery.

I have no doubt that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division will deal very suitably with Dieppe.

On the Canadian Army's seaward flank, where the front of General Crocker's 1<sup>st</sup> British Corps, facing the flooded valley of the lower Dives, had long been static, the eastward movement had begun as soon as the progress of the offensive down the Falaise Road shook loose the enemy's defences in this area. As early as 16 August the British troops got across the Dives in the areas of Mézidon and St. Pierre-sur-Dives. The Canadians themselves began to shift eastward on 21 August, when the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division moved; the remaining formations of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps, their work in the Pocket done, joined the pursuit on 23 August.

The advance was rapid. The Germans had sustained a tremendous reverse, and their plans were in total ruin. Nevertheless, in the words of General Crerar's report on the operations, "In spite of the severe treatment that had been meted out to him, the enemy continued to fight stubbornly and skilfully at many points to cover the retreat of his forces across the Seine." The British formations had bitter fighting in Lisieux and Pont l'Evêque. The Canadians met still fiercer opposition in the Seine valley itself. On the morning of the 26<sup>th</sup> General Simonds' leading troops reached the river, and took over from the Americans who had pushed down it as far as Elbeuf. The Canadians were now close to Rouen, but the occupation of the city was delayed for several days and the Germans were able to exact a heavy price for it.

Rouen stands at the top of one of the great loops of the Seine; and across the narrow neck of this loop, ten miles south of the city, lies the Forêt de la Londe, "a rugged piece of country that would do credit to the Canadian Laurentians". On this range of thicklytimbered hills, where their grandfathers had inflicted a severe defeat upon the French during the siege of Paris in 1870-71, the Germans now made a resolute stand. When the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division moved into the forest on the morning of 27 August they found it, contrary to report, held by a well equipped and strongly posted enemy. During the next three days the 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigades sustained very heavy losses in nasty forest fighting without making much progress. Only on the afternoon of the 29<sup>th</sup> did the Germans withdraw. The next day troops of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division, which had crossed the Seine near Elbeuf, entered Rouen. For twentyfour hours thereafter our pursuing formations poured through the sadly-scarred Norman capital, receiving a rousing welcome from its liberated people.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> It is of interest to recall that in pre-D Day planning the role of the First Canadian Army

The enemy, improvising with great skill, had managed to pull back across the Seine the greater part of the troops who had survived the disaster of the Battle of the Gap. Deprived of permanent bridges, he turned to pontoon bridges, which were used during the hours of darkness and folded back against the river-bank during the day; he also pressed into service great numbers of ferries. This movement, however, was harried by relentless low-flying attacks by the Allied airmen, who took a terrible toll. On 25 August the German air force, trying to cover the crossings, lost an estimated 77 aircraft in combat. "On this and the subsequent three days", Air Chief Marshal Leigh Mallory reported, "approximately 3000 vehicles were destroyed and several thousand dead German soldiers were found among the wreckage in the area of the Seine crossings". The destruction on the southern banks of the river was comparable to that in the Gap. British investigators nevertheless reached the conclusion that, taking the campaign as a whole, the Germans probably got a little more than half of their motor transport away to the north, although their loss in tanks and self-propelled guns was much heavier. Once proud enemy formations were reduced to shadows. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Panzer Division, for instance, had probably had a strength of about 15,000 men when the campaign began; now it was down to a little over 2000, with five tanks and three guns.

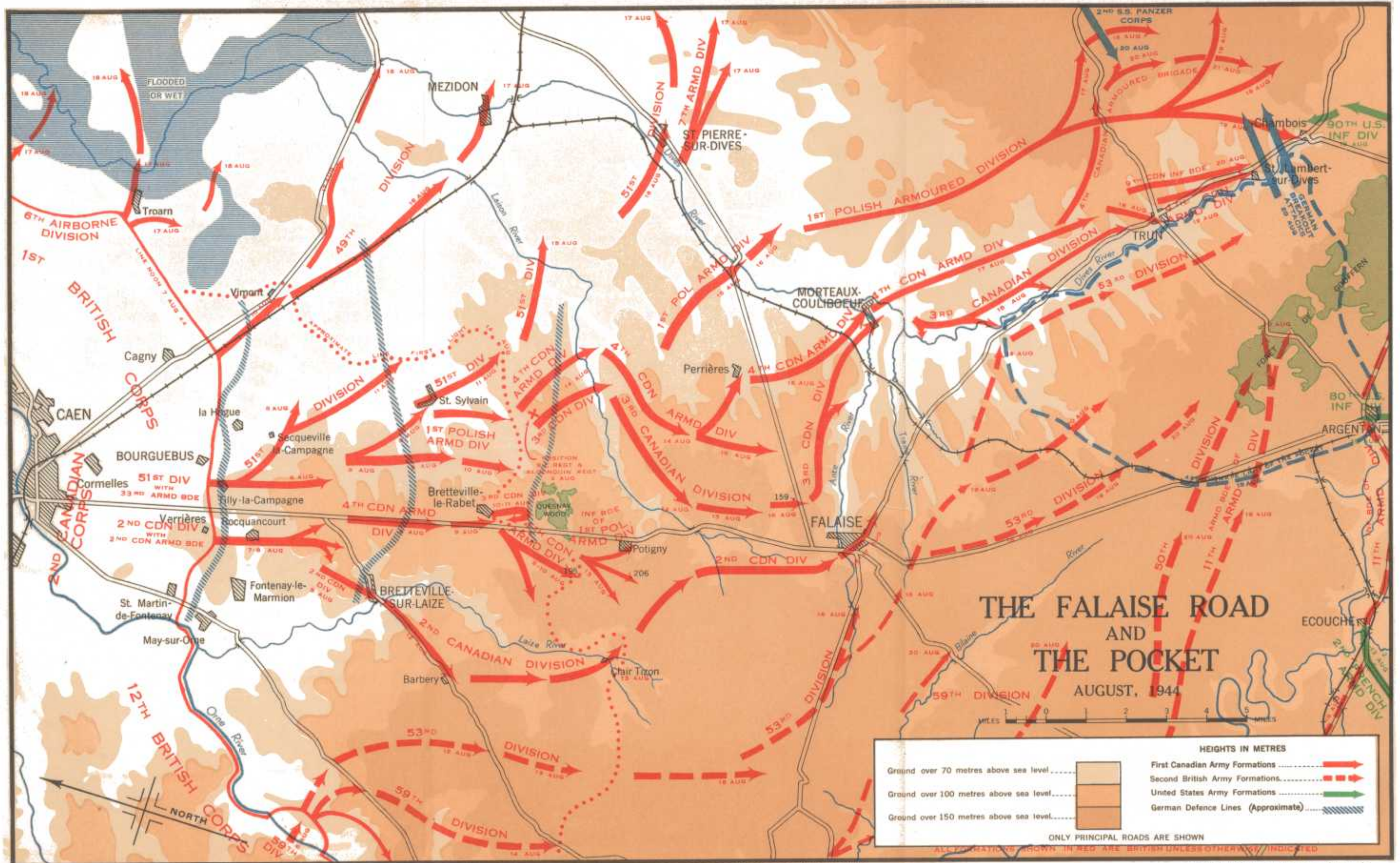
The Battle of Normandy was over, and the Allies had won an extraordinary victory. The German Seventh Army had for the moment almost ceased to exist as a fighting force, and the Fifth Panzer Army was in little better case.<sup>12</sup> To quote General Eisenhower's report, "By 25 August the enemy had 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 defences."

To this result General Crerar's Army had made a very great contribution. Nowhere on the long line had the fighting been fiercer. Of the damage inflicted on the enemy, the 25,776 prisoners taken on the Army front from the opening of the offensive on the night of 7-8 August until the end of the month represented only part; our Intelligence staff

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was defined as an advance eastward from the bridgehead, an attack across the lower reaches of the Seine in the face of opposition and the capture of Le Havre. With this in view, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps and particularly the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division carried out special training on the River Trent (Exercise "Kate" — Crossing a Tidal Estuary). Thanks to our great victory in Lower Normandy, this perilous Seine assault operation did not materialize.

<sup>12</sup> The Seventh Army had controlled the Germans' western sector; the Fifth Panzer Army (sailed earlier Panzer Group West) had faced the British and Canadians.



# THE FALAISE ROAD AND THE POCKET

## AUGUST, 1944

**HEIGHTS IN METRES**

- Ground over 70 metres above sea level.....
- Ground over 100 metres above sea level.....
- Ground over 150 metres above sea level.....

**ONLY PRINCIPAL ROADS ARE SHOWN**

ALL FORMATIONS SHOWN IN RED ARE BRITISH UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED

First Canadian Army Formations .....	
Second British Army Formations .....	
United States Army Formations .....	
German Defence Lines (Approximate) .....	

considered that the enemy's losses in killed and wounded might be conservatively estimated at about the same figure. But we had ourselves paid heavily. Casualties of Canadian troops of the First Canadian Army for the month of August totalled 632 officers and 8736 other ranks; 164 officers and 2094 other ranks lost their lives. "The loss of these gallant officers and men", wrote the Army Commander to the Minister of National Defence, "was the price of a most serious reverse inflicted upon the enemy".

On the night of 14-15 August a new blow had fallen on the Germans, when Allied forces from Italy landed on the Mediterranean coast of France. This operation, undertaken with many doubts and after vast discussion, was a sweeping success, and as early as 11 September the men from the south joined hands with the victors of Normandy. By then almost the whole of France was free. On 25 August the world had heard the glorious news that Leclerc's Division had entered Paris that morning. There now seemed no limit to the possibilities of the situation. After the crossing of the Seine, the question was whether the fleeing German armies could recover themselves so far as to stabilize it even temporarily. The Battle of Normandy had made ultimate German defeat inevitable; and at the beginning of September it seemed quite probable that the final collapse could not be postponed for more than a few weeks. These hopes proved illusory. Eight months' hard fighting still lay ahead in North-West Europe.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE CAMPAIGN IN NORTH-WEST EUROPE: THE CHANNEL PORTS, SEPTEMBER 1944

#### THE PURSUIT THROUGH FRANCE AND BELGIUM

The Allied victory in Lower Normandy had left the German armies in North-West Europe in desperate straits. Broken and disorganized, they streamed back across France; the resistance offered to our pursuing columns, though often fierce, was local and temporary; and Field-Marshal Model's plans for stabilizing the situation, first on the Seine and then on the Somme, collapsed before they could be elaborated.

Nevertheless, the enemy's situation had changed for the better in one respect at least. Stress of circumstances had forced him to take as the basis of his operations a far sounder strategic conception than that on which he had worked in Normandy. In the bridgehead campaign Hitler had enforced a thoroughly unrealistic strategy. Not only had the Germans failed to concentrate all available forces against the bridgehead while it was weak, but after it was clear that it could not be liquidated Hitler had still refused to give up ground, although by doing so he could have drawn off his armies in good order and looked forward to fighting a long campaign with them in more favourable circumstances further east. He chose instead to fight between the Seine and the Loire; and by so doing he suffered a shattering defeat and the loss of a great part of his best armies. Now, however, the enemy adopted, for the moment at any rate, a more effective system. The continuance of our advance depended upon supply, and it could not go on indefinitely if we were forced to maintain our armies from the Caen area. Every mile added to our communications increased the strain on our transport facilities; we must shorten those lines of supply, by possessing ourselves of ports further east, closer to our new front. The Germans now resolved to deny us such ports just as long as possible. And to meet the crisis Hitler called back from retirement the ablest of his generals. On 6 September Field-Marshal von Rundstedt again became Commander-in-Chief West.

"Administration", then, dominated the next phase. Lord Wavell once remarked that he knew of only one really satisfactory exposition of the virtues necessary for a general; it was that of Socrates, which, putting first things first, began, "The general must know how to get his men their rations and every other kind of stores needed for war." It showed, in other words, an understanding of administration, "the real



crux of generalship". The great essential for us, early in September 1944, was to maintain the momentum of our campaign, to keep the front moving and destroy the enemy before he could recover himself; but we could not do this without "rations and every other kind of stores", and this meant ports.

The days immediately after the crossing of the Seine saw the Allies advancing with giant strides. The next natural barrier was the Somme; but on the last day of August General Dempsey's Second Army reached and crossed that historic river at Amiens, picking up on the way General Eberbach, newly appointed to command the shattered Seventh Army. One of the most spectacular advances in the history of warfare followed. By 3 September the British were in Brussels; a supreme effort that day carried them forward full 60 miles; and on the 4<sup>th</sup> they entered Antwerp, and found its miles of docks virtually intact. Further east the Americans were motoring forward in much the same manner. One thrust carried them too into Belgium on 2 September, and another took them across the Moselle five days later.

Many a veteran will tell his children and grandchildren the story of how the liberated people of France and Belgium received our troops during the great pursuit. In every village and hamlet men, women and children turned out *en masse* to welcome those who had broken the chains of the oppressor. The cobble-stones which, through four long years, had echoed to the tramp of the German jackboot now rang with the noisy rattle of our carriers; but the shrill and cheerful greetings of the citizens rose above the din. Flags were everywhere, and flowers by thousands showered down upon our columns as they rolled through. Mile after mile, day after day, the story was the same, and there cannot have been many men in our army who were not moved by the demonstration. There is little enough glory in modern war; but it is a very glorious (and at the same time a rather humbling) experience to march in the ranks of an army of liberation.

For the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division the climax came at Dieppe, where this Division had assaulted the beaches in the great raid of 1942. It had seemed likely that the enemy would fight for this port, and we had accordingly made arrangements to deliver against it a shattering attack, in which very heavy bombardment by air and sea would be the prelude to the land assault. But Operation "Fusilade" never took place. When the 8<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Regiment (14<sup>th</sup> Canadian Hussars) reached Dieppe on the morning of 1 September it found the enemy gone.<sup>1</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> During this period of rapid advance our reconnaissance units came into their own. The 7<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Regiment (17<sup>th</sup> Duke of York's Royal Canadian Hussars) led the rush of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division into the Pas de Calais, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps' armoured car unit, the 18<sup>th</sup> Armoured Car Regiment (12<sup>th</sup> Manitoba Dragoons) was the spearhead of the

only obstacle to the passage of its armoured cars and carriers through the streets was, it recorded, “the dense crowds of Dieppe citizens, who were shouting, crying, throwing flowers (and other articles too numerous to mention) and generally climbing all over our vehicles in the mad joy of liberation”. The Division “stood down” for a few days at Dieppe. It was thus enabled to honour the graves of its dead of 1942 and to arrange a ceremonial march through the town, in addition to enjoying a much-needed period of rest and reorganization.<sup>2</sup>

Dieppe, however, meant more than the paying-off of an old Canadian score. It was a useful port, and therefore an important asset to the Allies. Why the Germans chose to relinquish it without a fight remains something of a mystery. They had even failed to demolish the harbour facilities in a really thorough manner; and in consequence our Engineers had the port ready to receive ships as early as 6 September. Yet Dieppe was only a harbour of secondary importance, capable of supplying roughly one-quarter of the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group; the rest had to be met from the depots in the original maintenance area around Bayeux — and after the fall of Antwerp the British line of communication back to Bayeux was over 300 miles long. To maintain supplies over such a line required far more lorries, obviously, than over a normal distance — far more than the Allied armies had available. The immediate solution, in the British zone, was to “ground” the 8<sup>th</sup> Corps — that is, to halt it where it stood and to use the greater part of its transport to supply the other British corps which were carrying on the pursuit. But the disadvantages of this are obvious, and the only real answer to the problem was the seizure of more ports within reach of the front. One small port — Le Tréport — the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division (now commanded by Major-General D.C. Spry) had taken on the same day on which the 2<sup>nd</sup> entered Dieppe; another and larger one, Ostend, fell to us on 9 September, but had been seriously damaged and was not open to traffic until 26 September. In every other port of any importance north of the Seine sat a German garrison; the sole exception was inland Antwerp, the greatest of all — but though we had Antwerp itself the enemy held both banks of the River Scheldt between it and the sea, and no Allied ship could enter until the Scheldt was free. To open these harbours was the next task. “A speedy and victorious conclusion to the war”, wrote General Crerar to his Corps Commanders on 9 September, “now depends, fundamentally, upon the capture by First Canadian Army of the Channel ports. . .”

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4<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division.

<sup>2</sup> See *Canada's Battle in Normandy*, pages 148-56. It was found that the men killed in the raid had been buried in a cemetery, near the Bois des Vertus, to which the French people of the district had given every care.

CLEARING THE CHANNEL COAST: LE HAVRE AND  
THE FLYING-BOMB SITES

Le Havre was to be dealt with by Sir John Crocker's 1<sup>st</sup> British Corps, now composed of the 49<sup>th</sup> (West Riding) and 51<sup>st</sup> (Highland) Divisions. Strongly fortified and garrisoned by some 12,000 men, it could be taken only by a deliberate "set-piece" attack. From 5 September onward the defences were repeatedly bombarded by the R.A.F. Bomber Command and the 15-inch guns of the battleship "Warspite" and the monitor "Erebus". On the afternoon of the 10<sup>th</sup> the ground attack began. The infantry divisions were supported by a fine assortment of the special assault vehicles of the 79<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division, including "Flail" tanks to beat paths through minefields, "Crocodile" flame-throwing tanks, engineer assault vehicles to blast open concrete strongpoints with their "petards", and last but not least a Canadian squadron of "Kangaroos" — the name given to the armoured personnel carrier, first used in Operation "Totalize" and now recognized as a most valuable adjunct to the infantry attack. By the evening of 12 September Operation "Astonia" was over; Le Havre was ours, and with it more than 11,000 prisoners. British casualties numbered fewer than 500. The port had been badly demolished and tonnage did not begin moving through it until 9 October. In any case, Supreme Headquarters allotted it for the maintenance of the American armies. This decision the British did not much regret, as it was already so far behind their front.<sup>3</sup>

General Crerar's Army was now dispersed along a front of more than 200 miles, as the armoured formations of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps, leaving the infantry divisions to contain the by-passed ports, swept on in pursuit. During the first days of September the 1<sup>st</sup> Polish and 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Divisions had crossed the Somme with the aid of the indefatigable Engineers and leaped forward into Belgium. About Bruges heavy German resistance was again encountered. The armour had collided here with the defences of the river approaches to Antwerp, on which the enemy intended to fight his hardest. Simultaneously, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division had resumed its place in the advance and was now probing the outer defences of Dunkirk. This town was held by the enemy, as were Calais and Boulogne, both of which were invested by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division.

The Canadians had now occupied the Pas de Calais, and in doing so had scotched one of the nastiest of Hitler's weapons. Since 13 June the

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<sup>3</sup> It may be noted at this point that on 1 September General Eisenhower, in accordance with the arrangements made before D Day, assumed personal control of the ground forces and General Montgomery (who was now promoted Field Marshal) ceased to act as ground commander. His command hereafter was limited to the Second British and First Canadian Armies.

enemy had been discharging flying bombs (V-is) from this area against London, and had caused heavy loss of life and still heavier damage to property. This, London's second great ordeal of the war, ended on 6 September when General Spry's men chased the Germans from the launching-sites. No other achievement of the Canadian Army ever gave the Canadian soldier such solid satisfaction as this one. A few flying bombs were launched from aircraft there after, but this menace never attained serious proportions. On 8 September, however, the first V-2 rocket, fired from Holland, fell in London's outskirts, and this bombardment continued sporadically until almost the end of the war with Germany.<sup>4</sup> Another and longer German campaign against the people of south-eastern England was drawing to a close; the heavily-fortified batteries of long-range guns near Calais, which had dropped shells in and around Dover since August 1940, now redoubled their fire as their crews saw the writing on the wall.

There was some discussion before First Canadian Army received firm orders for its operations against the ports. For a time it was intended to attack Dunkirk; but by 15 September Army Headquarters had been told that Dunkirk was merely to be masked and by-passed. Thereafter some thought was given to the possibility of doing the same with Calais. The Navy, however, argued that the guns around that place would interfere with the use of the harbour of Boulogne, and the decision was that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division would take on Calais after it had dealt with Boulogne. General Foulkes' Division was moved up to the Antwerp area, being replaced before Dunkirk first by the 4<sup>th</sup> Special Service Brigade, then by a brigade of the Highland Division and finally by the 1<sup>st</sup> Czechoslovak Independent Armoured Brigade Group, the latest recruit to General Crerar's international team, which included or had included English, Scottish, Polish, Belgian and Dutch formations in addition to its core of three Canadian Divisions and Canadian corps and army troops.<sup>5</sup>

## THE CAPTURE OF BOULOGNE AND CALAIS

The attack on Boulogne (Operation "Wellhit") was held up by the necessity of waiting for the special assault equipment used at Le Havre, and subsequently by delay in completing joint planning with the R.A.F.

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<sup>4</sup> During the period of the Arnhem operation in September, the threat of our advance led the Germans to withdraw their rocket units temporarily from the area around The Hague from which they bombarded London. From 25 September to 12 October they fired at Norwich instead.

<sup>5</sup> The Czechs remained under First Canadian Army until 27 November, when they passed to the direct control of the 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group. They continued to contain Dunkirk until the end of the war in Europe, when their commander, Major-General A. Liska, had the satisfaction of receiving the surrender of the town.

Bomber Command. But the air questions were adjusted by a conference with air commanders at Versailles on 15 September, and by the 17<sup>th</sup> all was ready. That morning the men of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division's 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Brigades — veterans now, with the D Day landings and the Caen and Falaise battles to look back upon — advanced against the enemy's works. They had plenty of support: in the air, the heavies of Bomber Command and the medium bombers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tactical Air Force; on the ground, the assault vehicles of the 79<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division, including the now ubiquitous Canadian Kangaroos, and the artillery of two divisions (their own and the 51<sup>st</sup>) and of the 9<sup>th</sup> (British) and 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Army Groups Royal Artillery. In addition, the huge guns on the English coast near Dover chimed in, firing with air observation on batteries near Calais which might interfere with our attack (and scoring, be it said with respect, a direct hit on one of the German 16inch guns at a range of about 42,000 yards).<sup>6</sup>

Boulogne was strong, for the Germans had supplemented its old forts with new concrete; high hills just outside the town afforded good defensive positions; and the enemy had plenty of artillery. Luckily, however, his defences had mainly faced seaward until a few weeks before the attack, when he hastily began to improve them on the land side; and the quality and morale of the 10,000-man garrison were not high. The complete reduction of the position took six days. The attack by 690 aircraft of Bomber Command on 17 September was extraordinarily impressive. Directed at five successive targets, it went on throughout the morning. An officer who watched the scene wrote:

The day was clear and sunny, though not wholly unclouded; beyond Boulogne we could see the Channel and, very faint on the distant horizon, the white line that marked the coast of England. The arrival of a wave of bombers was heralded in each case by two Pathfinder planes which dropped indicator flares. Within a minute or two thereafter the bombers were seen arriving, in most instances from the north-east. They did not manoeuvre, but moved straight over the target at a very considerable height, meeting very little anti-aircraft fire. As the bombs burst, they raised tremendous clouds of brown and black smoke, which at times wholly covered" the high ground about the targets. It was an awesome sight, and it was hard to believe that any enemy troops could remain alive in the target areas.

Nevertheless, the German commandant, Lt.-Gen. Heim, later testified that the bombing caused few casualties and had little effect on permanent defences; and when our infantry went forward (which they did the moment the last bomb fell on the first target, the area of the fortified height of Mont Lambert east of Boulogne) the enemy positions

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<sup>6</sup> The guns in action were two 14-inch manned by the Royal Marine Siege Regiment, and two 15-inch manned by the 540<sup>th</sup> Coast Regiment, Royal Artillery. In addition to the direct hit mentioned, there were repeated hits within German battery positions.

immediately opened fire and clearing them was a lengthy business.

The natural strength of the ground and the activity of the German artillery were the chief factors slowing our progress. By the evening of the 18<sup>th</sup>, in spite of these things, we had fought our way across the River Liane, which divides the built-up area of Boulogne in two. The Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders had captured the walled and moated Citadel in a manner worthy of a Dumas romance. While a company commander (Major J. G. Stothart) was planning the attack, a French civilian approached and offered to guide him through a "secret tunnel" leading into the heart of the citadel. Stothart with one platoon promptly plunged into the tunnel and appeared in the middle of the fort, behind the astonished defenders, at about the same moment at which two engineer assault vehicles blew in the gate. "At once a host of white flags waved from the walls". The centre of the enemy's position was now clear, but individual strongpoints fought on in isolation. The last of these, on the coast north and south of the town, surrendered only on 22 September. Boulogne yielded in all over 9500 prisoners; the severity of the fighting was reflected in the attackers' casualties, which amounted to 634 — chiefly caused by the enemy's persistent and accurate shellfire. He had demolished the harbour extensively, and we could not begin using it until 12 October.

While Boulogne was being reduced, Calais and the nearby batteries at Sangatte and Cape Gris Nez were masked and blockaded.<sup>7</sup> General Spry then turned his attention to these other objectives. The general plan of the Calais operation ("Undergo") was the same as for Boulogne: an attack by two infantry brigades (the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>) very strongly supported from the air and by armour and artillery. All the support that had been used at Boulogne was now diverted to Calais and in addition two regiments of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade were available. The operation was complicated by the fact that the city's land fronts were almost entirely covered by large flooded areas; the only high dry ground lay close along the shore and was barred by the heavy coastal defences.

The attack began on 25 September, following the now welltested pattern: a shattering bombing attack and artillery bombardment followed closely by assault by armour and infantry. The 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade went for the cross-Channel batteries in the area from Sangatte to Cape Blanc Nez, west of Calais, while the 7<sup>th</sup> assailed the town itself from the south. Progress was slow but steady. All resistance in the battery positions ended on the 26<sup>th</sup>; and the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade reached the coast west of the town and began fighting its way in from this direction. On 27 September, after further bombing, the old forts of Lapin and Nieulay

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<sup>7</sup> The 3<sup>rd</sup> Division was assisted in this task by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division's machine-gun unit, the Toronto Scottish Regiment (M.G.).

surrendered to the Canadian Scottish and the Royal Winnipeg Rifles respectively. Further south the Regina Rifle Regiment attacked straight across the flooded area; the water obstacles, their diarist remarked, "were surmounted by the simple expedients of swimming, wading, using canvas boats and by travelling Tarzan-like across on ropes".

On the evening of the 28<sup>th</sup> Lt.-Col. Schroeder, the enemy commander, asked for a parley. General Spry met his envoys near Guines, and they made the somewhat surprising request that Calais be declared an open city. On being refused, they asked for a forty eight hour truce to evacuate the civilian inhabitants. Twenty-four hours, however, was considered enough for this purpose, and this period Spry granted. This proved to be an excellent piece of business for the attackers. The cessation of bombing and shelling was apparently so pleasant to the German troops that they had no stomach for the resumption of fighting. When the attack began again at noon on the 30<sup>th</sup>, with the Queen's Own Rifles and the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa pushing in from the east and the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade from the west, resistance immediately began to crumble. The last enemy fighting men in Calais were mopped up on 1 October. Over 7000 prisoners had been taken at a cost of fewer than 300 casualties to our own forces.

On 29 September, moreover, the 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade had attacked and taken with relatively little trouble the batteries on Cape Gris Nez, the promontory, some twelve miles south-west of Calais, where the continent makes its closest approach to Britain. This independent position yielded some 1600 more prisoners. With them came the assurance that the shelling of south-eastern England, which had gone on for forty-nine months, was finally and utterly at an end. The occupation of the Pas de Calais had come none too soon; for as Mr. Churchill subsequently announced the enemy had been preparing there multiple artillery installations of a new type which would have done infinitely more damage than his gun batteries. "Only just in time did the Allied Armies blast the viper in his nest".

### THE THRUST TO ARNHEM

While the Canadians were reducing the Channel ports, British and American troops had been engaged in an epic struggle in southern Holland.

The Supreme Commander's general strategic policy was, he explains in his report, "to attack north-eastward in the greatest strength possible", striking his main blow on the 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group front. Troops of the First U.S. Army had actually entered Germany north-west of Trier on 11 September, but it was not intended to make a major effort on the American front (where supply difficulties were at their worst) for

the moment. An attack across the Lower Rhine into the North German plain appeared the most rewarding line of operation: "it seemed probable that through rapidity of exploitation both the Siegfried Line and the Rhine River might be crossed and strong bridgeheads established before the enemy could recover sufficiently to make a definite stand in the Arnhem area." Thereafter, as soon as Antwerp was usable, the invasion of Germany in strength could begin. With this programme in view, the First Allied Airborne Army was placed at General Montgomery's disposal, and three U.S. divisions were "grounded" to give additional administrative support to his operations.

The rights and wrongs of this strategy will doubtless long be debated by military students. Viscount Montgomery, in his book *Normandy to the Baltic*, relates that he had urged the Supreme Commander to strengthen the 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group further, and to deliver with it "one, powerful full-blooded thrust across the Rhine and into the heart of Germany, backed by the whole of the resources of the Allied Armies". He says that General Eisenhower preferred, however, a "broad front policy", closing up to the Rhine on a wide front, establishing bridgeheads if and where possible, and postponing operations further east until Antwerp was open. General Patton's posthumously-published narrative<sup>8</sup> complains of the results of the decision to divert so much strength to the support of the 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group thrust. Had he himself been given enough gasoline and ammunition, Patton argues, his Third Army could have pushed on and crossed the Rhine in very short order. This competition between Allied generals for administrative resources of course stemmed directly from our lack of ports and the length of our lines of communication. Deciding the best use to make of his limited means, in these circumstances, was one of the Supreme Commander's hardest tasks. Viscount Montgomery's former Chief of Staff, Major-General Sir Francis de Guingand, has argued, in *Operation Victory*, that Eisenhower's "broad front" policy was in fact the wisest possible. Our concern here is not to contribute to this discussion but merely to record what took place.

The Second Army had entered Holland on 12 September south of Eindhoven. The plan now was to lay, in Field-Marshal Montgomery's phrase, "a carpet of airborne troops" across the succession of waterways separating General Dempsey's men from the North German plain: the largest being the Maas and the two main branches of the Rhine — the Waal and the Neder Rijn (also called the Lek). Along this carpet or corridor stretching away through Eindhoven, Grave, Nijmegen and Arnhem, the Second Army was to roll, joining up with the airborne formations, making the ground secure and establishing beyond Arnhem

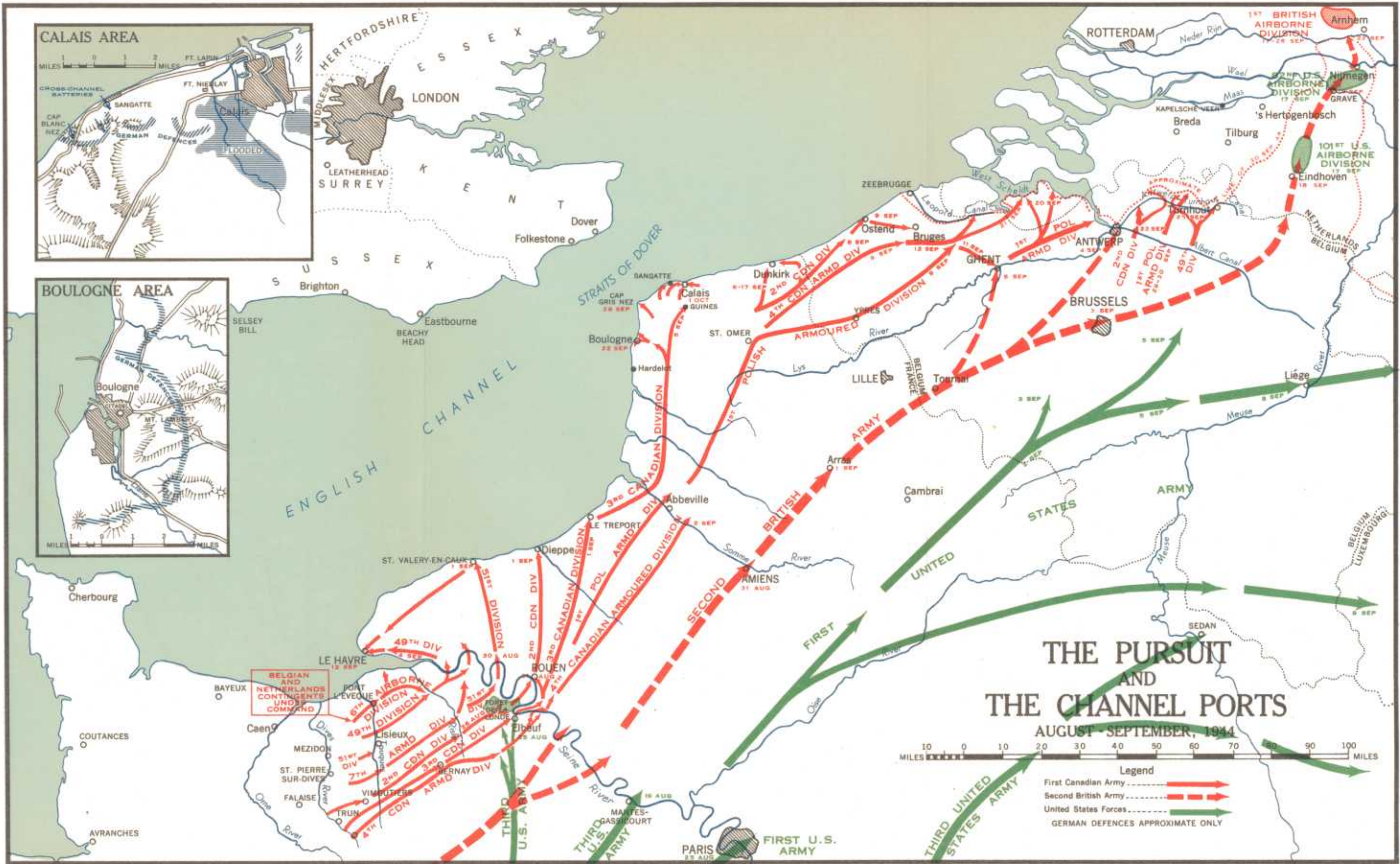
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<sup>8</sup> *War As I Knew It*.



a bridgehead across the Ijssel facing east. Thereafter the Field Marshal envisaged an advance by the Second Army to Hamm, and a thrust "southwards along the eastern face of the Ruhr" which in conjunction with an offensive by the First U.S. Army would encircle that great industrial area. For the attack across the rivers the 101<sup>st</sup> and 82<sup>nd</sup> U.S. Airborne Divisions were to drop in the areas about Eindhoven and Grave respectively, while the 1<sup>st</sup> British Airborne Division was destined for the more distant objective, Arnhem. The great enterprise (Operation "Market Garden") was to be launched on 17 September, the earliest possible date. Speed was of the essence, for already stiffening German resistance indicated the beginnings of recovery.

The results of the operation are well known. We seized and held the crossing of the Maas at Grave, and the great road-bridge across the Waal at Nijmegen; but at Arnhem we met with a glorious failure. The enemy was stronger in the area than we had expected — particularly in armour — and moreover reinforced his troops there with great speed. Persistent bad weather favoured him and hampered our air forces. Repeated attacks on the narrow corridor from Eindhoven to Nijmegen harassed our movement to the north. The result was that effective contact was never made with the 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, fighting so gallantly on the far side of the Neder Rijn. On the night of 25-26 September the survivors of the Division were withdrawn across the river, many of the assault boats that did the perilous ferrying being manned by Canadian engineers. The operation had been successful to the extent of an advance of about fifty miles; we now held a long salient, culminating in the "island" beyond the Nijmegen bridge, which was to be very useful to us in due course; but it had not achieved its great object. After Arnhem it gradually became clear that we were not to win the German war in 1944. We had to look forward to a hard winter campaign, and probably a spring campaign thereafter. In these circumstances the speedy opening of Antwerp remained a matter of the very greatest importance.



