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Directorate of History
National Defence Headquarters
Ottawa, Canada
K1A 0K2

July 1986

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REPORT NO. 69
HISTORICAL SECTION (G.S.)
ARMY HEADQUARTERS

DECLASSIFIED
AUTHORITY: DHD 3-12

BY OK FOR DHIST NDHQ
DATE: **NOV 6 1986**

30 Jul 54

THE CAMPAIGN IN NORTH-WEST EUROPE
INFORMATION FROM GERMAN SOURCES

Part III: German Defence Operations in the
Sphere of First Canadian Army
(23 Aug - 8 Nov 44)

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NOTES

1. Sitwest Where used below, the term "Sitwest" stands for the "Daily Situation Report of the German C.-in-C. West" (Tagesmeldung O.B. West).

 2. Sitwest,
date of Sitwests were usually issued in the early hours of the following day and dated accordingly. Throughout the present report the date given for a Sitwest is the day FOR WHICH, not on which it was issued.

 3. Use of
single dash A single dash preceding a sentence or a part of a sentence indicates that the next reference does not cover the text preceding the dash.

 4. use of
"enemy",
"opponent",
"adversary" In the present report these words do not always mean the enemy of the Canadians. For technical reasons they are used to denote the opponent of the belligerent whose source material is being cited at the moment.
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ABBREVIATIONSAmerican

O.C.M.H.	Office of the Chief of Military History
F.S.B.	Foreign Studies Branch
G.M.D.S.	German Military Documents Section
O.N.I.	Office of Naval Intelligence

German

OKW	Oberkommando der Wehrmacht Armed Forces High Command
OKH	Oberkommando des Heeres Army High Command
OKM	Oberkommando der Kriegsmarine Navy High Command
OKL	Oberkommando der Luftwaffe Air Force High Command
WFSt	Wehrmachtsfuhrungsstab Armed Forces Operations Staff
SKL	Seekriegsleitung Naval Operations Staff
O.B.	Oberbefehlshaber Commander-in-Chief
AOK	Armeeoberkommando (used for "Army Headquarters" and/or "Army Cmdr")
Chef	Chef des Generalstabes Chief of Staff (from Corps level up)
K.G.	Kommandierender General Commanding General (used for Corps Cmdrs only)

Others

G.S.C.	General Staff Corps
G.A.F.	German Air Force

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The Campaign in North-West Europe
Information from German Sources

Part III: German Defence Operations in the
Sphere of First Canadian Army
(23 Aug - 8 Nov 44)

1. The present report is a direct continuation of Historical Section (G.S.) Report No. 50, The Campaign in North-West Europe, Information from German Sources, Part II: Invasion and Battle of Normandy. It deals, however, almost exclusively with the German efforts to delay the progress of First Canadian Army on the extreme left of the Allied forces in the Western theatre. The broader aspects of the German struggle to postpone final collapse by the creation of a new cohesive front, as well as the subsequent developments up to the beginning of the Ardennes offensive, are being presented in Part IV of this series of reports.

2. Earlier Historical Section (G.S.) Reports dealing with German Operations in North-West Europe during 1944 were the following:

No. 40 The Campaign in North-West Europe, Part I: German Defence Preparations in the West;

No. 41 The German Defences in the Courseulles-St. Aubin Area.

3. Canadian Operations during the period in question have been described in Historical Section, Canadian Military Headquarters Reports:

No. 183 Canadian Participation in the Operations in North-West Europe, 1944. Part IV: First Canadian Army in the Pursuit (23 Aug - 30 Sep);

No. 184 Canadian Participation in the Operations in North-West Europe, 1944. Part V: Clearing the Channel Ports (3 Sep 44 - 6 Feb 45);

No. 188 Canadian Participation in the Operations in North-West Europe, 1944. Part VI: Canadian Operations, 1 Oct - 8 Nov, The Clearing of the Scheldt Estuary.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

4. The bulk of the supporting evidence for this report consists of original contemporary German military documents which it was possible, thanks to the great courtesy and cooperation of all concerned, to take on loan from, have reproduced by, or inspect on the premises of one or another of the following United States agencies:

United States Department of the Army, The Adjutant General's Office, German Military Documents Section (G.M.D.S.*), Alexandria, Va.;

United States Department of the Army, Office of the Chief of Military History (O.C.M.H.), Foreign Studies Branch, Washington, D.C.;

United States Navy, Naval Records and History, Arlington, Va.

5. Few original documents from Corps or lower levels were available; most of this material has been destroyed in action or on orders from higher German command authorities.

6. A certain amount of information has been taken from some of the many post war studies that have been prepared by former German senior officers for the Office of the Chief of Military History, Washington, D.C.

7. In all cases where a reproduction of a source document is being permanently retained by Historical Section (G.S.), the first reference to the document is followed by the Historical Section Master Index Number.

8. The first quotation from any given source is fully referenced. Subsequent references to the same source are abbreviated. To locate the full reference for an abbreviated one turn to the "List of German Sources" (Page XXVIII). The first paragraph number listed opposite the title indicates the paragraph carrying the full reference.

9. Quoted matter has been underlined in accordance with the original text. Subject matter enclosed in square brackets did not appear in the original text but has been added for clarification.

*Now styled: "Captured Records Section".

GERMAN REARGUARD ACTION SOUTH OF ROUEN

(23 - 29 Aug)

10. In the evening of 19 Aug Polish and American forces had closed the Falaise gap at Chambois. On the following day substantial remnants of Seventh Army succeeded in breaking out of the pocket at St. Lambert and southeast of Trun. In the meantime, however, American units had reached the Seine at Vernon and Mantes-Gassicourt, and the German forces still south of the lower Seine were in danger of renewed envelopment. Any further stand south of the river now could merely serve to cover the removal to the north shore of as many men and vehicles as possible. The German units carrying out this delaying action showed much tenacity and blocked the way to Rouen for a week.

11. On the morning of 22 Aug the steadily receding front of the German bridgehead south of the Seine extended in the form of an arc from Deauville (at the coast) through Rugles (6 miles NE Laigle) and Pacy sur Eure (7 miles SE Vernon) to the Seine at Vernon. Corps sectors were approximately:

86 Corps	Deauville - Pont L'Eveque - Lisieux (excl),
2 SS Pz Corps	Lisieux (incl) - Orbec - Glos la Ferriere (7 miles N Laigle),
81 Corps	Rugles - North of Breteuil - Damville - Pacy sur Eure - Seine at Vernon.

(G.M.D.S.- H22/59, O.B. West (A Gp D),
Daily Sitreps 25 Jul-31 Aug 44 (981CW
(D30)), Sitreps for 21 and 22 Aug 44)

In command of the German forces from the coast to the boundary with First Army, at Poissy, was Fifth Panzer Army under SS Col Gen Sepp Dietrich (Historical Section Report No. 50, Invasion and Battle of Normandy, op cit, para 274). Corps commanders were:

86 Corps	Gen Inf Hans von Obstfelder (20 Aug - 1 Dec 44),
2 SS Pz Corps	SS Gen Willi Bittrich (29 Jun 44 - May 45),
81 Corps	Gen Pz Tps Adolf Kuntzen (29 May 42 - 19 Sep 44).

A list of the principal appointments in the West during the period under review appears as Appendix "A" to the present report.

12. During the latter part of 22 Aug, 86 Corps on the whole managed to cling to its positions and 2 SS Pz Corps merely lost Orbec, but 81 Corps came under severe pressure between Breteuil and Pacy sur Eure. During the night Allied armoured spearheads reached the area southeast of Le Neubourg, where 1 SS Pz Corps (at the time a rather negligible force, composed of the remnants of 1 SS Pz Div, 12 SS Pz Div and 116 Pz Div) was reported to be engaged in an attempt to stem the advance. The German armoured covering group between Pacy and Vernon had been pushed back to the line la Chapelle - Vernon; Allied armour was advancing from Pacy

towards Evreux (O.B. West, Daily Sitreps (hereafter cited "Sitwest"), op cit, 23 Aug for 22 Aug). Only a determined stand in the immediate future could make it possible to extricate the forces from the bridgehead (G.M.D.S. - 63181/2, W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Part II, 9 Aug - 9 Sep 44; 22 Aug) (981PA5(D2)).

23 Aug

13. In the eastern sector of the bridgehead the armoured elements near the Seine were dwindling away and a breakthrough might take place at any moment; the Allied advance towards le Neubourg was endangering the whole bridgehead; strong measures were required. In the afternoon Field Marshal Model* demanded the execution of an armoured attack to regain the line Conches - Evreux, headquarters 81 Corps to be in command and employ the following: 116 Pz Div, 1 SS Pz Div, 12 SS Pz Div and 2 Pz Div. Col Gen Dietrich pointed out on the telephone that these divisions were merely little bands of men with a grand total of 30 tanks and that they were presently already embroiled in fighting. There was no immediate decision, but a few hours later the Field Marshal insisted that the attack be carried out under all circumstances. By 1600 hrs the troops were reported to be advancing from both sides of le Neubourg. Soon thereafter they collided with superior enemy forces advancing in the opposite direction. 116 Pz Div was cut in two and lost four tanks. By 1800 hrs the enemy had taken le Neubourg. (W.D. Fifth Pz Army, op cit, 23 Aug)

14. In the western sector the river Touques had been crossed on several places; there was pressure on 2 SS Pz Corps, and Army gave orders to withdraw during the night to the line Honfleur - Cormeilles - Bernay - Serquigny - Crosville. The armoured elements in the southern sector were now in the general line Crosville - Surtauville - Crasville - Louviers. The armoured group on the Seine had been forced back to the line Louviers - Seine loop north of Heudebouville.** Regardless of consequences at the centre, 21 Pz Div and 2 SS Pz Div were to be pulled out and moved to the area of le Neubourg for an attack there on the next day. (Ibid)

24 Aug

15. For the operations in the bridgehead on this day, O.B. West had given the following order:

*Field Marshal Walter Model,

O.B. West: 17 Aug - 4 Sep 44,
O.B. A Gp B: 17 Aug 44 - 15 Apr 45

**This was Group Mohnke, consisting in the main of remnants 12 SS Pz Regt, 12 Field Repl Bn, 2 Bn 26 Pz Gren Regt and remnants 1 Bn 25 Pz Gren Regt, all of 12 SS Pz Div (G.M.D.S.- 63181/4, W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Apps 9 Aug - 9 Sep 44, Appx 44, 24 Aug 44) (981PA5(D5)). In command was Standartenfuehrer Mohnke (ibid) presumably the officer who had led 26 Pz Gren Regt during the early fighting in the Canadian invasion sector in Normandy. (H.S. 205S1.023(D9)Shaef)

Withdrawal of the western wing in accordance with the situation. The eastern wing to stand fast under any circumstances and to be strengthened by all available forces in order to safeguard the crossings of the lower Seine. Not needed elements of Seventh Army and all vehicles to be ferried across the river forthwith at high pressure and without let-up.

(G.M.D.S. - 75144/25, W.D. A Gp D, 1 - 31 Aug 44, 24 Aug) (981CW (D32))

16. The concentration of the available armour in the area NNE le Neubourg to prevent a breakthrough along the Seine continued during the day (ibid). This group was under the command of Lt Gen Graf von Schwerin and was called Group Schwerin*. The perimeter of the bridgehead underwent a further contraction. East of Elbeuf enemy forward elements had reached the Seine. Between the Risle and Seine there was bitter fighting in the general line Brionne - Amfreville-la Campagne - St. Pierre les Elbeuf. West of the Risle the front was taken back to the line Fiquefleur (at the coast) - Beuzeville - Brionne; strong pressure on the new defence line was reported from St. Georges-du Vievre. (G.M.D.S. - 75803, A Gp B, Daily Sitreps 6 Jun-31 Aug 44, 24 Aug 44) (981A Gp B(D1))

17. Army Group B's Daily Sitrep for 24 Aug closed with a reference to the bravery shown by 272 Inf Div under Lt Gen August Schack during July and August (A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, op cit, 25 Aug for 24 Aug). This was the eulogy for the Division that had been thrown into the fighting repeatedly since mid July to relieve in succession 1 SS Pz Div, 21 Pz Div and 12 SS Pz Div between Caen and Falaise. It had suffered its first heavy losses in the Canadian holding attack of 25 Jul (H.S. Report No. 50, passim) and had been ground down to a total combat strength of one hundred men by 22 Aug when it was pulled out of the defence of Lisieux. (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, 22 Aug)

25 Aug

18. German dispositions in the shrinking bridgehead - particularly with regard to armour - had been changing with kaleidoscopic rapidity. But it is certain that the main burden of infantry action was borne by the following:

in the West by 86 Corps

with

711 Inf Div (in good condition),

346 Inf Div (which had lost its substance in the early fighting east of the Orne and had been reduced to a fighting strength of 1359 all ranks as early as 21 Jun, subsequently replenishing its ranks to some extent from misc units. (H.S. Report No. 50, para 105)),

*Lt Gen Graf Gerhard von Schwerin, Cmdr 116 Pz Div, 1 May - 20 Sep 44.

272 Inf Div (which had spent itself between Caen and Falaise and had reached the vanishing point on 23 Aug at Brionne (para 17 above);

in the South and East by 81 Corps with

331 Inf Div,

344 Inf Div, and

17 G.A.F. Div, all of which had been moved in from Fifteenth Army area, crossed the Seine between 6 and 16 Aug, fought under Fifth Pz Army's 81 Corps and had suffered palpable losses between 16 and 20 Aug (H.S. Report No. 50, passim)

19. By now virtually denuded of armour and devoid of infantry, the left wing of 86 Corps from Montfort to Brionne had become a dangerous gap. At first it had been intended to move in the remnants of 9 SS Pz Div, but during the day this body had been directed to join Group Schwerin near Elbeuf. 81 Corps thereupon decided to withdraw behind the Risle during the night and let 331 Inf Div on its right wing seek contact with 86 Corps near Montfort. (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, 25 Aug)

20. Frequently in the course of military operations a formation previously of average importance to the whole finds itself suddenly at the focal point of action and responsibility. This happened to 331 Inf Div on 25 Aug 44, when it was made responsible for covering the German withdrawal across the Seine in the Rouen area. - The formation was under the command of Col (later Lt Gen) Walter Steinmueller (who had earlier served as a regimental commander at the Russian front). It was well officered, the troops were young and of good morale, training and equipment were good. Originally the divisional infantry had consisted of 557, 558 and 559 Gren Regts of two battalions each. However, 558 Gren Regt, 1 Bn 557 Gren Regt and the assault gun company had been wiped out at the invasion front before the engagements in the bridgehead south of Rouen. At the time of the invasion the formation was in tactical reserve close to the Channel coast between Calais and Boulogne. On 28 Jul it received orders to join Fifth Panzer Army, but due to constant harassment from the air it was to be 8 Aug before it had completed its Seine crossings. On 9 Aug it was in the defence line Laigle - Verneuil - Dreux, and subsequently participated in the general retreat to the Seine.

... On 25 Aug the Division was defending a line bent forward west of Bougtheroulde. The two Seine loops south and southwest of Rouen were filled with vehicles of all types. Thus in the eastern loop alone about one thousand armoured and other vehicles were waiting for an opportunity to cross the river.

In view of this the two loops had to be held by all means until the vehicles had moved off. This task was assigned to 331 Inf Div. By 26 Aug the two loops had been sealed off....

(O.C.M.H., F.S.B., MS B-542, Steinmueller, 331 Inf Div, End of July to Beginning of September, and 70 Inf Div, 8 - 22 Sep 44) (981SOM(D210))

21. The Allied victory in Normandy had been immense and its significance unmistakable. Yet the Germans had been able to extricate considerable strength and some materiel. Between 20 Aug and the evening of 24 Aug Fifth Panzer Army and Seventh Army had succeeded in moving approximately 25,000 vehicles of all types across the Seine (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, 25 Aug). In his great post war study Zimmermann* wrote in this connection:

As it was, during the period 21 - 25 Aug we succeeded in withdrawing in phases toward the lower Seine, with our main effort on both sides of Rouen, and in crossing the river by ferry and, to some extent, even with amphibious** tanks and Volkswagens. It is true that this was accomplished at the expense of losing the bulk of our materiel, in an almost inextricable confusion of units, and with tremendous losses. The fighter-bombers attacked incessantly, Rouen itself underwent severe carpet-bombings, and several enemy tanks advanced as far as the Seine bends and fired into the columns and the elements crossing the river. An enormous traffic jam resulted, especially near Elbeuf, where some 2000 massed vehicles fell prey to the air attacks. Nevertheless, about 20 - 30% (on the average) of the units and materiel, including staffs, managed to get across the Seine....