## CHAPTER XIV

### THE CAMPAIGN IN NORTH-WEST EUROPE: THE BATTLE OF THE SCHELDT AND THE WINTER ON THE MAAS, SEPTEMBER 1944 — FEBRUARY 1945

#### THE PLAN FOR OPENING THE SCHELDT

The great port of Antwerp is some fifty miles from the sea as the crow flies. For a dozen miles below the city the River Scheldt is narrow; then, as it passes from Belgian into Dutch territory and turns west towards the sea, it widens. On the north side of this broad estuary is the long, low peninsula of South Beveland, once an island but now joined to the mainland by an isthmus carrying a road and a railway. Beyond South Beveland and joined to it by a narrow causeway lies the island of Walcheren, which completely commands the mouth of the river. The south side of the estuary is mainland. The whole countryside is almost as flat as a billiardtable. Much of it is reclaimed (“polder”) land protected from the sea by dykes, and the roads in general are raised above the damp fields on causeways. The Germans had done much fortifying, and Walcheren especially was one of the strongest areas in the world.

The situation in the last week of September 1944 was that we held the city of Antwerp, though the enemy was still very close to it on the north; and the Scheldt's south bank was in our hands as far as the inlet known as the Braakman (invariably but inaccurately called at the time “Savojaards Plaat”).<sup>1</sup> Westward from here to the mouth of the Scheldt, almost round to Zeebrugge, the enemy was still in possession. He was covered against attack from the south and west by artificial water-lines. Two canals, the Leopold Canal and the Canal de Dérivation de la Lys, run side by side here for a dozen miles from the sea, making a very effective moat for the Germans' position; the former, swinging back almost to the southern point of the Braakman, completed the protection of their pocket, the land front of which was about 25 miles long. On 13 September the 4<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division, now commanded by Major-General H. W. Foster, had sought to advance across the canals. The Algonquin Regiment established a bridgehead north-east of Bruges, but met the fiercest resistance imaginable and after suffering very heavy losses had to withdraw next day. The 1<sup>st</sup> British Corps had been brought

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<sup>1</sup> The name Savojaards Plant properly applies to the mudflats in the mouth of the inlet.

up from the Le Havre area and with it the First Canadian Army had taken over the Antwerp sector, freeing General Dempsey's hands for the Arnhem battle. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division began to move in here on 16 September and came under General Crocker's command. The Polish Armoured Division, which had cleared the south bank of the Scheldt to the Braakman, was also moved over to the right flank, and at the end of September the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division was patrolling the whole front south of the river while preparations for the clearing operation went on behind it. For some time past active planning had been in progress at Headquarters First Canadian Army in consultation with the naval and air forces, and a basic plan was ready by 23 September. General Crerar, however, was not able to see this operation through. Illness compelled him to return to the United Kingdom for treatment on the 27<sup>th</sup>. Throughout the Scheldt operations Lieutenant-General Simonds acted as G.O.C.-in-C. First Canadian Army, and Major-General Foulkes as G.O.C. 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps. General Foulkes' place at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was taken by Brigadier R. H. Keebler.

The plan for freeing the estuary envisaged four main tasks. The first was to clear the area north of Antwerp and close the eastern end of the South Beveland isthmus; this was to be done by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division. The second was to clear the pocket behind the Leopold Canal; this was the business of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division and was known as Operation "Switchback". Thirdly, when "Switchback" had been completed, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division would attack along the isthmus to take South Beveland (Operation "Vitality"). The fourth and last phase would be the capture of Walcheren Island (Operation "Infatuate"). It had been proposed to use airborne forces against South Beveland and Walcheren, but General Brereton, commanding the First Allied Airborne Army, argued that the terrain was unsuitable for an "airborne task" and the Supreme Commander supported him.

### CLOSING THE SOUTH BEVELAND ISTHMUS

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division's advance to the isthmus leading to South Beveland proved to be no easy matter. In the beginning, it is true, things went well. On 22 September the Division had secured a bridgehead over the Albert Canal immediately east of Antwerp. The next formidable obstacle to the north was the Antwerp — Turnhout Canal; and bridgeheads over it were likewise acquired, after sharp fighting, by the joint efforts of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 49<sup>th</sup> Divisions. By the beginning of October the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was firmly established on a line running from Merxem in the northern outskirts of Antwerp north-easterly along the north bank of the canal. From this base it now jumped off in the direction of the isthmus, reverting about the same time from the 1<sup>st</sup> British to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian

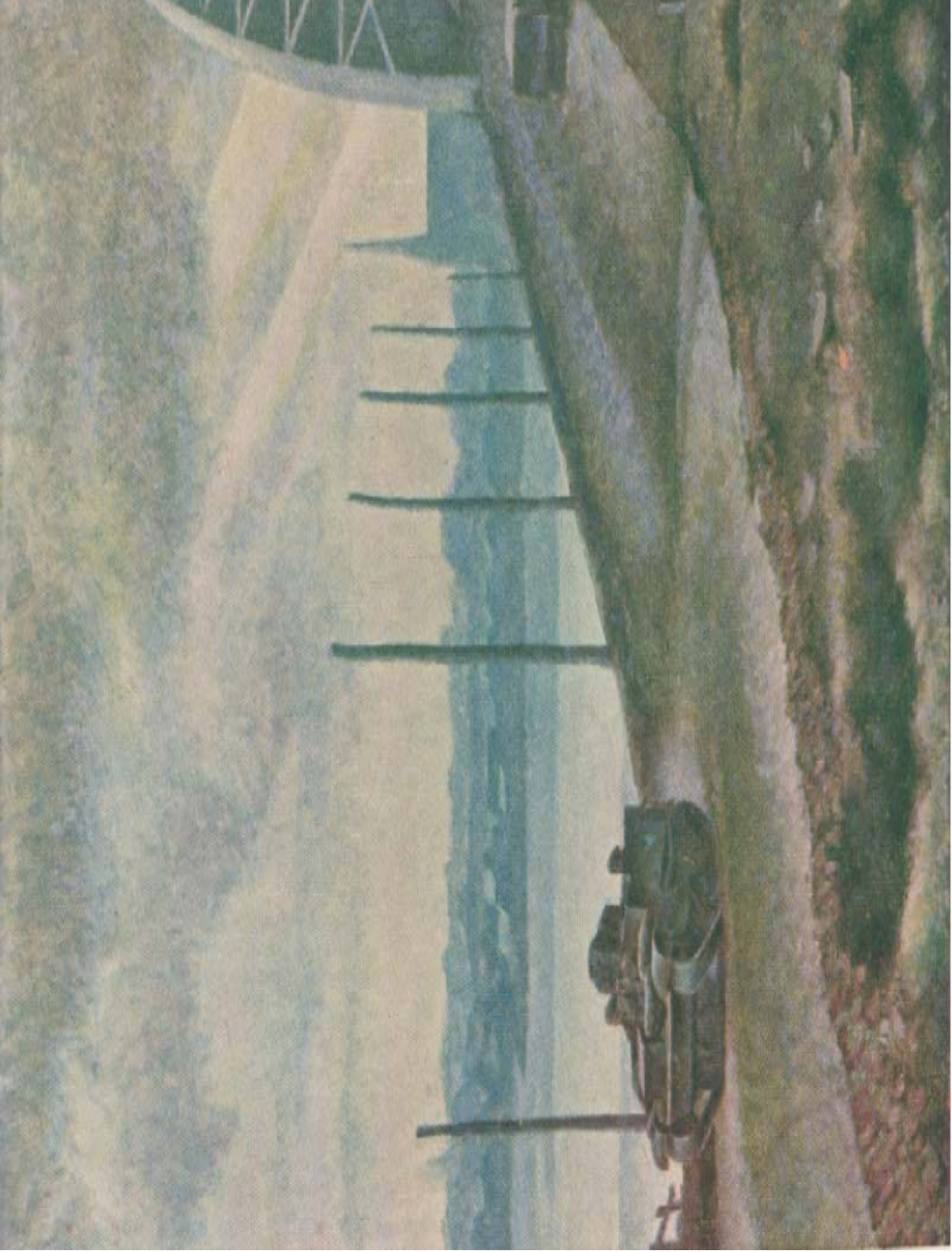
Corps. German resistance was not particularly fierce (one prisoner quoted a battalion commander as saying, recalling the retreat from Normandy, "You can't turn a hare into a porcupine") and good progress was made until 8 October, by which time Brigadier W. J. McGill's 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade were very close to the isthmus. Now the opposition abruptly stiffened; the enemy had thrown in four battalions of his redoubtable paratroopers to bar our way.

The bitterest kind of fighting followed. No written record can do justice to the situation which confronted our troops in this area. Securely dug in on the further slopes of the dykes about the village of Woensdrecht and the embankment that carries the railway across the isthmus, the paratroopers waited coolly for successive Canadian attacks across the open, flooded fields before them. The 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade suffered very heavily; one battalion, the Canadian Black Watch, lost all its rifle company commanders in a single day (13 October). But our infantry persisted. On 10 October we got a footing upon the embankment on the isthmus west of Woensdrecht, but the bottle was not yet corked. The enemy continued to counter-attack most violently, and while he gained little ground he prevented us from improving our positions. On the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup> the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry finally captured Woensdrecht and held it against further furious counter-attacks. Although the situation was now better in hand, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division required assistance to enable it to obtain that secure control of the area without which it could not start across the isthmus towards South Beveland.

On 16 October Field-Marshal Montgomery issued new instructions to his Army Commanders. These directed a regrouping designed to bring larger forces to bear on the great task of freeing the Scheldt. The directive ran in part as follows:

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.
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.

Briefly, the effect of this directive was that Dempsey was to take over the right sector of the line then held by Simonds, and, closing down all other offensive operations, launch a westward drive designed to clear



THE NIJMEGEN BRIDGE

From a painting by Capt. D. A. Colville

the Germans out of the area south of the Maas from 's Hertogenbosch westwards. The Canadian Army, its line thus shortened, was to push its right forward to clear the country north of the Beveland isthmus.

These orders soon took effect. By the time Dempsey's offensive got under way on 22 October, the 1<sup>st</sup> British Corps, still forming the Canadian Army's right wing, had already made good progress. General Crocker had been given the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division to help him, and retained the Polish Armoured Division and the 49<sup>th</sup> Division. In addition, the 104<sup>th</sup> United States Division (the first American formation to serve under First Canadian Army) came under his command on 23 October. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> the Canadian armour captured Esschen, about eight miles north-east of Woensdrecht. This advance shook loose the Germans in the latter area. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> it was finally reported that the isthmus was completely sealed, and next day the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division began the advance against South Beveland.

#### CLEARING THE BRESKENS POCKET

While the bitter struggle went on at the entrance to the Beveland peninsula there had been equally fierce fighting along the Scheldt's southern shore. Here the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division, abandoning the role of siege warfare which it had sustained so successfully along the Pas de Calais, turned to the dirty and onerous business of "polder" fighting.

The scheme for the reduction of the enemy's positions behind the Leopold Canal centring on his coastal defences about the little port of Breskens was as follows. A frontal attack was to be delivered by the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade (now commanded by Brigadier J. G. Spragge) across the canal just east of the point where it separated from the Canal de Dérivation de la Lys. The 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade would then pass through the 7<sup>th</sup> and assist in exploitation. Thereafter, Brigadier J. M. Rockingham's 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade would make an amphibious assault against the rear of the enemy pocket, crossing the Braakman ("Savojaards Plaat") from the vicinity of Terneuzen and landing north of Biervliet.

The Leopold Canal is not broad, but the high tree-lined dykes containing it made it a dangerous obstacle, and the enemy was known to be well dug in on the further side. It was decided that the best expedient for clearing the way for the assault was the use of massed flame-throwers. In the early morning of 6 October, accordingly, 27 "Wasps", which had been brought up during the night, opened their searing bombardment against the far bank; and immediately two battalions of the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade flung assault boats into the canal and paddled across. The flame (a weapon especially feared by the enemy) had momentarily demoralized the defenders, and the Canadian Scottish and the Regina

Rifles both established footholds on the north side of the canal. But the Germans recovered quickly. Particularly heavy machine-gun fire came down from the left, and a most bloody struggle set in. The enemy counter-attacked fiercely, and mortar and small arms fire was incessant. On 7 October the Royal Winnipeg Rifles crossed the canal to assist, but the two original battalion bridgeheads were not linked up until early on the 9<sup>th</sup>. Even now, "in places the bridgehead was little deeper than the northern canal bank". The pocket south of the Scheldt was held by one of the best German formations the Canadians had met, MajorGeneral Eberding's 64<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. Only after the 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade's waterborne thrust had had its due effect could the Leopold Canal bridgehead be properly developed and Bailey bridges thrown across the canal.

The 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade operation, originally scheduled for 8 October, was postponed for a day by damage to locks of the canal up which the amphibious vehicles ("Buffaloes") had to swim from Ghent to Terneuzen. The Buffaloes were manned by the 5<sup>th</sup> Assault Regiment, Royal Engineers and a unit of the 79<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division. The leading battalions, the Highland Light Infantry of Canada and the North Nova Scotia Highlanders, set out on their five-mile voyage shortly after midnight and touched down soon after two o'clock. The foe was completely surprised and there was little opposition until dawn; but counter-attacks then set in, heavy shells began to arrive from the directions of Breskens and Flushing, and the bridgehead was enlarged only by hard fighting. "The enemy fought tenaciously, launching one counter-attack after another with great determination. These were not the garrison troops of Boulogne or Cape Gris Nez, but soldiers of a highly trained field division. The enemy dashed along the ditches, bouncing out here and there over the culverts, greatcoats flapping, and wearing full equipment." Nevertheless, these energetic Germans were steadily pushed back, and the situation was much more satisfactory than in the other bridgehead along the Leopold Canal. Accordingly, advantage was taken of the flexibility of the original plan, and the 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade was put in behind the 9<sup>th</sup> instead of behind the 7<sup>th</sup>.

In the meantime the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division's 10<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade had taken a hand. The Algonquin Regiment fought its way into the enemy pocket through the narrow land gap between the east end of the Leopold Canal and the head of the Braakman Inlet, and subsequently the Argyll and Sutherlands crossed the canal itself east of the original bridgehead. The aim was now to link up the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Brigades with the 10<sup>th</sup>. This was effected on 14 October when the Queen's Own Rifles from the north made contact with the Algonquins.

The east side had been carved off the pocket and a land route opened around the end of the Leopold Canal which did away with the need for continued ferry service across the Braakman from Terneuzen.



Furthermore, thanks to the reduction of pressure resulting from the amphibious operation, the Leopold bridgehead now began to expand and on 14 October a few tanks got across the canal. The 52<sup>nd</sup> (Lowland) Division had come under the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps and on 18 October one of its brigades, temporarily under General Spry's orders, began to relieve the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade north of the Leopold. The next day the Lowlanders made contact with the Canadians coming from the north-east. After nearly a fortnight's effort, the pocket had been reduced to little more than half of its original extent. But the vital coast defences at Breskens and west of it were still in German hands, and what remained of the 64<sup>th</sup> Division was still fighting hard.

The liquidation of the rest of the pocket now proceeded. Breskens fell on 22 October after heavy artillery and air bombardment; but Fort Frederik Hendrik, an ancient moated stronghold just to the west, which the Germans had strengthened with concrete, held out for three days more. Oostburg, intended by Eberding as a pivot position on which to hinge a gradual retirement, was seized on the 26<sup>th</sup>, and the enemy was forced back into his last refuge, the waterlogged area around the sea end of the Leopold Canal. Here, near Knocke-sur-Mer, the North Nova Scotia Highlanders captured Eberding on 1 November, and on 3 November all resistance ended. The hardhitting 64<sup>th</sup> Division had been entirely destroyed. Since the first crossing of the Leopold Canal we had taken 12,707 prisoners in the pocket. The enemy had been cleared from the last corner of Belgium, the first occupied nation of western Europe to be completely liberated; and the south shore of the Scheldt was free.

"Switchback" had been no ordinary operation. The enemy had been uncommonly skilful and determined, and the terrain uncommonly difficult and nasty. Flooded fields and dyke roads had precluded any considerable use of tanks; but artillery and air support were heavy and invaluable. All arms and services had fought and worked like Trojans. Not least important was the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps, which maintained supply in spite of driving conditions described with restraint as "perhaps the poorest we have ever faced". On one occasion, it was reported, an N.C.O. in charge of a convoy reconnoitred ahead of his trucks in a rowboat! But the credit for the victory lay, above all, with the infantry soldier, whose dogged determination had carried him onward through mud, water and fire to dislodge the stubborn foe.

#### THE TAKING OF SOUTH BEVELAND AND WALCHEREN

We must now return to the north side of the Scheldt and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division. By 23 October, we have seen, this formation was in a position to attack along the isthmus towards South Beveland; while progress south of the river had been such as to remove the possibility of

interference by enemy guns from that shore. The plan was for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division to thrust along the isthmus and obtain bridgeheads over the formidable Beveland Canal, which cuts across the peninsula from north to south. This advance was to be coordinated with an amphibious assault delivered west of the canal from the south side of the Scheldt.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade began the advance along the isthmus on 24 October. The main road and the one secondary one had been badly broken up, and the ground off the roads was flooded. Nevertheless, an advance of two-and-a-half miles was made this day, and by the 27<sup>th</sup> the Division had reached the banks of the Beveland Canal. That night the assault boats went into the water and the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade<sup>2</sup> established bridgeheads at two points. At a third, very heavy enemy shelling prevented a crossing. The engineers immediately set about bridging the 300-foot canal. Already British troops of the 52<sup>nd</sup> Division had made their waterborne assault in Buffaloes across the Scheldt from Terneuzen, landing west of the canal on the morning of the 26<sup>th</sup> and making their lodgement good. This diversion weakened the enemy's resistance to the Canadian advance from the canal and on the 29<sup>th</sup> British and Canadians linked up. The technique of "Switchback" had been repeated, and with like success. The rest of the peninsula was now cleared very rapidly; by the morning of 31 October South Beveland was ours, save for a tiny enemy bridgehead at the east end of the causeway leading to Walcheren. The 8<sup>th</sup> Canadian Reconnaissance Regiment had in the meantime passed a squadron across on Dutch barges to the neighbouring island of North Beveland, where it conducted a "private war" and picked up nearly 500 prisoners.

With the south shore already virtually clear, there remained one great obstacle to our use of the port of Antwerp: the island of Walcheren. Its name was ill-omened, for it had been the scene of a famous British military reverse during the wars against Napoleon. And even isolated as it now was, it seemed likely to be a very hard nut to crack. Its defences, we have said, were extremely strong, and the only land approach was the straight and narrow causeway from South Beveland. This was singularly uninviting. Over half a mile long and less than a hundred yards wide; a brick-paved road, very badly cratered, three or four feet above the surrounding tidal flats; a single-line railway track two or three feet higher; the inevitable Dutch bicycle-path; and a row of telegraph poles — that was the causeway. To make matters worse, it was found that there was not enough water over the flats, even at high tide, to permit of an assault in storm boats; yet the flats were too saturated for movement on foot, and there were too many runnels to

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<sup>2</sup> The 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade's commander, Brigadier J. G. Gauvreau, had been badly wounded on the 26<sup>th</sup> when his jeep struck a mine.

allow tracked amphibious "Weasels" to operate.

The position of the Germans on Walcheren, however, was already considerably the worse for the activities of the R.A.F. The island, it may be explained, is shaped like an enormous saucer; almost the whole of the interior is below sea-level, the only higher ground being around the edges. Through the centuries the industrious Dutch have filled the gaps in this higher ground, constructing massive dykes. At the island's western point the Westkapelle Dyke, 330 feet wide at its base, excluded the waters of the North Sea. During September General Simonds had formed the opinion that this and other dykes could be breached by bombing. Some of the experts were dubious, but Simonds argued that there was little to lose and much to gain by trying, and on 3 October the experiment was made by the R.A.F. Bomber Command at Westkapelle. That evening the sea was observed to be flowing in through a 75-yard gap. Further attacks followed, at the same and other points. Ultimately the Westkapelle gap was 380 yards wide, and the island had returned to its natural state, with the whole central region covered with salt water. What a blow this was to the inhabitants can be imagined. What mattered at the moment, however, was the blow dealt the enemy. Some of his defences were flooded, and though the most formidable batteries were on higher ground they were isolated by the waters and the Germans' movements generally were most seriously hampered. We, on the other hand, were offered the prospect of free use of our invaluable amphibious vehicles, and it was at least partly due to them that operations on Walcheren moved more rapidly than those south of the Scheldt, where there had been a great deal of miserably wet ground but little water deep enough to permit the use of amphibians.

Walcheren was to be attacked from three directions: across the causeway from the east; across the Scheldt from the south; and in the west by a force landed from the sea. The two latter attacks were to go in on 1 November; the causeway attack was to be delivered as soon as the causeway was reached.

During 31 October the Royal Regiment of Canada liquidated the little German pocket at the causeway's eastern end, and the Canadian Black Watch then attacked along the causeway itself. There was heavy opposition and particularly deadly mortar fire, but early in the afternoon it was reported that the Black Watch were only 75 yards from the west end. That night the Calgary Highlanders passed through and after much trouble established a shallow bridgehead. But in the face of continued resolute opposition they could not enlarge it; and that evening a sudden violent counter-attack threw them out of it and back some distance along the causeway. On 2 November Le Régiment de Maisonneuve took over and reestablished the bridgehead, but enemy resistance continued to be bitter, heavy shelling supplementing machine-gun and mortar fire.

The Maisonneuves handed over their foothold the same day to the 52<sup>nd</sup> Division, and after being continuously engaged since leaving

Dieppe the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division was withdrawn to rest. Since 29 September, when it crossed the Antwerp-Turnhout Canal, the Division had captured over 5200 Germans and killed great numbers more. Its own casualties — 207 officers and 3443 other ranks — testified sufficiently to the fierceness of the fighting it had seen.

The two waterborne attacks on Walcheren, though directed, like the rest of the operations, by First Canadian Army, were carried out by British forces. After R.A.F. bombing No. 4 Commando crossed the Scheldt from Breskens, covered by artillery fire and by the salvos of an experimental Canadian rocket unit, and landed at the port of Flushing before daylight on 1 November in the face of only moderate opposition. It was followed by a brigade of the Lowland Division. By nightfall much of the town was in our hands. The operation here was substantially aided by our counter-battery fire from across the river; General Daser, the commander of the 70<sup>th</sup> German Division which defended Walcheren, said later (perhaps with some -exaggeration) that every coast-defence gun on the south side of the island had been put out of action by this fire or by flooding or bombing.

The Westkapelle landing was a different matter. The batteries here were not so vulnerable to our guns on the Breskens shore; and the scale of the heavy bomber attacks delivered against them had evidently been insufficient to “neutralize” the positions. It was clear to General Simonds before the assault that it was likely to be costly, but the overmastering importance of opening Antwerp at the earliest possible moment (so clearly stated in Field-Marshal Montgomery’s directive of 16 October) led him to order it to proceed. The naval and military commanders afloat were authorized to cancel the operation at the last moment if conditions were too unfavourable; but they resolved to deliver the attack in spite of the fact that the weather made close air support, or air observation for the bombarding squadron, impossible at the outset. The peril was enhanced by the fact that the state of the tide made it necessary to assault in daylight.

The commanders’ decisions were justified by the success of the operation. The cost, however, was heavy. Every known enemy battery in the assault area came into action as the flotillas approached. The brunt was borne by the converted landing craft of the gun support squadron, which stood close inshore and valiantly engaged these batteries point-blank. Of 25 support craft engaged, nine were sunk and eight damaged, and there were 372 casualties among the crews. But the Commandos got ashore, aided by a timely and skilful attack by R.A.F. Typhoons; and as they began to advance along the dykes the fall of

Walcheren became only a question of time.

On the eastern side of the island the Lowland Division had had no better luck than the Canadians in expanding the causeway bridgehead. They accordingly attempted an assault across the flats south of the causeway on the night of 2-3 November. A battalion of Cameronians struggled over and secured a foothold which was steadily enlarged thereafter and linked up with the causeway bridgehead on the 4<sup>th</sup>. On 6 November Middelburg, the island capital, fell and General Daser surrendered. On 8 November the 52<sup>nd</sup> Division reported that all organized resistance on Walcheren had ceased at noon. The last Germans on the island were rounded up next day. The Navy had already begun the heavy task of clearing the Scheldt of mines.

On 28 November an historic ceremony took place at Antwerp, when the first Allied convoy came up the Scheldt and entered the port. Curiously enough, no one had thought of inviting an official representative of the Canadian Army, but the convoy's leading ship was the Canadian-built "Fort Catarauqui". One of the world's great harbours was now available to serve as an advanced base for the Allied armies in the forthcoming campaign. On 1 December, 10,000 tons of stores were discharged through it. In the view of the Supreme Commander, this was the greatest climax of the operations of the First Canadian Army. "The end of Naziism was in clear view", he said in Ottawa on 10 January 1946, "when the first ship moved unmolested up the Scheldt".

From 1 October through 8 November a total of 41,043 prisoners had been taken on the Army front. The Army's own casualties of all nationalities for the same period were reported as 703 officers and 12,170 other ranks, killed, wounded and missing. Of these, 355 officers and 6012 other ranks were Canadians.<sup>3</sup> Such was the cost of opening Antwerp. On 3 November Field-Marshal Montgomery wrote to General Simonds:

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

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<sup>3</sup> In terms of divisions, the following was the composition of First Canadian Army on 31 October 1944: Canadian, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Divisions, 4<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division; British, 49<sup>th</sup> (West Riding) and 52<sup>nd</sup> (Lowland) Divisions; United States, 104<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division; Polish, 1st Armoured Division. An additional nationality was represented by the 1st Czechoslovak Independent Armoured Brigade Group, containing Dunkirk. The Royal Netherlands Brigade came back under command on 8 November.

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.

### THE WATCH ON THE MAAS

While the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps freed the Scheldt, the 1<sup>st</sup> British Corps on its right was clearing the country up to the Maas River. On 27 October the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division liberated Bergen op Zoom; on the 29<sup>th</sup> the Poles took Breda; and on 9 November resistance south of the main stream of the Maas ended. With the immediate essential objectives in the coastal area in our hands, and a broad water barrier in front of us, it was now possible to regroup, holding this leftward sector with comparatively weak forces and shifting the strength of the 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group over to the right for offensive operations into Germany. On 9 November, accordingly — the same day on which General Crerar returned to his command — the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps took over the Nijmegen salient from the Second Army.<sup>4</sup> The First Canadian Army front now ran from close to the German frontier south of Nijmegen round through the Dutch islands to Dunkirk — a distance of over 200 miles.

There now ensued the only static period the Army knew during the campaign in North-West Europe. For almost exactly three months Crerar's troops carried out no major operation. Attention was concentrated on holding securely the ground we had gained and, above all, on planning and preparing the great final offensive which was to be launched from that ground in due course. In this connection particular importance attached to the Nijmegen area and the "island" which we still held here north of the Waal between Nijmegen and Arnhem. The question which Allied leaders were now beginning to ask was, would the enemy fight his main battle for Germany west of the Rhine, or would he choose what they considered much the wiser course, retire over that river and force us to attack across it in the face of his unbroken armies? In either case the Nijmegen salient was vital. In the former, it offered a base between Maas and Rhine from which an attack could be launched against the enemy's flank: in the latter, it gave us a foothold beyond the main stream of the Rhine from which we could assault across the lesser branch to turn the German position.

The Germans were not blind to these facts, and they soon tried to flood us out of the "island". On 2 December they cut the dykes on the south side of the Neder Rijn at Arnhem. Extensive flooding followed, the extent of the island was considerably reduced, and a large portion of

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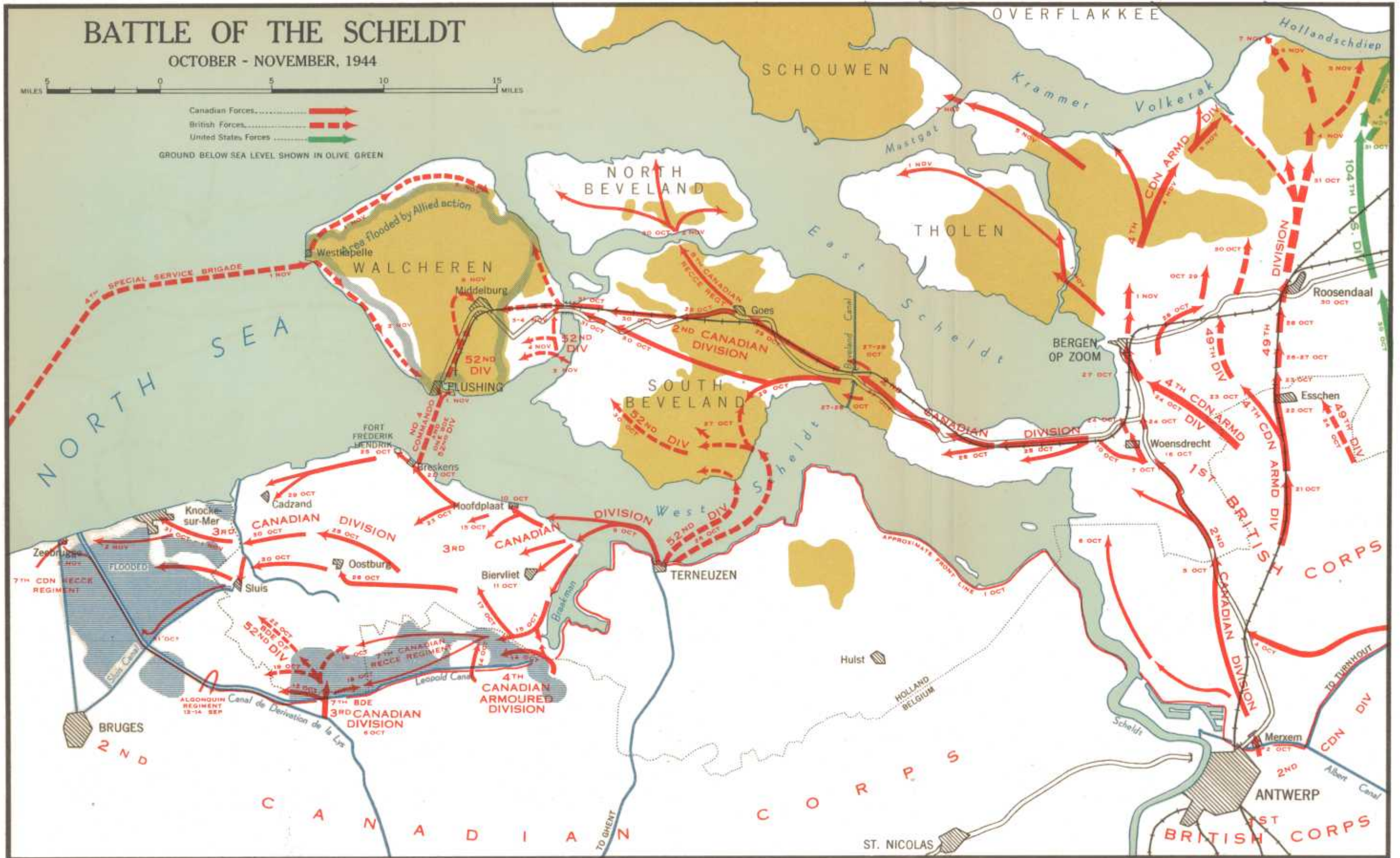
<sup>4</sup> The 82<sup>nd</sup> and 101<sup>st</sup> U.S. Airborne Divisions, which had been in this area since the Arnhem operation, now came under Canadian Army command for a short period.

# BATTLE OF THE SCHELDT

OCTOBER - NOVEMBER, 1944



Canadian Forces: .....  
British Forces: .....  
United States Forces: .....  
GROUND BELOW SEA LEVEL SHOWN IN OLIVE GREEN



the garrison was withdrawn in accordance with plans we had made for this eventuality. But we kept our foothold north of the Waal, and retained the great Nijmegen bridge; and when enemy paratroopers made a fierce attack on what remained of the island on 4 December they were "seen off" by the 49<sup>th</sup> Division with heavy losses.

On 2 November Field-Marshal Montgomery had instructed the First Canadian Army to begin planning for both possible eventualities: an offensive south-eastward from Nijmegen between the Maas and the Rhine, and an assault across the Neder Rijn. At the same time the Second Army was ordered to clear forthwith the remaining enemy pocket west of the Maas in the Venlo area. This task was completed during the first week in December. Simultaneously (the flooding of the island having ruled out the Neder Rijn attack) the Canadian Army was warned that it was now intended to mount the drive between Maas and Rhine at an early date, and on 16 December a further directive indicated that it was to go in as soon after 1 January as possible. This scheme, however, was immediately postponed, for on the very day on which the directive was issued Rundstedt launched against the First U.S. Army his famous Ardennes offensive. This, like the equally celebrated stroke at Mortain in the previous August, was a personal project of Hitler's, undertaken, as Rundstedt later explained, over his own vigorous protest. In the end the Ardennes operation was perhaps as fatal for the Germans as that at Mortain. For the moment, however, it seriously disrupted our plans, and one effect was to postpone General Crerar's operation for five weeks, since the 30<sup>th</sup> British Corps, which was slated for a leading role in it, had to be moved southward to assist in countering Rundstedt's thrust.

Apart from the Forestry Corps companies that had been working in the Ardennes Forest, only one Canadian unit (the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Parachute Battalion, which was brought in by sea with the 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division to help meet the crisis) actually took part in the desperate battle in the Belgian snows; but Crerar watched the situation on his own front narrowly, for our Intelligence staffs had detected signs that the enemy was planning another powerful thrust to be delivered across the lower Maas. On Christmas Eve the Army Commander moved the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division to the Breda area, where it could be ready to meet such an offensive; and on the following day the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division (less one brigade) came into reserve near Nijmegen.<sup>5</sup> The attack never materialized, but we now know that the precautions were justified. Colonel-General Kurt Student, the experienced and formidable commander of the German Army Group "H", has described the preparations he had made: the three infantry divisions, two parachute divisions and 150 armoured

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<sup>5</sup> Major-General A. B. Matthews had taken command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division on General Foulkes' departure for Italy to take over the lot Canadian Corps.



vehicles that were to attack across the Maas; the parachute battalion, led by an officer who had taken part in the rescue of Mussolini, which was to drop among our artillery positions; the minor naval units that were to assail our shipping in the Scheldt. The objective was to be Antwerp. But the great scheme depended on the progress of the Ardennes offensive, and that was shortly stopped dead.

During the last days of this threat on the Maas there began one of the strangest episodes of the campaign. In a heavily waterlogged area north-east of Breda a subsidiary channel of the Maas forms along the river's south shore a long island, in the midst of which is a ferry crossing and harbour called Kapelsche Veer. Student, desiring as he has since explained to give training and battle inoculation to his young paratroopers, established on this desolate spot a tiny bridgehead in our territory, which he maintained by relieving the troops in it with a new company every three or four days. The Germans dug themselves in with remarkable thoroughness, and eliminating this foothold was a long, cold and costly business, involving attacking across open and snow-covered ground in the face of a determined enemy. The Poles tried it in the last days of December and again on 7 January 1945, both times without success. The 47<sup>th</sup> Royal Marine Commando, under Polish command, attacked the place on 13 and 14 January (Operation "Horse") with no better result. Finally the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division mounted a very considerable attack (Operation "Elephant") against the position with ample artillery support and tanks; but there were five icy days of thoroughly nasty fighting — the phrase of the 10<sup>th</sup> Brigade's historian is "sheer misery" — before it was reported on 31 January that all enemy south of the Maas had been liquidated. The brunt was borne by the Lincoln and Welland Regiment, assisted by the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and South Alberta Regiment tanks. The Germans had lost 145 killed, 64 wounded and 34 prisoners. The tough young paratroopers had received in the end a rather more severe lesson in the art of war than Student had intended.