(O.C.M.H., F.S.B., MS B-308, Zimmermann, O.B. West from Atlantic Wall to Siegfried Line, "A Study in Command", English text, para 226) (981SOM(D94))

22. However, now, on 25 Aug, the Seine loops south of Rouen were still crowded with transport, the ferries at Quillebeuf and Caudebec had been destroyed by direct hits, and the completion of a floating-bridge at Rouen had been made impossible by the destruction of three boats (W.D., A Gp D, 25 Aug). And under existing circumstances saving vehicles was a matter of very real importance. Clearly 331 Inf Div alone would not be able to resist determined pressure. In the afternoon Fifth Panzer Army directed General von Schwerin to form two armoured groups, one from 2 and 9 SS Pz Divs and the other from 21 and 116 Pz Divs, to block the Seine loops south of Rouen and south of Duclair. (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, 25 Aug)

*ZIMMERMANN, Bodo, Lt Gen, 1 Ops Offr A Gp D, 26 Oct 40 - 11 May 45.

**"Amphibious" may or may not be a precise translation of the German text. The original text is not on hand here.

26 Aug

23. German reports from the bridgehead ceased to describe withdrawal movements "as planned". In the western sector British armour was well past Montfort; sharp Canadian pressure at several points had led to the loss of Bourgtheroulde, Elbeuf and Orival. Elbeuf had been lost "after heavy see-saw fighting".

Today again the enemy tried to collapse the bridgehead of Fifth Panzer Army. In hard fighting that was costly to both sides, the enemy pushed back the southern front of the bridgehead to the line Corneville - Epreville - N Orival.

(A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, 27 for 26 Aug)

Main line of defence on 26 Aug: Risle to Corneville - Epreville - Bourg Achard - Infreville - St. Quen - N Orival.

(W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, 26 Aug)

24. Ferrying operations on 26 Aug were difficult, and few units managed to cross the river. 86 Corps therefore asked Army for permission to remain on the south shore for another night.

The Corps was therefore given orders to stand fast on 27 Aug in the line Risle Estuary - Corneville - Bourg Achard. 81 Corps was directed to fill the gap from Bourg Achard to Moulineaux with 331 Inf Div. Group Schwerin was instructed to seal off the Seine loop at Orival....(Ibid)

25. In the absence of original detailed information what little is known of the German dispositions in the bridgehead at the time is cited below from post war studies of the commanders concerned.

331 Inf Div

On 26 Aug both loops had been sealed off.
Committed were:

In the right loop [south of Duclair]:

557 Gren Regt with the Fusilier Battalion
and one light artillery battalion under
command,

In the left loop [south of Rouen]:

559 Gren Regt

with under command

one light artillery battalion reinforced
with one heavy battery,

the Battle Group of 6 Para Div,

one regimental group 1053 (from 85 Inf Div)*, and

Between the loops on the north shore:

Regimental Group 344 Inf Div.**

The balance of the artillery north of the Seine was disposed in a manner enabling it to support the defensive fighting in the loops.

In repeated attacks the enemy attempted to break through the blocking lines at the loops, but he was repulsed time and again. Break-ins were eliminated in counter-attacks. Battle Group 559 had to undergo particularly heavy fighting.

(Steinmueller, 331 Inf Div, op cit, 26 Aug)

116 Pz Div

On 26 Aug the front extended from Moulineaux in south-easterly direction diagonally through the Foret de la Londe to the Seine north of Elbeuf.

(O.C.M.H., F.S.B., MS B-058, Voigtsberger, 116 Pz Div, 21 Aug - 19 Sep 44) (981SOM(D61))***

26. Late in the evening of 26 Aug the Headquarters of Fifth Panzer Army moved from Rouen to Saleux (3.5 km S Amiens). On completion of the withdrawal from the bridgehead the following Corps boundaries would be in force:

86 Corps (711 and 346 Inf Divs)

right boundary (with Fifteenth Army)

Vieux Port - Caudebec - Yvetot****

left boundary

Barneville - Quevillon - Maromme*****

*At the time of the invasion 85 Inf Div was in tactical reserve north of Abbeville. It crossed the Seine between 5 and 8 Aug en route to Fifth Panzer Army, was committed piecemeal immediately upon arrival, and virtually destroyed north of Falaise on 15 Aug. (H.S. Report No. 50, passim)

**The remnants of 344 Inf Div had been assembled northeast of le Neubourg and formed into a reinforced regimental group (Steinmueller, 331 Inf Div, op cit, 22 Aug).

***Voigtsberger, Col (later Maj Gen), then cmdr 60 Pz Gren Regt (116 Pz Div).

****G.S.G.S. France, 1:50,000, 8E/6 838169 - 8E/4 935275 - 8E/9336.

*****G.S.G.S. France, 1:50,000, 8E/6 0009 - 8E/6 083127 - 9E 9E/5 1619.

then

74 Corps (331 Inf Div, 344 Inf Div, 17 G.A.F. Div)
left boundary River Andelle*

then

81 Corps (353 Inf Div with remnants
277, 326 and 49 Inf Divs)

left boundary

River Epte to Fourges - la Roche Guyon -
Bonnières

then

1 SS Pz Corps (18 G.A.F. Div and 6 Para Div)

left boundary (with First Army)

Poissy - Conflans - Senlis.

(W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, 26 Aug)

27 Aug

27. In the western sector the forces of 86 Corps had been dislodged from Valletot and Brestot and were withdrawing in easterly direction. 81 Corps was standing fast in the arc: Bourg Achard - la Bouille (on the Seine) - north of Orival. The armour was disposed as follows:

Bourg Orival - la Bouille	Remnants
	9 SS Pz Div
	10 SS Pz Div
	21 Pz Div
la Bouille - N Orival	116 Pz Div
	and
	2 SS Pz Div.

(W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, 27 Aug)

28. Another three days would be required to remove all vehicles from the Seine loops (Ibid). The armour was therefore still needed in the bridgehead, but there had also been orders since 25 Aug for General von Schwerin to form a battle group of 1 SS, 2 SS, 12 SS Pz Divs and 116 Pz Div in the area of Beauvais, and for 2 SS Pz Corps to assemble 9 SS Pz Div, 10 SS Pz Div and 21 Pz Div in the area Morgny la Pommeraye - Boissay (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Vol of Apps, op cit, Appx 47, 25 Aug). 116 Pz Div evidently pulled out during the night 27/28 Aug, but 2 SS Pz Div remained in the

*G.S.G.S. France, 1:50,000, 9E/5.

line.*

331 Inf Div, committed towards evening to the defence of the two Seine bends near Caumont and Orival, thereby relieving 116 Pz Div and 2 SS Pz Div, cannot hold this sector alone with its weak effectives. Hence 81 Corps reports that 2 SS Pz Div cannot be relieved by 331 Inf Div. The Army thereon authorizes 2 SS Pz Div to remain in its present sector with the comment that the Division nevertheless must be relieved definitely on 28 Aug.

(W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, 27 Aug)

29. In the meantime strong Allied forces had crossed the Seine between Criquebeuf and Pont de l'Arche. Tired 17 G.A.F. Div was ejected from Sotteville and lost Freneuse. Later in the day it lost Igoville. True enough it had been possible to recapture Hill 85, but there was lively ferrying activity at Freneuse and the enemy was bound to resume his advance. (Ibid)

28 Aug

30. Strong pressure forced 86 Corps to fall back to the line Vieux Port - le Landin (8E/6 9712) - Seine south of Le Mesnil (8E/6 0011 and 0012). Incessant artillery fire and the loss of various ferries added further to the difficulties of the river crossings. In the adjoining sector 331 Inf Div continued holding the tendon line at Mauny (8E/6 0309) and from Moulineaux to the South. North of Freneuse the opponent launched the expected attack in the afternoon. 74 Corps intended to resist the advance at Ymare (9E/5 2404) and south thereof as far as the Seine, but to close the gap between Ymare and Gouy (9E/5 2204) would be impossible due to the complete lack of troops for the task. (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, 28 Aug)

31. Further upstream Allied forces were surging across the Seine in many places. On the southern wing of the Army Group, Allied spearheads advancing from Meaux via Betz towards the North and via Chateau Thierry towards Soissons seemed to indicate Allied intentions of enveloping Army Group B in the general area Amiens - Arras (Ibid). Speed was now imperative, and no armour was to be left at the Seine:

*Writing from memory, Voigtsberger says:

During the night 26/27 Aug, after having been relieved by an infantry division (331 or 344)[sic], the fighting elements of 116 Pz Div crossed the Seine on ferries near Grande Couronne [NE Moulineaux] and marched off to the assembly areas.