This was the finale of the "static" period of winter warfare. The Watch on the Maas had involved few operations on such a scale. It had however meant unremitting vigilance, constant patrolling (including many incursions across the river into enemy country) and frequent raids: all under the most wretched conditions of ground and weather. Now major operations under equally difficult circumstances were impending. Rundstedt's Ardennes thrust had been broken and his armoured reserves decimated, but the Germans showed no sign of withdrawing beyond the Rhine. With the 30<sup>th</sup> Corps again becoming available, active preparations for the offensive between Mass and Rhine were resumed; and on 8 February 1945 began the series of

battles which was to produce in three months' time the total downfall of the Third Reich.

### THE CRISIS IN INFANTRY REINFORCEMENTS

There is no space here to tell the full story of the extraordinarily complex problem of "reinforcements" (replacements for casualties) as it presented itself in the autumn of 1944. All that can be provided is a brief general outline of the main factors that produced a fundamental change in manpower policy in November of that year.

As we have already noted, the Canadian Government was armed from 1942 onward with full powers for general conscription, but held these in reserve. The men called up for compulsory service under the National Resources Mobilization Act were used for home defence, save for those employed in the Kiska operation and in other areas considered to lie within the North American zone. On 25 October 1944, there were 59,876 N.R.M.A. men serving, plus 8244 on extended leave. It should be noted that to the end of October 1944 a total of 41,945 other men called up under the N.R.M.A. had volunteered for general service in the Army, and 5734 more had gone to the other fighting services.

The stream of voluntary enlistments was now drying up, just as in the previous war: it had reached its flood in the critical month of June 1940 when enlistments numbered 29,309,<sup>6</sup> but the last month in which the intake passed five figures was January 1943, when it was 12,079, and in October of 1944 there were — only 4956 general service enlistments from all sources (the public, the Reserve Army and transfers from N.R.M.A.) This state of things coincided in time with the violent fighting of the summer and autumn of 1944 in both Italy and North-West Europe, when for the first time the whole field army was engaged in active operations and battle casualties were being suffered on an unprecedented scale.

To make matters worse, these casualties fell more heavily upon the infantry than upon any other arm, and much more heavily than had ever been anticipated by Allied planners. War is an uncertain business, and the events of 1944 demonstrated that no phase of it is more uncertain than the task of calculating how many casualties will have to be replaced. Canada had founded her reinforcement calculations upon forecasts made by the British War Office on the basis of the best information available to it. These forecasts proved fallacious. So far as overall totals were concerned, it is true, the estimates accepted before the beginning of the Normandy campaign turned out to be pretty sound.

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<sup>6</sup> The largest month of the war, naturally enough, was the first, September 1939, when 54,873 men enlisted; apart from this, June and July 1940 saw the peak of enlistments. The figures here given do not include men appointed to commissions.

But the losses of the infantry were far higher, and those of other arms, including the Armoured Corps, considerably lower, than had been expected. The result was infantry reinforcement difficulties which were common to all the Western Allies. General Marshall, the United States Chief of Staff, speaks in his report of "the miscalculation after North Africa that resulted in too many men being trained for the armored forces, the artillery and special troops, and too few by far for the infantry". As for the British Army, the War Office was obliged in August 1944 to disband one infantry division and one additional brigade to provide infantry reinforcements for other formations. Another division was similarly disbanded in October.

The proportions of Canada's own problem were beginning to be apparent in August. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of that month, just after the Falaise Gap battle, the Chief of Staff at Canadian Military Headquarters (Lieutenant-General Stuart) cabled Ottawa that there was "a shortage of about 3000 general duty infantry in our 21 battalions in 21 Army Group". He was sending forward drafts totalling about 2000 from England within the next six days, and the problem, which he characterized as one of "detailed distribution" rather than of "general supply", was being dealt with by "remustering" and re-training men of other arms as infantry and by utilizing infantry tradesmen and specialists, of whom there was a surplus, for general duty. By early autumn, however, remustering was yielding smaller proceeds, while heavy casualties were continuing, and it was now evident that there was no ground for expecting the early collapse of Germany; we had to look forward to several more months' costly fighting. On the basis of this forecast and of new "rates of wastage" deriving from actual Canadian experience, staff calculations made at C.M.H.Q. in October indicated that between Italy and North-West Europe we might expect 22,207 infantry casualties by the end of the year. We then had in sight 18,341 infantry reinforcements from all sources (available overseas, expected arrivals from Canada and recovered wounded returning to the ranks). We thus faced the apparent prospect of an empty reinforcement pool and an actual deficiency of over 3800 men in our infantry battalions at 31 December. Further remustering shortly reduced this estimated future deficiency to 2380.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> There would have been some thousands of infantry reinforcements in training. On 30 October General Stuart, on the basis of the latest information, summed up as follows in a memorandum to the Minister of National Defence: "The resulting situation emerging on 31 Dec will be a shortage in Inf Units in the field of about 2380; a holding in the U.K. of about 8600 infantry in training and a holding of about 9000 other arms reinforcements. Of this 8600 infantry only 3600 will be available to meet casualties in Jan 44." ("Jan 44" obviously ought to read "Jan 45.")



#### ARTILLERY IN ACTION ON THE MAAS, JANUARY 1945

From a painting by Capt. B. J. Boback

The guns are self-propelled anti-tank guns (American-pattern 3-inch M-10 "tank destroyer") of the 5<sup>th</sup> Anti-Tank Regiment, Royal Canadian Artillery (4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division). They are firing on enemy positions across the Maas north of s' Hertogenbosch.

On 2 June, just before the Normandy D Day, General Stuart, believing that there was "an excellent chance of our being able to finish the war with Germany on a voluntary basis", had advised against the extension of compulsory service. In the new circumstances which had arisen, he now considered that it was necessary, in order to re-establish the reinforcement pool, to draw upon that "potential source of reinforcement for the Canadian Army Overseas", the trained N.R.M.A. troops. The Minister of National Defence, during a visit to England and the battlefronts, came to the same conclusion. On 18 October he returned to Ottawa, accompanied by Stuart. On the next and succeeding days he placed his views before the Cabinet. The Prime Minister, however, deeply convinced that "resort to conscription for service overseas would occasion the most serious controversy that could arise in Canada", was reluctant to accept Colonel Ralston's recommendation. Faced with the possibility of Ralston's resignation, Mr. King consulted General McNaughton (who had lately retired from the army with the full rank of General) and ascertained from him that he still believed in the possibility of obtaining the required recruits by voluntary means and that, in the event of Colonel Ralston's departure, he was prepared to accept the portfolio of National Defence. Confronted with this situation, Ralston tendered his resignation on 1 November and General McNaughton was sworn as Minister next day.<sup>8</sup>

One of the most violent and bitter public controversies in Canadian political history followed. In the midst of it, the new Minister's appeals for recruits from among the N.R.M.A. men and the public had relatively little effect.<sup>9</sup> By 22 November, when Parliament met in special session, the Government had decided that the situation could be met only by the employment of N.R.M.A. men overseas. On 23 November an order-in-council was tabled in the House of Commons authorizing the despatch of 16,000 of these men — this being the number of trained or largely trained infantrymen among them, and a little more than the number (15,000) calculated as required to fill the overseas pool. The first N.R.M.A. soldiers sailed from Halifax on 3 January 1945.<sup>10</sup>

While the government could of course have authorized the despatch of further groups of N.R.M.A. men beyond the 16,000 authorized by the

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<sup>8</sup> General Stuart did not return to C.M.H.Q. Major-General Montague was appointed Chief of Staff there, with the rank of Lieutenant-General.

<sup>9</sup> During the whole of November, including the final week after the announcement that N.R.M.A. men would be sent abroad, there were 7371 enlistments, including conversions from N.R.M.A.

<sup>10</sup> The decision to send N.R.M.A. men overseas caused a considerable wave of desertion among these soldiers. On 20 January it was announced that 7800 had at one time been overdue or absent without leave, and that 6300 were still absent at that date. There were breaches of discipline (though happily no bloodshed) in a number of camps.

order of 23 November, this did not prove to be necessary. It may be noted here that a total of 12,908 were actually sent overseas and that N.R.M.A. men suffered 315 casualties, of which 69 were fatal. As it turned out, thanks to the quiet which obtained on the Canadian front in Holland during November, December and January, casualties were considerably fewer than the October estimate had allowed for. This and the influx of N.R.M.A. soldiers from Canada meant that the reinforcement units were full of adequately trained men when major operations began again early in February. From then until the end of hostilities in Europe three months later there was no serious difficulty in keeping our battalions in the field up to strength, and no question of disbanding Canadian formations ever arose.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> General McNaughton failed of election to the House of Commons in a by-election and subsequently in the general election of 11 June 1945. He resigned in August, after the Japanese surrender, and was succeeded as Minister of National Defence by Mr. D. C. Abbott.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE CAMPAIGN IN NORTH-WEST EUROPE: THE BATTLE OF THE RHINELAND, FEBRUARY — MARCH 1945

#### PLANNING THE RHINELAND OFFENSIVE

In February 1945 the First Canadian Army entered the Battle of Germany. The next three months were to witness the clearing of the western Rhineland, the crossing of the Rhine, the liberation of the Netherlands and the destruction of Hitler's empire. In these historic operations General Crerar's army — incorporating, before the end, the whole Canadian field force including the men from Italy — was to take a major part.

Let no one misconceive the severity of the fighting during these final months. In this, the twilight of their gods, the defenders of the Reich displayed the recklessness of fanaticism and the courage of despair. In the contests west of the Rhine, in particular, they fought with special ferocity and resolution, rendering the battles in the Reichswald and Rochwald forests grimly memorable in the annals of this war.

We have already seen how the opening of the port of Antwerp and the build-up during the winter months had laid the foundation for a further offensive on the western front. The enemy's costly effort in the Ardennes had imposed delay, but the broad pattern of Allied strategy remained unchanged. In his subsequent report, General Eisenhower wrote:

In planning our forthcoming spring and summer offensives, I envisaged the operations which would lead to Germany's collapse as falling into three phases: first, the destruction of the enemy forces west of the Rhine and closing to that river; second, the seizure of bridgeheads over the Rhine from which to develop operations into Germany; and third, the destruction of the remaining enemy east of the Rhine and the advance into the heart of the Reich. This was the same purpose that had guided all our actions since early 1944.

The time was propitious for launching the first phase, for on the eastern front the Russians had begun a tremendous new advance on 12 January and before the end of the month had crossed Germany's 1939 frontier. They were soon on the banks of the Oder, within fifty miles of the centre of Berlin.

The plan for defeating the enemy's forces west of the Rhine visualized a series of massive blows along the entire length of the front. The direction, timing and strength of these great operations were

influenced by conditions of weather and terrain, the necessity of capturing suitable sites for crossing the Rhine, and the obvious advantage of forcing mobile warfare upon an enemy whose reserves of motor fuel were known to be dangerously low.

The campaign was to begin in the north. Here, Field-Marshal Montgomery, with the Ninth United States Army under his command in addition to his British and Canadian forces; was to develop two formidable thrusts which would converge on the Rhine opposite Wesel. From the Nijmegen salient the First Canadian Army would launch Operation "Veritable", its offensive between Maas and Rhine, south-eastwards through the barrier of the Reichswald Forest (the western edge of which forms the Dutch-German frontier) and the northern tip of the Siegfried Line. From the Roer River, the Ninth Army, commanded by Lieutenant-General W. H. Simpson and built up to consist of four corps totalling twelve divisions, would thrust north-eastwards (Operation "Grenade") to link up with the Canadian drive on the Rhine. Originally, the Commander-in-Chief intended to employ the Second British Army in a third thrust, directed across the Maas. But the difficulty of carrying out regrouping in the American sector on the eve of the offensive resulted in a reduction of Simpson's command to ten divisions; this eliminated forces that would have been used by General Dempsey and it became necessary to cancel his attack. As Crerar was to use most of the divisions normally allotted to the Second Army, that army's tasks during "Veritable" would be limited to holding the line of the Maas — and planning for the crossing of the Rhine.

Montgomery's view of the coming operations, and of the general situation after the defeat of the German Ardennes offensive, was expressed in a directive sent to his Army Commanders on 21 January:

The enemy is in a bad way; he has had a tremendous battering and has lost heavily in men and equipment. On no account can we relax, or have a "stand still", in the winter months; it is vital that we keep going, so as not to allow him time to recover and so as to wear down his strength still further. There will be difficulties caused by mud, cold, lack of air support during periods of bad weather, and so on. But we must continue to fight the enemy hard during the winter months.

The main objective of the Allies on the western front is the Ruhr; if we can cut it off from the rest of Germany the enemy capacity to continue the struggle must gradually peter out.

A further, and very important, object of our operations must be to force mobile war on the Germans...

The first stage in carrying out this policy must be to close up to the line of the Rhine... When the opportune moment arrives the Allied armies will cross the Rhine in strength north of the Ruhr and at such other places as may be ordered by the Supreme Allied Commander.

For "Veritable", a most impressive array of divisions was placed under



General Crerar's command. Indeed, for a time in February, he was to control thirteen divisions, including nine from the United Kingdom. During this period the fighting strength of the First Canadian Army rose above 380,000 men; while attached personnel (civilian labour, prisoners of war, etc.) raised its "ration strength" above 470,000.

If the British army headquarters was temporarily to take a back seat, a British corps was to make up for this by the part it played under the Canadian Army. It was considered desirable that a single corps should control the whole front of attack in the first phase; and this was to be Lieutenant-General B. G. Horrocks' 30<sup>th</sup> Corps. It would consist for this operation of no less than seven divisions — one armoured and six infantry — plus three armoured brigades, special assault units from the 79<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division, and a great force of artillery. The initial attack was to be delivered by five divisions. The 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Divisions were under General Horrocks during this phase.

The scale of the assault was warranted by the enemy's strength west of the Rhine. He had three main lines of defence: first, a screen of strong outposts; then the Siegfried Line, running through the Reichswald; and finally, the Hochwald "layback" position covering the approach to the Rhine at Xanten. General Crerar's plan was based upon the assumption that the enemy would "strongly man and fight his several lines of organized defences". In a directive issued on 25 January, the Army Commander wrote: "The operation, as a whole, will comprise several phases and, after each phase is completed, it will be necessary to move up the artillery and supporting weapons and commence the next phase with co-ordinated and heavy fire support, and with controlled movement". In the first of three phases, the 30<sup>th</sup> Corps would clear the Reichswald, and make good a line running from Gennep through Asperden to Cleve. Thereafter, the operation was to be conducted on a two-corps front: General Simonds' 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps was to come in on the left and advance abreast of the 30<sup>th</sup> to a line extending through Weeze, Udem and Calcar to the Rhine opposite Emmerich. In the final phase we would break the Hochwald defences and secure the general line from Geldern to Xanten.

The build-up for "Veritable" was enormous. The weight of artillery was particularly impressive. More than a thousand guns, one-third of which were mediums, heavies or super-heavies, were to bring down a volume of fire equal to, if not greater than, that supporting any British army during the war. Seven divisional artilleries were supplemented by five Army Groups Royal Artillery, including the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian, and two anti-aircraft brigades. Also in support was a relatively new organization, the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Rocket Unit.<sup>1</sup> The elaborate fire-plan included

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<sup>1</sup> As the result of trials carried out in England and on the Continent, the 1<sup>st</sup> Rocket Unit,

provision for counter-battery and counter-mortar tasks, a barrage covering the fronts of four divisions, an extremely long smoke-screen to blind the enemy, and a "Pepper Pot". The latter was another of the gunners' innovations, designed to neutralize targets at relatively short ranges by the coordinated fire of all available tanks, machine-guns, heavy mortars, anti-tank guns and light anti-aircraft guns.

Air support was also planned on a maximum scale. The Second Tactical Air Force, with a potential strength, including the First Canadian Army's own associated Tactical Group, No. 84, of 1000 fighters or fighter-bombers, was to provide close support. The R.A.F. Bomber Command was to employ up to 1000 heavy bombers in the immediate area of the battle and further assistance was expected from the medium bombers of the Ninth and the heavy bombers of the Eighth United States Army Air Forces. A feature of this overwhelming offensive in the air was to be the complete destruction of three German towns vital to the enemy's defences, Cleve, Goch and Emmerich.

General Crerar recognized that, from D minus three (5 February) onwards, it would become increasingly difficult to conceal from the enemy the concentration of the assaulting force in the forward assembly areas. This problem was aggravated by the movement of so many formations, over a few main routes, into the restricted area opposite the Reichswald. Accordingly, the Army Commander decided that even the advantage of full air support, which would result from favourable weather conditions, could not justify any delay in launching "Veritable". Regardless of the weather, the attack would begin on 8 February.

That the German High Command had not fathomed our intentions was made clear by the subsequent interrogation of Field-Marshal von Rundstedt. The Commander-in-Chief West admitted that he had not anticipated a large-scale attack in the Reichswald sector. He expected a "diversionary assault" from this direction, but felt that "the main offensive effort would come from opposite Venlo, combined with an American attack across the Roer River". This opinion was shared by Colonel-General Blaskowitz, who had succeeded Student as commander of Army Group "H" at the northern end of the front. General Schlemm, whose First Parachute Army faced the Canadians, afterwards claimed that he had anticipated the offensive through the Reichswald; but he was unable to convince his superiors until the battle had begun. One of the principal circumstances serving to mislead the enemy was the fact that until "Veritable" was actually launched the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Divisions continued to hold the entire front facing the Reichswald. Consequently, although the enemy sent patrols into our lines, he was

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Royal Canadian Artillery, was formed on 23 December 1944. The unit was equipped with 12 rocket projectors, each of 32 barrels.

unable to secure identifications confirming the presence of new formations in the area. His limited air reconnaissance contributed little information; the result was that the strength of the attack when it came surprised even the allegedly prescient Schlemm.

Meeting war correspondents the day before the attack began, General Crerar spoke of the administrative foundations of this vast operation: the 1880 tons of bridging equipment that had gone into five bridges across the Maas leading into the forward assembly area; the 100 miles of road that had been constructed or improved; the 35,000 vehicles and 1,300,000 gallons of petrol used to carry the troops and their equipment and supplies forward; the 500,000 air photographs; the 800,000 special maps; the incredible quantities of ammunition, of which there were 350 types. He mentioned too that whereas, as a result of the absence of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps in Italy, the First Canadian Army's composition had hitherto usually been only about half Canadian, for this particular operation the Canadian component would be only about *one-quarter* of the total; and he especially asked the newspapermen to give "proper recognition to English, Scottish and Welsh formations" in their dispatches.<sup>2</sup>

#### OPERATION "VERITABLE" BEGINS

"Veritable" began in the early morning of 8 February. During the night the heavy bombers had smashed at the enemy's communication centres behind the Reichswald — in particular, Cleve, Goch, Weeze, Udem and Calcar. At five o'clock the thunder of the artillery preparation broke out. After more than two and half hours of bombardment a sudden silence fell on the entire front for ten minutes: during this period the flash spotters and sound rangers endeavoured to locate active enemy batteries not previously known. Then the artillery spoke once more. In the words of one observer:

The weather promised to be fair, and the sight of the airbursts and tracer in the sky, against the yellow light of the rising sun was very impressive... There was little reply from the enemy and, at this stage, the spectator was left with the impression that hostile positions were being simply smothered.

Now began the barrage, during which our batteries were to fire over 160,000 shells; and to the growing roar of gunfire was added the guttural rumble of tanks moving forward and, overhead, the heavy drone of supporting aircraft. All tanks carried fluorescent panels,

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<sup>2</sup> The correspondents in the field understood and cooperated; but elsewhere there was less comprehension. Throughout the war it was difficult for civilians (including editors) to understand that the composition of an Army was a very fluid thing, and that there were long periods when the Eighth British Army for instance, had very few United Kingdom divisions under its command.

“glowing like red hot plates against the dull background”, for identification from the air.

At 10:30 a.m. the infantry advanced. Four divisions moved forward simultaneously on a six-mile front between the NijmegenCleve road and the Maas. From north to south they were: 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian, 15<sup>th</sup> (Scottish), 53<sup>rd</sup> (Welsh) and 51<sup>st</sup> (Highland). On the extreme northern flank, by previous arrangement, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division did not begin its advance until later. Thus began what Field-Marshal Montgomery afterwards called “the memorable battle which, in intensity and fierceness, equalled any which our troops have experienced in this war”.

The enemy’s resistance at first was disorganized and confused. There is ample evidence to prove that, except here and there, his troops had been stunned by the weight of the bombardment. General Schlemm later asserted that he had at once “smelt the big offensive”; but not until late on the first day was he able to produce identifications for Army Group “H” proving, beyond all doubt, that several British divisions were included in the assaulting force. Tardy approval was then given to his request for the 7<sup>th</sup> Parachute Division to be moved into the Reichswald. In the meantime the 84<sup>th</sup> German Infantry Division, which bore the brunt of the onslaught, had been shattered.

The enemy now began to repeat disastrous mistakes he had made in Normandy. Not only did he choose to continue the battle west of the Rhine when it would have been wiser to withdraw his forces intact behind that great obstacle, but he fed his irreplaceable reserves piecemeal into the grinder in the desperate hope of stabilizing an impossible situation.

Our initial assault was hampered less by the Germans than by the weather. Throughout January the ground had remained firmly frozen, thus facilitating the movement of thousands of vehicles over a few main roads. However, during the week preceding the attack, a sudden thaw combined with the heavy traffic to reduce these roads to little more than muddy tracks. Great efforts on the part of drivers, mechanics and administrative staffs enabled the concentration to be completed on schedule. But, when the operation began, many armoured vehicles became hopelessly bogged down and subsequent progress was materially affected. Moreover, the situation was aggravated in the northern sector by the flooding just before the operation of a large area south of the Waal,<sup>3</sup> along the main road from Nijmegen to Cleve. Dykes here had been breached by the Germans earlier; now the river rose, another important dyke gave way, and the flood penetrated as far east as the Siegfried defences.

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<sup>3</sup> The Waal, we may recall once more, is the main stream of the Rhine, and is called the Rhine within the German frontier.

Advance was most difficult on the right. The Highland Division met heavy resistance as they attacked the south-western tip of the Reichswald and endeavoured to clear the main road from Mook to Gennep. In the centre the 15<sup>th</sup> and 53<sup>rd</sup> Divisions advanced across the open ground east of Groesbeek (still strewn with skeletons of innumerable gliders from the airborne attack of the previous September), crossed the German frontier and entered the northern outskirts of the Réichswald. Minefields were encountered but the principal obstacle was mud. Routes were soon churned up by the armour; in some cases the axes of advance became impassable to all but infantry and the lightest of vehicles.

On the Scottish Division's northern flank the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division, using one brigade, did its work rapidly. The 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade had the task of seizing a triangular area dominating the main road from Nijmegen to Cleve. Following the barrage, Le Régiment de Maisonneuve went through Den Heuvel to the frontier. The Calgary Highlanders had more trouble in taking Wyler. Mines were plentiful and caused casualties. In some cases the enemy had interspersed schu-mines<sup>4</sup> on the ground with others under the surface, and in attempting to avoid the more obvious ones men were caught on those which were hidden. However, by making a surprise attack on Wyler from the rear, with the assistance of artillery and heavy bombers, the Highlanders were able to complete their task by nightfall of the 8<sup>th</sup>.

On the extreme left, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division had advanced late in the afternoon to clear the flooded area between the Nijmegen-Cleve road and the Waal. It was fortunate that the "Water Rats" had accumulated an almost unique experience of amphibious warfare, for now the knowledge gained on the beaches of Normandy and the shores of the Scheldt was invaluable. The flooding which took place almost on the eve of the attack had necessitated a revision of plans and the substitution of amphibious "Buffaloes" and "Weasels" for tanks. — In these General Spry's men floated over anti-tank ditches, wire and mines. On the right of the divisional front the 7<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade advanced as far as Zyfflich on the first evening; on the left the 8<sup>th</sup> met more opposition but soon secured Zandpol and Leuth. At times the troops went forward through water three feet deep.

The first day of the battle had carried us across the frontier and into the Reichswald along the whole front. Reporting later to the Minister of National Defence, General Crerar wrote: "That morning the enemy commander held strong positions some 6000 to 7000 yards in advance of the Siegfried Line with probably seven infantry battalions. By

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<sup>4</sup> Small, box-like anti-personnel mines, difficult to detect because of the few metal parts used in their construction.

nightfall six of these battalions had been decimated. Driven back from the line which they had held all the winter forward of the Reichswald, they lost some 1300 prisoners." The outpost screen had been broken. The next obstacle was the Siegfried Line.

### BREACHING THE SIEGFRIED LINE

The northern end of the Siegfried Line or West Wall passed through the centre of the Reichswald. General Straube, who commanded the German 86<sup>th</sup> Corps here, afterwards declared that the defences of this portion of the Line were farcical. "It wasn't a wall", he said, "it was an idea". However, according to the Army Commander, Schlemm, the idea had reality in the mind of Hitler: "The Führer envisaged huge cement fortifications, kilometres in depth, behind which the Reich was secure". Accordingly, orders had been issued for an immediate report to Berlin whenever a single bunker of the defences was lost.

Whatever its limitations, the Siegfried Line was no paper wall. The main defences ran south from Kranenburg (southeast of Wyler) across the Reichswald and over open ground to the south of it. The northern and southern ends of this sector of the Line were anchored to the Rhine and Maas, respectively, by anti-tank ditches. Other defences had recently been constructed east of the Reichswald between Cleve and Goch. In addition to trenches, weapon-pits and antitank ditches throughout the entire length of the Line, the enemy had a number of large concrete fortifications in the Goch-Asperden area. These were intended to protect the vulnerable southern flank of the Reichswald, where relatively open country extended to the Maas. Although they did not possess heavy armament, they were skilfully sited for mutual support with automatic weapons covering excellent fields of fire.

During the days following the launching of "Veritable", the battle in the pine woods of the Reichswald grew in violence. Realizing now the potential danger of the new offensive, the German Command brought reinforcements forward in increasing numbers; and it was favoured by developments elsewhere. For it had become necessary to postpone the Ninth Army's converging operation. General Simpson's advance had been scheduled to begin on 10 February, after the capture of the Roer dams by the First United States Army. As long as these remained in German possession, the enemy was able to flood the area opposite the Ninth Army at will. After heavy fighting the Americans captured the last of the seven dams on 10 February; but, meanwhile, the enemy had succeeded in opening the sluices and raising the level of the Roer some four feet. Consequently, Operation "Grenade" could not begin on time and it was in fact to be delayed almost a fortnight. This development was an "extreme disappointment" to Field-Marshal

Montgomery. “‘Veritable’ had to continue alone, and against it the enemy was able to concentrate all his available reserves; it was therefore inevitable that progress was slower than had been hoped”.

Following the first assault, in which the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division had completed its immediate limited task, the advance was continued by the remaining four divisions. On the second day the Highland Division pushed through the southern fringe of the Reichswald and cut the main road from Mook to Gennepe. On their left, the Welsh Division drove through the centre of the forest to occupy the high ground south-west of Materborn; while the Scottish Division broke the Siegfried Line further north and was soon in the outskirts of Cleve. On the extreme left, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division continued to struggle through the flooded countryside south of the Rhine. Many vehicles were lost in the rising water and, at times, forward battalions were completely marooned; but the troops’ fortitude and determination carried them into the Millingen area. Then, on 10 February, the 9<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade launched an attack which broke the northern tip of the Siegfried defences. Using “Buffaloes” the Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders and the Highland Light Infantry of Canada reached the Spoy Canal, immediately north of Cleve. During this advance there was particularly severe fighting at Rindern, where the enemy counter-attacked with paratroops, and at Duffelward, where pillboxes and fortified houses marked the extremity of the Line.

The Reichswald battle now entered its crucial stage. In addition to the 7<sup>th</sup> Parachute Division, the enemy threw in the 6<sup>th</sup> Parachute, 15<sup>th</sup> Panzer Grenadier and 116<sup>th</sup> Panzer Divisions. He was greatly assisted by our communication difficulties. By 10 February five miles of the road from Nijmegen to Cleve, our “main axis”, was under two feet of water. Within three days the depth had doubled. In spite of herculean efforts by the sappers, other routes broke down under the impossible strain imposed by the requirements of the advance. South of the Reichswald the only good road — that leading to Goch — was held in force by the enemy.

Another British formation now came in: the 43<sup>rd</sup> (Wessex) Division joined the vanguard, at the north-eastern corner of the forest, and intervened in the heavy fighting near Cleve. Moreover, FieldMarshal Montgomery ordered the 11<sup>th</sup> Armoured and the 52<sup>nd</sup> (Lowland) Divisions transferred to Crerar’s command. In the Commander-in-Chief’s words, “the difficulty was to deploy additional strength through the Reichswald Forest in view of the communications, but I wanted to make certain that General Crerar had at his disposal all the resources he could use for the battle”. Not until D plus five (13 February) was the Reichswald finally cleared. In the south, the Highland Division captured Gennepe — thus

facilitating the construction of another bridge across the Maas — while the Welsh drove the enemy out of the eastern corner of the forest. Beyond the Reichswald, the important junction of Bedburg fell to the Wessex, while the Scottish Division secured the ruins of Cleve, which were then taken over by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division; the Allied air forces, they found, had left very little of the town from which Henry VIII got his fourth wife. Although, by now, the northern portion of the Siegfried Line was completely overrun, the enemy still held formidable positions around Goch.

With the first phase of “Veritable” completed, the offensive continued according to plan on a two-corps front. At noon on 15 February the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps took over the left sector from the 30<sup>th</sup> Corps and General Simonds became responsible for all operations north of a line running through Grave, Groesbeek and Cleve to Emmerich. Simultaneously the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division came back under his command; he also had the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian and 11<sup>th</sup> British Armoured Divisions and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division. Elements of ten German divisions and supporting units still barred the way to the Rhine. Employing a powerful “left hook”, to be developed by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps, General Crerar planned to break through the enemy’s remaining defence line in the Hochwald Forest; but, before its reduction could begin, it was necessary to clear the stubbornly contested area of Goch.

The 30<sup>th</sup> Corps attacked Goch on 18 February. After the Wessex Division had driven the enemy out of the Forest of Cleve and seized the escarpment overlooking Goch from the north-east, the 15<sup>th</sup> Division passed through and attacked the town from this direction while the 51<sup>st</sup> assailed it from the west. The fortifications hereabouts provided a special problem. The embrasures of many pillboxes were of four-inch steel, mounted in concrete two feet thick. Mines and trip-wires covered the approach to each post. But these defences rapidly succumbed to co-ordinated attacks of armour and infantry. The enemy’s failure to site anti-tank guns in his pillboxes made the latter very vulnerable to “Crocodiles” and engineer assault vehicles (A.Vs.R.E.). After a pillbox had been isolated, with the help of smoke, a Churchill tank would engage its embrasures. If resistance continued an A.V.R.E. would then use its petard to blast open the entrance and a “Crocodile would spray the interior with flame. Confronted with this technique of assault, the remaining defenders of the Siegfried Line in due course lost heart. The German commander at Goch surrendered on the second day of the attack; but his men continued to fight from house to house and two more days were required before the 15<sup>th</sup> and 51<sup>st</sup> Divisions finished mopping up the town. This was the last of the northern sector of the Siegfried Line.

#### MOYLAND WOOD AND THE GOCH-CALCAR ROAD



While British troops were capturing Goch, the Canadians were fighting a stiff battle south-east of Cleve. In this sector, the enemy's stubborn resistance now centred about Moyland Wood—a narrow strip of forest midway between Cleve and Calcar — and the main road from Goch to Calcar. He held both of these localities in force, for he had been strengthened by the arrival of the Panzer Lehr Division and another infantry division.

After a brigade of the Scottish Division had secured the western end of Moyland Wood, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division on 16 February began the task of clearing the rest of it. The 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade met fierce opposition from determined paratroopers. On the second day of the struggle, the Royal Winnipeg Rifles reported the heaviest shelling the battalion had ever been under; while the diary of the Regina Rifle Regiment records that the fighting was “just as bad as anything encountered in Normandy”. In addition to artillery, machine-guns and mortars, the enemy was using rockets. On the evening of 19 February, one company of the Canadian Scottish beat off no less than six counter-attacks. “The thin line of troops on the ground was tired and dirty and hungry”. For the moment the Germans retained a foothold in the wood.

In the meantime the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division was heavily engaged to the south, along the road joining Goch and Calcar. This road was of great importance to the enemy since it covered the approach to the ridge between Calcar and Udem, an essential feature of the Hochwald defences. Here the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade under Brigadier F.N. Cabeldu fought one of its bloodiest battles. The attack began at noon on 19 February. The assaulting battalions, the Essex Scottish and the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry, were transported over open ground in “Kangaroos”<sup>5</sup> and were supported by tanks of the 10<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Regiment (The Fort Garry Horse), while ten field and six medium artillery regiments fired a rolling barrage. Nevertheless, the progress of the armour was hindered from the beginning by boggy ground; and, it soon became evident that a strong screen of anti-tank defences, including many 88millimetre guns, lined the Goch-Calcar road. The enemy, moreover, had brought in fresh troops, including units of the Panzer Lehr Division.

Although the infantry were able to penetrate to the immediate vicinity of their objectives they suffered severely. In particular, the Essex Scottish were cut off and overrun during the following night; for a time, it was feared that this battalion had been destroyed as a fighting unit. The enemy made repeated counter-attacks with tanks and infantry, and the position became so desperate that one company commander called

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<sup>5</sup> A complete Canadian regiment of these had been authorized in October 1944. The 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Personnel Carrier Regiment was then formed and incorporated in the 79<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division.



LE RÉGIMENT DE MAISONNEUVE CLEARING DEN HEUVEL, 8 FEBRUARY 1945

From a painting by Capt. G. D. Pepper

The regiment is seen advancing towards the German frontier behind the great barrage on the first morning of Operation "Veritable", the winter offensive of the First Canadian Army between the Rivers Maas and Rhine.

for fire support on his own headquarters. The Royal Hamilton Light Infantry, however, were able to hold their positions against the most desperate assaults, and the Royal Regiment of Canada restored the situation with a further attack on 20 February. When the brigade commander visited the R.H.L.I. on the 21<sup>st</sup> he found them “in rare fighting trim — very cocky — greedily adding up their totals in enemy tanks K.O.’d.” As a result of this fierce fighting, the enemy lost control of the vital road. Furthermore, his resistance in Moyland Wood was weakened, and a carefully coordinated attack made by the Winnipegs on 21 February cleared the remainder of it. Two of the three German lines had now been smashed by British troops and Canadians in some of the fiercest fighting of the war. But very formidable obstacles still stood between the First Canadian Army and the Rhine. Xanten was covered by an ideal natural defensive position: a boomerang-shaped ridge upon which stood the forests known as the Hochwald and the Balberger Wald.

#### OPERATION “BLOCKBUSTER”: ON TO THE RHINE

General Crerar’s plan for the final phase of the drive to the Rhine involved “a deliberate assault across the plateau between Calcar and Udem against the strong enemy defences of the Hochwald”. With these defences broken, the Army Commander intended to finish the operation with an armoured thrust at Xanten. “Blockbuster”, the code name given to this final phase of “Veritable”, was to be carried out mainly by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps. In addition to the three Canadian divisions, General Simonds had at his disposal the 11<sup>th</sup> Armoured and 43<sup>rd</sup> (Wessex) Divisions, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army Group Royal Canadian Artillery.

While preparations were being completed for the renewal of the northern offensive, the Ninth Army was at last able to begin its long-delayed attack. The flooded Roer had gradually subsided during the middle of February, and on the 23<sup>rd</sup> General Simpson launched Operation “Grenade”. Ever since the beginning of “Veritable”, the enemy had been shifting troops from the American front to that of the First Canadian Army. This made Simpson’s task somewhat easier, and within two days of his first attack both Düren and Jülich had fallen. On the front of the 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group, the Germans west of the Rhine were now caught in the powerful pincers of two converging armies. But for the moment this did not lessen their stubborn resistance in the north. As Crerar wrote later, “the American attack led to the strategic defeat of the enemy, but it did not immediately have any substantial effect upon our own hard battle between the rivers”.

The new phase of the offensive was launched early on 26 February. General Simonds had decided that success depended upon the capture of

the enemy's defences at the southern end of the Hochwald. Between this forest and the smaller Balberger Wald a railway ran almost due east towards Xanten. The Corps Commander intended to use this railway as his, main axis of advance. However, in order to deceive the enemy and draw his reserves away from the main effort, he ordered a preliminary attack in force against the high ground south of Calcar. A strong attack here was necessary in any case to provide a "firm base" for an armoured thrust from Udem across the forest ridge which barred the way to Xanten.

Aided by a heavy artillery bombardment, infantry of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Divisions opened the initial attack against the heights. They were supported by tanks of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade and the assaulting troops were assisted by "artificial moonlight". The operation produced the bitterest kind of fighting. In the centre, Brigadier R. H. Keebler's 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade attacked with all three battalions mounted on either "Kangaroos" or tanks. The enemy offered determined opposition. Keebler afterwards remarked, "It was as known that German paratroops were holding the position being attacked and, in spite of fairly heavy artillery fire, it was a case of the infantry fighting their way forward right from the outset against small arms fire, anti-tank weapons and self-propelled guns." In spite of this resistance, and very soft ground, Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal soon forced their way through to their objectives. The South Saskatchewan Regiment likewise succeeded in capturing theirs — a height which dominated the ridge south of Calcar. When on the following day the enemy counter-attacked here he was beaten back with heavy casualties. The third battalion, the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada, ran into bad going, mines and repeated counter-attacks; only after very severe fighting were the Camerons able to clear their final objectives. By noon of the first day of "Blockbuster" the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade had completed its task. Throughout, the infantry had received notable assistance from the tanks of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Regiments.

Meanwhile, on the left flank, the 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade had advanced to secure positions along the ridge southwest of Calcar. The two leading battalions, the Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada and Le Régiment de Maisonneuve, were supported by tanks of the 6<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Regiment as well as by timed artillery concentrations. The enemy had reinforced this — front before the attack and fought hard. In Brigadier Megill's words, "The struggle developed into a very slow infantry fight in close contact with the enemy, which made effective artillery support difficult to arrange". Nevertheless, helped by the armour and "Wasps", the battalions succeeded in taking their objectives early on the first day of the operation.

On the extreme southern flank of the attack one battalion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division had been particularly heavily engaged. During the opening

phase of “Blockbuster” the Queen’s Own Rifles of Canada had the task of seizing positions astride the road from Calcar to Udem immediately north of Keppeln. Here as elsewhere the enemy resisted fiercely. Only after very heavy fighting, in which grenades and bayonets were freely used, did the Queen’s Own take their objectives. In the course of the advance a supreme act of bravery won for Sergeant Aubrey Cosens the Victoria Cross. Supported by two tanks, his platoon attacked enemy strongpoints in three farm buildings and encountered bitter resistance. With his platoon commander killed, the platoon reduced to four other men and himself, and the enemy counter-attacking fiercely, Sergeant Cosens took command. Heavy mortar and shell fire was raining down, but he ran across open ground to direct the fire of the remaining tank upon the enemy. The little group broke up a further counter-attack, but this did not satisfy their leader. The enemy still held the strongpoints; he must be evicted. Reorganizing his tiny command, the sergeant ordered the tank to ram the first building. Single-handed, he then faced intense machine-gun and small arms fire to clear all three. Every man in them was killed or captured. In the moment of triumph, with his task completed and the objective secured, Sergeant Cosens, who had “himself killed at least twenty of the enemy”, was slain by an enemy sniper.

On the same day (26 February), the other battalions of the 8<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade were also able to capture their final objectives. With the assistance of the 6<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiment, the infantry secured Keppeln and the 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade then launched an attack against Udem. Possession of this important place was hotly contested. The Highland Light Infantry of Canada reported tersely that “paratroops held out in strongpoints and counter-attacked numerous times”. When the town finally fell, on the 27<sup>th</sup>, this phase of “Blockbuster” was brought to a successful conclusion.

Meanwhile, on the morning of the first assault, two armoured formations had been projected into the battle. The 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division’s armoured brigade, commanded by Brigadier R. W. Moncel,<sup>6</sup> lunged forward between the two infantry divisions. It found the ridge immediately north-east of Udem “ringed with anti-tank guns”. The men of the Lake Superior Regiment rode into the assault on the tanks of the 21<sup>st</sup> Armoured Regiment (The Governor General’s Foot Guards). The objectives were taken, along with several hundred prisoners, but we lost 35 tanks. By the second day the Brigade had advanced as far as the gap between the Hochwald and the Balberger Wald. To penetrate this was the task of Brigadier Jefferson’s 10<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade; but the Germans held this vital area in force, and

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<sup>6</sup> Brigadier Moncel had taken over the 4<sup>th</sup> Armoured Brigade when Brigadier Booth was killed in the battle of the Laison Valley.

“hellish fighting” and heavy losses followed without our troops being able to make much progress. While preparations were being made for another thrust through the gap in the direction of Xanten, farther to the right the 11<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division was advancing south-east on Sonsbeck. The capture of this town would permit an outflanking operation at the base of the Balberger Wald.

Up to a point the enemy had reacted as General Simonds had hoped. Fearing further development of the attack against his right, Schlemm had committed the 116<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division in the fighting south of Calcar. Moreover, he was so apprehensive about this area that he brought up reserves of experienced paratroops to block the Calcar-Xanten road north of the Hochwald. But, at the same time, he had the foresight to place other special troops (the Parachute Army Assault Battalion) in the gap between the Hochwald and the Balberger Wald, where he also had many tanks and much artillery. Aided by bad weather, soft ground and the natural strength of his positions, the enemy was prepared to fight a most stubborn delaying battle. By the end of the month he had temporarily stabilized his line. It was apparent that succeeding phases of “Blockbuster” would involve very heavy fighting.

In the meantime the Ninth Army was gathering momentum in the south. From this time onward “Grenade” had an increasing effect upon the Canadian and British operations. As General Simpson’s troops drove north the enemy was compelled to send against them first the Panzer Lehr and then the 15<sup>th</sup> Panzer Grenadier Division. This desperate shuffling of diminishing resources was of no avail. By the beginning of March the Americans had captured the important industrial centre of München-Gladbach and had entered Neuss, opposite Düsseldorf. Further south, the First United States Army was approaching Cologne. It is against this background of highly successful operations elsewhere, the consummation of Allied strategy, that the concluding stages of “Blockbuster” must be seen.

On 1 March there was bitter fighting in the Hochwald and Balberger Wald as the Canadian infantry renewed the assault on the forest ridge. The 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade secured a bridgehead in the Hochwald and pushed patrols into the gap at the southern end. Further north, the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade encountered particularly severe opposition. Heavy casualties were suffered, but the Essex Scottish finally made their objectives good.

As this battalion advanced across open ground against enemy posts on the western edge of the Hochwald, a company commander, Major F. A. Tilston, was wounded in the head. Nevertheless, he pressed forward, “shouting orders and encouragement and using his Sten gun with great effect”, and was the first to reach the enemy position. He ordered his reserve platoon to clear it and then led the rest of his men against the German second line, maintaining the momentum of the attack by the

force of his example. As he approached the wood he was again severely wounded but continued to urge his men forward. In the German positions he reorganized his sadly depleted company, now but one-quarter of its original strength, and continually exposed himself while successive savage counter-attacks were beaten back. He was now hit a third time. "Although very seriously wounded and barely conscious, he would not submit to medical attention until he had given complete instructions as to the defence plan, had emphasized the absolute necessity of holding the position, and had ordered his one remaining officer to take over". In due course he received the Victoria Cross.

While the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was clearing the Hochwald of its stubborn defenders, the 3<sup>rd</sup> was pushing into the outskirts of the Balberger Wald. Here, as elsewhere, vehicles soon bogged down in the mud and minefields failed to reveal any recognizable pattern. Le Régiment de la Chaudière made a night attack against the northern annex of the Balberger known as the Tuschen Wald but were repulsed by "an overpowering artillery and mortar concentration". On the following day (2 March), after a further effort, the battalion succeeded in capturing this wood and then the Queen's Own and the North Shore Regiment passed through to clear the Balberger Wald. On 2 March also the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division made a further thrust in the gap. Opposition here was as vicious as ever, and we lost many men, particularly of the Algonquin and Lake Superior Regiments, without breaking clear through. The enemy continued his counter-attacks and not until the evening of 4 March could it be said that the great forest obstacle of the Hochwald and Balberger Wald was clear.

While the Canadians were fighting through this last important barrier between them and the Rhine, the Americans were continuing their powerful northward drive. To facilitate a junction with them, General Crerar had directed the 30<sup>th</sup> Corps to make a converging thrust south-east of Weeze, which had been captured by the Welsh Division; and contact between the First Canadian and Ninth United States Armies was made at Geldern on 3 March. Thereafter, the 30<sup>th</sup> British and 16<sup>th</sup> U.S. Corps turned eastward and made parallel drives towards the Rhine in the direction of Wesel. The German defence of the approaches to the Ruhr was crumbling. Crerar saw that the enemy was "executing a withdrawal to a line before Xanten, Sonsbeck, Bonninghardt and Rheinberg". It was obvious that he would make strenuous efforts to retain this narrow bridgehead to cover the evacuation of his decimated formations across the Rhine.

Resistance further west gradually diminished as the paratroops were pulled back to their final positions close to Xanten. North of the Hochwald and east of Calcar, the Wessex Division cleared an area which extended as far as the Rhine. Further south, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian

Division secured Sonsbeck as a base for a new armoured thrust to the east, and on 6 March the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division attacked towards Veen. This attack made some progress, but extensive cratering of roads, minefields and increased resistance held the armour up short of Veen. Moreover, this town proved to be a particularly nasty obstacle and the 10<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade suffered severely in assaulting it. The war diary of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada described the enemy's defences:

The houses in this area were obviously built with a view to turning them into improvised pillboxes. They all possessed extremely strong concrete walls, with narrow slits to be used for machine guns and Panzerfauste.<sup>7</sup> The cellars of these houses were subdivided into box like concrete compartments, ideal for last-ditch, suicidal defences.

Veen fell only on 9 March. The following day the Lowland Division, advancing on the Canadians' right flank, secured Menzelen.

With British and American troops threatening his flanks, and the Canadians advancing against his centre, the enemy's position was hopeless. The commander of the First Parachute Army claims that he was plagued with repeated, frantic and contradictory orders from Berlin. It became his personal responsibility to ensure that none of the nine bridges in his sector fell into Allied hands;<sup>8</sup> he also received a stream of instructions forbidding the evacuation of "a single fit man" to the east bank of the Rhine. Schlemm's shrinking bridgehead contained -the remnants of four corps — nine emaciated divisions occupied an area of about fifteen square miles and three divisional headquarters were crammed into a single group of buildings.

For the First Canadian Army there was still the problem of breaking into the Xanten area and eliminating the remaining enemy west of the Rhine. The task was not easy. All experience indicated that the daredevil paratroopers would offer fierce resistance. And they held strong positions: an anti-tank ditch, minefields and dug-in emplacements protected Xanten. Accordingly, preparations were made for a deliberate attack, using special assault equipment and infantry of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian and Wessex Divisions. While the Canadians were seizing the western edge of the town and high ground to the south of it, the Wessex were to capture Xanten itself.

On 8 March both divisions attacked from the north-west along lines roughly parallel to the main road from Calcar to Xanten. On the

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<sup>7</sup> A portable one-man anti-tank weapon comparable to the British PIAT or the American "Bazooka".

<sup>8</sup> The anxiety of the German High Command was no doubt related to the fact that on 7 March, in a brilliantly executed operation, the First United States Army had seized the Ludendorff railway bridge across the Rhine at Remagen.



northern flank, the Wessex Division advanced over open ground subject to observation from the east bank of the river. However, this was little help to the German artillery, since a "beamed" screen of oil smoke, more than three miles long, hid the flank of the attack. As anticipated, the enemy fought stubbornly and there was some difficulty in bridging the anti-tank ditch. Nevertheless, with the aid of "Flails" and "Crocodiles", the British troops overcame all obstacles and the final objectives in Xanten were secured by nightfall on the first day of the assault. During the following day, the Wessex Division mopped up isolated strongpoints on the north-eastern outskirts.

South of the Calcar-Xanten road, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division also made steady progress against strenuous opposition. The assaulting battalions of the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade suffered heavy casualties, particularly among officers. The enemy held out in fortified houses until the flame-throwers arrived to support the infantry; then, as the diary of the Essex Scottish remarks, "The Crocs put the finishing touches on the Germans with shell and flame". At one point, scouts of the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry were pinned down, up to their necks in the icy water of a ditch, for several hours and one of the men afterwards remarked that "it was just like battle courses in England, but the bullets were aimed at them instead of over their heads". Forward companies were temporarily cut off and vehicles bogged down; but a critical situation was averted after the Royal Regiment of Canada succeeded in re-establishing contact with the forward troops and those on the flanks of the brigade.

Late on the night of 8-9 March, the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade (with the South Saskatchewan Regiment under command) passed through the area already won to capture the ridge south of Xanten. This second phase of the attack was completed with comparative ease, for the coordinated pressure of two divisions had broken the core of the enemy's resistance. Early on 9 March all battalions secured their objectives and the brigade drove on southward along the bank of the Alter Rhein, a horseshoe-shaped pond once part of the main course of the river. During the advance a wood in which enemy troops were forming was cleared and over 200 prisoners were taken.

While the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade on the right flank cleared the high wood called Die Hees, the 5<sup>th</sup> moved on towards the Rhine. The Calgary Highlanders recorded that "burning buildings cast a rosy glow in the sky and the constant rumble of guns drowned out whatever noise the advancing troops made". Small parties of disorganized paratroops were overcome and patrols were pushed east towards Ginderich and the Rhine bridges. At one stage, in this final phase, a possibility appeared that the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade might be used to "bounce a crossing" of the Rhine at Wesel. But, warned by the example of Remagen, the enemy blew up

the Wesel bridges in the early hours of 10 March. That day the Lowland Division, moving forward swiftly, captured Ginderich; and infantry and tanks of the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division overcame desperate resistance in a monastery at Winnenthal, just east of Veen. Off to the right, the 16<sup>th</sup> U.S. Corps had come under General Crerar's direction to assist in liquidating the enemy's bridgehead. By 10 p.m. on the 10<sup>th</sup> all organized resistance in this bridgehead had ceased. The redoubtable First Parachute Army had withdrawn the bulk of its divisions across the river in good order; but these divisions were now greatly depleted.

### THE VICTORY IN THE RHINELAND

After more than a month of incessant sanguinary fighting the enemy had been driven back over the Rhine. Operations "Veritable" and "Grenade" had carried the Allied forces to the west bank along a front extending from Düsseldorf to Nijmegen.

For the Canadians, and the great force of troops from the United Kingdom associated with them in the First Canadian Army, these battles had been among the most grim and gruelling of the war. The conditions of weather and ground, particularly in the early stages, had been almost beyond belief; and the enemy — largely paratroopers — had fought with a combination of disciplined skill and wild fanatical resolution. (One Canadian diarist wrote in February, "How he comes in in the face of what is thrown at him is a mystery to us".) During the offensive Rundstedt had gradually built up his force opposite General Crerar's army to a total of three infantry, four parachute, one panzer grenadier and two panzer divisions. And this force had unusual fire-power behind it; Intelligence estimated that at the beginning of March the First Parachute Army, had available over 700 mortars and more than 1000 guns of various calibres, apart from self-propelled pieces. It is not surprising, in these circumstances, that our losses were heavy. The casualties of the First Canadian Army from the beginning of the offensive on 8 February through 10 March were 1049 officers and 14,585 other ranks, of whom 379 officers and 4925 other ranks were Canadians. During the operations the Army had captured over 23,000 prisoners.

Commentary may perhaps be left to the Supreme Allied Commander. On 26 March he wrote 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.

The general significance of the victory is clear. The Germans' failure to withdraw across the Rhine after their defeat in the Ardennes was, in Field-Marshal Montgomery's opinion, their third "major blunder" of the campaign — the others being the decisions to fight the battle of France south of the Seine and to launch the Ardennes counter-offensive itself. This mistake led to the destruction west of the Rhine of the formations that might have opposed our crossing and prolonged the defence east of the river. "Veritable" and "Grenade" together cost the Germans about 90,000 casualties; and the total was vastly increased by Operations "Lumberjack" and "Undertone" further south, in the course of which the First, Third and Seventh U.S. Armies closed up to the Rhine and (thanks to the Remagen "windfall") even got across it.<sup>9</sup> The enemy, as General Eisenhower wrote, "was now in no condition to hold fast in the defensive line to which he had been compelled to retreat". Ills defeat in the Rhineland led straight to his complete collapse less than two months later.

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<sup>9</sup> German casualties in the west for the period 8 February — 14 March were estimated by SHAEF at 210,000. During the month of March, including operations east of the Rhine, some 43,000 Germans were taken prisoner.

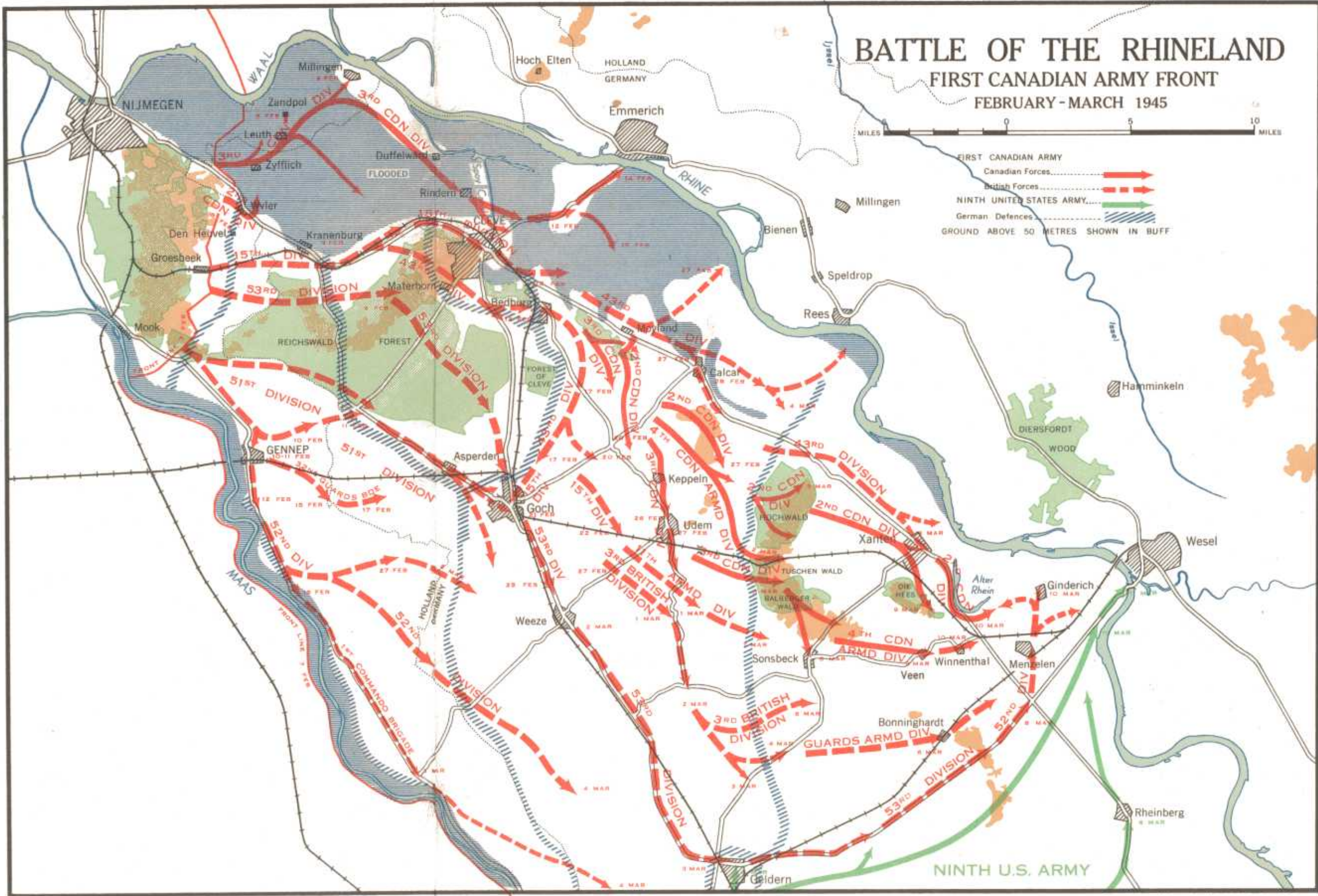
# BATTLE OF THE RHINELAND

## FIRST CANADIAN ARMY FRONT

### FEBRUARY - MARCH 1945



- FIRST CANADIAN ARMY
- Canadian Forces.....→
- British Forces.....→
- NINTH UNITED STATES ARMY.....→
- German Defences.....
- GROUND ABOVE 50 METRES SHOWN IN BUFF



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## CHAPTER XVI

### THE CAMPAIGN IN NORTH-WEST EUROPE: THE ADVANCE TO VICTORY, MARCH - MAY 1945

#### “OVER THE RHINE, THEN, LET US GO”

By 20 March 1945 there were no German troops in the field west of the Rhine except those remaining in the pocket east of the Saar and the Moselle, which was being carved away by the Americans with incredible rapidity. The Allied armies stood on the western bank ready for the killing thrust into the heart of Germany, and the plan for this thrust was ready. The Supreme Commander writes:

The plan of campaign for crossing the Rhine and establishing a strong force on the far bank was, thanks to the success of the operations west of the river, basically the same as that envisaged in our long-term planning in January, and even before D Day. Its fundamental features were the launching of a main attack to the north of the Ruhr, supported by a strong secondary thrust from bridgeheads in the Frankfurt area, directed initially on Kassel to complete the envelopment of the Ruhr. Subsequently, offensives would strike out from the bridgeheads to any remaining organized forces and complete their destruction.

The main attack thus fell to Field-Marshal Montgomery's 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group, in which the Ninth U.S. Army was still included. The task of Montgomery's armies, however, was considerably eased by the existence of the First U.S. Army's Remagen bridgehead, which had drawn large enemy forces in against it and proportionately disturbed the German arrangements for defence of the Rhine elsewhere. And twenty-four hours before the main attack was delivered, General Patton's Third U.S. Army further disrupted the defence by slipping a division across the river south of Mainz.

The 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group attack (Operation "Plunder") was to take place on a two-army front between Rheinberg and Rees, immediately to the north of the great urban area of the Ruhr. The Ninth Army would go in on the right and the Second (which as already noted had been planning for this operation while the First Canadian Army was conducting the drive between the rivers) on the left. The 18<sup>th</sup> U.S. Airborne Corps, composed for this operation of the 6<sup>th</sup> British and 17<sup>th</sup> U.S. Airborne Divisions, was to take part under General Dempsey. The airborne men, however, were not to drop before or simultaneously with the waterborne assault, as in previous operations, but only after the ground troops were established on the far bank of the Rhine. Their mission was to seize commanding ground from which German artillery could sweep the area,

and to prevent the arrival of enemy reinforcements.

General Crerar's Army Headquarters had no part in the crossing operations. Its immediate tasks were to hold the line of the Rhine and the Maas from Emmerich to the sea, and to prepare to bridge the Rhine at Emmerich and to take control of the lodgement beyond the river north and north-west of that place when so ordered. General Simonds' 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps, however, passed for the moment under Dempsey's orders and was given a share in "Plunder"; and Canada was to be represented in the first phase of the operation by the 9<sup>th</sup> ("Highland") Infantry Brigade, which would be under the 51<sup>st</sup> (Highland) Division for the occasion. When the time came for the First Canadian Army as such to go into action again, it would be far more completely Canadian than before; for, as we have seen, the Headquarters of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps and all the Canadian formations that had fought so long in Italy had now been transferred to North-West Europe, and General Foulkes had taken over a section of the line there on 15 March. In the operations about to begin, two Canadian army corps would face the enemy side by side for the first time in history.

The way was prepared for "Plunder" by a programme of widespread air bombing second only to that preceding the Normandy landings; and a smoke-screen 50 miles long concealed our movements west of the Rhine from the enemy. Under its cover, amphibious vehicles and even naval craft were brought up across country by road to the points of assault. On the eve of the attack, Field Marshal Montgomery issued one of his personal messages to the troops, reviewing the enemy's recent losses and his desperate situation, and concluding:

21 ARMY GROUP WILL NOW CROSS THE RHINE.

The enemy possibly thinks he is safe behind this great river obstacle. We all agree that it is a great obstacle; but we will show the enemy that he is far from safe behind it...

And having crossed the Rhine, we will crack about in the plains of Northern Germany, chasing the enemy from pillar to post. The swifter and the more energetic our action the sooner the war will be over, and that is what we all desire: to get on with the job and finish off the German war as soon as possible.

Over the Rhine, then, let us go. And good hunting to you all on the other side.

May "the Lord mighty in battle" give us the victory in this our latest undertaking, as He has done in all our battles since we landed in Normandy on D-Day.

"Plunder" began on the evening of 23 March with one of the greatest artillery bombardments of the war; over 1300 British guns were firing. On the British front the 51<sup>st</sup> Division launched the attack across the river on the left at 9:00 p.m.; an hour later the 1<sup>st</sup> Commando Brigade assaulted Wesel (which had been completely flattened by the R.A.F). In both sectors the troops secured their first objectives in a matter of minutes. On

their front, the Americans were equally successful. With very few exceptions the amphibious attacks encountered only light opposition.<sup>1</sup>

While the Commando Brigade was dealing with Wesel, forward units of the 51<sup>st</sup> Division were making progress in the direction of Rees. At 4:00 a.m. on 24 March the 9<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade began to cross the Rhine. Using the familiar "Buffaloes", the Highland Light Infantry of Canada were the first Canadians to reach the further shore. They suffered only "sporadic shelling" while afloat and were soon in position near the bend of the river west of Rees. Later in the day they were joined by the Glengarrians and the North Nova Scotia Highlanders.

By this time German resistance was stiffening and the Canadians were ordered to capture the village of Speldrop, some three miles inland, which had already repulsed several attacks. The H.L.I., advancing against it, had to cross open flats which were swept by artillery and mortar fire from positions which had survived our bombardment. The enemy's paratroops fought in the manner to which we had become accustomed; our infantry reported that "houses had to be cleared at the point of the bayonet and single Germans made suicidal attempts to break up our attacks". Only on the following day (25 March) was the enemy driven out of Speldrop.

Meanwhile, on the morning of the 24<sup>th</sup>, Operation "Varsity", the third great Allied airborne attack of the campaign, had been launched and had been successful. As the aerial armada, three thousand aircraft and gliders, roared over the river the troops below were cheered by what a Canadian unit called the "tremendous spectacle". Nine hundred fighters provided a protective "umbrella" for the landings while a still larger force farther east isolated the battle area.

Shortly before ten o'clock in the morning the airborne troops began to drop. Although tactical surprise was achieved, and initial casualties to men and aircraft were light, German light anti-aircraft guns made some trouble. The 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Parachute Battalion, still serving with the 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division, dropped along the northern fringe of Diersfordt Wood, north-west of Wesel, in an area which was under heavy fire. The commanding officer (Lt.-Col. J. A. Nicklin) was killed, but the battalion quickly concentrated and cleared its objectives along the wood's western edge. Further east, British airborne troops captured Hamminkeln and bridges over the Issel, while the Americans seized other crossings and the village of Diersfordt. During the 24<sup>th</sup> the airborne troops took over 3500 prisoners, "destroyed or reduced all the artillery positions", and joined up with the divisions of the ground assault.

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<sup>1</sup> Two days before the assault, a squadron of Allied fighter-bombers had singled out sohlemm's headquarters at Dorsten and he was severely wounded. A week later, he relinquished his command to General Gunther Blumentritt and spent the remainder of the campaign in hospital.

In the course of this day's work a non-commissioned officer of the Canadian Parachute Battalion won the Victoria Cross. Corporal F. G. Topham, a medical orderly who had dropped with his unit, was treating casualties when he heard a cry for help from a wounded man in the open. Although two other orderlies had already been killed while attempting to help this man, the corporal immediately responded. He received a painful wound in the face but nevertheless dressed the soldier's hurts and carried him through intense fire to safety. Refusing treatment himself, Topham continued to work devotedly, and when at last he was ordered evacuated he "interceded so earnestly on his own behalf that he was eventually allowed to return to duty". He then further distinguished himself. A carrier had been hit and was burning furiously as its own ammunition exploded. Again Topham went forward across open ground to bring back the three men in the carrier. In the words of the citation, he displayed "sustained gallantry of the highest order, for six hours, most of the time in great pain". His actions recall and typify the selfless heroism and devotion shown on many occasions by noncombatant soldiers of the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps and of unit medical staffs.

At this point it may be noted that the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Parachute Battalion continued to serve with the 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division throughout the remainder of the campaign. Advancing rapidly on the right flank of the 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group, this division captured Erle and Lembeck; the pace then accelerated and on 3 April the Canadian battalion recorded that "approximately 40 miles were covered during the day". They took Minden and then pushed on through Celle to reach the Elbe east of Hamburg. The Canadians crossed this river on 30 April and thereafter were in the forefront of the notable advance which carried the airborne division to the Baltic Sea. A Russian officer arriving at Wismar on the night of 2-3 May was surprised to find the town in Canadian hands. Thus the first Canadian battalion to engage the enemy in Normandy also enjoyed the distinction of penetrating deeper into Germany than any other Canadian unit, — deeper, indeed, than any British unit except its associates in the 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division.

The airborne phase of "Plunder" led to rapid expansion of the bridgehead beyond the Rhine. By nightfall on 24 March the Ninth Army had two divisions across the river, and soon the Americans were thrusting forward on a broad front along the north edge of the Ruhr. At Wesel, on the boundary between the Second and Ninth Armies, the Commandos linked up with the airborne troops, who then began their eastern drive. Further north, in the British sector, the 12<sup>th</sup> Corps made a rapid advance towards Bocholt and Borken. Somewhat stiffer resistance was encountered on the left by the 30<sup>th</sup> British Corps: At Rees the



enemy's stubborn parachute troops held out until 26 March; by-passing this pocket, other British formations pushed eastwards to the Issel.

On the extreme left flank of the 30<sup>th</sup> Corps, the 9<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade met continued determined opposition along the road to Emmerich. At Bienen the North Nova Scotias lost heavily in fighting that was at such close quarters that our artillery could not help. On the morning of 26 March the H.L.I. finally subdued what was left of the enemy in the town. On the same day, the North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment, which had come under the 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade's orders, cleared nearby Millingen.<sup>2</sup> As the Canadians advanced towards Emmerich, and the bridgehead expanded, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division, now commanded by Major-General R. H. Keebler,<sup>3</sup> assumed responsibility for the left flank of the 30<sup>th</sup> Corps. By 28 March this division had come back under the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps and with it General Simonds took over the left sector of the bridgehead. During the last days of March, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division forced its way into the shattered debris of Emmerich. This industrial town had been almost pulverized by bombing, but -the enemy fought on amid the desolation. From across the Rhine, the whole tank strength of the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division, firing as artillery, supported Keebler's battalions. Repeated counter-attacks were beaten back by the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade; then the 8<sup>th</sup> occupied the high wooded hill known as Hoch Elten, north of the city. This completed the initial Canadian task in Operation "Plunder".

### FIRST CANADIAN ARMY RETURNS TO THE BATTLE

The First Canadian Army as a whole was about to resume its active role. On 27 March General Crerar conferred with Field Marshal Montgomery, who told him that "in view of the favourable situation which was developing in front of the two assaulting armies, he had decided to thrust them forward to the river Elbe". General Simpson's Ninth Army was to advance with its right aimed at Magdeburg, while the left wing of General Dempsey's Second Army was to be directed on Hamburg. The Canadian Army, in the words of a formal directive issued by the Army Group Commander on 28 March, was "to open up the supply route to the north through Arnhem, and then to operate to clear North-East Holland, the coastal belt eastwards to the Elbe, and West Holland".

The German commanders could do little to interfere with the development of the Allied strategy. Germany was disintegrating before their eyes. The hysterical orders continued to flow from Berlin, but the

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<sup>2</sup> Not to be confused with the village of the same name west of the Rhine which had been captured in February.

<sup>3</sup> The 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade was taken over by Brigadier J. V. Allard, formerly commanding the Royal 22<sup>e</sup> Régiment.

generals in the field, whose vision was less obscured by Nazi histrionics, knew that resistance was fast becoming hopeless. When Blumentritt took over the First Parachute Army, he found that his new headquarters seldom knew the disposition of German formations on the flanks and lacked intelligence of our movements. "If they heard that white flags had been hung out in a certain town, they would phone the town's Burgomaster and ask if the Allies had already taken it". Obviously, the end was near.

By the beginning of April a situation was developing which resembled that after the Battle of Normandy. The enemy's remaining reserves having been consumed in the struggle west of the Rhine, the Allied armies broke out of the bridgehead which they had established on the eastern bank and drove deep into German territory. This great advance was comparable to the previous autumn's pursuit through Northern France and the Low Countries. There were, however, important differences. The enemy now had no Rhine and no Siegfried Line to fall back upon; nor had he the manpower, the industrial resources or the communication facilities to rebuild his shattered armies a second time. And in the east the Russians were approaching Vienna and were almost ready to advance over the Oder against Berlin itself.

On the evening of 1 April, only thirty-two hours after General Crerar's Chief Engineer (Brigadier Walsh) had received orders to begin the work, the Canadian sappers completed a bridge across the Rhine at Emmerich. At midnight the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps came again under the direction of Crerar, who thus took over its part of the line beyond the river. Almost simultaneously, he relinquished the direction of the 1<sup>st</sup> British Corps, which had fought continuously, and most valiantly, under his headquarters for over eight months. As we shall see, the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps, lately arrived from Italy, was about to begin operations about Arnhem. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps was building up quickly east of the Rhine: the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division had already entered the bridgehead and was soon to be followed by the 4<sup>th</sup>.

Important developments were taking place on the southern flank. By 1 April the First and Ninth United States Armies had effected a junction near Lippstadt — thus completing the long-planned encirclement of the Ruhr. The Supreme Commander now decided that the central sector offered the best field for the main Allied effort, which would be directed towards Leipzig with a view to linking up with the Russians and severing Germany in two. Consequently, the Ninth Army left Field-Marshal Montgomery's command and returned to General Bradley's. 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group. In the Field-Marshal's words, "the aim of 21 Army Group remained to reach the line of the Elbe in our sector, and to reduce the ports of Bremen and Hamburg". While the Second British

Army advanced to an intermediate line formed by the Weser, Aller and Leine, the First Canadian Army was to clear north-east Holland and the German coast as far as the mouth of the Weser. Thereafter, as prescribed by Montgomery's directive of 5 April, it was to be ready to protect the Second Army's flank as that army pushed on to the Elbe, and to clear the Cuxhaven peninsula. In addition, however, one corps, of at least two divisions, was to operate westwards to clean up western Holland. "This may take some time", wrote Montgomery; "it will proceed methodically until completed".