(Voigtsberger, 116 Pz Div, op cit, 26 Aug)

But the contemporary evidence seems to indicate that the disengagement was carried out during the night 27/28 Aug.

(W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, 27 Aug, and W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Vol of Apps, op cit, Appx 54, 27 Aug)

To: 86 Corps, 74 Corps, 81 Corps,
1 SS Pz Corps, 2 SS Pz Corps,
Group Schwerin

On the morning of 29 Aug the panzer divisions presently still committed at the Seine must be complete in the indicated areas NE Rouen and at Beauvais. Elements still committed must be withdrawn from the Seine front regardless of consequences and moved across the river with the greatest possible speed.

74 Corps and 81 Corps direct the infantry divisions in the respective areas to take over the sectors previously held by armoured elements. The Corps will order the ferries under their command forthwith to accord first priority over all others to waiting or arriving panzer divisions.

H.Q. Fifth Panzer Army
Ops No. 1049/44
28 Aug 44

(W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Vol of Apps,
op cit, Appx 63, 28 Aug)

29 Aug

32. This was the last day of resistance in the bridgehead. The retreat through Northern France was proceeding apace and the German High Command was seeking ways and means to conjure-up a new cohesive front.

33. From the bridgehead the following was reported:

86 Corps Heavy pressure on the whole Seine position. Enemy penetration at St. Croix [SE/6 8515] sealed off. Heavy artillery harassing fire increases difficulties of last withdrawals.

(Sitwest, 29 Aug)

74 Corps After extremely heavy artillery preparation the enemy this morning continued his attack in the Seine loop south of Rouen and obtained several penetrations.

In view of the pronounced shortage of artillery ammunition and the lack of reserves of any kind, a breakthrough on Rouen seems inevitable.

(W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, Appendices,
op cit, Appx 65, Morning Report
Fifth Panzer Army, 29 Aug)

34. During this final phase of liquidating the bridgehead 711 Inf Div lost most of its transport due to the crossing priority accorded to the armoured elements (OCMH, FSB, MS B-796, Reichert, 711 Inf Div, 24 Jul - 15 Sep 44) (981SOM(D212)). But 331 Inf Div apparently managed to withdraw in reasonably good order:

On 29 Aug all vehicles had been removed from the loops and the troops committed there could be withdrawn. The last elements crossed the river in the early morning hours of 30 Aug. No man and no vehicle fell into the hands of the enemy. The operations of 331 Inf Div south of the Seine had come to an end and the formation crossed the river as the last German division to do so.

(Steinmueller, op cit, 29 Aug)

35. 558 Gren Regt and some smaller elements had been lost before the action on the bridgehead (para 20 above). For the balance of the Division, Steinmueller's narrative does not mention any abnormally high casualties prior to the action south of Rouen. It seems reasonable, therefore, to assume that the greater part of the losses occurred in the bridgehead. Upon assembling his forces on the north shore Steinmueller found his units reduced in strength by the following percentages:

Operations Staff		10%
557 Gren Regt (with Fus Bn u/c)		25%
559 Gren Regt (with Battle Group 6 Para Div u/c)		25-30%
Regimental Group 344 Inf Div		20%
Engr Battalion		15%
Anti Tank Battalion (no assault gun company)	men materiel	30% 30%
331 Arty Regt (4 Bns) (with one reinf Bty 344 Inf Div and one mot Arty Bn 6 Para Div)		15%
Signal Bn	men materiel	25% 50%

(Ibid)

36. Various explanations have been advanced for the slow progress of the Canadian brigades south of Rouen, but the cardinal factor was clearly the determined resistance put up for important reasons by a sizable conglomeration of good troops in a small area well suited for defence.

FIFTEENTH ARMY'S WITHDRAWAL
UP TO THE FALL OF ANTWERP

(29 Aug - 4 Sep)

37. At the beginning of June 1944 Fifteenth Army was responsible for the defence of the Channel coast from Walcheren Island and North Beveland to a few miles east of the mouth of the river Orne. Years of lavish effort had

made it the king pin of the German defences in the West. But on 6 Jun 44 the opponent cracked the coastal crust in Normandy, and in so doing drained the German works on the Channel coast of much of their value. A few weeks later, after a time of dazed waiting for a landing north of the Seine, the better part of Fifteenth Army was sacrificed in vain efforts to stem the tide in Normandy. Nevertheless, some competent command staffs and good formations had been left at the coast, and in the weeks and months to come they would offer stern resistance to the forces exploiting the majestic Allied victory south of the Seine.

38. Since 20 Jun 44 the north shore of the Seine had been the southern boundary of Fifteenth Army. When Fifth Panzer Army was reeling back through Northern France, Fifteenth Army's sector was being reduced to a cylinder that was walled in by water in the West, Second British Army in the East and airpower overhead. The piston chosen to eject the Germans from this cylinder was First Canadian Army. But it was a time of many urgent tasks, and somehow Fifteenth Army was given the opportunity of closing the cylinderhead so tight that the opening of the port of Antwerp turned into a long and costly operation. German records seem to indicate that developments would have taken a different turn, had Second British Army extended its march on Antwerp to include Breda, or at least the lightly held Woensdrecht isthmus, and had First Canadian Army surged forward with greater speed and force.

39. From 5 Aug 43 to 23 Aug 44 Fifteenth Army was under the command of Col Gen Hans von Salmuth. Only a capable general would be entrusted with this important Army, and his High Command personnel file shows indeed that he was well rated (G.M.D.S.-OKH, Personnel Files) (Selected Photostats: 981HC(D52), File von Salmuth). On the other hand he was inclined to be critical and pessimistic (*ibid*). We know that his reports to higher authority were outspoken and frankly realistic (H.S. Report No. 40, para 32). It is possible that events in Normandy had made him too frank and realistic in his assessment of the situation; in any case on 23 Aug 44 he was posted to the OKW Reserve of Higher Commanders (OKH Personnel Files, *op cit*, von Salmuth).

40. He was succeeded by Gen Inf Gustav von Zangen, an officer who had done exceptionally well as a divisional commander in the East (*ibid*, File von Zangen). In the recent past he had commanded *Armeeabteilung von Zangen* in the Italian rear area (H.S. Reports Nos. 20 and 24, various refs). For a few days the two generals stayed together at the Army headquarters in Tourcoing, then von Salmuth departed on 27 Aug and von Zangen assumed command (O.C.M.H., F.S.B., MS B-249, von Zangen, Fifteenth Army, 28 Aug - 10 Nov 44) (German Text 981SOM(D75), English Text 981SOM(D164)).

41. At that time, 82 Corps Headquarters was just moving off to First Army, and the main elements of Fifteenth Army were disposed as follows:

north of the Somme:

89 Corps	with	70 Inf Div	(north of the [W] Scheldt)
		712 Inf Div	(south of the Scheldt)
		59 Inf Div	(east of Dunkirk to West of Calais*)

*Formation had moved to this area in the immediate past.

64 Inf Div (north of the Somme*)

south of the Somme:

67 Corps with 245 Inf Div (astride Dieppe)

226 Inf Div (NE Seine Estuary*)

and 5 Sec Regt at Abbeville.

Commanders:

67 Corps Gen Inf Otto Sponheimer (25 Jul - 28 Oct 44)

89 Corps Gen Inf Freiherr Werner von und zu Gilsa
(1 Jun 43 - 1 Dec 44)

59 Inf Div Lt Gen Walter Poppe (5 Jul 44 - 23 Mar 45)

64 Inf Div Maj Gen Knut Eberding (5 Jul - 2 Nov 44)

70 Inf Div Lt Gen Wilhelm Daser (15 May - 27 Nov 44)

226 Inf Div Lt Gen Wolfgang von Kluge (5 Jul - 21 Sep 44)

245 Inf Div Lt Gen Erwin Sander (15 Jul 43 - Autumn 1944)

712 Inf Div Lt Gen Friedrich Neumann (16 Apr 42 - 25 Feb 45)

(Ibid)

Also within the Army area were the fortresses Dunkirk, Boulogne, Le Havre, and the Defended Area Calais.