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps' northern drive rapidly gathered momentum. Recrossing a portion of the meandering German frontier, the troops found themselves back in the Netherlands. Although the weather was cold and rainy, there were compensations; as one officer observed, "the route was enlivened by the enthusiastic demonstrations of the recently liberated Dutch people, who had their red, white and blue flags flying, and who all wore orange-coloured rosettes". After the grim processions of refugees in Germany, he found the sight "very cheering and moving". So did everyone else.

Resistance was weakest for the moment on the right, where General Vokes' 4<sup>th</sup> Division crossed the Twente Canal and pushed forward to capture Almelo on 5 April. In the centre, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, under General Matthews, advanced very swiftly and established a bridgehead over the Twente Canal on the night of 2-3 April. Counter-attacks and shelling of the rafts with which we were ferrying troops across the canal were vain; the bridgehead was expanded and the Germans driven back to their next obstacle, the Schipbeek Canal. On the Corps' left flank, which was open, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, charged with clearing the area immediately adjoining the Ijssel, had to isolate and contain small pockets of resistance before turning against historic Zutphen, near the scene of the Elizabethan battle in which Sir Philip Sidney got his deathwound. On 6 April the 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade attacked this town and met fierce opposition from paratroopers ensconced behind its old water defences. Le Régiment de la Chaudière and the North Shore Regiment had two days stiff fighting before the place was clear.

The drive to the North Sea was speeded by the action of French paratroops of the Special Air Service who were dropped behind the enemy's lines, in the Meppel-Assen area, on the night of 7-8 April. They were subsequently joined by British and Belgian elements of the same force. These tough fighting-men seized bridges and airfields before the retreating enemy could complete demolitions, and generally spread confusion in his rear areas. By 11 April the 8<sup>th</sup> Canadian Reconnaissance Regiment of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division had established contact with the S.A.S. nearly fifty miles north of the Twente Canal. Further east, the 4<sup>th</sup> Division linked up with other groups.

The enemy continued to fight stubbornly here and there, but his improvised positions were soon outflanked and overrun. In spite of intense machine-gun and mortar fire, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division had secured a bridgehead over the Schipbeek Canal on 7 April. During the following week this division advanced nearly seventy miles in a virtually straight line to the outskirts of Groningen, the most important city in northern Holland. Here it was momentarily checked. On the left flank the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, pushing forward against somewhat heavier resistance, captured Deventer on 10 April. Four days later it took Zwolle and, with its western flank secured by the operations of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps, then drove north in the direction of Leeuwarden.

While General Simonds' infantry divisions were thus liberating north-eastern Holland, the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division had curved east, re-entering Germany along an axis directed against the city of Oldenburg. On 8 April, it won a bridgehead over the River Ems at Meppen and then pressed forward through Sogel to Friesoythe. At first light on 14 April the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada attacked this town. They took it, but not without bloody fighting in which they lost their Commanding Officer, Lt: Col. F. E. Wigle.

On this part of the front the Canadians were now fighting across the North German Plain, an extension of the neighbouring low lands of Holland, and just as flat and wet: a countryside prosperous but extremely dull, and a very difficult battlefield. General Vokes' Division was advancing "on a single axis and that axis in the heart of a peat bog which permitted no deviation from the straight and narrow". Such secondary roads as there were tended to disappear under the weight of our vehicles, and since tanks could not move anywhere except on the roads, the brunt of the fighting had to be borne by the infantry brigade and the motor battalion (the Lake Superior Regiment). The enemy (the 2<sup>nd</sup> Parachute Corps) made the most of this situation; he clearly intended to defend Oldenburg and the naval bases of Emden and Wilhelmshaven as long as possible, using the water-lines of the Küsten Canal and the Leda River, running through the bogs athwart our line of advance, to the best possible advantage. To strengthen our armoured thrust to the north-east, the 1<sup>st</sup> Polish Armoured Division was now brought up from the Lower Maas, placed under General Simonds' command and directed northward between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Divisions.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps was operating over a hundred-mile front, from Friesoythe to the Ijsselmeer<sup>4</sup> In Rolland, the 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Car Regiment (The Royal Canadian Dragoons), operating under the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, reached the North Sea at Zoutkamp on 15 April. The unit set up its headquarters at Leeuwarden, receiving a rapturous welcome from

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<sup>4</sup> Celled in earlier times the Zuider Zee.

the overjoyed population. Meanwhile, the enemy was making more than a show of resistance at Groningen. He had sited machine-guns in the basements of houses to cover all approaches through the streets and his snipers were everywhere. Nevertheless, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division made steady progress and by 16 April all but the northern outskirts of the city had been cleared. During the next two days the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division completed its northward drive to the coast. The enemy still held out around Delfzijl, across the Ems estuary from Emden; with this exception, the whole of the northeastern Netherlands was free.

### OPERATIONS IN THE WESTERN NETHERLANDS

In the meantime, General Foulkes' 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps had likewise been busy. This formation was concerned with the Germans remaining in western Holland north of the Maas.

In this region, still under the heel of the Nazis, were the greatest cities of the Netherlands; and harrowing stories of misery and starvation were coming from them. The Dutch government in London naturally was urging the Allies to take steps to liberate the area at the earliest possible moment. The military commanders, however, saw it as their task to destroy the German armies in the field, and from this point of view an attack on the western Netherlands represented merely a diversion of resources from the main object. With the enemy armies defeated, all problems would be solved, but while they remained in being nobody was safe. Moreover, it was questionable if it would be a kindness to the folk of western Holland to turn their country into a battleground; if we attacked across it our shells and bombs would spread devastation, and the Germans were likely to flood still more land as a measure of defence or of spite. Montgomery's views had been defined in his basic directive of 9 March, which had prescribed the tasks of the Canadian Army in terms of operations northward to attack the Ijssel river defences (designed by the Germans primarily against attack from the west) in rear; capture Deventer and Zutphen; cross the Ijssel and capture Apeldoorn and the high ground between Apeldoorn and Arnhem; and bridge the Neder Rijn at Arnhem and open up the supply route through that place to the north-east as already noted. The directive proceeded:

A secure flank will be formed facing west on some suitable line running northwards from the Neder Rijn about Renkum.

Operations will not be undertaken to the west of this flank into western Holland; having opened up a good supply route... the axis of operations will be eastward.

In a subsequent report to the Minister of National Defence, General Crerar recorded the Field-Marshal's statements made during their conference on 27 March:

The C.-in-C. went on to say that recent intelligence indicated that the enemy might be intending to evacuate the western Netherlands, a likelihood which would be increased as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps pursued its northward advance. On the other hand, if the enemy did not withdraw and for high political reasons it became necessary to carry out military operations against him in that part of the country, these would require to be conducted under my direction. FieldMarshal Montgomery hoped, and was inclined to believe, however, that such a diversion of forces would not be necessary as it would tend to detract from the effort to achieve the main object — which was the complete defeat of the main German armies in North West Europe.

The enemy did not withdraw, and the continued representations of the Dutch government evidently could not be overlooked. The result we have already seen: on 5 April a new directive from Headquarters 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group instructed General Crerar to employ one corps to undertake the “methodical” clearing of western Holland. The directive added that the available engineer resources might not be sufficient for all the widespread tasks assigned to the First Canadian Army. If so, the operations to clear north-east Holland and the coastal belt of Germany, and to protect the left Rank of the Second Army, would take priority in this respect over the proposed offensive against the Germans in the west.

General Foulkes, with the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division and the 49<sup>th</sup> (West Riding) Division under his orders, had begun his task in the Arnhem area on 2 April. The first essential was to expand the “island” south of the Neder Rijn and gain a bridgehead beyond that river and east of the Ijssel. Attacking with the West Riding on the right, the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps made rapid progress and by evening of 3 April we were well established between Neder Rijn and Ijssel. The plan was to attack Arnhem from the west, across the Neder Rijn, and the Corps regrouped accordingly; the bad condition of the routes across the island from Nijmegen, however, and the fact that the enemy clearly expected the western attack, now prompted a decision to attack instead across the Ijssel from the east. The 49<sup>th</sup> Division was moved back to the right and on the evening of 12 April it launched Operation “Quick Anger”, crossing the river and assailing Arnhem. The Engineers had built a bridge at Nijmegen; the Royal Navy pushed it along the rivers to the point of assault; it was swung into position across the Ijssel and the enemy’s first intimation of its existence was the arrival of our tanks in Arnhem. He made strenuous efforts to hold the place and there was much house-to-house fighting, but by nightfall on the 14<sup>th</sup> Arnhem was clear. Five days later a visiting officer wrote a description of this town, the scene of two fierce battles:

This city is one of the most saddening sights I have seen in this war, for though the destruction is very far from total every building is smashed in some degree. There has been little bombing and in most areas not a great deal of shelling, but the whole town seems marked by small-arms fire. The greater part

of it was entirely empty of civilians, and the doors of many houses were standing open. The effect was that of a ghost city, oddly pathetic and disturbing.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Division, fresh from the Mediterranean, had now entered the battle. Coming for the moment under General Simonds' command, on 11 April it launched Operation "Cannonshot" across the Ijssel south of Deventer, directed upon Apeldoorn. The attack went well, and on the 13<sup>th</sup> the Division came back to General Foulkes, who would henceforth control all operations west of the Ijssel and north of the Neder Rijn. As the advance neared Apeldoorn opposition stiffened; but by the evening of 14 April General Foster's troops had closed up to the canal which runs through the eastern edge of the town.

The capture of Arnhem and the threat to Apeldoorn now enabled Foulkes to use the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division for a bold stroke. General Hoffmeister was directed to make a northward dash from Arnhem to the shore of the Ijsselmeer, some thirty miles away, to cut off the enemy still resisting about Apeldoorn. It will be seen that this operation ("Cleanser") was to be conducted along an axis at right angles to the 1<sup>st</sup> Division's anticipated western advance. The drive began on 15 April and the armoured division soon cut the main road and railway which connect Apeldoorn with the western Netherlands. In consequence the Germans in Apeldoorn were compelled to beat a hasty retreat, which they did in three main groups. Remnants of one reached the Ijsselmeer and escaped in boats; a second retired by road along the shore of the Ijsselmeer to Amersfoort, and another attempted to break away to the south-west through the 5<sup>th</sup> Division. In the early hours of 17 April this last group blundered on to the 5<sup>th</sup> Division's headquarters and the gun positions of the 17<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment, R.C.A. This occasioned the "Battle of Otterloo", in which "staff officers, clerks, runners, signallers, drivers, batmen, cooks" turned their hands to fighting and (not without assistance from the 17<sup>th</sup> and the Irish Regiment of Canada) beat off the attack and took a couple of hundred prisoners. The same day the 1<sup>st</sup> Division occupied Apeldoorn; the 5<sup>th</sup> Division's drive was completed on 18 April, when the 5<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiment (8<sup>th</sup> New Brunswick Hussars) reached the south-eastern corner of the Ijsselmeer.

Operations "Quick Anger", "Cannonshot" and "Cleanser", together with a further thrust by the West Riding Division along the right bank of the Neder Rijn, had cost the enemy over 7000 prisoners, including great parts of two of his attenuated divisions. The Corps was now in position on an arc running south from Harderwijk, on the Ijsselmeer, through Barneveld to Renkum on the Neder Rijn. In a week's fighting the enemy had been driven back nearly thirty miles from his defences along the Ijssel. His troops in Western Holland, now entirely isolated, had manned new positions known as the Grebbe Line, based on waterways and inundations running south-easterly through Amersfoort.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps had completed the task of securing the route to the north through Arnhem for the rest of the Army Group, and had liberated a large area of the Netherlands to boot. As it turned out, this was the Corps' only active task in North-West Europe.

The Allies' inability to divert large forces to clear Western Holland had been emphasized during a conference on 12 April between Field-Marshal Montgomery and General Crerar. Only two divisions, it emerged, could be allocated to the flank south of the IJsselmeer. They would advance westward on their own resources if they could, but with no extra engineers or transport available till later they would have to stop when the limit of those resources was reached. For the moment, then, General Foulkes with the 49<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Divisions, plus the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade and his corps troops including the 1<sup>st</sup> Army Group Royal Canadian Artillery, faced General Blaskowitz's Twenty-Fifth Army across the inundations protecting the Grebbe Line. Blaskowitz had about 120,000 men under his command, and though they were of mixed quality it was hardly practicable for a two-division corps to attack such a force holding prepared defences.

At the same time, however, information coming from behind the German lines indicated that the food situation in Western Holland was getting steadily worse and that it was essential that something be done for the people there. In these circumstances, it was fortunate that the decline in the enemy's fighting spirit on this front rendered it possible to make a temporary arrangement with him that would meet the need. At the middle of April contact was made with the Reichskommissar in Holland, the notorious Seyss-Inquart, through a representative of the Dutch resistance forces. Seyss-Inquart is reported to have spoken frankly. He said that he had been ordered "to hold out under all circumstances" and, if necessary, to carry out demolitions and inundations which would bring utter disaster upon the western provinces. He added, however, that if the Allies would halt their advance short of the Grebbe Line he could avoid taking such measures and at the same time save face with Berlin. In such a case he would refrain from further repressive action against the Dutch population. He also suggested his readiness to facilitate the movement of food into the provinces, and made it clear that in the case of Germany ceasing to resist he was prepared to surrender.<sup>5</sup>

The matter was now discussed between Supreme Headquarters, the Combined Chiefs of Staff and the Allied governments concerned. It was obvious that the German's hints offered the means of reconciling the requirements of strategy with those of humanity, and the decision was

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<sup>5</sup> So runs the report. The soldiers who had contact with Seyss-Inquart during the subsequent conferences found that he would commit himself to nothing.



taken to deal with him accordingly. General Montgomery's directive of 22 April ordered, "In western Holland, the army will not for the present operate further westwards than the general line now held east of Amersfoort". On 28 April Allied representatives met Seyss-Inquart's delegates in a conference which the Canadian Army had been instructed to arrange at Achterveld, just inside our lines. At 8:00 a.m. that day what amounted to a truce came into effect on the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps front, our troops being ordered not to fire on the enemy unless attacked. From that moment hostilities in Western Holland may be said to have ceased; there was no more fighting of any importance, although there were various alarms and a very occasional exchange of shots with venturesome or ill-informed enemy patrols. (Perhaps it is relevant to note that on the night of 28 April the West Nova Scotia Regiment reported "much mirth, hilarity, and general celebrating going on in enemy lines".)

Arrangements for moving food into the stricken area had been in preparation for some time, and on 29 April Allied bombers dropped 510 tons. As a result of further conferences with the Germans on 30 April and 1 May, food began to move in by road. Beginning on the morning of 2 May the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Corps became responsible for sending 1000 tons a day into a dump set up behind the enemy's lines; thence it was to be distributed by the Dutch civil authorities, whom the Allies provided with lorries and petrol. Thus the immediate needs of the people of the Western Netherlands were fairly well provided for, pending the enemy's final collapse.

#### "WE WERE OUT IN FRONT PUSHING ON"

For the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps in Germany and Northern Holland there was still no respite. On its long front the enemy continued to fight hard, even though it was abundantly clear that now the fight could have only one ending. The Russians had taken Vienna on 13 April and on the 15<sup>th</sup> had launched a fierce offensive across the Oder towards Berlin. In the west, the Americans finally liquidated the great Ruhr pocket, now far behind the front, on 18 April. "The total bag of prisoners reached the immense figure of 325,000, including 30 general officers." General Bradley's armies had lunged forward towards Leipzig and a junction with the Russians on the Elbe. The Second British Army was also rapidly approaching the Elbe and developing operations against Bremen and Hamburg. In Italy the Germans were beginning to disintegrate under the blows of the 15<sup>th</sup> Army Group.

Throughout, during these last days, the First Canadian Army's primary task was clearing the "coastal belt" of Germany and protecting the left flank of the Second Army. This involved continued bitter

fighting as the Canadians pushed north in the damp corridor between the Weser and the Ems. At one time it seemed possible that the Army's responsibilities might be extended to include the capture of Bremen and the Cuxhaven peninsula. But the rapid advance of the Second Army and the other commitments of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>

Canadian Corps made it necessary for General Dempsey to assume these tasks. The 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division came under General Simonds' command on 21 April to relieve the two infantry divisions in north-eastern Holland; the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division, in turn, relieved Polish elements near the mouth of the Ems and drove north; and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division made a long move from Groningen, the scene of its final success in the Netherlands, to the Oldenburg sector, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps' far right flank. Here its function was to give further security to the Second Army during its operations against Bremen.

"Notwithstanding the collapse of the German armies elsewhere on the western front", wrote General Crerar afterwards, "the 2<sup>nd</sup> Parachute Corps was still maintaining good control. In part the troops available to defend this territory and the ports... were composed of naval units. These nautical elements showed more spirit than dexterity in their unaccustomed role as infantry. But... the parachutists still fought with their accustomed fanaticism and skill at arms." Fighting was particularly fierce in the area west of Oldenburg and north of the Küsten Canal. Infantry of the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division had effected a crossing over the canal on the night of 16-17 April; but thereafter the enemy reacted savagely. As so often before, his defence was greatly helped by the ground, which was interlaced with streams and bogs. Less suitable country for tanks would have been hard to find. Under the weight of heavy vehicles, roads deteriorated quickly and only the indefatigable efforts of the engineers kept the routes open. After the infantry had consolidated and expanded the bridgehead over the Küsten Canal, the armour continued the northward drive. On 27 April the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Armoured Brigade, now commanded by Brigadier G. W. Robinson, came under General Vokes' command. Further west, the Polish Division had also secured a bridgehead over the canal but found itself held up by wet ground and the difficult crossings of the Ems and Leda Rivers which here are tidal. The resources of an armoured division being unsuited to such an operation, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division made the crossing on 28 April; the Poles then passed through and pushed on towards Jever, northwest of Wilhelmshaven.

Bremen fell to the Second Army on 26 April. On Dempsey's left, Simonds was soon directing the advance of six divisions. The 3<sup>rd</sup> British Division came under his command on 28 April and pushed forward on the Corps' extreme right, meeting little opposition. Next to it, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division made steady progress towards Oldenburg, which fell

without further serious resistance on 3 May. But there was still hard fighting on the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division's front, where the report on 30 April was "few but determined enemy". On 1 May the Division occupied Bad Zwischenahn and pushed on. In the middle of the Emden — Wilhelmshaven peninsula the Poles were driving forward; and on their left the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division, having cleared Leer, was approaching Emden and Aurich. West of the estuary of the Ems, the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division fought its last battle on 1 and 2 May when it attacked and cleared the pocket around Delfzijl, taking over 3000 prisoners. By the evening of the 2<sup>nd</sup> the mainland of Northern Holland was clear of the enemy.

The whole great Nazi edifice was falling into sudden ruin. The Third Reich,

Her strong enchantments failing,  
Her towers of fear in wreck,  
Her limbecks dried of poisons  
And the knife at her neck,

could no longer terrify the world. On 25 April, United States and Russian troops met at Torgau on the Elbe, and Germany was cut in two. In the north, the German commanders in Hamburg and in Denmark had intimated their readiness to surrender to the Western Allies provided they could be secured against the possible arrival of "diehard S.S. formations" from central Germany; Field-Marshal Montgomery was accordingly ordered to drive on to the Baltic and cut off these areas. On 2 May the Second Army reported the completion of the task: "The Baltic was reached in the course of the afternoon both at Wismar and at Lübeck, and 17,000 prisoners were taken including four generals". The same day the German forces in Italy surrendered to Field-Marshal Alexander. By that time Hitler himself, the author of so many of the world's misfortunes, had gone to his account. On the afternoon of 30 April (it appears), with the Russians inexorably fighting their way across Berlin, he put the muzzle of a pistol into his mouth in the bunker in the Reichschancellery garden.

On 4 May the divisions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Corps were still advancing northward and still meeting opposition. At 12:55 p.m. a telephone call from Field-Marshal Montgomery's Headquarters informed General Crerar that negotiations were in progress for the unconditional surrender of all German forces facing the 21<sup>st</sup> Army Group. The Army Commander immediately telephoned General Simonds to "call off" the attacks, then imminent, by the Poles towards Jever and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division upon Aurich, and to limit our troops' activity to reconnaissance and the improvement of dispositions. That evening came the news (first from the British Broadcasting Corporation, later more officially) that the surrender had been duly

signed at Montgomery's headquarters on Luneburg Heath, and would become effective at 8:00 a.m. next day. For the Canadians in Europe the war was over. They had been in action to the last. On the 4<sup>th</sup> Division's front, the 22<sup>nd</sup> Armoured Regiment (Canadian Grenadier Guards) and the Lake Superior Regiment had fought forward together during 4 May as they often had before; and the Grenadiers recorded proudly, in words that a good many other units might have echoed, "the end came when we were out in front pushing on".

On the evening of 5 May, General Crerar's two Corps Commanders accepted on his behalf the submission of the enemy commanders on their respective fronts. In "the shell-scarred hotel in the small village of Wageningen" General Blaskowitz, tired, and disconsolate, received from General Foulkes his orders for the disposition of the defeated Twenty-Fifth Army. "The terms of surrender were read over by General Foulkes, and Blaskowitz hardly answered a word". At General Simonds' headquarters at Bad Zwischenahn, General Straube, now commander of a rudimentary army known as "Armee Abteilung Straube" organized only three days before, was more wordy and less dignified. It was a bad day for Straube, who is reported to have been particularly shaken by information received from Brigadier J. A. Roberts, the commander of the 8<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, who escorted him. "General Straube asked Brigadier Roberts the age of the Corps Commander. To learn he had just surrendered to a man of 41 unnerved him, to learn that Brigadier Roberts was also years younger than himself increased the unhappy state, but to learn that Brigadier Roberts was not even a regular army soldier, but a manufacturer in civil life, was the final blow to the dignity of the German General Staff".

Three hundred and thirty-three days after the Normandy landings, the Canadians and their allies had come to the end of the road. The men of the First Canadian Army could look back upon eleven months of hard and bloody campaigning and reflect that they had done their full share in the liberation of Europe. In due course the Supreme Commander was to write in his report

In attempting very briefly to assess the factors underlying the Allied success in this campaign, I would stress the importance of three episodes as being the most decisive in insuring victory.

The first of these was the battle of the Normandy beaches. The second vital battle was that of the Falaise pocket. The third decisive phase in the campaign consisted of the battles west of the Rhine during February and March...

In all three of these episodes Canadian soldiers were among the chief actors.

The formal surrender of the German forces at large was signed at

Rheims on 7 May. The 8<sup>th</sup> was the official “VE Day”. That day Field-Marshal Montgomery wrote a letter to General Crerar:

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.

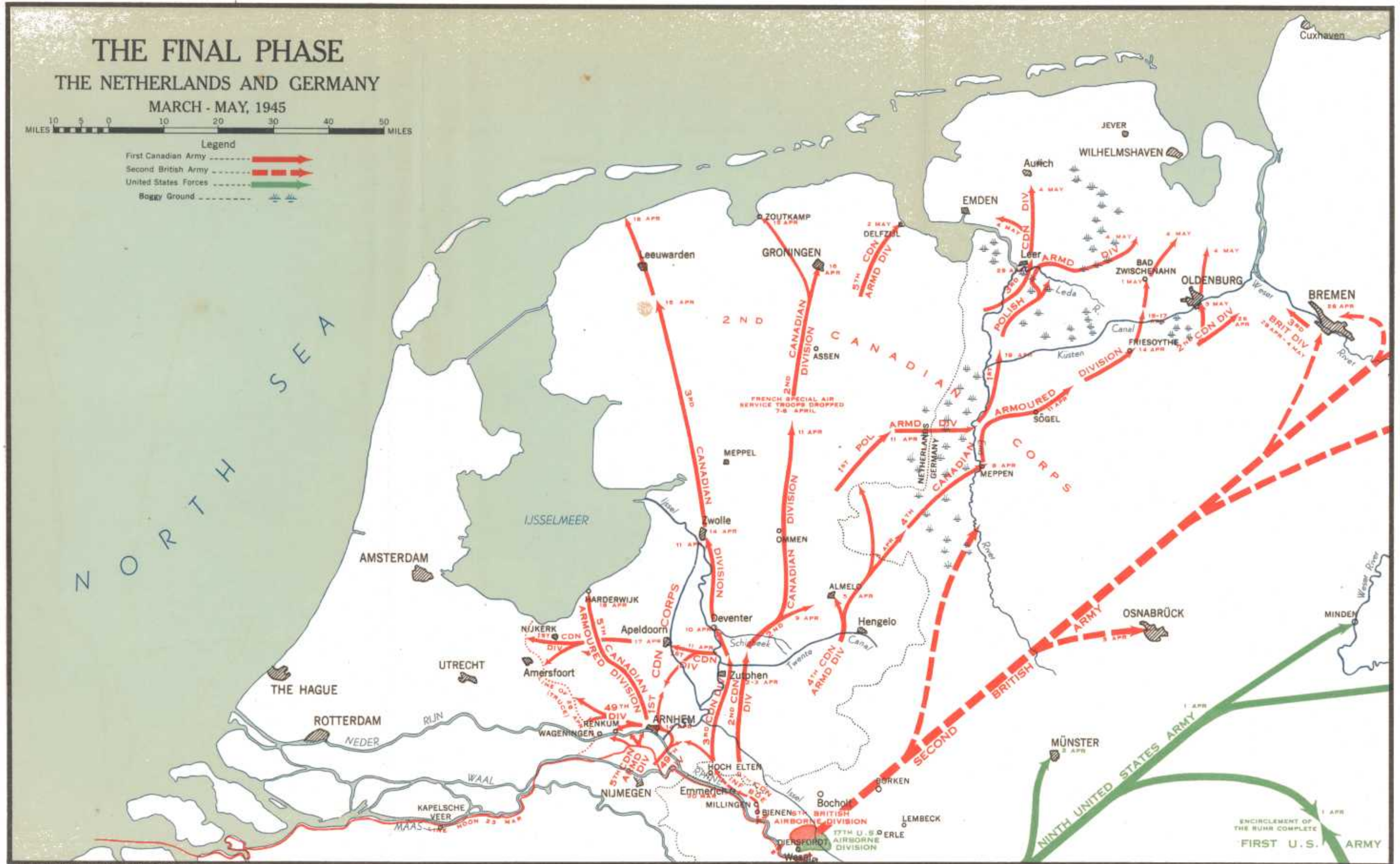
Since it entered the line east of Caen on 23 July 1944, the First Canadian Army’s formations—Canadian, British, Polish and others had taken 192,000 prisoners from the enemy (not counting the 185,000 that capitulated in the end in North-West Germany and Western Holland). No less than sixty enemy divisions had been identified at various times among the German armies which it had met and worsted. “These divisions”, wrote General Crerar, “had ranged from the fanatical S.S. and tenacious Paratroopers to the mediocre ‘Training’ formations and others drawn from the German navy and air force. But throughout the campaign we had always been opposed by the best forces available to the German High Command.”

The victory had been bought at a price. Canadian battle casualties for the final phase, from the completion of the clearing of the west bank of the Rhine to the German surrender, were 368 officers and 5147 other ranks, killed, wounded, and missing. For the whole of the North-West Europe campaign, from D Day to VE Day, the toll was 3680 officers and 44,272 other ranks. Of these, 1033 officers and 11,546 other ranks had given their lives. Many a home across Canada had been darkened by these tragic losses; but the bereaved were not without consolation. A tyranny, callous and cruel almost beyond belief, which had menaced the whole free world, had been brought down in ruin; and the way lay open—if men were wise enough to see it—to “broader lands and better days”.

# THE FINAL PHASE THE NETHERLANDS AND GERMANY MARCH - MAY, 1945

MILES 10 5 0 10 20 30 40 50 MILES

- Legend
- First Canadian Army
  - Second British Army
  - United States Forces
  - Boggy Ground



## CHAPTER XVII

### THE ARMY IN THE PACIFIC WAR, 1941 -1945

The Second Great War was world-wide. There were important operations in every ocean, and on almost every continent. The Canadian Army's main effort, however, was exerted in Europe against the Germans. The Japanese did not enter the war for more than two years after its outbreak; and by the time of their attack Canada had already built up her field army in the United Kingdom. The support and development of that army continued to be her primary care until the defeat of Germany, and thereafter the collapse of Japan interposed before major Canadian military forces could be sent to the Pacific. This chapter deals, therefore, with certain isolated episodes only: chiefly with the defence of Hong Kong in 1941, the enterprise against Kiska in 1943, and the plans for a Canadian Army Pacific Force which were interrupted by the Japanese surrender.

#### THE DISPATCH OF CANADIAN TROOPS TO HONG KONG

The possibility of Canada's contributing to the security of Hong Kong was first suggested by the British Government in September, 1941, a little less than three months before the Japanese attack. At this time, it will be recalled, there were already three Canadian divisions and a tank brigade in Britain, while another division was moving thither shortly.

As the telegram sent by the Dominions Office in London to the Government of Canada on 19 September 1941 was the basis of the subsequent Canadian action, and as under wartime conditions it could not be included in the Report of the Royal Commission which investigated that action in 1942, it is printed here. The text has been paraphrased in accordance with security regulations:

#### MOST SECRET

United Kingdom Government has been conferring with late G.O.C. who has lately returned to this country upon the defences of Hong Kong. In the event of war in the Far East accepted policy has been that Hong Kong should be considered as an outpost and held as long as possible. We have thought hitherto that it would not serve any ultimate useful purpose to increase the existing army garrison which consists of four battalions of infantry and represents bare minimum required for its assigned task.

Situation in the Orient however has now altered. There have been signs of a certain weakening in attitude of Japan towards United States

and ourselves. Defences of Malaya have been improved. Under these conditions our view is that a small reinforcement (e.g. one or two more battalions) of Hong Kong garrison would be very fully justified. It would reassure Chiang Kai Shek as to genuineness of our intention to hold the colony and in addition would have a very great moral effect throughout the Far East. This action would strengthen garrison out of all proportion to actual numbers involved and would greatly encourage the garrison and the colony.

We should be most grateful if Government of Canada would give consideration to providing for this purpose one or two Canadian battalions from Canada. Your Government will be well aware of difficulties now being experienced by us in providing the forces demanded by the situation in various parts of the world, despite the very great assistance which Dominions are furnishing. We consider that Canadian Government in view of Canada's special position in the North Pacific would wish in any case to be informed of the need as seen by us for the reinforcement of Hong Kong and the special value of such a measure at present time, even though on very limited scale. The fact that the United States have recently sent a small reinforcement to the Philippines may also be relevant. If the Government of Canada could cooperate with us in the suggested manner it would be of the greatest help. We much hope that they will feel able to do this.

We would communicate with you again regarding the best time for despatch in the light of the general political situation in the Far East if your government concur in principle in sending one or two battalions.

On receipt of this telegram the War Committee of the Canadian Cabinet obtained the advice of the General Staff and consulted the Minister of National Defence, then in the United States. On 29 September the Secretary of State for External Affairs cabled to the Secretary of State for the Dominions that the Government agreed in principle to "the despatch of two battalions to strengthen the garrison at Hong Kong" and would "be glad to consider arrangements proposed for sending them." The Dominions Office replied on 1 October expressing the gratitude of the United Kingdom Government; and on 9 October a further telegram advised Ottawa that "in all circumstances" it would be most desirable if the two Canadian battalions could be dispatched "at a very early date." Two days later the War Office asked for a brigade headquarters, a signal section and certain additional specialists, and Canada agreed to provide these also. By this time administrative arrangements for the dispatch of the force were already under way.

It will be noted that neither in Ottawa nor in London (from which Ottawa derived most of its intelligence on such matters) was there at this time any apprehension of immediate war in the Pacific. On the contrary, it was believed that the Japanese attitude was showing signs of



“weakening” and that in these circumstances the reinforcement of Hong Kong would serve as a deterrent to hostile action by Japan. As Colonel Ralston put it before the Royal Commission, “It seemed to me from what I knew generally that above all things we needed time, and I had very definitely in my mind, rightly or wrongly, that if Japan did come into the war the United States would be in, too; and I had it definitely in my mind that the United States were none too ready to come in, and anything which would either defer or deter Japan from coming in would be highly desirable from our point of view.” On 16-17 October, while the Canadian expedition was being organized, there was a change of Government in Japan and General Tojo became Prime Minister. This, however, was evidently not interpreted as involving immediate danger of hostilities, and it was still hoped that Canada’s proposed action would have a useful deterrent effect. On 30 October the Chief of the Imperial General Staff cabled the C.G.S. at Ottawa thanking him for the speed with which the force had been organized, and remarking, “The moral effect of their arrival in November will be much greater than it would have been two months later”. As the Report of the Royal Commission pointed out, it is quite clear that both in London and Ottawa it was considered that the troops being dispatched to Hong Kong would be “employed in garrison duties”.

The Chief of the General Staff (General Crerar) recommended the selection for this duty of two battalions which had lately been employed on similar tasks outside of Canada: the Winnipeg Grenadiers (commanded by Lt.-Col. J. L. R. Sutcliffe), who had recently returned from Jamaica, and the Royal Rifles of Canada (commanded by Lt.Col. W. J. Home), who had similarly returned from Newfoundland. These units had been mobilized since 1 September 1939 and 8 July 1940 respectively and were “of proven efficiency”. It was naturally considered undesirable to disrupt the organization of a division intended for the European theatre by withdrawing two battalions from it. It seems doubtful whether units more efficient in any significant degree than those selected could have been obtained without actually bringing battalions back from the Corps in England — which was clearly out of the question.<sup>1</sup> The officer selected to command the force was Colonel J. K. Lawson, a Permanent Force soldier then serving as Director of Military Training at Ottawa, who was promoted Brigadier. With him as Senior Administrative Officer went Colonel P. Hennessy, whose function it was to handle special Canadian administrative business, of which there would be a good deal in such a detached force.