42. By 28 Aug Allied spearheads were moving towards the Somme and seemed to have no intentions of veering off to the Northwest or Southeast. If the Somme position could not be held - as seemed certain - the way lay open for an Allied thrust along the axis Arras - Lille - Brussels. Subsequently the fortresses on the Channel would be assaulted from the rear, and Fifteenth Army encircled, pressed against the coast and smashed. Standing fast could serve no useful purpose, the formations would have to be pulled out from the coast and used to defend the Somme position and lend strength to the left wing of the new Army front, particularly in the Arras region. With the consent of Army Group, Fifteenth Army therefore instructed 67 Corps to vacate the Channel position and, with 226 Inf Div,**245 Inf Div and 5 Sec Regt to reach the Somme sector from the sea to Picquigny in an uninterrupted movement to be carried out during 28 and 29 Aug. After that the common boundary with Fifth Panzer Army would be the line: Picquigny (15) - Arras (15) - Douai (5 Pz) - Tournai (5 Pz) - Alost (15) - Antwerp (15). (Ibid)

*Formation had moved to this area in the immediate past.

**However, one of 226 Inf Div's three two-battalion regiments, one Fusilier battalion, one artillery battalion and two engineer companies went to Le Havre (von Zangen, Fifteenth Army, op cit)

43. Exact times and places for the withdrawal of 67 Corps to the Somme cannot be fully established from the contemporary source material on hand. It is quite possible that the movement proceeded more slowly than shown in the preceding paragraph. According to the Daily Sitreps of A Gp D the movement was carried out in small daily bounds. According to the War Diary of Fifth Panzer Army, the Army Group at first had given its consent to a quick withdrawal in one bound, but later had reversed itself. Obviously there was much confusion and lack of proper information. In the absence of detailed contemporary documentation from corps and division level, the Canadian Special Interrogation Reports on the various German commanders concerned -- though not wholly reliable -- seem to constitute perhaps the best available source of information on this phase. (Note: For material from this source see also C.M.H.Q. Report No. 183, op cit, paras 171 - 174).

44. O.B. West's Daily Intelligence Reports at the time gave the following successive locations for the westernmost part of the Army Group:

29 Aug Fecamp -- Nointot -- Lillebonne
30 Aug St. Valery en Caux -- N. Rouen
31 Aug Dieppe -- Neufchatel -- Beauvais

(G.M.D.S. - No number, A Gp D, Daily
Intreps O.B. West, 1 Jul - 30 Sep 44,
29-31 Aug) (981CW (D33))

45. 67 Corps and 86 Corps were withdrawing according to plan, but further east the situation was out of hand. During the night 26/27 Aug Headquarters Fifth Panzer Army had moved from Canteleu (3 miles W Rouen) to Saleux (3 miles SW Amiens). In the afternoon of 30 Aug Gen Pz Tps Heinrich Eberbach (Cmdr Seventh Army 24 Aug - 31 Aug 44) appeared at Saleux under orders to assume command over a group of Corps on the left wing of the Panzer Army*. During the night 30/31 Aug, however, British armour reached the vicinity of Amiens, and on the morning of 31 Aug Eberbach and his entourage were captured in the command post of the Panzer Army (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, 26-31 Aug). Later on the same day Gen Pz Tps Erich Brandenberger was appointed acting commander of Seventh Army; he remained its acting commander until 19 Feb 45 (OKH, Personnel Files, op cit, Brandenberger).

1 Sep

46. The fall of Amiens on 31 Aug had put an end to any thoughts of defending the Somme line. But it might be possible to hold a line further to the North. To this end

*Eberbach was placed in charge of Seventh Army on 24 Aug, three days after General of the Waffen SS Paul Hausser (Cmdr Seventh Army 29 Jun - 20 Aug 44) had returned gravely injured from the Falaise pocket on 21 Aug. -- There had been some hasty and abortive attempts to make new command arrangements. Crippled Seventh Army Headquarters had been directed to take command on the left wing of Fifth Panzer Army, Headquarters Fifth Panzer Army then would move to a command role further inland, and Seventh Army command the forces hitherto under the Panzer Army. (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, passim); von Zangen, Fifteenth Army, passim)

three of 89 Corps' four divisions had been withdrawn from the coast and were now on the march to meet the forces approaching from the South and Southeast. By the morning of 1 Sep one regimental group of 59 Inf Div had reached the area of Hesdin (20 miles NE Abbeville) (G.M.D.S. - 75144/26, A Gp D, W.D. Sep 44) (981CW(D59)). At the same time 712 Inf Div was approaching the area north of the Arras - Douai road, and 64 Inf Div was en route to the Doullens area (18 miles N Amiens). Elements of 86 Corps had reached Doullens. Fifteenth Army was left to its own devices, there was no contact with Fifth Panzer Army or the Army Group and consequently no information on the situation further inland (von Zangen, Fifteenth Army, op cit). At 1430 hrs the opponent entered Arras (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, 1 Sep).

47. Fighting strength and fire power of 67 Corps were substantially increased at this time by the addition of various batteries which had been stationed in the coastal zone:

The numerous anti-aircraft and searchlight batteries remaining in the Somme area placed themselves under command of Corps Headquarters - as no further orders were received from the competent headquarters. There were, on 1 Sep, some ten 88 mm batteries, and some twelve 37mm or 20mm batteries. By 15 Sep 44, their number had risen to some fifteen 88 mm batteries, and seventeen 37mm or 20mm batteries. They were concentrated under the command of a very energetic anti-aircraft regimental commander and his staff to form a mobile defence element under the direct command of Corps Headquarters and were a valuable reinforcement of the combat strength right up to the crossing of the Scheldt.... This combat team was initially organized in the area of Crecy, and had already committed several batteries around Abbeville and Pont Remy. It could be committed for antitank tasks, as well as - with its heavy batteries - for artillery missions. The heavy batteries could no longer be employed against aerial targets because most of the command equipment had had to be destroyed owing to lack of transportation, but the light batteries were suitable for anti-aircraft defence.

(O.C.M.H., F.S.B., MS B-596, Gerber, 67 Corps from Spring 1944 to 15 Sep 44, U.S. Transl) (981SOM(D179))

2 Sep

48. During the night 1/2 Sep the command post of O.B. West (A Gp D) was transferred to Coblenz. - In the West, Doullens, Arras and the area south of Cambrai were occupied by strong Allied forces; advance elements lunged forward to Lille, Valenciennes and Mons (G.M.D.S. - H22/60, O.B. West (A Gp D), Daily Sitreps 2 - 30 Sep 44 (for days 1 - 29 Sep 44); 2 Sep) (981CW(D53)) (Daily Situation Report hereafter cited "Sitwest"). Armour advancing past Doullens in northwesterly direction was a sharp reminder for Fifteenth Army to be on guard against possible envelopment. Considerable concentrations of armour were noted at Abbeville (W.D. A Gp D, Sep 44, op cit, 2 Sep). 67 and 86 Corps were instructed to withdraw behind the river Authie during the night 2/3 Sep (Sitwest). There was a big gap between Fifteenth Army and Fifth Panzer

Army*. General Brandenberger with the remnants of Seventh Army Headquarters was directed to establish contact and block the gap between the two Armies. But at the moment he had neither the command apparatus nor the troops required to carry out this task. (O.C.M.H., F.S.B., MS B-447, Brandenberger, Seventh Army, 1 Sep 44 - 25 Jan 45, Answers to Questions) (981SOM(D159))

3 Sep

49. Second British Army's swift advance to Brussels by the evening of 3 Sep indicated the intentions of reaching the V-1 Bases and of cutting off Fifteenth Army by means of a thrust to the Scheldt at Antwerp. It seemed at the time that only moving up some Panzer Brigades as a last resort might make it possible to prevent an encirclement of Fifteenth Army, but no unit of substance was available immediately (W.D. A Gp D, 3 Sep). On the left wing of the Army 86 Corps lost St. Pol and Lillers; on the right wing 67 Corps became engaged in heavy see-saw fighting on both sides of Montreuil. Outflanked and under pressure, 67 and 86 Corps were forced to fall back to the river Canche position: Etaples - Hesdin - Heuchin (Gerber, 67 Corps, op cit). 711 Inf Div, till then under 86 Corps, was placed under 67 Corps (O.C.M.H., F.S.B., MS B-796, Reichert, 711 Inf Div 24 Jul - 15 Sep 44) (981SOM(D212)).

4 Sep

50. With a sharp thrust to Antwerp, Second British Army on this day completely separated Fifteenth Army from Fifth Panzer Army.

This advance to Antwerp has closed the ring around Fifteenth Army. A thrust to Breda must be expected.... (W.D. A Gp D, 4 Sep)

To all appearances Fifteenth Army's situation was now hopeless. But the unexpected happened, the Woensdrecht isthmus and the Breda area remained unmolested and events evolved in a different way.