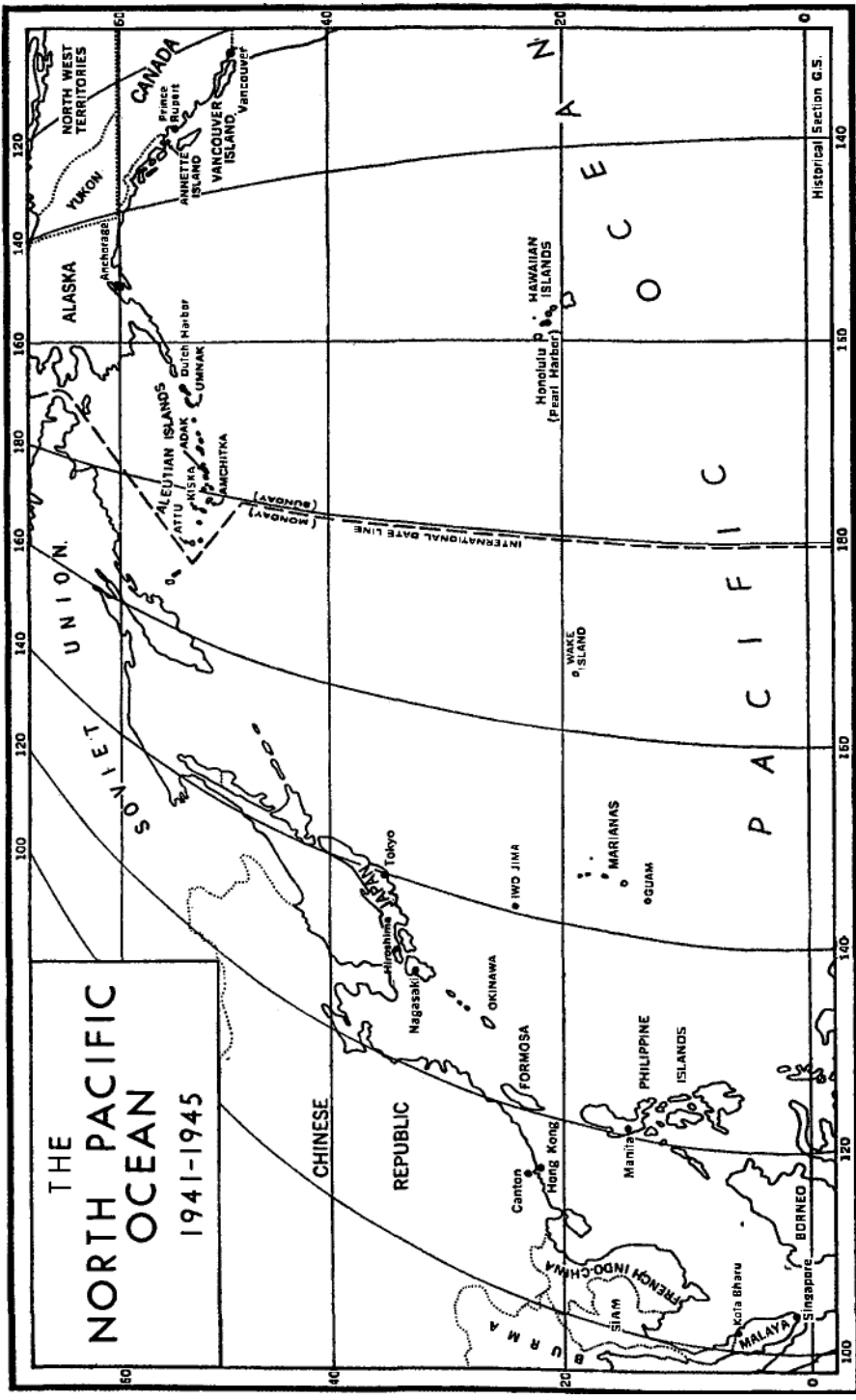
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<sup>1</sup> Readers interested in the details of the organization of the force will find the evidence reviewed in Report on the Canadian Expeditionary Force to the Crown Colony of Hong Kong, by Right Hon. Sir Lyman P. Duff, G.C.M.G., Royal Commissioner (Ottawa, 1942).

The units were to take their "first reinforcements" with them, and accordingly required drafts to bring them up to this additional strength. It was later reported that men not fully trained were posted into them, and the Royal Commissioner found that, in fact, of 448 new volunteers transferred to the two battalions at this time, approximately 120 had received less than the sixteen weeks' training normally prescribed as requisite before men were sent overseas. The explanation was found in the need for "speed and secrecy": the whole process, including the grant of embarkation leave and the move to the West Coast, had to take place between 9 October, when the units were warned for overseas service, and 27 October, when they sailed; and in the interest of secrecy it was undesirable to extend the search for qualified volunteers beyond a few localities. The Commissioner concluded that the fact that six per cent of the men of the whole force fell short, in varying degrees, of the accepted standard of training, did not detrimentally affect the force's fighting efficiency. In spite of the outbreak of war three weeks after the force arrived at Hong Kong, all the men concerned had opportunities for improving their training before 7 December.

On one point the Commissioner concluded that there had been some administrative slackness. The "Awatea", the ship which carried the troops to Hong Kong, sailed with some cargo space empty and it appeared likely that she could have carried a few (though only a few) of the force's 212 transport vehicles had they been available. Twenty vehicles, including six Bren carriers, were in fact sent forward with this in view, but reached Vancouver after the ship had sailed. In the Commissioner's opinion this could have been avoided by greater energy and alertness on the part of Movement Control. As it was, these twenty vehicles were loaded along with all the others on the American vessel "Don José", which sailed from Vancouver on 4 November. Under orders from the United States naval authorities, this ship went by way of Honolulu and Manila, reaching the latter place only after war had broken out with Japan. The vehicles accordingly never reached Hong Kong, but were diverted with Canadian concurrence to the use of the United States forces in the Philippines. The vehicles intended for the "Awatea" would have been useful at Hong Kong, for transport was short there. On the other hand, the lack of them certainly had no significant effect upon the outcome of the fighting.

A total of 1973 Canadian officers and soldiers (plus two Auxiliary Services Supervisors) sailed from Vancouver on 27 October in the "Awatea" and her naval escort, H.M.C.S. "Prince Robert". The passage was uneventful, and useful training was carried out on board. "C" Force, as the Canadian contingent was called, reached Hong Kong on 16 November and was greeted by the Governor, Sir Mark Young, and the G.O.C. British Troops in China, Major-General C. M. Maltby, who was



also commander of the fortress. So far the whole transaction had been cloaked in secrecy, but with the movement safely completed an announcement was now issued to the effect that "a Canadian Force under the command of Brigadier J. K. Lawson" had arrived at Hong Kong and would serve as part of the garrison there.

### HONG KONG AND ITS DEFENCES

The Crown Colony of Hong Kong consists of Hong Kong Island, the adjacent mainland peninsula of Kowloon, and beyond the latter the "New Territories". Its total area is 410 square miles. The Island itself is about 29 square miles in extent and very mountainous; there is almost no flat ground. The strait between island and mainland is less than half a mile wide at its narrowest point, the Lye Mun Passage at the island's northeast corner. The population of the Colony early in 1941 was 1,500,000. The vast majority were Chinese, many of them recent arrivals. There were certainly some Japanese agents and sympathizers among them.

The colony had always been a "defended port" of some strength, but following the Washington treaties of 1922 any improvement in the defences had been precluded by the agreement then made to maintain the *status quo* in such matters in this part of the Pacific. This arrangement lapsed only in 1937. Thereafter the defences were somewhat improved. It is interesting to note that in the summer of 1939 the War Office appreciated that the Japanese, being now well placed on the adjacent Chinese mainland, were less likely to attack the colony from the sea. In December 1941 there were some thirty fixed guns, of calibres up to 9.2-inch, in position in the defences. The available mobile artillery was largely extemporized and included none of the latest types. There were 20 anti-aircraft guns, of which however only four were 3.7.-inch and two 40-millimetre Bofors, the rest being of earlier models. There was no radar equipment.

By the time of the Japanese attack, all naval units of any importance had been withdrawn to European waters or south to Singapore (they could have accomplished little at Hong Kong) and only a few small vessels remained. This was less serious for the defenders than their total lack of air support. At the colony's airfield there were at most six military aircraft, and there was no hope of assistance from outside, for the nearest R.A.F. station was Kota Bharu in Malaya, roughly 1300 miles away to the south-west. This isolation was the fatal feature of Hong Kong's strategic situation, more particularly in view of the nearness of Japan and of Japanese bases in Formosa and on the Chinese mainland. Those concerned with planning its defence, nevertheless, took the view that it was capable of holding out for a long period. General Grasett, the retiring G.O.C. British Troops in China, who passed through Canada en route to

England in the summer of 1941, had expressed to the Chief of the General Staff the opinion that the garrison, if reinforced by two or more additional battalions, would be able to withstand for an extensive period of siege such forces as the Japanese could bring against it. Reserve supplies for 130 days were on hand.

After the arrival of the Canadians, General Maltby had available for the defence of the colony a total force of just under 14,000, including naval and air force personnel and such non-combatants as nursing sisters. The military force included two coast regiments and one anti-aircraft regiment of the Royal Artillery (all containing many Indian personnel), a regiment of the Hong Kong and Singapore Royal Artillery (Indian troops with British officers), and two engineer companies. There was one battalion of British infantry (the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, Royal Scots), one British machine-gun battalion (the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Middlesex Regiment), and two Indian infantry battalions (the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, the 7<sup>th</sup> Rajput Regiment and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, the 14<sup>th</sup> Punjab Regiment). Not least useful was the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps, which included units of artillery, infantry and other arms.

Until late in 1941 the defence plan provided for using one battalion on the mainland and a brigade on the island in the first phase. In the event of attack from the landward side, the mainland positions would be held long enough to permit the complete military evacuation of Kowloon, after which the defence (except for a small bridgehead on Devil's Peak Peninsula covering Lye Mun Passage) would be concentrated on the island. The Canadians' arrival permitted the G.O.C. to increase his mainland force to a full brigade. The Mainland Brigade, commanded by Brigadier C. Wallis, was composed of the Royal Scots and the two Indian battalions. The Canadian signal section was allotted to this brigade. The Island Brigade, under Brigadier Lawson, consisted of the two Canadian battalions (the Winnipeg Grenadiers in the south-west sector, the Royal Rifles in the south-east) and the Middlesex Regiment. The Canadian units, facing the sea, both had beach defence for their primary role; the Middlesex with their Vickers medium machine-guns had the task of holding the system of pillboxes (over sixty in number) with which the whole island was girdled.

Although their battle stations were on the island, the Canadians were quartered on the mainland, at Sham Shui Po Camp on the edge of the city of Kowloon. Here they carried on active training, with special emphasis on mastery of infantry weapons. Their battle role, however, received careful attention. Officers and N.C.Os. of the two battalions, down to and including section commanders, carried out several reconnaissances of defence positions and roads on the island during the three weeks preceding the outbreak of war; and there were two "manning exercises", in which the battle positions on the island were actually occupied by one

platoon of each company for several days. When the attack came, then, the Canadians had some knowledge of the ground over which they had to fight, though much less than they would have had at a later time.

It will be noted that the task to which the defence scheme assigned them was a static one, designed to counter an attack from the sea. In this role they were never employed, as no such attack took place. The battalions did a considerable amount of actual fighting in the general areas of the island allotted to them in the original plan. The fighting, however, took the form of mobile warfare against an enemy advancing across the island's remarkably rugged terrain from the direction of the mainland.

### THE ATTACK ON HONG KONG

In spite of the optimism that had been current in London in September and October, the Japanese attack on Hong Kong did not take the garrison by surprise. Every battle position was manned and ready for action when it came. It is clear, however, that the energy and skill with which the attack was delivered were greater than the authorities on the spot had expected.

The plans agreed upon between the Japanese Army and Navy in November 1941 for their cold-blooded campaign of conquest included virtually simultaneous attacks at many points. Most important of these was the air blow struck at the United States fleet at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii; but the same day saw attacks on Northern Malaya, the Philippines, Guam, Wake Island and Hong Kong. The first bomb fell on Pearl Harbor at 7:55 a.m. on 7 December (Hawaiian time).<sup>2</sup> The attacks on the other points followed within a few hours as the daylight, sweeping westward, showed the successive objectives to the Japanese airmen. Both the Pearl Harbor and Hong Kong attacks were made just after first light; but the former thus preceded the latter by over six hours.

On 6 December (Hong Kong date),<sup>3</sup> Headquarters China Command at Hong Kong issued a warning of impending war and ordered all officers to keep in touch with their unit headquarters. Reports of Japanese concentrations opposite the frontier had been received, and further reports continued to come in. On the morning of 7 December the entire garrison was ordered to war stations. The Canadian force was ferried across from the mainland to the island, and by five in the afternoon the battalions had manned their battle positions and Brigadier Lawson's headquarters was set up in a group of shelters provided for the purpose at Wong Nei Chong Gap, in the middle of the island. The planned dispositions were thus completed some fifteen hours before the

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<sup>2</sup> This is 12:55 p.m. 7 December Ottawa time, and 1:25 a.m. 8 December Hong Kong time.

<sup>3</sup> All times and dates in the account that follows are Hong Kong unless otherwise noted.

Japanese blow fell.

At 4:45 a.m. on 8 December Intelligence at Hong Kong intercepted a Tokyo broadcast warning the Japanese people that war was imminent. General Maltby's headquarters immediately sent orders to carry out the obstructive demolitions prepared in the frontier area. At 6:45 a.m. the garrison was warned that war had begun (Pearl Harbor having been attacked some five hours before). At about 8:00 a.m. the colony's aerodrome at Kai Tak was heavily and skilfully attacked by about fifty Japanese aircraft, and all the half-dozen R.A.F. machines there were either damaged or destroyed. The Japanese also gave some attention to the nearly-empty camp at Sham Shui Po. So began the attack on Hong Kong.

As the Canadian troops were chiefly deployed on the island, and the attack came from the land side, they played little part in the first phase of the defence. In the course of 8 December Japanese troops crossed the frontier of the colony, and late in the afternoon fighting began between them and the forward forces of the Mainland Brigade. That night the enemy developed strong pressure and these British advanced units fell back upon the Brigade's main body, which was holding the chief mainland defence line. This line had been constructed on strong ground five or six miles north of the harbour strait separating mainland and island. It covered the isthmus between Tide Cove and Gin Drinkers Bay, and was known as the Gin Drinkers Line. It was considered capable of being held for a week or more.

This expectation was not realized. On the night of 9-10 December the Japanese, showing an aptitude for night fighting with which the British had not credited them, surprised and captured Shing Mun Redoubt, a key position in the left sector of the line. On the same night "D" Company of the Winnipeg Grenadiers, which had been serving as a reserve company under direct control of the Island Brigade, was brought over to the mainland to strengthen this sector.<sup>4</sup> It was committed on the 11<sup>th</sup>, and while not heavily engaged established the claim of the Winnipeg Grenadiers to be the first infantry unit of the Canadian Army to be in action in the Second Great War.

The loss of Shing Mun Redoubt was fatal to the hope of prolonged defence of the Gin Drinkers Line. At noon on the — 11<sup>th</sup> orders were issued for the withdrawal to the island that night of all troops except the 5/7 Rajput, who were to hold the Devil's Peak Peninsula. The defence

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<sup>4</sup> The outline of the operations of Canadian units which follows derives mainly from accounts, equivalent to unit war diaries, written subsequently in prison camps under the noses of Japanese guards and carefully preserved (in at least one case by being buried) until the day of liberation. The creation and preservation of these records is not the least of the debts which their country owes to the men of Hong Kong.

plans had assumed that this final foothold on the mainland could be held more or less indefinitely. The company of Winnipeg Grenadiers covered the withdrawal of the Royal Scots. It had some trouble with "fifth columnists" in Kowloon, but was back on the island in the early hours of the 12<sup>th</sup>. Some of the 2/14 Punjab, on the other flank, did not get away from the mainland until that night. The 5/7 Rajput beat off a strong Japanese attack on the afternoon of the 12<sup>th</sup>, inflicting many casualties; but General Maltby, finding that to supply them in their isolated position was going to be difficult if not impossible, and needing them to hold a sector of the island, now ordered them too to withdraw. This was accomplished under cover of artillery fire in the early morning of 13 December. By 8:30 a.m. that day the defenders of Hong Kong were entirely concentrated on the island. The mainland defence had lasted five days.

The forces were now reorganized into an East and a West Brigade. The former, commanded by Brigadier Wallis, consisted of the Royal Rifles and the 5/7 Rajput; the latter, under Brigadier Lawson, comprised the Royal Scots, the Grenadiers and the 2/14 Punjab. The Canadian signallers were now allotted to Lawson. The Middlesex were directly under Fortress Headquarters. Thus organized, the garrison faced its further ordeal. That it was to have no respite was indicated by the heavy artillery bombardment now directed at the island, which knocked out several of the defending guns on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>. Varied by a series of destructive air raids, this bombardment continued for six days, steadily reducing the defenders' means of resistance. A systematic and effective shelling of the pillboxes along the north shore was particularly ominous.

### THE LANDINGS ON HONG KONG ISLAND

On 13 December the Japanese demanded the surrender of Hong Kong and received a brusque refusal. On the night of the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup>, an apparent landing attempt at the north-east point of the island was successfully repulsed. On the 17<sup>th</sup> the enemy renewed the demand for surrender, accompanying it with what amounted to a threat of indiscriminate bombardment. Their envoy was "apparently genuinely surprised and disconcerted" when this proposal too was summarily rejected. The colony still presented a brave front, but its fall was only a question of time. The most that could now be hoped for was to prolong the defence and inflict as much damage as might be upon the enemy; as the Governor told General Maltby, "every day gained was a direct help" to the Allied cause. The crippling blow inflicted upon the United States fleet at Pearl Harbor, and the sinking of H.M.S. "Prince of Wales" and H.M.S. "Repulse" by Japanese aircraft off Malaya on 10 December, had put an end to the possibility (never very great) of relief by British or



American forces; and the Chinese armies were not in a position to give the immediate aid which was required.

About 8:00 p.m. on 18 December the final and most desperate phase of the Hong Kong battle set in. In the darkness the Japanese began crossing the island's narrow moat in small boats towed by ferry steamers. They poured ashore in large numbers on a front of about two miles at the north-east corner, disregarding heavy losses inflicted on them by the 5/7 Rajput who held the pillboxes there. Then, having overcome the defenders of this area, the enemy, displaying the energy, the skill in night fighting and the accurate knowledge of the terrain and of our defences which were in evidence throughout the operations, fanned out to east and west and advanced up the valleys leading to the high ground in the centre of the island. By morning he had infiltrated as far as Wong Nei Chong and Tai Tam Gaps.

The first Canadian troops to come into action were those of "C" Company of the Royal Rifles, which was in reserve in the area adjacent to the landings. In unsuccessful counter-attacks which it delivered during the night this company both suffered and inflicted heavy casualties. During the night also platoons from other companies of the Rifles sought to prevent the enemy from gaining Mount Parker (1700 feet) or to evict him from the positions he had reached. Many men were lost in this endeavour, but dawn found the enemy in possession of the summit of the hill. During the morning of the 19<sup>th</sup> General Maltby authorized the East Brigade to withdraw southward towards Stanley Peninsula. Operations by scattered platoons had accomplished nothing, and it was now hoped to concentrate the troops on this part of the front in a strong group capable of effective counterattack. The withdrawal took place that afternoon and a line was occupied running through the vicinity of Stanley Mound. The Brigade now consisted of little but the Royal Rifles and some companies of the Volunteer Defence Corps, for the Rajput battalion had been virtually destroyed in the fighting about the enemy's points of landing. Unfortunately, some much-needed mobile artillery was destroyed by our own forces during the withdrawal, apparently through a misunderstanding of orders. Still worse, the enemy had reached the sea west of Stanley and our force there was now cut off from the main body in the western part of the island.

The Royal Rifles were not in good condition. For several days before the enemy landings the men had had no hot meals and no sleep except what they could catch in the weapon pits which they were continuously manning. Even in the earliest stage of the island fighting, it is recorded, "some would fall down in the roadway and go to sleep, and it took several shakings to get them going again". For this exhausted and weakened battalion, counter-attack in the mountainous terrain of Hong Kong was a task of desperate difficulty. Nevertheless,

during the next three days Brigadier Wallis's force at Stanley made a series of brave efforts to drive northward and join hands with the main body or evict the enemy from the high peaks which he had seized.

The first attempt took the form of a leftward thrust along the shore of Repulse Bay in the hope of making contact with the West Brigade around Wong Nei Chong Gap. This broke down about noon on the 20<sup>th</sup> in the face of fierce machine-gun fire from hill positions, after the leading troops had cleared the area about the Repulse Bay Hotel. One company of the Rifles was left to hold this area and thereafter was isolated. Next day another attack was made with the object of reaching Wong Nei Chong by a more easterly route. It ran into heavy opposition south of Tai Tam Tuk Reservoir. A succession of determined attacks drove the Japanese from positions on the hills round about, and destroyed a party holding the crossroads south of the reservoir; thereafter a counter-attack by Japanese light tanks was beaten off; but further advance proved impossible. On the same evening the detached company at the Repulse Bay Hotel moved north and made contact with a party of British troops holding a house a few hundred yards short of Wong Nei Chong Gap. This position was held through 22 December against heavy enemy pressure. After dark the garrison again withdrew to the vicinity of the Hotel, and the Hotel itself was ordered evacuated later that night. Only about the equivalent of a platoon of the troops here managed to filter back through the enemy's lines and join the force at Stanley.

No further attempts were made by Wallis's force to drive north, for 22 and 23 December brought constant attacks upon it by the Japanese. On the former day the enemy took Sugar Loaf Hill, and the Royal Rifles took it back again. Another company, however, lost Stanley Mound and did not succeed in recovering it; and late in the afternoon of the 23<sup>rd</sup> the whole force had to be pulled back to Stanley Peninsula. Next day the Royal Rifles were taken out to Stanley Fort, well down the peninsula, for a rest, while the Volunteer Defence Corps companies and other available troops held the line. The Rifles had to be brought back in the early hours of Christmas Day because of increasing Japanese pressure. Brigadier Wallis ordered a counter-attack to recover ground lost during the night near Stanley Prison. "D" Company delivered it early in the afternoon. There was no artillery support, for the coastal guns lower down the peninsula could not bear. The company suffered very heavy casualties before the attack came to a halt. In the early evening another company was moving forward under fire when a car flying a white flag came down the road with the news that the Governor had surrendered the Colony.

#### THE DEFENCE OF THE WESTERN PART OF THE ISLAND

We must now go back a week and deal with the fortunes of the

West Brigade and the Winnipeg Grenadiers.

The first men of the Grenadiers to go into action on the island were three platoons organized as "flying columns" for swift and immediate counter-attack. All three moved forward after the enemy landings on the night of 18-19 December. Two of them were directed respectively upon the hills known as Jardine's Lookout and Mount Butler. Both were repulsed by the advancing enemy, and both platoon commanders were killed. Early in the morning of the 19<sup>th</sup>, Brigadier Lawson, whose headquarters was still at Wong Nei Chong Gap, ordered "A" Company of the Grenadiers to engage the enemy on Jardine's Lookout and thence advance to Mount Butler. The company pushed forward boldly and at first made excellent progress, but in the end, in spite of great gallantry, came to disaster. In the words of the battalion report, "After stiff fighting during which the Company was surrounded and attacked by superior numbers, all officers, N.C.Os. and men, with a very few exceptions, were killed, wounded or taken prisoner. All officers were killed or severely wounded."

During the company's advance it had become divided. Survivors later testified that one party led by Company Sergeant-Major J. R. Osborn (a veteran of the First Great War) got through to Mount Butler, captured the summit at the point of the bayonet and held it for three hours. The position then becoming untenable owing to the enemy's superior numbers and fierce fire, Osborn withdrew his party, himself covering its retirement, and succeeding in rejoining what was left of the rest of the company. The whole body now attempted to pull back to Wong Nei Chong, but found itself surrounded. Enemy grenades began to fall in the company position, and Osborn caught several and threw them back. At last one fell where he could not retrieve it in time; and the Sergeant-Major, shouting a warning, threw himself upon it as it exploded, giving his life for his comrades. A sergeant who had stood beside him believed that this sacrifice saved him "and at least six other men who were in our group". Not many minutes after Osborn's death the Japanese finally rushed the position and the survivors of "A" Company became prisoners. After the final defeat of Japan, C.S.M. Osborn's gallantry was recognized by the award of the Victoria Cross.

When it became clear that the Japanese were close to the West Brigade headquarters, Brigadier Lawson decided to withdraw it to a previously selected site some distance in rear. Before the withdrawal could be completed, the Wong Nei Chong position was overrun. About ten in the morning of 19 December Lawson reported to Fortress Headquarters that the enemy was firing into his shelters at point-blank range and that he was "going outside to fight it out". He did so and in doing so lost his life. No eye-witness survived to tell the story of his last fight. About twenty-four hours later the Canadian officer next in

seniority was also dead; for Colonel Hennessy was mortally wounded when a heavy shell struck the house allotted to him as office and quarters. The West Brigade had no commander from the time of Brigadier Lawson's death until the morning of 20 December, when Colonel H. B. Rose of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps was appointed. During this period operations were co-ordinated by Fortress Headquarters.

For nearly three days after the Brigadier's fall "D" Company of the Grenadiers held out in its position near the headquarters in Wong Nei Chong Gap. During this period it denied the Japanese the use of the one main north-south road across the island, and killed, it is estimated, over 200 of them.<sup>5</sup> Enemy accounts leave no doubt that the resistance offered here considerably upset the Japanese plans and delayed their advance for three days. Only on the morning of 22 December, when ammunition, food and water were exhausted and the enemy had blown in the steel shutters of the company shelters with a light gun, did the senior surviving officer surrender the position, in which there were then 37 wounded men. A series of unco-ordinated attacks by companies of the Grenadiers and the Royal Scots had failed to achieve their object of capturing the Japanese-held Police Station in the Gap and relieving "D" Company. In the last of these, on the night of 20-21 December, the Grenadiers lost three subalterns killed, and every other officer engaged was wounded.

The final phase of the fighting in the western part of the island took the form of a brave attempt to maintain a continuous line across it from Victoria Harbour to the south shore, under continuous bombardment and air attack and constant pressure by Japanese infantry. On the morning of 21 December the Winnipeg Grenadiers occupied Mount Cameron, an important height in the centre of the then existing line, with orders to hold it against any further enemy advance. They did, hold it, under heavy dive-bombing and mortaring, through that day and the next, but were forced back off it by a Japanese attack in the darkness of the night of 22-23 December. British troops stabilized the situation on the western slopes of Mount Cameron and on the following night the line still ran over its western end. The left was held by remnants of the Middlesex (who were clinging gallantly to Leighton Hill) and of the Indian battalions; the Royal Scots were on Mount Cameron; the Grenadiers held the right sector, thence to Bennet's Hill. There were still some elements of the Middlesex holding out around a magazine at Little Hong Kong. On the afternoon of 24 December Leighton Hill was

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<sup>5</sup> Colonel Shoji, who commanded the Japanese "butai" (evidently roughly equivalent to a brigade group) which was operating in this area, states that on the evening of 20 December he "apologized" to his divisional commander for having incurred so many casualties (approximately 800).

lost and the enemy made further progress in the Mount Cameron area. The Grenadiers however held positions on the south slope against heavy attacks, and some ground lost at Bennet's Hill was regained by a counterattack at first light on Christmas morning.

### THE FALL OF HONG KONG

The dawn of this, the Allies' grimmest Christmas of the war, found the defenders of Hong Kong in desperate straits. Nevertheless, when the Japanese that morning sent two civilian prisoners with a third demand for surrender, it was still refused. A partial truce of three hours' duration resulted from this overture. When it expired at midday the Japanese attacked immediately. On the left Mount Parish fell, Wan Chai Gap west of Mount Cameron was taken, and the enemy was close to Fortress Headquarters. Bennet's Hill was surrounded and forced to surrender, and the Canadian line to the north gave ground. All communication with the isolated force in Stanley Peninsula had ceased. The water supply for the city of Victoria had been cut off for more than two days, and the fighting troops were feeling the shortage. The main body had only six mobile guns remaining, with an average ammunition supply of 60 rounds per gun. General Maltby now decided that more fighting meant merely useless slaughter. At 3:15 p.m. he advised the Governor that no further military resistance was possible, and the white flag was hoisted. As we have seen, a party was sent to inform Brigadier Wallis of the surrender. He asked for written confirmation, and although fighting ceased at once the formal capitulation of the force at Stanley was delayed until the early hours of 26 December.

Thus the defence of Hong Kong came to an end, after seventeen and a half days of fighting. The colony had fallen more rapidly than had been expected; but very heavy casualties had been inflicted on the enemy and some delay imposed upon his further operations, for the troops employed at Hong Kong were to be used against the Netherlands Indies when the colony fell.<sup>6</sup>

Canada's losses in this tragic episode were heavy. A total of 23 officers and 267 other ranks were killed or died of wounds.<sup>7</sup> This includes a number who were wantonly murdered by the Japanese at the time of their capture or shortly afterwards. The enemy sullied his victory at Hong Kong by acts of barbarism worthy of savages; there were particularly brutal outrages

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<sup>6</sup> For the Japanese plans, see United States Strategic Bombing Survey (Pacific), Naval Analysis Division, *The Campaigns of the Pacific War* (Washington, 194(s)). Hong Kong was attacked by "one Group of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Army"; the troops actually employed appear to have been the 38<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, strongly reinforced with extra artillery and other elements. It is estimated that there were the equivalent of one and a half Japanese divisions on Hong Kong Island at the time of the surrender. The Japanese are reported to have held a memorial service for 1995 of their men who fell in the operations.

<sup>7</sup> Brigade Headquarters, four officers and 16 other ranks; Royal Rifles of Canada, seven officers and 123 other ranks; Winnipeg Grenadiers, 12 officers and 128 other ranks.

against the patients and staffs of hospitals and aid posts.<sup>8</sup> The number of Canadians wounded in action cannot be established, but it was large.

The harrowing experiences of the prisoners can only be outlined here. Until early in 1943 all the Canadians were kept in camps at Hong Kong. Mainly as a result of conditions in these camps, four officers and 125 other ranks died there; among these did the Japanese without trial when captured after escaping shoot four soldiers.<sup>9</sup> A diphtheria epidemic in the summer and autumn of 1942 took many lives. From January 1943 onwards a total of one officer and 1183 other ranks were taken to Japan, where they were forced to work in various industries, chiefly mining. Here again conditions were extremely bad, as evidenced by the fact that some 135 of these men died. Of the 1973 Canadian soldiers who sailed from Vancouver in October 1941, there were 555 who never returned to Canada.<sup>10</sup>

The sudden attack by Japan resulted in the Canadians who helped to defend Hong Kong going into battle in very unfavourable circumstances. Dispatched to the Far East to serve as garrison troops, at a time when, as we have seen, immediate hostilities were not considered probable, they found themselves plunged abruptly into action without having undergone the concentrated and rigorous battle training which later fitted Canadian soldiers for operations in Italy and North-West Europe. They had no chance for the gradual acquisition of battle wisdom through experience. The extraordinarily rugged and largely unfamiliar terrain of Hong Kong was one of the hardest battlefields on which Canadians fought in any theatre; and after their' long sea voyage, followed by brief training for a static role which was never realized, the Royal Rifles and Winnipeg Grenadiers were not in the best of shape for fighting on scrub-covered mountainsides. These adverse circumstances inevitably reduced the units' tactical efficiency. How hard they fought in spite of such conditions, their casualty lists fully and poignantly show.

## WAR IN THE ALEUTIANS

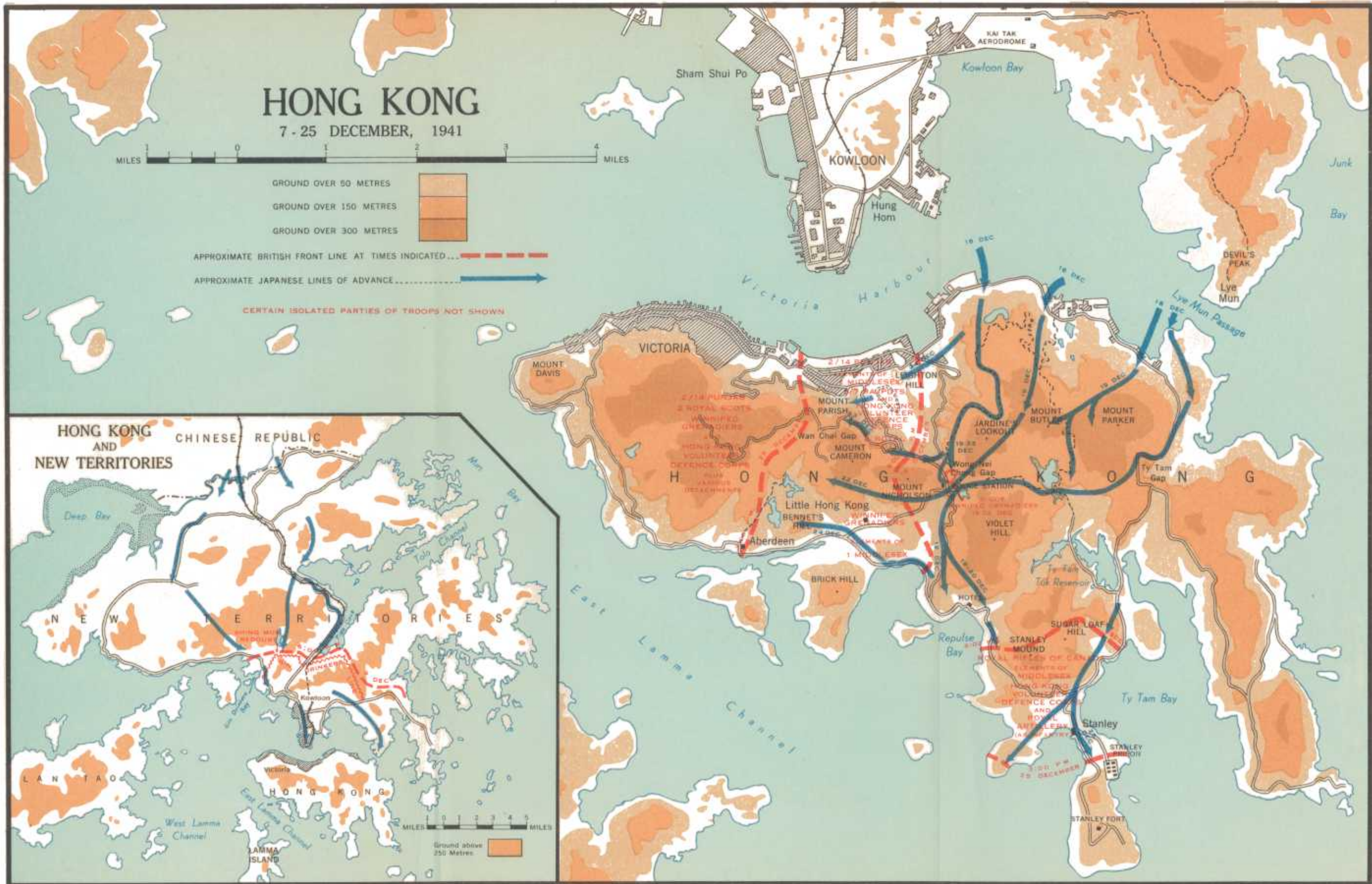
As we have already seen, the Japanese invaded the Aleutian Islands in June 1942, opening the offensive with air attacks on the American base at Dutch Harbor on 3 and 4 June. They landed on both Kiska and Attu on the 7<sup>th</sup> of the month and proceeded to set up defences and establishments

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<sup>8</sup> Major-General (formerly Col.) Tanaka Ryosaburo, who commanded one of the infantry regiments which attacked the island, was in due course tried by a War Crimes Court for his part in these atrocities and sentenced to twenty years' imprisonment.

<sup>9</sup> Col. Tokunaga, Commandant of the Hong Kong prison camps, and Capt. Saito, Medical Officer, were tried by a War Crimes Court at Hong Kong in October 1946-February 1947 and sentenced to be hanged. The sentences were subsequently commuted to life imprisonment and twenty years' imprisonment respectively.

<sup>10</sup> One man had died on the original voyage to Hong Kong.



there. The force in the islands was gradually increased until in May 1943 there were 2500 troops on Attu and about 5400 on Kiska.

Even though Kiska is nearly 3000 miles from Vancouver, this enemy incursion into the North American zone was necessarily a source of grave anxiety to Canada as well as the United States. The Americans immediately took counter-measures, launching heavy air attacks against the Japanese garrisons and operating against their communications with naval forces. United States troops occupied the island of Adak in August 1942 and Amchitka in the following January, thus obtaining advanced air bases close to their targets. We have now to review the assistance given by Canada to the United States in the action taken against the Japanese invaders.

At the time of the attacks on Dutch Harbor, one squadron of the Royal Canadian Air Force was already serving on Alaskan soil, at Annette Island in the southern tip of the Alaska panhandle — a position important to the defence of the Canadian port of Prince Rupert--and the despatch of further units to Alaska had been arranged with the U.S. authorities; two squadrons indeed were actually in transit. These were sent forward to Anchorage, and subsequently on to Umnak and Amchitka, and played their part in the attacks on the Japanese in the Aleutians. In addition, small forces of the Canadian Army served in Southern Alaska as a result of R.C.A.F. activity there. This was arranged by General Stuart, who arrived on the Pacific Coast on 30 May 1942. On 1 June the first detachment of Canadian anti-aircraft gunners reached Annette Island. The force there was ultimately built up to a light anti-aircraft battery, a heavy anti-aircraft troop, and an aerodrome defence company. Canadian soldiers remained on the island until 27 November 1943, by which time the Japanese had been cleared from the Aleutians and the threat to Alaska no longer existed.