51. To stave off fresh disaster the right wing of Army Group B would have to keep the Allies from using Antwerp and block the gateway to the Ruhr. At the moment, however, the nearly sixty miles wide area between Antwerp and Maastricht lay almost undefended within Allied grasp. Moving up forces to the Albert Canal between the two cities might make it possible to stem or delay the enemy's advance. The conduct of the required operations was assigned to the Headquarters First Parachute Army under Col Gen Kurt Student (O.C. First Para Army 4 Sep - 31 Oct 44).

Contrary to O.B. West's order of 3 Sep, OKW gives orders to commit First Parachute Army Headquarters NOT in the area of Nancy

*Although no contemporary evidence is on hand, it seems certain that 86 Corps at the time was under Fifteenth Army. And von Zangen writes:

Headquarters Staff 86 Corps arrived at Lanches (SW Doullens) on 31 Aug, was placed under Fifteenth Army and instructed to....

(von Zangen, Fifteenth Army, op cit)

but in the Antwerp - Albert-Canal sector. In addition to 88 Corps, 3 and 5 Para Div will be placed under this Army Command. It is intended to move in additional troops (ten battalions from Military District VI). It is important that the Antwerp bridgehead be occupied with forces of sufficient strength to deny the enemy the use of this to him particularly important supply port.

(W.D. A Gp B, 4 Sep)

52. It had been clear for days that something would have to be done about defending Antwerp and the area southeast of it. As shown below, Second British Army captured Antwerp before the troops en route from the Dutch coast could settle down to assist the insignificant forces defending the city under a primarily administrative "136th Special Employment Division Staff", commanded by Maj Gen Christoph Stolberg-Stolberg.

53. The German troops moving from the Dutch coast towards Antwerp and the Albert-Canal at the beginning of September were elements of 88 Corps. As Fifteenth Army's right neighbour this Corps had been responsible for the defence of the coast northeast of the East Scheldt. Corps Commander, and simultaneously Commander of the German Army Elements in the Netherlands, was Gen Inf Hans Reinhardt (1 Jul 42 - 21 Dec 44). His C. of S. was Colonel Curt Eichert-Wiersdorff, G.S.C.-Corps Headquarters were at Bilthoven (8 miles NE Utrecht). There had been many changes in the composition of the Corps; at the end of August 1944 it consisted in the main of:

347 Inf Div (Cmdr: Lt Gen Wolf Trierenberg,
10 Dec 43 - April 1945),

719 Inf Div (Cmdr: Lt Gen Karl Sievers,
3 Aug - 3 Oct 44),

miscellaneous SS elements under General of the Waffen SS Karl-Maria Demelhuber (Commander of the Waffen SS in the Netherlands and Commander of the Coast Defence Sector: "Commander of the Waffen SS"),

and the Replacement and Training Regiment of 1 Para Pz Div "Hermann Göring" under Colonel Fullried.

(G.M.D.S. - 63289/1, 88 Corps, W.D. No. 1,
1 Jul - 31 Dec 44, passim)

54. 88 Corps had been aroused from its static role on 29 Aug when the Armed Forces Commander in the Netherlands* gave orders to withdraw one division from the coast and prepare it for a move elsewhere. 347 Inf Div (860 and 861 Gren Regts) was selected. Proceedings were speeded up on the evening of 30 Aug after Field Marshal Model on the telephone had described the situation as "burning" and demanded the immediate despatch of the Division. - Two days later 719 Inf Div (723 and 743 Gren Regts) was withdrawn from coast defence. Early on 2 Sep it was en route to the area SE Brussels. Late on 3 Sep the Corps Commander suggested vainly to bring the Division to a halt at the Albert-Canal. On the morning of 4 Sep Army Group B gave orders to rush the bulk of the formation to Antwerp. At that time substantial elements of 347 Inf Div were already returning from the northern outskirts of Brussels to Antwerp by rail. They were supposed to detrain at Antwerp and take

*Armed Forces Commander in the Netherlands: Gen Air Force Karl Christiansen; C. of S.: Lt Gen Heinz Helmut von Wulisch.

part in its defence under 719 Inf Div. But - (719 Inf Div apparently not being there yet) - the trains rolled on to Capelles (7 miles north of Antwerp) (Ibid). - Army Group B had been anxious to defend the city. At 0915 hrs it had even demanded the use of every type of civilian vehicle to rush all available naval and air force fighters to the defence of Antwerp (G.M.D.S. -63289/4, 88 Corps, W.D. No. 1, Vol B of Apps, Appx B 230a, 4 Sep). But the British had moved very fast, the slow moving coastal divisions had been pulled out too late, and all chance of holding Antwerp had been lost.

55. When OKW on 4 Sep decided to defend the Antwerp - Maastricht area with First Para Army, this Army was not an operational force, but merely a nucleus of para troops being organized and trained in various locations under the over-all direction of General Student. According to Student's post war account the sudden fall of Antwerp "created utmost surprise and consternation at the Fuehrer's Headquarters 'Wolfsschanze' near Rastenburg in East Prussia". He continues:

As C.-in-C. Para Troops, I was at the time attending to the activation of new units. I had been at the Fuehrer's Headquarters on 2 Sep, and on 4 Sep was in my office at Berlin-Wannsee with a small staff. In the afternoon of that day, I quite unexpectedly received a telephone call: I was ordered to form a new defence front along the Albert Canal immediately. Its right wing was to extend to the mouth of the Scheldt, where this river flows into the West Scheldt.

(O.C.M.H., F.S.B., MS-B-717, First Para Army and A Gp H, Comments by General Student) (English Text: 981SOM(D148))

56. However, some time would elapse before an Army on paper would be an Army in the line and the situation could be stabilized. At 1900 hrs 4 Sep, Seventh Army Headquarters took command of the forces hitherto under Fifth Panzer Army (Sitwest, 4 Sep), whilst Headquarters Fifth Panzer Army was advised of its forthcoming employment in Alsace under A Gp G (W.D. Fifth Panzer Army, 4 Sep). At the time the headquarters of A Gp B were at Venlo, headquarters Fifteenth Army at Ghent. - During the night 4/5 Sep, 88 Corps opened tactical headquarters at Moergestel (east of Tilburg) (W.D. 88 Corps, op cit, 4 Sep).

FIFTEENTH ARMY MOVES OFF VIA WALCHEREN;
LEAVES FORCES BEHIND TO DEFEND SCHELDT ESTUARY

(4 - 22 Sep)

57. In the meantime Fifteenth Army's formations had withdrawn to the general line:

67 Corps Calais - St. Omer
86 Corps St. Omer - Aire
89 Corps Aire - Merville - Estaires,
712 Inf Div north of Douai.

(von Zangen, Fifteenth Army, op cit)

By evening the Army had O.B. West's orders to reinforce and hold Boulogne, Dunkirk and Calais, move a larger force (including Army Headquarters) via Flushing to Breda, hold on to the island of Walcheren and attempt with 712 Inf Div a breakout north of Brussels towards Diest (Sitwest, 4 Sep).

58. During the day 70 Inf Div on Walcheren received orders to cross the Scheldt and block an enemy advance on either side of Ghent. It seems almost as if General von Zangen had been prepared for a brief span of time to give up this valuable and well-fortified island.

70 Inf Div screens off on both sides of Ghent against an enemy advance to the North and joins the break-through attack of 89 Corps (Sitwest, 4 Sep).

59. Before it had been possible to conclude that a large-scale withdrawal via Walcheren would be feasible, General von Zangen had given orders to marshal the bulk of his forces for a break-out north of Brussels. O.B. West had concurred (von Zangen, Fifteenth Army, op cit). The Fuehrer, however, did not approve of the two-pronged withdrawal and expected the break-out to fail. The plan was dropped (on 6 Sep, after fruitless efforts) and steps taken instead to form a bridgehead south of the Scheldt Estuary and to organize a strong defence of Walcheren Island. (Schramm*, Der Westen, p. 131) (981SOM(D102))

5 Sep

60. At 0930 hrs, O.B. West received an OKW Order setting forth the prospective composition of First Para Army**. The preamble stressed the fact that in the light of the fall of Antwerp the Fuehrer regarded it of decisive importance to hold the fortresses, the Island of Walcheren, the Antwerp bridgehead and the Albert Canal (W.D. A Gp D, 5 Sep). Pending the arrival of Headquarters First Para Army, General Christiansen, Armed Forces Commander in the Netherlands, was to command the sector from the Scheldt Estuary to Maastricht

*Schramm, Der Westen: This draft War Diary (KTB) is based on the detailed daily working notes kept by Major Schramm in his capacity as historian at the headquarters of OKW. Until the end of 1943 the Diary was arranged purely chronologically, supplemented by information from participants in operations. After 1943 the Diary was arranged according to subject matter and fronts (Ausarbeitungen), for example, the Anzio Beachhead, shifting of divisions between fronts, and so forth, and was supplemented by a Merkbuch kept by Schramm, with notes of the discussions at the situation meetings he attended and notes obtained from special interviews with the Deputy Chief of WFSt, General Warlimont. From 1 January 1945 the chronological order was reintroduced. In view of the subsequent destruction of the OKW records ordered by General Scherff, the copies of the Ausarbeitungen for 1944 and the personal commentaries preserved by Schramm represent a unique and valuable source. (H.M. Cole, The Lorraine Campaign, U.S. Army in World War II, European Theatre of Operations)

**For text of order see: G.M.D.S. - 75145/6, A Gp B, Misc Fuehrer Orders, OKW/WFSt No. 773222/44, 5 Sep 44) (981 A Gp B (D2)) (For U.S. Navy translation of this order see: 981HC(D17), Fuehrer Directives, Vol II, p. 175)

(ibid). This stop gap arrangement was short-lived, for in the evening of 5 Sep General Student arrived at the headquarters of 88 Corps and on the following morning assumed command of the Antwerp-Hasselt sector (W.D. 88 Corps, op cit, 5 and 6 Sep). 70 Inf Div was placed directly under Fifteenth Army and set in motion from Walcheren to the area of Ghent to form a blocking line and screen off towards Antwerp (von Zangen, op cit). 67 and 86 Corps were withdrawing as planned. The advance party of Fifteenth Army Headquarters reached Walcheren; by the next day Army Headquarters would be complete at Middelburg. At 1800 hrs Field Marshal von Rundstedt arrived at the Headquarters O.B. West, at Arenberg (near Coblenz), and resumed his former command as O.B. West and O.B. Army Group D*. The opponent had used the day to close-up and regroup his forces. (W.D. A Gp D, 5 Sep)

61. At the lower levels matters were not so simple and straightforward as the reports from higher levels might seem to indicate. The Army Command's endeavours to gear the operations to the necessities and opportunities of the quickly changing situation gave rise to a spate of orders and counter-orders. Typical was the experience of 711 Inf Div on 5 Sep. Lt. Gen Reichert relates:

After the Division had reached the area of Cassel, orders and counterorders were chasing one another. At one time the Division was to move to Dunkirk to strengthen the local garrison and let itself be locked in with it. But the advance parties returned with the message that the Commandant refused flatly to receive the Division on the grounds that the fortress was already overcrowded and had neither rations nor water for the formation. Thereupon the Division received orders to fight its way through to Calais, but this order was shortly superseded by one directing the formation to make ready to follow in the wake of two divisions that were supposed to make a breakout to the Southeast. Finally that order was cancelled too....

(Reichert, 711 Inf Div, op cit)

6 Sep

62. General von Zangen felt little enthusiasm for a withdrawal across water to an isthmus that might be sealed off at any moment, and during the operation his staff felt constant concern lest the Army be cut off and trapped (Special Interrogation Report von Zangen). 89 Corps at first regarded the operation as a forlorn hope (89 Corps, Concluding Report on Scheldt Crossings, para 95fn below), and for once we do not read the usual protestations that everything would have gone well but for the interference of the High Command. In his post-war account von Zangen states vaguely that the order to desist from attempting to break out was received on "5 or 6 Sep". At any rate, on 6 Sep, 88 Corps was attacking eastwards with four divisions, 89 Corps with one division (von Zangen, Fifteenth Army). But the undertaking seems to have bogged down. Partly for that reason and partly in compliance with the orders received, the Army now began to pull back its formations. During the night 6/7 Sep, 59 Inf Div took up positions in the line Ingelmunster - Wacken - Deynze; junction with 70 Inf Div at Deynze. (Ibid)

*For numerous references to Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt see Historical Section Reports Nos. 40 and 50.

63. 70 Inf Div had been rushed from Walcheren to the line Deynze - south of Ghent - Wichelen (5½ m WSW Termonde) under orders to keep the bridges across the Lys Canal and the Scheldt open for the withdrawing Germans and keep the enemy from following. Taking part in the operation were:

Div H.Q.,
1018 and 1020 Gren Regts,
two Lt Arty Bns,
Engr Bn, Sigs Bn and Recce Pl

1019 Gren Regt had remained on Walcheren, but a (Fortress Stamm) regimental headquarters (Col Geyer), and two Fortress Stamm Battalions (para 259fn below), were pulled out from their locations in the Breskens - Blankenberghe sector at the same time and with 70 Inf Div placed directly under Fifteenth Army. The Fortress Stamm Regiment had occupied the Lys Canal from Deynze to St. Martin (NE Deynze). Next to it was 1018 Gren Regt on the Lys Canal, in the southern and southeastern outskirts of Ghent (reinforced by Emergency Alert Units from the city) and in the Scheldt loop as far as Heusden (halfway between Ghent and Wetteren). 1020 Gren Regt was in the area north of Wetteren. On the move to this area it had already been attacked repeatedly by enemy tanks and suffered many casualties. Effective artillery support was received from positions N and NE Ghent, particularly after the artillery had been reinforced by two batteries of railway guns at Sleydinge. Div HQ was at Evergem (4 miles N Ghent).

(O.C.M.H., F.S.B., MS B - 274, Daser,
165 Res Div and 70 Inf Div in Holland -
1944) (98LSOM(D206))

64. With all hope gone for a breakout, and with pressure from the South increasing steadily, Fifteenth Army's situation had become precarious. Enemy spearheads were at Poperinghe, Ypres, Cruyshautem and Deynze. There was heavy fighting at Bevers and Eyne, German forces at Ghent had been thrown back to the northern outskirts of the city (Sitwest 6 Sep). Battle Group 226 Ind Div had reached Dunkirk, 5 Sec Regt Boulogne. - Further east First Parachute Army had assumed command in the Antwerp - Hasselt sector (W.D. A Gp D, 6 Sep).

65. Walcheren was important now. Naval Operations Staff signalled to Naval Group West and others:

Most Immediate

Berlin, 6 Sep 44

Sk1 points to special importance
Walcheren as corner post Dutch area and
obstruction-fort Scheldt.

All possibilities of further mining
Scheldt and obstructing it by scuttling
vessels must be exploited energetically.
Report intentions.

1 Sk1, I West 27609/44, Secret

(O.N.I., Tambach Collection, Reel T 5 B,
Naval Operations Staff, North Sea - Norway,
Sep - Nov 44) (98LHCN(D16))

7 Sep

66. In the coastal sector the Germans were approaching the area where they wanted to make a stand. On the whole the withdrawal of Fifteenth Army was still proceeding as

planned, but it was now being carried out under sharp pressure (W.D. A Gp D). The covering elements of 67 Corps reported individual enemy tanks as far north as Ghistelles (8.5 miles NW Thourout). Thourout was lost at 1600 hrs. Battle Group 245 was still fighting in the area of Cortemarcks, some three miles southwest of Thourout (Sitwest, 7 Sep). 711 Inf Div was moving towards the Ghent Canal to occupy the sector Moerbrugge (excl) - St. Georges (incl) (Reichert, 711 Inf Div, op cit). 86 Corps was engaged in heavy defensive fighting in the general line Staden (5.5 miles NW Roulers) - Roulers - Canal [sic] (Sitwest, 7 Sep). 89 Corps was yielding ground to forces pressing forward north of the line Courtrai - Audenarde (O.B. West Intrep). Headquarters 89 Corps were transferred to Breskens to make preparations for the Scheldt crossings. The Army intended to be in the line Zeebrugge - Bruges - Ghent - Stekene in the early morning of 8 Sep. (W.D. A Gp D)

67. Demolitions in the ports of Ostend and Blankenberghe had been completed and were under way at Zeebrugge. O.B. West had asked for permission to begin with the destruction of the ports of Rotterdam and Amsterdam, but the Fuehrer had reserved decision (Ibid). By 1600 hours 7 Sep 25,000 men had crossed the Western Scheldt to Walcheren. First Canadian Army was apparently under orders to clear the French and Belgian coastal sector and to capture the Channel ports. Whether Second British Army would advance in northerly direction or move towards the industrial area on the Rhine was not discernible as yet (War Diary Naval Operations Staff, 8 Sep 44, Historical Section (G.S.), Microfilms, Reel No. 13) - Col Gen Alfred Jodl, Chief WFSt, told O.B. West on the telephone of the Fuehrer's repeated insistence on a defended bridgehead opposite Flushing (Schramm, Der Westen). Jodl said the Fuehrer was ascribing considerable importance to additional inundations and had demanded once again the blocking of the Scheldt by all conceivable means. Only a stubborn defence of Breskens, Walcheren and Schouwen would lend meaning to the sacrifices of the fortresses on the coast (W.D. A Gp B). In the meantime Field Marshal von Rundstedt had examined the over-all situation and discussed it with Field Marshal Model. In the evening he informed the High Command of his findings in a detailed estimate of the situation.*

8 Sep

68. Fifteenth Army was now in the designated bridgehead line. O.B. West reported the following dispositions:

from right to left

67 Corps H.Q. at Maldegem (appx 6 miles west of
Eecloo on Eecloo-Bruges road)

with

Battle Group 245 Inf Div,
Remnants 711 Inf Div [leaving],
Battle Group 64 Inf Div

in sector

*For details see Part IV of this series of reports.