### THE ENTERPRISE AGAINST KISKA

Bombing and blockade having proved inadequate means for evicting the Japanese from Attu and Kiska, the Americans in the spring of 1943 set about recovering the islands by ground assault. On 12 May United States troops landed on Attu, and one of the fiercest and nastiest battles of the war began. It ended in the complete annihilation of the Japanese defenders, who made their final *Banzai* charge on 28 May. They had numbered, as we have said, about 2500. The Americans took eleven prisoners; all the rest were killed in action or committed suicide. With Attu in Allied hands, the larger garrison in the more easterly island of Kiska was now in an extremely dangerous situation.

The possibility of the Canadian Army's helping in the Aleutian campaign was first discussed between Lieutenant-General J. L. De Witt,



Commanding General of the U. S. Western Defence Command and Fourth Army, and Major-General G. R. Pearkes, V.C., G.O.C.-in-C. Pacific Command, in April 1943. When it was more formally discussed between Ottawa and Washington next month the American authorities welcomed the idea; definite proposals were formulated and approved, and on 3 June the Chief of the General Staff telegraphed Pacific Command authorizing the organization of a brigade group to take part in the intended attack on Kiska. An experienced overseas brigade commander, Brigadier H. W. Foster, was brought back from England to take command.

The Canadian force was composed of the Headquarters of the 13<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, with four infantry battalions: the Canadian Fusiliers, the Winnipeg Grenadiers (re-formed after the destruction of the active battalion at Hong Kong), the Rocky Mountain Rangers and Le Régiment de Hull. The 24<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment, Royal Canadian Artillery, and some smaller units and service detachments, completed the order of battle. All the units contained large numbers of "Home Defence" troops called up for compulsory service under the National Resources Mobilization Act; and a special order-in-council, dated 18 June 1943, authorized the employment of such troops in the Aleutians. The force was organized on American lines, with Le Régiment de Hull taking the place of a battalion of Combat Engineers which was provided in each parallel American formation. The headquarters of the Brigade was reorganized on the U.S. staff system, and the units were given a considerable amount of American equipment, all transport vehicles, in particular, being of U.S. pattern. In general, Canadian weapons were used.

The Canadian force, numbering exactly 4800 officers and men, sailed from Vancouver Island ports on 12 July in four U.S. transports. On the 21<sup>st</sup> the troops disembarked at Adak, the American base in the western Aleutians where they were to undergo specialized training. After three strenuous weeks of hardening training and combined exercises, the force re-embarked and the whole expedition sailed for Kiska on 13 August. The military force for the attack on the island amounted, including the Canadians, to over 34,000 men. It was commanded by Major-General C. H. Corlett, U.S. Army.

D Day for the Kiska assault was 15 August. The first troops ashore were to be those of the First Special Service Force, with its Canadian component. When the Special Service men landed, however, they met no resistance; nor did the Canadian brigade when it went ashore next day, nor any other element of the force. Although it was some time before the attackers were wholly certain of the fact, and the island (it is 25 miles long) was carefully searched, the Japanese were gone. They had evacuated Kiska over a fortnight before; the Allied blow had struck only the air.

We now know that orders for the evacuation had been issued in

Tokyo on 21 May, while the fighting on Attu was still in progress. For months past, the United States blockade of Kiska had prevented contact with the garrison by surface ship, and it was ordered that the withdrawal should be carried out by submarine; but after several submarines had been lost this attempt was abandoned and a force of light cruisers and destroyers was dispatched to do the work. It waited a considerable time for suitable weather, but on 28 July, under cover of fog, and favoured by the fact that the American blockaders had withdrawn to refuel, it dashed in to Kiska and in an incredibly short space of time (one Japanese account says forty-five minutes, another two hours) embarked the 5100 men still on the island and got safely away. During the period between the withdrawal and the Allied landings American warships repeatedly bombarded Kiska without bringing any reply from the shore guns, but their silence was interpreted as possibly the result of reluctance to give away their positions before an actual assault began.

The Canadian Brigade remained on Kiska (a station rendered disagreeable by fog, rain and savage wind) for more than three months. It was then withdrawn to British Columbia. The last Canadian troops left the island on 12 January 1944. So ended an enterprise which might have produced very bloody fighting, but which the ene-s my's discreet withdrawal turned into one of the great anti-climaxes of the war.

#### PLANS FOR THE PACIFIC FORCE

During 1944 the Canadian Government gave much attention to the form of Canada's contribution to the operations against Japan following the defeat of Germany. It was considered desirable that her military forces should operate in areas of direct interest to her as a North American nation, i.e. the North or Central Pacific, rather than in more remote areas such as South-East Asia. By the time of the Quebec Conference in September consideration was being given to using an army division in the Pacific. Conversations with the United States authorities having cleared the way, the War Committee of the Cabinet on 20 November approved a programme under which the Dominion would contribute one division, with ancillary troops as required, to operate under United States higher command and to be organized and equipped in accordance with U.S. tables of organization. The Canadian naval forces for the Pacific would cooperate with the Royal Navy, and the R.C.A.F. component with the Royal Air Force.

On 4 April 1945 the Prime Minister explained this programme in the House of Commons, making the points that the force would be concentrated in Canada before moving to the Pacific, that no one serving in Europe would go to the Pacific "without first having had the opportunity of coming home", and that the force for the Pacific would

be composed entirely of men volunteering for this service. The moment the Germans laid down their arms, questionnaires were circulated among men of the Canadian Army at home and abroad concerning their preferences. The result by 17 July 1945 was that 9943 officers and 68,256 other ranks had volunteered for the Pacific. This was gratifying, but a good many of the male volunteers were too old or, of too low a medical category for the service, while a much larger number of the adventurous young women of the Canadian Women's Army Corps had volunteered than could possibly be used. Among the male volunteers 2796 officers and 36,386 other ranks were in the "most select group" whose age and category made them suitable for the work in hand. As the requirements of the Canadian Army Pacific Force were 30,000 all ranks for the original force and 33,600 to be placed in training as reinforcements, there was a material overall deficiency.

After considerable discussion it was settled that the division for the Pacific should be designated the 6<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division.<sup>11</sup> Its infantry units were however to bear the names of the battalions of the earliest Canadian formation to serve overseas, the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Division. They would be organized, in accordance with United States practice, not in "brigades" but in "regiments", although these regiments were to be commanded by brigadiers, instead of by colonels as was the American custom. Field artillery "battalions" replaced the "regiments" of British and Canadian organization, and in other respects the establishment of the new division conformed to American organization and terminology, which sounded strange in the ears of most Canadian soldiers. The Royal Montreal Regiment (which had served as the First Canadian Army Headquarters Defence Battalion) was to provide the Division's reconnaissance "troop", and the tank battalion which was to form part of the force was to bear the name of the Canadian Grenadier Guards.

Major-General B. M. Hoffmeister, the distinguished commander of the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Armoured Division in Europe, was appointed to command the 6<sup>th</sup> Division in the Pacific. The plan was to concentrate the force in Canada and move it to the United States for training. Before organization could be completed, however, the Japanese surrendered. Since 24 November 1944 United States heavy bombers based in the Marianas had been attacking Japan's home islands in increasing strength. In July 1945 the United States fleet, augmented by a strong British force, began to attack Japan not only with carrier-based aircraft but with shellfire. On 6 August an atomic bomb, by far the most terrible weapon of destruction yet devised, was dropped on Hiroshima, and on 9 August another was dropped on Nagasaki. Russia suddenly declared war

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<sup>11</sup> The Home Defence division formerly bearing this number had been disbanded in December 1944.

on Japan on the 8<sup>th</sup>. On 10 August Japan sued for peace. On the 14<sup>th</sup> active hostilities ceased, and on 2 September the formal act of surrender was signed in Tokyo Bay. On the previous day orders had been issued for the disbandment of the Canadian Army Pacific Force.

In these circumstances, the Canadian Army was represented in the Pacific theatre in the closing phase of the war only by a number of individuals and one or two special units. Two large groups served with the Australian forces. No. 1 Special Wireless Group, Royal Canadian Corps of Signals, was sent out late in 1944 and did useful work in intercepting enemy wireless messages. In addition a number of trained Canadian radar personnel (nine officers and 73 other ranks) were loaned to Australia. From 1944 onwards Canadian officers in considerable numbers were dispatched to gain experience in the Pacific area in operations with Australian, New Zealand and United States forces. Figures compiled in June 1945 showed that 37 staff officers and 62 regimental officers of the Army had had such opportunities. The experience thus acquired would have been very valuable had the Canadian Army Pacific Force gone into action.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### CANADIAN SOLDIERS IN MANY ROLES, 1939-1945

We have told, very briefly, the story of the two great Canadian campaigns; we have outlined the growth of the Canadian Army Overseas and its miscellaneous operations previous to 1943; and we have related also those incidents of the Pacific War in which the Army played a part.

These topics are far from exhausting the story of the Army in the Second Great War, and indeed, as we have already said, that story cannot be exhausted in this relatively small volume. Only an encyclopaedic work could cover the whole of the skilful, devoted and industrious effort that the men' and women of the Canadian Army put into the task of defeating the enemies of freedom. We have no space here, for instance, to describe the essential activities of Training Centres and similar establishments across Canada; in a later volume at least a summary of this must be given. Nor can we tell of the contributions made by those who manned the coast defences, guarded the internment camps, staffed the static headquarters and did many other indispensable if sometimes unexciting jobs in wartime Canada.

We have apologized to those arms and services of the overseas Army to which it has not been possible to do justice individually. Our aim has been to tell the story of the Canadian Army as a whole, and we could not describe the work of, shall we say, the Royal'Canadian Corps of Signals (to mention one technical combatant arm) or the Royal Canadian Army Pay Corps (to mention one administrative service) without breaking the thread of the story and rendering it too detailed and technical. Yet without these corps, and a dozen others, the Army could not have operated in the field for twentyfour hours.

We must, however, mention here, however briefly, certain Canadians overseas who performed special tasks, all of them important to the cause and some of them most perilous, outside the Canadian field army.

### CANADIAN OFFICERS IN THE BRITISH ARMY

At various times in the course of the war Canadian soldiers fought in the Armies of Canada's Allies. We have seen, for instance, Canadians gaining battle experience with the British Army in North Africa, and serving with United States and other forces in the Pacific as preparation for a final campaign against Japan which was fated never to take place. In addition, a large group of Canadian officers were lent to the British

Army and fought with distinction in various British regiments during the final campaigns.

This "Canloan" scheme, as it came to be called, had its origin in discussions held by Major-General H. F. G. Letson, the Canadian Adjutant General, during a visit to England in October 1943. At this time the British Army was seriously short of junior officers (especially infantry officers) for the impending campaign in North West Europe, and the suggestion was made that Canada could help meet this situation. Partly as a result of the disbandment of two Home Defence divisions, she had some officers to spare, and in the end she provided 622 infantry officers and (in accordance with a special request) 51 officers for the Royal Army Ordnance Corps — 673 "Canloan" officers in all. By agreement between the two countries, the officers continued to be paid by the Canadian Government at Canadian rates. When in battledress they wore all the badges of their respective British units, plus "Canada" badges; when in "service dress they were permitted to wear Canadian uniforms and badges.

The officers volunteering for this duty were carefully "screened" in Canada by Selection Boards. Those approved received a special four-week course designed to bring them up to the standard of officers leaving the Canadian Reinforcement Units in the United Kingdom. The first group of Canloan officers arrived in Britain on 7 April 1944, and the remainder followed during the next few months. The great majority were lieutenants, but a few captains were included.

The Canadians were immediately posted to British units; wherever possible, to the regiment, if any, with which the officer's Canadian unit was allied. Many of them were in action on the Normandy beaches on D Day, and virtually all of them saw *very* active service during the weeks that followed. There is no doubt that in general they acquitted themselves extremely well; this is attested by the reports made on individuals as well as by statistics for the group as a whole.

The Canloan officers suffered heavy casualties. The total in all categories amounted to 465, including 101 killed in action, five presumed killed, 20 died of wounds, one died of sickness and one from accident, and 310 wounded, while 27 became prisoners of war. One hundred and twenty-six fatal battle casualties out of 673 officers was a high proportion, but not exceptionally high for a group almost all of whom were junior officers in fighting infantry battalions. The excellence of the service rendered by the Canloan officers is witnessed not only by the losses they suffered but also by the honours they won, which include 41 Military Crosses and one bar. Although they were originally lent only for service in North-West Europe or the Mediterranean, authority was ultimately granted for them to volunteer for other theatres, and a number

offered themselves for duty in South-East Asia.

The Canloan scheme may be accounted decidedly successful; the gallant young officers lent to the British forces under its terms did their country credit and made a distinguished and significant contribution to the military effort of the Commonwealth and the winning of the war.

### THE CANADIAN-AMERICAN SPECIAL SERVICE FORCE

We have told in outline the story of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Parachute Battalion, which fought in the campaign in North-West Europe as part of the 6<sup>th</sup> British Airborne Division. We must make some reference here to another distinctive unit, the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Special Service Battalion. This was the Canadian component of the First Special Service Force, whose personnel was drawn partly from the Canadian and partly from the United States Army.

This unique international undertaking had its origin early in 1942, when those directing Allied strategy were considering what was known as Operation "Plough" — a scheme for operations during the winter of 1942-43 in the snow-covered areas of Europe, the chief objective being power-stations in Northern Norway. This involved the provision and training of a special force, and the development of special equipment. In the latter connection, much attention was given in Canada, by agencies of the Department of Munitions and Supply, to the design of snowmobiles, and an effective vehicle was actually produced.<sup>1</sup> At the same time the suggestion was made that the military force for the projected operation might be provided jointly by Canada, Norway and the United States. The Norwegian component, as it turned out, was not available; but in July 1942 authority was given for the employment in this enterprise of about 700 Canadian officers and soldiers. Partly with a view to avoiding undesirable publicity, the Canadian part of the Special Service Force was raised under the name "2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Parachute Battalion", which it retained until redesignated "1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Special Service Battalion" in May 1943. Lt.-Col. J. G. McQueen returned from overseas to take command of the Battalion; the bulk of the personnel was selected on a voluntary basis from the Army in Canada, the junior officers being in the main recent graduates of the Officers Training Centre at Brockville, Ontario. All men accepted were required to be fully trained soldiers, and to volunteer for duty as parachute troops.

The First Special Service Force as organized consisted of a Combat Force and a Base Echelon or Service Battalion. Canada provided no

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<sup>1</sup> It was this machine, considerably modified, which was used in the long march of Exercise "Musk-Ox" through the North-West Territories in 1946. The Americans on their side produced, with some aid from Canada's National Research Council and other Allied countries, an excellent tracked amphibious vehicle which became famous as the "Weasel".

men for the Service Battalion, but supplied, as already noted, about 700 all ranks for the Combat Force. Under the original "table of organization" this would have been about half the latter's strength; but in practice the Force was always larger, and the Canadian component amounted to a little more than one-third of the Combat Force and a little more than one-quarter of the Force as a whole.<sup>2</sup> The Commander of the First Special Service Force from the beginning was Colonel Robert T. Frederick, U.S. Army. Lt.-Col. McQueen was appointed Second-in-Command of the Force. The Combat Force was organized in three "regiments" each of two battalions. Canadian and American soldiers alike were distributed throughout these regiments, not segregated in separate units. The 1st Canadian Special Service Battalion was thus never a "tactical" unit; this title was simply a convenient administrative label for the Canadian portion of the international force.

The Canadians joined the Special Service Force at Fort William Henry Harrison (Helena, Montana) in August 1942, and parachute training was undertaken at once. During this training Lt.-Col. McQueen was injured and Lt.-Col. D. D. Williamson became the Force's senior Canadian officer. When all members had qualified as parachutists, intensive ground training followed, and with the cold weather came training in winter warfare, under the advice of Norwegian instructors.

By this time, however, Operation "Plough" had been cancelled. Allied planners had decided on less ambitious schemes for sabotaging Norwegian power installations, and the Norwegian Government was rather unwilling to countenance a general attack on such establishments; while the number of aircraft required for transporting the snowmobiles for the proposed operation was considered prohibitive. (Existing American types were unsuitable, and the Chief of the Air Staff in England was decidedly unwilling to divert 750 Lancaster bombers from the assault on Germany for this purpose.) The question of the future of the Special Service Force thus arose. The United States expressed a desire to keep it in existence for use in other operations, and in November 1942 the War Committee of the Canadian Cabinet authorized the continuance of the Canadian participation. The following spring the Force underwent amphibious training in Virginia.

In August 1943 it took part, as we have already seen, in the operations against Kiska in the Aleutians. The Japanese having cleared out before the attack, the Canadians of the Force, like those of the 13<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade Group, which was also involved, saw no fighting. The Force was immediately returned to the United States, for a decision had

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<sup>2</sup> At one time (just before the Anzio Bridgehead break-out) the total effective strength of the Force exceeded 3200. For this and other information the author is indebted to the kindness of Major-General Robert T. Frederick, U.S.A.



been taken to employ it in the Mediterranean Theatre. It moved by way of North Africa and entered the line north of Naples in November as part of the Fifth United States Army.

Early in December, while the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division was battling towards Ortona, the Special Service Force was likewise heavily engaged on the other side of Italy. In fighting around Monte la Difensa and Monte la Remetanea it lost heavily. Canadian casualties during this phase (the Force was relieved on 9 December) were reported as totalling 113; 27 men were killed or missing. The Force went into action again on Christmas Day east of Cassino. In the bitter mountain battles that followed frostbite and exposure caused as many casualties as the enemy.

On 22 January 1944 came the Allied landing at Anzio, south of Rome (above, page 129); and at the beginning of February the Special Service Force was put into the bridgehead there. Its Canadian component was the only Canadian unit to share the gruelling Anzio experience. The Force took over a portion of the line, along the Mussolini Canal on the right of the bridgehead, on the night of 2-3 February 1944. It remained in position there, digging, fighting off counter-attacks, and being pounded by the German guns on the high ground overlooking our level and exposed positions, for fourteen weeks. It was finally relieved on 9 May.

About this time the Canadian Battalion received its first reinforcements since the beginning of the Mediterranean operations. Its effective fighting strength had fallen below 400 all ranks, and the 255 Canadian officers and men who now joined were most welcome, especially as further action was in immediate prospect. The Special Service Force had particularly fierce fighting during the break-out from the bridgehead beginning on 23 May and was also heavily engaged during the subsequent advance to Rome. This was the period of its heaviest Canadian losses; from 1 May to 7 June casualties amounted to 18 officers and 194 other ranks. Additional reinforcements arrived later in June.

After a further period of amphibious training, the Special Service Force took part in August in Operation "Dragoon", the great assault of the Seventh Army on the south coast of France. Here again the Special Service Battalion was the only Canadian Army unit to take part in the operation, although the Royal Canadian Navy was well represented. The Force fought in a Commando role, landing in the early hours of 15 August on the islands of Port Cros and Levant east of Toulon. Its task was carried out with complete success in the face of fairly stiff opposition. Thereafter it took part in the rapid exploitation inland and early in September was close to the fortified Italian boundary. Here the Force halted and remained covering the Allied right flank until 28 November, when it was withdrawn.

The First Special Service Force was now disbanded, on the

suggestion of the United States authorities, to which Canada agreed. A farewell parade was held on 5 December 1944; the Canadians parted from their American comrades amid mutual good wishes, and returned to Italy. Those men not trained as parachutists were used as infantry reinforcements for the Canadian force in that country. The balance of the personnel were sent back to the United Kingdom, where they became reinforcements for the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Parachute Battalion. The 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Special Service Battalion officially ceased to exist on 10 January 1945.<sup>3</sup> Thus ended a remarkable international experiment. The mixed composition of the Force had not prevented it from attaining an extraordinary regimental spirit; perhaps, indeed, it was in great part responsible for that spirit. Canadians and Americans have never found it hard to co-operate, and in the First Special Service Force they worked and fought together in a relationship which helped to make the Force the splendid fighting unit it was.

### CANADIANS IN THE UNDERGROUND WAR

One of the most remarkable features of the War of 1939-45 was the extent and importance of the clandestine operations carried out by the Allied Nations on all fronts. Though always subordinate to the regular operations of the armies in the field, this shadowy, furtive war of the agent and the saboteur, of "undergrounds" and resistance groups, constantly reflected the larger open war, and on many occasions had a considerable influence upon the course of military events. In these underground hostilities officers and soldiers of the Canadian Army, as well as other Canadians recruited outside the forces, ultimately played parts of some importance. The service was one of extraordinary peril. An agent working in enemy territory in disguise is liable under international law to suffer death if apprehended; but in addition tortures countenanced by no law were likely to be the lot of an agent who fell into the hands of the German Gestapo or the Japanese Kempetai.

No Canadian authority was directly concerned with the management of this secret war; but the Canadian Government permitted and encouraged the employment of individual Canadians by three British agencies. The first and largest of these was the "Special Force" (S.F.), an organization which at the time of its inception in 1940 was primarily concerned with sabotage in enemy-occupied countries, but which later devoted itself increasingly to assistance and guidance to the national resistance movements in those countries. The S.F. agent now "ceased to be merely a saboteur and became in addition a liaison officer and an

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<sup>3</sup> During its existence the Battalion had suffered 776 casualties in all categories; 13 officers and 137 other ranks lost their lives.

expert in weapon training, in supply, in tactics and in leadership". The second organization was concerned with organizing the escape of Allied aircrews who had managed to make safe landings from aircraft lost over the Continent, and any other "evaders or escapers" such as escaped Allied prisoners of war. Thirdly, a small number of Canadians was employed by and worked under the direction of the British Foreign Office. Under these three agencies Canadians served, again, in three geographical areas: France, the Mediterranean and the Far East.

One reason for the prominence of Canadians in the underground war was the availability in the country's population of representatives of many races and languages. In Canada it was possible to recruit men speaking the languages of the occupied countries and at the same time unquestionably loyal to the Allied cause. In this respect, pride of place went naturally and properly to the Canadians of French origin, who were able to make a most notable contribution to the organization of resistance in France and to the ultimate liberation of the country of their ancestors. But almost every racial strain represented in Canada had some share in this dangerous work. Yugoslav Canadians, Italian Canadians, Hungarian Canadians, Rumanian Canadians, Bulgarian Canadians, Chinese and Japanese Canadians (and, it may be added, some also of British race) were all involved in it.

Although individual Canadians had been used by British agencies at earlier dates (the first, actually, were a group of men of Yugoslav origin enlisted late in 1941), the Canadian Army as such began to contribute to the work only in 1942. The earliest recruit was Captain (later Major) G. D. A. Bieler of Le Régiment de Maisonneuve, a Canadian of Swiss origin and French birth. He was dropped into the Montargis area of France by parachute on 25 November 1942, and although seriously hurt in landing he persisted in carrying out his mission. Defying the pain of his injury, he made his way northward and worked very effectively for many months in the area below the Belgian frontier. His "circuit" did great damage to railways serving the Germans in Northern France; and he continued to direct its operations until 14 January 1944, when with a large number of other members of it he was arrested by the Gestapo at a café just outside St. Quentin which had served as his headquarters.

Major Bieler was taken by the Germans to Paris. It is known that he was repeatedly tortured, and it is also known that he revealed no information. After a period of imprisonment at Fresnes, he was taken in April with other captured British agents to the concentration camp at Flossenbergr, Germany. Here he was confined in "Cell 23, a concrete box 1.20 metres wide, 3.80 metres long and 2.75 metres high". The British prisoners were kept in solitary confinement and were denied exercise, writing materials or reading matter; the prison diet comprised

a cup of black *ersatz* coffee for breakfast, a bowl of soup at midday, and 200 grams of bread and another cup of coffee at night. From this existence Major Bieler was delivered early in July by execution before a firing squad in the courtyard of the prison.<sup>4</sup>

About the time that Major Bieler was beginning his active work, three French-Canadian soldiers of Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal, who had been captured at Dieppe and succeeded in getting back to England, volunteered for duty with the escaping organization above referred to. (A person who has arranged his own escape will obviously be a good man to organize escapes for other people.) All three, commissioned as officers (as most agents were), served for long periods in occupied France with remarkable boldness, efficiency and success; and all three survived.

In all, twenty-eight Canadians actually saw service as special agents in France during 1942-44. Of these a large number were qualified French-Canadian wireless operators from the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals. This Corps provided more men for the work than any other corps or unit of the Canadian Army. Eight of these twenty-eight valiant spirits lost their lives in the service, in several cases after savage torture. Several agents dropped in the early months of 1944 were apprehended very soon after reaching France. The reason for the difficulties of this period is clear enough. Our invasion was impending, and the German counter-espionage had received orders to liquidate the resistance in France at any cost. In certain instances the Gestapo had succeeded in "controlling" a resistance circuit; that is to say, after arresting its members, the Germans continued to send back false messages to London in the proper code. As a result of such a deception, at least two Canadians parachuted straight into the arms of the Gestapo in March 1944. On the other hand, several who were dropped into France during the weeks immediately before or after D Day were able to operate effectively and return safe and sound, for now the Resistance had taken the field in strength and the Gestapo was fighting a defensive battle. During these inspiring days more than one Canadian commanded an active *Maquis* force of strength equivalent to a brigade.

Of Canadian clandestine activities in the Mediterranean area we can say little here; they were chiefly concerned with subsidiary operations in the Balkans, and with tasks undertaken for the Foreign Office in North Africa and the Dodecanese Islands. It was in the Balkans that the Canadian Yugoslavs and Hungarians played their part, assisting in organizing and encouraging the Partisan resistance and

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<sup>4</sup> It is obviously impossible here to refer by name to all the brave men engaged in this work or to tell of their exploits. Major Bieler and his record must stand as types of all of them. He was a pioneer, at a time when our organization was less complete and efficient than it later became; and of all the Canadian agents he was perhaps the most skilful and effective. He was awarded the D.S.O. and the M.B.E.

arranging escapes of Allied airmen.

In the Far East, the story of Canadian participation in special operations falls substantially into two parts. One relates to a small group of operational agents organized in the first half of 1945 around a hard core of French-Canadian S.F. veterans who had already seen service in France and now volunteered for work against the Japanese. There was also a large contingent of linguists, consisting mainly of Canadian-born Chinese and Japanese recruited in Canada itself. Some of these linguists operated as agents in the field. The French-Canadian agents did excellent work in advance of the Fourteenth Army in the area about the border between Burma and Siam, harassing Japanese supply convoys on the jungle trails. One of these officers was killed by the accidental explosion of his demolition charges. Some of the same agents, and others, later performed equally good service in Malaya.

Valuable contributions were made by Canadian-born Chinese volunteers, of whom ten were actually dropped on operations in Malaya prior to the Japanese surrender. In addition a group of Canadians of Japanese origin was collected and dispatched to the Far East. There was no intention of using these men as operational S.F. agents; the object was to use their linguistic knowledge for political warfare purposes. A number were in fact however employed as interpreters in forward areas and acquitted themselves with distinction. Mention should also be made of Canadian officers trained in Canada in the Japanese Language School, who were employed on a variety of "political warfare tasks" in India and Burma and, subsequently, in French Indo-China, Malaya and Hong Kong.

### CIVIL AFFAIRS OFFICERS

Another special Canadian Army contribution to victory took the form of provision of officers to assist in the administration of "Civil Affairs" in theatres of operations and in occupied territory.

The service known in liberated territory as Civil Affairs, and in enemy territory as Military Government, was created to deal with the problems arising from the presence of civil populations in areas where fighting was going on. This service was a part of the Army and existed for its benefit; it was "an instrument of the will of the Commander-in-Chief". Its basic object was to facilitate military operations. It was designed to work for the benefit of the civil populations only in so far as the prevention of want, disease, fear and disorder among them were essential to such operations. It was thus not a "relief" organization, except as a matter of "first aid" to the most urgent needs. Relief and rehabilitation proper were the concern in liberated territory of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, to which Civil Affairs handed over these matters as soon as possible. Civil Affairs

worked through two categories of officers: first, staff officers at the headquarters of fighting formations, who moved with their formations and directed C.A. activities in their areas; and, secondly, Civil Affairs detachments who took charge of specific towns or districts and remained there.

For these purposes specially-trained men were required, and late in 1942 the suggestion was made by the British authorities that Canada might provide a quota of Civil Affairs officers. The suggestion was accepted, and Canadian officers were accordingly selected to attend courses at the Civil Affairs Staff Centre, Wimbledon. In December 1943 a Canadian Civil Affairs Staff Course opened at the Royal Military College, Kingston, and this course and those that succeeded it trained a total of 141 officers of the Canadian services. A few Canadians took courses at the American School of Military Government at Charlottesville, Virginia. The ultimate numerical contribution was considerable. In November 1944, in the midst of the North-West Europe campaign, a survey showed 349 Canadian Army and R.C.A.F. officers actually employed in Civil Affairs operations. Of these, 332 were from the Army. The first Canadians to be employed in Civil Affairs in the field were a group of the early Wimbledon graduates who were asked for by the War Office to assist in the work in the Mediterranean theatre. By the end of 1943 thirty Canadian officers were employed in Sicily and Italy. In the North West Europe campaign, Canada provided C.A. staffs for her own formation headquarters, and also made a large contribution to the pool of C.A. officers for employment in localized detachments or otherwise. In November 1944, a total of 279 Canadian Army officers were listed as posted to the pool. These men were chiefly employed, in the early part of the campaign, in mixed British-American C.A. teams in which they were assigned to the functions for which they were best fitted. It is interesting to note the functions in which the Canadians seem to have excelled; those in which they filled more than their numerical proportion of the vacancies were the Administrative, Financial, Legal, Labour, Supply, Food and Engineering services. In such capacities Canadian officers served the Allied armies in Italy, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and subsequently Germany.

### THE CANADIAN FORESTRY CORPS

During the First Great War a Canadian Forestry Corps was raised and did important work in the production of lumber for war purposes from the forests of the United Kingdom and the Continent. This experience was repeated during 1939-45, when Canadian foresters again made a valuable and characteristically Canadian contribution to victory in the European theatre.

This second Canadian Forestry Corps came into existence in the summer of 1940, as the result of a request from the British Government. The first suggestion was that as many as eighty companies might be raised for service in Britain and on the continent. The situation was soon materially altered by the collapse of France, but there was still an urgent need for foresters in the United Kingdom, where with Baltic supplies cut off there was a great gap between local supplies of lumber and essential requirements. An initial force of twenty companies was asked for, and it was pointed out that the military situation in Britain now made it important that these companies should have received an "appropriate scale of military training" before arriving there.

Twenty Forestry Companies (each with a strength of about 200 men) were accordingly mobilized in Canada, trained as soldiers, and dispatched overseas. The Corps was commanded by BrigadierGeneral J. B. White, who had played an important part in the work of the Forestry Corps of 1914-18. Under a financial agreement between the two Governments, Canada bore the cost of pay and allowances for the Corps, transport to and from the United Kingdom, and certain other items, while the British Government paid "all other expenses connected with equipment, work or maintenance".

An advance party arrived in Britain in October 1940; the Corps Headquarters and the first complete company landed at Christmas. Work began at once in the assigned timber areas of Scotland. The full twenty companies had reached the United Kingdom by July of 1941. In that year the British Government, pointing out that the effects of the Battle of the Atlantic and heavy demands on shipping for various theatres of war had compelled progressive reductions in the tonnage that could be allocated to bringing timber to the United Kingdom, asked for more companies. The matter required careful consideration, in the light of the manpower involved; but ten additional companies were ultimately provided and were all at work in Scotland by October 1942. The overseas strength of the Corps was now above 6000 all ranks.

Throughout the war the Highland hills rang to the crash of falling timber and the scream of Canadian saws. Each company worked, as a rule, in two sections, one cutting "in the bush" and bringing out the timber, the other sawing it into lumber with the aid of Canadian mechanical equipment in the company mill. Visitors from Canada noted how each company tended to maintain the lumbering practices of the part of the Dominion where it was raised: a British Columbia unit, for instance, could usually be identified by its fondness for "high rigging" techniques and the use of wire rope. Each unit was a self-contained community, including men capable of turning their hands to almost any task; and the Corps performed in fact an endless variety of tasks, from miscellaneous building to snow clearance on the Highland roads. Military training was never neglected,

the companies devoting a regular proportion of time to it and studying the part they would play in the defence of their areas if invasion came.

As our own invasion of North-West Europe approached, it was considered desirable to have forestry troops available to exploit the timber resources of that area for Allied benefit. Accordingly five, and ultimately ten, forestry companies, under Headquarters No. 1 Canadian Forestry Group, commanded by Col. C. E. F. Jones, were allocated to this duty. The first five began moving to France late in July 1944 and commenced work in the forests of Normandy. In the autumn they moved up into Belgium and cutting began in the Ardennes Forest. At the same time the other five companies crossed the Channel to Belgium. When in the following December the Germans launched their Ardennes counter-offensive, the Canadian foresters here found themselves for a moment in the front line and were in fact called on to do combatant duty. The six companies working in the Ardennes had to leave much equipment behind when they withdrew.

The Forestry Corps had supported the early operations on the continent in another way. The planners of the Normandy invasion could spare no shipping for moving timber across the Channel to the bridgehead, yet timber would be urgently required. The Canadian Forestry Corps was accordingly called upon to build timber rafts suitable for cross-Channel towing. Active work on the rafts began at Southampton and Barry in April 1944 and ended only in August, by which time it was practicable and more economical to cut timber on the Continent. The Canadians constructed in all 77 square timber and 54 round timber rafts. It was found that these could be towed across the Channel in safety even in comparatively rough weather.

In 1945 our troops had barely cleared the Reichswald and Hochwald Forests of Western Germany when the Forestry Corps began work there, preparing lumber and timber for use in the Rhine crossings; and after the end of hostilities the whole Group was cutting for a time in German forests. Canadian timber operations on the Continent ended on 23 November 1945. Actual production figures recorded for the whole period of work in North-West Europe included about 47,700,000 F.B.M. of sawn lumber.

The overseas strength of the Canadian Forestry Corps had been reduced by ten companies in the autumn of 1943. Ten others remained at work in Scotland, however, during 1944 and the first months of 1945. Timber operations ceased entirely here in June 1945. The production figures for four and a half years of work in the Scottish forests are impressive; they are headed by about 394,400,000 F.B.M. of sawn lumber. The remaining units of the C.F.Cn in the United Kingdom were disbanded at the end of August 1945, and the Corps Headquarters ceased to operate on 1 September. The disbandment of the Headquarters of the Forestry Group on the Continent, on 3 December 1945, marked the final conclusion of a job well done.



## CONCLUSION

### REPATRIATION AND DEMOBILIZATION

As soon as the war in Europe was over, the process of repatriating and demobilizing the men of the Canadian fighting force began.

For this plans had been in readiness. If only because of shortage of shipping, repatriation was bound to take many months and priorities were certain to be a matter of burning interest. The principle "first in, first out" would have been desirable from the viewpoint of abstract justice; but it was impossible to apply it without qualification, for many of the officers and men who had been "in" longest were indispensable to administration. A system of point-scores was set up (each month's service in Canada counted two points, each month's overseas service three, while the scores of married men, or of widowers or divorced men with dependent children, were increased by 20 per cent), and as far as possible priorities for repatriation were allotted in accordance with individual scores. The men with longest service who could be spared were released from their units and sent home in drafts; the majority of the men of the Army returned in this manner. Subsequently, the major units, the gaps in their ranks filled in part at least by low-point men from their home regions, returned home as units, and the cities and towns of Canada saw the regiments that had borne their names with honour on so many battlefields marching through their streets once more.

When the fighting ceased there were some 282,000 men and women of the Canadian Army serving in the European Zone (including Britain). The highest priority for returning went to the volunteers accepted for the Pacific Force, who were to have "thirty clear days' leave at home" before their further service. For these and men with high scores the repatriation mill began to grind with commendable promptitude after the end of hostilities. During June of 1945, more than 17,000 members of the Canadian Army sailed; homewards; in July the number rose above 26,000. The movement continued as shipping became available. On 16 October 1945 the Minister of National Defence was able to tell the House of Commons that 111,000 men had returned from Europe since VE Day. By 28 February 1946 the back of the tremendous job was broken; a total of 238,293 Army personnel had then been brought home since hostilities ended — a most satisfactory administrative achievement. Thereafter the liquidation of Canada's remaining overseas commitments proceeded gradually but steadily. The final stage consisted of returning the men

who had staffed the Repatriation Units<sup>1</sup> and done the other administrative work involved in settling the business of the Canadian Army Overseas. The grand old Cunard White Star trooper "Aquitania", which had carried the Headquarters of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division to England in the first convoy in December 1939, now brought the last men back. The final large group, about 900 strong, reached Halifax on 21 January 1947.

Repatriating the officers and men was not the whole story. The Canadian Government also brought to Canada at public expense the wives and children whom many soldiers had acquired during their long stay overseas. By 7 August 1947, transport had thus been provided for 40,764 brides and 19,608 children of Canadians of the three services; of these, the vast majority came from Britain, and about 80 per cent of the wives and 85 per cent of the children were those of Army men.

Along with repatriation went demobilization. The great force built up during nearly six years of conflict now began to melt quietly away. The total strength of the Canadian Army at the time of Germany's surrender (including all personnel doing full-time duty) was 491,942. By October 1945 nearly 2000 men a day were being discharged. By 31 July 1946 the strength of the Active Army (the wartime force, as distinguished from the small Interim Force set up to tide over the transition from war to peace) was down to 38,148 all ranks. Small numbers of officers and men of the wartime force continued to serve for a short time longer to assist in the multifarious tasks of "run-down" administration; but, except for a few individuals, all of them had returned to civil life by 30 September 1947. The Army had now reverted to peacetime status, and comprised an Active Force (the regular component, which, reflecting the lessons of the war, was both larger and better equipped than the Permanent Force of 1939) and a Reserve Force (the old Non-Permanent Active Militia, which had done so much to make the wartime achievements possible, and which was now likewise reorganized and placed upon a sounder basis than ever before). During the fiery trial of 1939-45 the units of both forces had acquired new honours to set beside those won by earlier generations.

For a time the Canadian Army took part in the occupation of Germany. On 10 August 1945 the Government announced that Canada was contributing Army and Air Force contingents "for the present phase of the occupation". The Army contribution was to be "the reconstituted 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division and certain administrative and lines of communication units totalling about 25,000 all ranks". Apart from key personnel who were necessarily retained the Canadian Army Occupation Force was organized from individuals volunteering for the service and from men with low point-scores. The Force was commanded by Major-

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<sup>1</sup> The former "Reinforcement Units", which had now reversed their old function.

General Vokes. Its area of occupation, which formed part of the 30<sup>th</sup> Corps District, was the north-western corner of Germany where the Canadians had fought; its headquarters was at Bad Zwischenahn.

The C.A.O.F. as finally constituted had an establishment strength of 21,574 all ranks. It played its part in Germany for a year after the surrender, maintaining order, assisting in the control, disarmament and disbandment of the German forces, and performing a multitude of miscellaneous duties. In December 1945 the Canadian Government advised the United Kingdom of its intention of withdrawing the force,<sup>2</sup> and the first units left Germany late in the following March. On 15 May 1946 the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division turned over its area to the 52<sup>nd</sup> (Lowland) Division. The men who had formed the Occupation Force were repatriated to Canada during the spring and early summer.

### THE NATIONAL EFFORT IN TWO GREAT WARS

During this Second Great War, 630,052 Canadians served in the Active Army. Of these, 25,251 were women. All these men and women were volunteers. In addition, 100,573 men were called up for service under the National Resources Mobilization Act.<sup>3</sup> The Army's total "intake" was thus 730,625. Its peak strength at a given time was 495,804, reached on 22 March 1944. The Reserve Army, the part-time force equivalent to the pre-war Non-Permanent Active Militia, numbered 82,163 all ranks at 30 April 1945. Approximately 368,000 all ranks served overseas in the European Zone. Roughly 2800 served in the Pacific war zone, in addition to the 4800 engaged in the Kiska operation. Some thousands more did duty outside of Canada in the outposts of North America.

It is a matter of interest to compare this effort with that of the First Great War. In 1939 the population of Canada was considerably larger than in 1914 — the official estimates for these years being 11,267,000 and 7,879,000 respectively. In the war which began in 1914, 628,462 Canadians are recorded as having served, most of them in the military forces, for the Dominion's naval forces in that conflict amounted only to about 10,000 men, while her contribution to the British air forces was about 24,000. It will be noted that the figure for all three services is considerably less than the total of Canadians serving in the Army during the more recent war. In the war of 1939-45, however, Canada also maintained very large air and naval forces. In the course of the struggle, a total of 249,624 men and women served in the Royal Canadian Air

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<sup>2</sup> See the statement made by the Prime Minister in the Canadian House of Commons, 10 March 1947.

<sup>3</sup> This figure does not include 57,483 men called up for service who transferred to the Active Army and are embraced in the figures for that Army given above; it does include 5793 N.R.M.A. men who were subsequently transferred to the Navy or Air Force.

Force and 106,522 in the Canadian naval forces. The total enlisted or appointed into the three armed services for full-time duty was thus 1,086,771, or roughly 9.65 per cent of the 1939 population.<sup>4</sup> This compares with 7.98 per cent for the war of 1914-18. When one takes into account the further fact that Canada's industrial contribution in 1914-18, though very considerable, was certainly materially less than in 1939-45, the fact appears to emerge that the total of national effort in the more recent and longer war was greater by a respectable margin.

Happily, however, the same is not true of the sacrifice of blood, tragically heavy though this was. Canada's fatal casualties of 1914-18 numbered 60,661, or 9.65 per cent of the total enlisted. For the Second Great War the Army's total casualties in all categories as known in July 1947 were 74,374, of which 22,964 were fatal. For all three services fatal casualties numbered 41,992, or 3.86 per cent of the total enlisted.<sup>5</sup> The contrast with 1914-18, so far as the Army is concerned, is not due entirely or even primarily to the fact that the Canadian Army was inactive for a long period; it stems from the different nature of the war. Our smaller casualties in the more recent struggle may be attributed to the more widespread use of tanks; to the fact that in most of our campaigns we enjoyed a great superiority in the air; but above all to the more mobile nature of the fighting. The singularly lethal position warfare of the Western Front of 1914-18 was not repeated, and though the Canadian historian of 1939-45 has to tell the story of many a grim and costly infantry battle, there is no incident in his chronicle parallel to the fighting at Passchendaele in 1917, thus summarized in the Memorial Chamber in the Parliament Buildings at Ottawa: "The Corps returned to the Lens sector, having gained two square miles at a cost of 16,404 casualties".

One other comparison may be made. The Canadian Army of 1939-45 was much more an army of the native-born than that of 1914-18. Of 619,636 enlistments recorded for the Canadian Expeditionary Force of the First Great War, only 318,728 were set down as Canadian-born; that is, about 51.38 per cent. Of the remainder, 237,586 were born in Great Britain or other British countries. In 1939-45, a total of 618,354 of the men and women of the Canadian Army reported Canada as their country of birth. This is 84.61 per cent.

### AN ARMY OF CITIZEN SOLDIERS

The army which Canada placed in the field in 1939-45 was, like its

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<sup>4</sup> It is estimated that 40.6 per cent of the male population of ages 18 to 45 served in the armed forces.

<sup>5</sup> The Air Force had 17,047 fatal casualties, a particularly heavy proportion. None of the casualty figures here given include prisoners of war who were subsequently repatriated. For the Army, such prisoners numbered 6432 all ranks.

gallant predecessor of 1914-18, a civilian army in the sense that it was not composed of professional soldiers. The tiny Permanent Force, it is true, proved itself a national asset of inestimable value, and provided the country with a group of senior commanders whose abilities and professional skill would have rendered them distinguished in any company. Yet even of the senior commanders many were not soldiers by profession. At the conclusion of hostilities with Germany, three of Canada's five fighting Divisions were commanded by officers who in 1939 had been captains or majors in the Non-Permanent Active Militia, and who were none of them even graduates of the Royal Military College. They were soldiers, and very good ones; but they were citizen soldiers. In this they were thoroughly representative. The typical Canadian fighting man of 1939-45 was a volunteer, who came forward of his own free will to do a duty which he did not find pleasant but which, he knew, had to be done. He forsook civil life with reluctance, and when the victory was won he returned to it with alacrity.

Nevertheless, it would be erroneous to suggest that the men who broke the Adolf Hitler Line or cleared the Hochwald were simply civilians in uniform. Nothing could be more undesirable than to foster in the minds of Canadians the dangerous delusion that any Canadian citizen can merely put on military costume and thereby find himself immediately a first-class soldier. The Canadian Corps of 1914-18 was effective in the field because it was a highly-trained and very experienced formation. The Canadian Army of 1939-45, by the time it went into action, was better trained than any peacetime regular troops have ever been. Even so, its units found that they still had something to learn on the battlefield. Regiments, and Armies, are not made overnight, however excellent the raw material (and the Canadian raw material was the best possible); they are formed, as Kipling once remarked, by the expenditure of time, money and blood. The increasingly scientific nature of war has only lengthened the time required. A Canadian general officer recently expressed the personal view, founded on very wide experience in the field in 1939-45, that "the modern infantry soldier requires at least twelve months' intensive training".

Yet no one who knew the Canadian Army of 1939-45 can doubt that it owed much of its effectiveness to the fact that it was Canadian. Many an observer has recorded how the pulse of the national life beat within the Corps of the First Great War, more and more strongly as the conflict proceeded. The men of the Second Great War inherited this national consciousness and to them their Army was a living symbol of their country's position in the world. They were proud of it and its specifically Canadian nature. And to a country only too conscious of its internal divisions it is a matter of importance that they thought of themselves as Canadians and not as citizens of a particular province or

local community. Circumstances forced the sense of embracing nationality upon them, and as time passed the local jealousies frequently found between units from different sections in the early months of the war steadily declined. Even between French-speaking and English-speaking Canadians, with the formidable barrier of language to surmount, the comradeship of the battle field materially improved an understanding which had notoriously been far from perfect. It would be palpably absurd to suggest that the overseas Army wholly solved within itself this fundamental national problem, but it is the present writer's opinion that decided progress was made and that during the war mutual respect and liking between English-speaking and French-speaking Canadians in the service grew in a marked degree. And he is quite certain that to many Canadians, returning from service abroad, who had grown accustomed to thinking of themselves as Canadians, and not as citizens of Nova Scotia or British Columbia, of Toronto or Montreal or Winnipeg, the rediscovery of the abiding localism of Canadian life came as a shock, and not a pleasant one. That localism, it is to be hoped, suffered some permanent weakening as the result of the experiences of Canadian men and women during the years between 1939 and 1945.

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We have tried in this book to tell some part of the story of the most momentous undertaking in Canada's national history: her contribution to the overthrow of the bloodiest tyrannies of modern times. We have had a large canvas on which to paint, and if the picture lacks colour, definition or meaning the fault lies solely with the artist. During this war Canadian soldiers fought the Japanese in Asia and the Germans and Italians in Africa; they sailed to the Arctic archipelago of Spitsbergen and to the fog-bound Aleutians; they did duty in Iceland, the Antilles and South America; they helped to extend the defences of Gibraltar. They were among the foremost of the defenders of the United Kingdom when it was the last citadel of European freedom. They bore the brunt of the largest and most significant of the Allies' raids against Europe's coast in the days when the enemy controlled it from the North Cape to the Pyrenees. Above all, they played their part, and that no small one, in two great campaigns: they fought for twenty arduous months in Italy, and were in the front of the fight in the last mighty struggle in North-West Europe from the Norman beaches to Luneburg Heath. They left a trail of triumphs behind them, and did honour to their country wherever they set the print of their hobnailed boots.

The Army that did these things is already little more than a memory. Many thousands of those who made its reputation sleep in

alien ground; and of the survivors the vast majority have returned to civilian pursuits and are scattered about the country and the world. Canadians will do well, however, to cherish the recollection of this remarkable fighting force. In the most desperate crisis of which human records tell, it was Canada's strong right arm. With it she intervened on the world's battlefield and struck good blows for the good cause. The men and women who made up this army dispersed gladly about their business when their task was done. They left to their fellow-Canadians, for today, the peace which they and their brave comrades of other services and other lands had bought with toil and blood; for tomorrow, and the myriad perils and uncertainties with which tomorrow is always fraught, they bequeathed to their countrymen, for their inspiration and support, a tradition of service, sacrifice and victory.

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## **APPENDICES**





## APPENDIX "A"

### PERSONS HOLDING PRINCIPAL APPOINTMENTS CANADIAN ARMY 1939 - 1945

The list of appointments for the Canadian Army Overseas ends with the cessation of hostilities against Germany; that of appointments in Canada continues until the surrender of Japan. Only the most senior appointments in Canada are included.

Officers are shown with rank 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 the appointments. No distinction is made between acting and confirmed rank.

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#### APPOINTMENTS IN CANADA (to 14 Aug. 45)

##### MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Ian A. Mackenzie .....	23 Oct. 35	— 19 Sep. 39
Hon. Norman McL. Rogers .....	19 Sep. 39	— 10 Jun. 40
Col. The Hon. J. L. Ralston, C.M.G., D.S.O .....	5 Jul. 40	— 2 Nov. 44
Gen. The Hon. A. G. L. McNaughton, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O .....	2 Nov. 44	— 21 Aug. 45

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##### CHIEF OR THE GENERAL STAFF

Maj.-Gen. T. V. Anderson, D.S.O .....	21 Nov. 38	— 21 Jul. 40
Lt.-Gen. H.D.G. Crerar, D.S.O .....	22 Jul. 40	— 23 Dec. 41
Lt.-Gen. K. Stuart, C.B., D.S.O., M.C .....	24 Dec. 41	— 26 Dec. 43
Lt.-Gen. J. C. Murchie, C.B., C.B.E .....	3 May 44	— 20 Aug. 45

##### VICE CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF

Maj.-Gen. H.D.G. Crerar, D.S.O .....	6 Jul. 40	— 21 Jul. 40
Maj.-Gen. K. Stuart, D.S.O., M.C .....	13 Mar. 41	— 23 Dec. 41
Maj.-Gen. M.A. Pope, M.C .....	24 Dec. 41	— 14 Feb. 42
Maj.-Gen. J. C. Murchie, C.B.E .....	15 Feb. 42	— 2 May 44
Maj.-Gen. R. B. Gibson, C.B., C.B.R., V.D .....	5 Sep. 44	— 2 Feb. 46

##### ADJUTANT-GENERAL

Maj.-Gen. H. H. Matthews, C.M.G., D.S.O .....	15 Aug. 38	— 8 Apr. 40
Maj.-Gen. B. W. Browne, D.S.O., M.C .....	6 Jul. 40	— 1 Feb. 42
Maj.-Gen. H. F. G. Letson, C.B.E., M.C., RD .....	2 Feb. 42	— 30 Sep. 44
Maj.-Gen. A. E. Walford, C.B., C.B.E., M.M., RD .....	1 Oct. 44	— 4 Jan. 46

##### QUARTERMASTER-GENERAL

Maj.-Gen. H. F. H. Hertzberg, C.M.G., D.S.O., M.C. (Acting from 15 Aug. 38) .....	21 Nov. 38	— 8 Apr. 40
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Maj.-Gen. E. J. C. Schmidlin, M.C., (Acting from 9 Apr. 40) .....	24 Jul. 40	— 12 Jan. 42
Maj.-Gen. J. P. Mackenzie, D.S.O .....	2 Feb. 42	— 6 May 43
Maj.-Gen. H. Kennedy, C.B.E., M.C.....	7 May 43	— 15 Sep. 44
Maj.-Gen. H. A. Young, C.B.E., D.S.O.....	16 Sep. 44	— 29 Mar. 46
<b>MASTER-GENERAL OF THE ORDONANCE</b>		
Maj.-Gen. W. H. P. Elkins, C.B.E., D.S.O. (Acting from 7 Oct. 38).....	9 Nov. 38	— 31 Jul. 40
P. A. Chester, Esq.....	15 Aug. 40	— 30 Nov. 40
V. Sifton, Esq., C.B.E. ....	1 Dec. 40	— 30 Jun. 42
Maj.-Gen. J. V. Young, C.B.E. ....	1 Jul. 42	— 30 Jun. 45
Maj.-Gen. J. H. MacQueen, C.B.E.....	1 Jul. 45	— 6 Apr. 47
<b>G.O.C.-IN-C. ATLANTIC COMMAND</b>		
Maj.-Gen. W. H. P. Elkins, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O. ....	1 Aug. 40	— 15 Jul. 43
Maj.-Gen. L. F. Page, C.B., D.S.O.....	16 Jul. 43	— 26 Aug. 44
<b>G.O.C.-IN-C. PACIFIC COMMAND</b>		
Maj.-Gen. R. O. Alexander, D.S.O .....	30 Oct. 40	— 30 Jun. 42
Maj.-Gen. G. R. Pearkes, V.C., C.B., D.S.O., M.C. ....	2 Sep. 42	— 15 Feb. 45
Maj.-Gen. F. F. Worthington, C.B., M.C., M.M .....	1 Apr. 45	— 22 Jan. 46

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## CANADIAN ARMY OVERSEAS (to 8 May 45)

### CANADIAN MILITARY HEADQUARTERS, LONDON

#### SENIOR COMBATANT OFFICER

Maj.-Gen. H.D.G. Crerar, D.S.O.....	17 Oct. 39	— 5 Jul. 40 <sup>1</sup>
Maj.-Gen. The Hon. P. J. Montague, C.M.G., D.S.O., M.C., V.D .....	6 Jul. 40	— 26 Dec. 43

#### CHIEF OF STAFF

Lt.-Gen. K. Stuart, C.B., D.S.O., M.C .....	27 Dec. 43	— 11 Nov. 44
Lt.-Gen. The Hon. P. J. Montague, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., M.C., V.D .....	22 Nov. 44	— 17 Sep. 45

#### MAJOR-GENERAL IN CHARGE OF ADMINISTRATION

Maj.-Gen. The Hon. P. J. Montague, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., M.C., V.D .....	27 Dec. 43	— 21 Nov. 44
Maj.-Gen. E.G. Weeks, C.B.E., M.C., M.M.....	30 Nov. 44	— 15 Oct. 45

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## FIRST CANADIAN ARMY

#### G.O.C.-IN-C. FIRST CANADIAN ARMY

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<sup>1</sup> General Crerar was first appointed to C.M.H.Q as "Brigadier, General Staff".

Lt.-Gen. A. G. L. McNaughton, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O. ....	6 Apr. 42	— 26 Dec. 43
Gen. H. D. G. Crerar, C.H., C.B., D.S.O. ....	20 Mar. 44	— 30 Jul. 45
G.O.C. 1 <sup>ST</sup> CANADIAN CORPS		
Lt.-Gen. A. G. L. McNaughton, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O. ....	19 Jul. 40	— 5 Apr. 42 <sup>2</sup>
Lt.-Gen. H.D.G. Crerar, C.B., D.S.O., (Detailed temporarily to command from 23 Dec. 41) .....	8 Apr. 42	— 19 Mar. 44
Lt.-Gen. E. L. M. Burns, D.S.O., O.B.E., M.C. ....	20 Mar. 44	— 5 Nov. 44
Lt.-Gen. C. Foulkes, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O. ....	10 Nov. 44	— 17 Jul. 45
G.O.C. 2 <sup>ND</sup> CANADIAN CORPS		
Lt.-Gen. E.W. Sansom, C.B., D.S.O. ....	15 Jan. 43	— 29 Jan. 44
Lt.-Gen. G. G. Simonds, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O. ....	30 Jan. 44	— 25 Jun. 45
G.O.C. 1 <sup>ST</sup> CANADIAN INFANTRY DIVISION		
Lt.-Gen. A. G. L. McNaughton, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O. ....	17 Oct. 39	— 19 Jul. 40 <sup>3</sup>
Maj.-Gen. G. R. Pearkes, V.C., D.S.O., M.C. ....	20 Jul. 40	— 1 Sep. 42
Maj.-Gen. H. L. N. Salmon, M.C. ....	8 Sep. 42	— 29 Apr. 43
Maj.-Gen. G. G. Simonds, C.B.E., D.S.O. ....	29 Apr. 43	— 31 Oct. 43
Maj.-GQn. C. Vokes, C.B.E., D.S.O. ....	1 Nov. 43	— 30 Nov. 44
Maj.-Gen. H. W. Foster, C.B.E., D.S.O. ....	1 Dec. 44	— 15 Sep. 45
G.O.C. 2 <sup>ND</sup> CANADIAN INFANTRY DIVISION		
Maj.-Gen. V. W. Odium, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., V.D. ....	20 May 40	— 6 Nov. 41
Maj.-Gen. H. D. G. Crerar, D.S.O. ....	23 Dec. 41	— 5 Apr. 42 <sup>4</sup>
Maj.-Gen. J. H. Roberts, D.S.O., M.C. (Acting from 7 Nov. 41) .....	6 Apr. 42	— 12 Apr. 43
Maj.-Gen. G. G. Simonds, C.B.E. ....	13 Apr. 43	— 28 Apr. 43
Maj.-Gen. E. L. M. Burns, O.B.E., M.C. ....	6 May 43	— 10 Jan. 44
Maj.-Gen. C. Foulkes, CRE .....	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
G.O.C. 3 <sup>RD</sup> CANADIAN INFANTRY DIVISION		
Maj.-Gen. E. W. Sansom, D.S.O. ....	26 Oct. 40	— 13 Mar. 41
Maj.-Gen. C. B. Price, D.S.O., D.C.M., V.D. ....	14 Mar. 41	— 7 Sep. 42
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
G.O.C. 4 <sup>TH</sup> CANADIAN ARMoured DIVISION		
Maj.-Gen. L. F. Page, D.S.O. ....	10 Jun. 41	— 24 Dec. 41

<sup>2</sup> General McNaughton actually relinquished active command of the Canadian Corps on 14 Nov. 41 as the result of an illness. When recovered he left on a visit to Canada, and on returning to England took command of First Canadian Army.

<sup>3</sup> Maj.-Gen. McNaughton was promoted Lt.-Gen. 10 Jul. 40 and appointed to command the 7<sup>th</sup> Corps 19 Jul. 40.

<sup>4</sup> General Crerar never actually commanded the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Division as on the same day on which he was appointed he was detailed temporarily to command the Canadian Corps.

Maj.-Gen. F. F. Worthington, C.B., M.C., M.M.....	2 Feb. 42	— 29 Feb. 44
Maj.-Gen. G. Hitching, 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
<b>G.O.C. 5<sup>TH</sup> CANADIAN ARMoured DIVISION</b>		
Maj.-Gen. E. W. Sansom, D.S.O.....	14 Mar. 41	— 14 Jan. 43
Maj.-Gen. C. R. S. Stein .....	15 Jan. 43	— 18 Oct. 43
Maj.-Gen. G. G. Simonds, C.B.E., D.S.O.....	1 Nov. 43	— 29 Jan. 44
Maj.-Gen. E. L. M. Burns, O.B.E., M.C.....	30 Jan. 44	— 19 Mar. 44
Maj.-Gen. B. M. Hoffmeister, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., E.D.....	20 Mar. 44	— 6 Jun. 45

## **APPENDIX “B”**

### **COMPOSITION OF THE FIRST CANADIAN ARMY (5 May 1945)**

(Armoured Corps, Artillery and Infantry)

Titles of units in this “skeleton” composition are those actually used overseas on 5 May 1945. Since that date the prefix “Royal” has been granted to the Canadian Armoured Corps and the Canadian Infantry Corps. The complete roll of units of all arms and services is too long to be printed here, but the types of units forming infantry and armoured divisions are listed in Appendix “C”. Limitations of space have rendered it impossible to include many units of G.H.Q., L. of C., Army and Corps Troops which made important contributions. All Canadian Dental Corps units, for instance, were Army Troops.

Canadian units only are shown, although many British units also served under First Canadian Army. Similarly, Canadian units served from time to time under British formations. To indicate in some degree the extent of this co-operation, a list is given of Allied formations (down to brigades) actually under command of the First Canadian Army on 5 May 1945 and of special Canadian units serving with British divisions.

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#### **FIRST CANADIAN ARMY TROOPS**

##### **CANADIAN ARMoured CORPS:**

25<sup>th</sup> Armoured Delivery Regiment (The Elgin Regiment)

##### **ROYAL CANADIAN ARTILLERY:**

1<sup>st</sup> Army Group, Royal Canadian Artillery:

11<sup>th</sup> Army Field Regiment

1<sup>st</sup> Medium Regiment

2<sup>nd</sup> Medium Regiment

5<sup>th</sup> Medium Regiment

2<sup>nd</sup> Army Group, Royal Canadian Artillery:

19<sup>th</sup> Army Field Regiment

3<sup>rd</sup> Medium Regiment

4<sup>th</sup> Medium Regiment

7<sup>th</sup> Medium Regiment

2<sup>nd</sup> Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment (Mobile)

##### **CANADIAN INFANTRY CORPS:**

First Canadian Army Headquarters Defence Battalion (Royal Montreal Regiment)

#### **1<sup>st</sup> CANADIAN CORPS TROOPS**

##### **CANADIAN ARMoured CORPS:**

1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Car Regiment (The Royal Canadian Dragoons)

##### **ROYAL CANADIAN ARTILLERY:**

7<sup>th</sup> Anti-Tank Regiment

1<sup>st</sup> Survey Regiment

1<sup>st</sup> Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (Lanark and Renfrew Scottish Regiment)

## CANADIAN INFANTRY CORPS

1<sup>st</sup> Corps Defence Company<sup>1</sup>**2<sup>nd</sup> CANADIAN CORPS TROOPS**

## CANADIAN ARMoured CORPS:

18<sup>th</sup> Armoured Car Regiment (12<sup>th</sup> Manitoba Dragoons)

## ROYAL CANADIAN ARTILLERY

6<sup>th</sup> Anti-Tank Regiment2<sup>nd</sup> Survey Regiment6<sup>th</sup> Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment

## CANADIAN INFANTRY CORPS:

2<sup>nd</sup> Corps Defence Company (The Prince Edward Island Light Horse)**1<sup>st</sup> CANADIAN INFANTRY DIVISION**

## CANADIAN ARMoured CORPS:

4<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Regiment (4<sup>th</sup> Princess Louise Dragoon Guards)

## ROYAL CANADIAN ARTILLERY:

1<sup>st</sup> Field Regiment, R.C.H.A.2<sup>nd</sup> Field Regiment3<sup>rd</sup> Field Regiment1<sup>st</sup> Anti-Tank Regiment2<sup>nd</sup> Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment

## CANADIAN INFANTRY CORPS:

The Saskatoon Light Infantry (M.G.) (Machine gun battalion)

1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Brigade:

The Royal Canadian Regiment

The Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment

48<sup>th</sup> Highlanders of Canada2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Brigade:

Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry

The Seaforth Highlanders of Canada

The Loyal Edmonton Regiment

3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Brigade:Royal 22<sup>e</sup> Régiment

The Carleton and York Regiment

The West Nova Scotia Regiment

**2<sup>nd</sup> CANADIAN INFANTRY DIVISION**

## CANADIAN ARMoured CORPS:

8<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Regiment (14<sup>th</sup> Canadian Hussars)

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<sup>1</sup> This company was supplied by The Lorne Scots (Peel, Dufferin and Halton Regiment), which also provided a total of seventeen platoons for defence and/or employment duties at army, divisional and brigade headquarters.

## ROYAL CANADIAN ARTILLERY:

- 4<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment
- 5<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment
- 6<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Anti-Tank Regiment
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment

## CANADIAN INFANTRY CORPS:

The Toronto Scottish Regiment (M.G.) (Machine gun battalion)

4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade:

- The Royal Regiment of Canada
- The Royal Hamilton Light Infantry
- The Essex Scottish Regiment

5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade:

- The Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada
- Le Régiment de Maisonneuve
- The Calgary Highlanders

6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade:

- Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal
- The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada
- The South Saskatchewan Regiment

**3<sup>rd</sup> CANADIAN INFANTRY DIVISION**

## CANADIAN ARMoured CORPS:

7<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Regiment (17<sup>th</sup> Duke of York's Royal Canadian Hussars)

## ROYAL CANADIAN ARTILLERY:

- 12<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment
- 13<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment
- 14<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Anti-Tank Regiment
- 4<sup>th</sup> Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment

## CANADIAN INFANTRY CORPS:

The Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa (M.G.) (Machine gun battalion)

7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade:

- The Royal Winnipeg Rifles
- The Regina Rifle Regiment
- 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, The Canadian Scottish Regiment

8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade:

- The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada
- Le Régiment de la Chaudière
- The North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment

9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade:

- The Highland Light Infantry of Canada
- The Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders
- The North Nova Scotia Highlanders



**4<sup>th</sup> CANADIAN ARMoured DIVISION**

## CANADIAN ARMoured CORPS:

29<sup>th</sup> Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment (The South Alberta Regiment)

4<sup>th</sup> Armoured Brigade:

21<sup>st</sup> Armoured Regiment (The Governor General's Foot Guards)

22<sup>nd</sup> Armoured Regiment (The Canadian Grenadier Guards)

28<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiment (The British Columbia Regiment)

## ROYAL CANADIAN ARTILLERY:

15<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment

23<sup>rd</sup> Field Regiment (Self-Propelled)

5<sup>th</sup> Anti-Tank Regiment

8<sup>th</sup> Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment

## CANADIAN INFANTRY CORPS:

10<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade:

10<sup>th</sup> Independent Machine Gun Company (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)<sup>2</sup>

**5<sup>th</sup> CANADIAN ARMoured DIVISION**

## CANADIAN ARMoured CORPS:

3<sup>rd</sup> Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment (The Governor General's Horse Guards)

5<sup>th</sup> Armoured Brigade

2<sup>nd</sup> Armoured Regiment (Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians))

5<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiment (8<sup>th</sup> Princess Louise's (New Brunswick) Hussars)

9<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiment (The British Columbia Dragoons)

## ROYAL CANADIAN ARTILLERY:

17<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment

8<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment (Self-Propelled)

4<sup>th</sup> Anti-Tank Regiment

5<sup>th</sup> Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment

## CANADIAN INFANTRY CORPS:

11<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade:

11<sup>th</sup> Independent Machine Gun Company (The Princess Louise Fusiliers)

The Perth Regiment

The Cape Breton Highlanders

The Irish Regiment of Canada

The Westminster Regiment (Motor)<sup>2</sup>

**1<sup>st</sup> CANADIAN ARMoured BRIGADE**

## CANADIAN ARMoured CORPS:

11<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiment (The Ontario Regiment)

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<sup>2</sup> The motor battalion formed part of the armoured brigade of the armoured division.

- 12<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiment (Three Rivers Regiment)
- 14<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiment (The Calgary Regiment)

## **2<sup>nd</sup> CANADIAN ARMOURED BRIGADE**

### CANADIAN ARMOURED CORPS:

- 6<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiment (1st Hussars)
- 10<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiment (The Fort Garry Horse)
- 27<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiment (The Sherbrooke Fusiliers Regiment)

## **BRITISH AND ALLIED FORMATIONS UNDER COMMAND FIRST CANADIAN ARMY (5 May 1945)**

### BRITISH

- 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division
- 49<sup>th</sup> (West Riding) Infantry Division
- 4<sup>th</sup> Army Group, Royal Artillery
- 31<sup>st</sup> Anti-Aircraft Brigade
- 74<sup>th</sup> Anti-Aircraft Brigade
- 107<sup>th</sup> Anti-Aircraft Brigade
- 4<sup>th</sup> Commando Brigade
- 308<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade

### BELGIAN

- 1<sup>st</sup> Belgian Infantry Brigade

### DUTCH

- Royal Netherlands Brigade (Princess Irene's)

### POLISH

- 1<sup>st</sup> Polish Armoured Division

## **SPECIAL CANADIAN UNITS SERVING WITH BRITISH DIVISIONS**

### CANADIAN ARMOURED CORPS:

- 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Armoured Personnel Carrier Regiment (79<sup>th</sup> British Armoured Division)

### CANADIAN INFANTRY CORPS:

- 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Parachute Battalion (6<sup>th</sup> British Airborne Division)

## APPENDIX “C”

### ORGANIZATION OF INFANTRY AND ARMoured DIVISIONS, BY UNITS (May 1945)

	<b>INFANTRY DIVISION</b>	<b>ARMoured DIVISION</b>
	Divisional Headquarters	Divisional Headquarters
CANADIAN ARMoured CORPS	One reconnaissance regiment — —	One armoured reconnaissance regiment One armoured brigade headquarters Three armoured regiments
ROYAL CANADIAN ARTILLERY	Headquarters, R.C.A. Three field regiments One anti-tank regiment One light anti-aircraft regiment One counter-mortar officer's staff	Headquarters, R.C.A. Two field regiments (one self-propelled) One anti-tank regiment One light anti-aircraft regiment One counter-mortar officer's staff
CORPS OF ROYAL CANADIAN ENGINEERS	Headquarters, R.C.E. One field park company One divisional bridge platoon Three field companies	— One field park squadron One divisional bridge troop Two field squadrons
ROYAL CANADIAN CORPS OF SIGNALS	Divisional Signals	Divisional signals
CANADIAN INFANTRY CORPS	One machine gun battalion One defence and employment platoon Three infantry brigade headquarters Three ground defence platoons Nine infantry battalions (three per brigade) —	One independent machine gun com- pany One employment platoon One infantry brigade headquarters One ground defence platoon Three infantry battalion One motor battalion (part of armoured brigade)
ROYAL CANADIAN ARMY SERVICE CORPS	Headquarters, R.C.A.S.C. — Three infantry brigade companies One divisional troops company —	Headquarters R.C.A.S.C. One armoured brigade company One infantry brigade company One divisional troops company One armoured division transport com- pany
ROYAL CANADIAN ARMY MEDICAL CORPS	— Three field ambulances Two field dressing stations One field hygiene section	One light field ambulance One field ambulance One field dressing station One field hygiene section
ROYAL CANADIAN ORDNANCE CORPS	One ordnance field park	One ordnance field park
ROYAL CANADIAN ELECTRICAL AND MECHANICAL ENGINEERS	Headquarters, R.C.E.M.E. — Three infantry brigade workshops One light anti-aircraft workshop Eleven light aid detachments	Headquarters, R.C.E.M.E. One armoured brigade workshop One infantry brigade workshop One light anti-aircraft workshop Twelve light aid detachments
CANADIAN POSTAL CORPS	One divisional postal unit	One divisional postal unit
CANADIAN PROVOST CORPS	One provost company	One provost company
CANADIAN INTELLIGENCE CORPS	One field security section	One field security section

**“DIVISIONAL INCREMENTS TO CORPS TROOPS”**

ROYAL CANADIAN  
ORDNANCE CORPS  
ROYAL CANADIAN  
ARMY PAY CORPS

One ordnance sub park  
One mobile laundry and bath unit  
One field cash office

One ordnance sub park  
One mobile laundry and bath unit  
One field cash office

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