Zeebrugge - Bruges - Bellem
[Bellem on Ghent Canal appx 2 miles
NE Aeltre]

and

86 Corps H.Q. at Bouchauterhaven (24 km
N Ghent)

with

Battle Group 59 Inf Div
Battle Group 70 Inf Div

in sector

Bellem (excl) - N Ghent - Stekene -
Scheldt Estuary.

Remnants 346 Inf Div (with remnants 17 GAF Div
u/c) and remnants 331 Inf Div in area north of
Ghent.

712 Inf Div still engaged in its fighting with-
drawal to the bridgehead line.

(Sitwest, 8 Sep)

69. From the sea to Bruges (excl) the extreme right wing of 67 Corps (on the east side of the Zeebrugge - Bruges Canal) was a composite force of some 2000 - 3000 men from various naval and emergency units in the Ostend - Blankenberghe - Zeebrugge - Bruges area. This force had been organized and was led by the Artillery Commander of 67 Corps. It was strengthened on 8 Sep by the subordination of three 88 mm batteries and three 37 mm batteries from the Corps' large (ad hoc) Anti Aircraft Artillery Regiment (para 47 above). (Gerber, 67 Corps, op cit)

70. Southeast of Bruges there would be little time for settling down in the new line. The opponent was in close pursuit; by midday enemy tanks were feeling their way forward on the entire line from Bruges to Aeltre. Advance elements were at St. Georges (9 miles SE Bruges) (Sitwest, 8 Sep). An enemy build-up was obviously under way at Moerbrugge (Reichert, 711 Inf Div). Ferrying traffic from Breskens to Flushing was in full swing. Hitherto mostly supply troops had been moved to Walcheren, now 67 Corps was to cross from Breskens, and 86 Corps from Terneuzen. At Breskens the embarkation operations were marshalled by Lt Gen Eugen-Felix Schwalbe and the headquarters staff of his no longer existing 344th Infantry Division. At Terneuzen Lt Gen Hans-Kurt Hoecker and headquarters staff 17 G.A.F. Div were in charge. (Gerber, 67 Corps)

9 Sep

71. 712 Inf Div reached the area of Eecloo, and all of Fifteenth Army's formations were now within the bridgehead. Unless air attacks paralyzed traffic, it would be possible to defend the mouth of the Scheldt and bolster First Parachute Army (W.D. A Gp D). At Bruges two Allied demands for surrender remained unanswered, but during the night 8/9 Sep the enemy had succeeded in forming a bridgehead on the north bank of the Ghent Canal at Moerbrugge. German counter-attacks

were of no avail and the artillery was unable to stop the opponent's bridging operations (Sitwest, 9 Sep). The attack had come at the seam between 245 and 711 Inf Divs; main cause of the dangerous penetration had been 245 Inf Div's delay in taking counter-measures. The situation was dangerous indeed, for a quick and forceful exploitation might ruin at the last moment all chance for saving Fifteenth Army (Gerber, 67 Corps). 711 Inf Div at the time was under orders to move out via Breskens, and 64 Inf Div at the point of taking over the defence of the bridgehead. Under the existing circumstances however, 3 Bn 731 Gren Regt (711 Inf Div), at the site of the penetration, was left there for another day and assisted elements of 64 Inf Div and various antiaircraft units in the formation of a new line of defence. (Reichert, 711 Inf Div)

72. On this day one regimental group of Battle Group 346 Inf Div* reached Walcheren on its way to the area north of Antwerp, and a second one was scheduled to begin moving across the Scheldt at 1600 hrs, to be followed in turn by the leading elements of 711 Inf Div (Sitwest, 9 Sep). Schedules were upset, however, by high winds and heavy seas during the late afternoon (*ibid*; also W.D. Skl, *op cit*). The crossing place at Terneuzen was functioning now, and the Woensdrecht area had been reinforced considerably with artillery, antiaircraft artillery and antitank equipment (von Zangen, *op cit*). O.B. West and A Gp D acquired a new Chief of Staff at noon, when Lt Gen Siegfried Westphal relieved Gen Inf Guenther Blumentritt, who was being transferred to the High Command Reserve of Higher Commanders pending reassignment.** (W.D. A Gp D, 9 Sep). About one week earlier a corresponding change had taken place at A Gp B, where Lt Gen Hans Krebs had replaced Lt Gen Hans Speidel (W.D. 88 Corps, *op cit*, 7 Sep).

10 Sep

73. At the bridgehead the day was fairly quiet. But the enemy was obviously gathering strength for an attempt to capture the land-bridge between the inundations in the Bruges - Ghent sector (Sitwest). Ferrying operations were harassed by enemy fighter bombers. O.B. West asked for fighter protection (*ibid*), but apparently in vain. In a report to OKW on the same day he called OKL's curtailment of air operations due to lack of fuel "an untenable situation" (W.D. A Gp D). Perhaps this was done merely for the record, for the Luftwaffe's pitiful state was no secret. As a matter of fact on this same day - with the German position in France still in danger of complete collapse - the activities of the Third Air Fleet remained confined to two small nuisance raids on Liege (Last part of

*Originally the term "Battle Group" (Kampfgruppe) had been used for improvised composite task forces, but by this time it had become a euphemism for what the Germans had grown tired of calling "Remnants .. Division". Not much later, and while the divisions were still very weak, the terms "Remnants" and "Battle Group" (the latter in the sense described above) disappeared from the command language, and the formations were again called "Divisions". It must be borne in mind, however, that after the defeat in Normandy the term "division" was no longer indicative of the quantitative and qualitative value of the elements so designated.

**Westphal had been Kesselring's Chief of Staff until he fell ill from overwork during the last days of the Battle for Rome (Historical Section Report No. 20, The Italian Campaign (4 Jan - 4 Jun 44), para 154 fn and Appx "A", p. 11). Earlier he had been C. of S. Panzer Army Africa.

sentence: W.D. Third Airfleet, British Air Ministry Translation, 10 Sep 44) (981. 013(D74)).

74. Headquarters 89 Corps took over command of the forces in the bridgehead from headquarters 67 Corps, which was moving to Oostburg preliminary to its forthcoming transfer to the right wing of First Para Army. One regimental group of 346 Inf Div had reached Walcheren and was to move on to the area north of Antwerp during the night 10/11 Sep. A second regimental group was to follow on 11 Sep (Sitwest). These two regimental groups had neither motor vehicles nor horse-drawn transport; each group consisted of about one thousand men (W.D. 88 Corps, Vol of Appx, op cit, Appx 208, 10 Sep), the infantry elements were badly in need of new foot-gear (W.D. 88 Corps, 12 Sep). The first group of Battle Group 711 Inf Div had reached Walcheren (W.D. A Gp D). 70 Inf Div was scheduled to cross the West Scheldt on 12 Sep (Sitwest).*

11 Sep

75. On either side of Bruges 89 Corps repulsed moderately strong attacks, but at Moerbrugge the opponent succeeded in enlarging his bridgehead. 86 Corps stopped enemy armour at Bellem and north of Ghent. Further east 712 Inf Div made a sortie in the direction of Antwerp and managed to push on beyond Beveren Waes**. - Ferrying operations were seriously hampered by air attacks; the volume of movement across the river had fallen off by 40%; crossings were now possible only at night. Headquarters 67 Corps and elements Battle Groups 346 and 711 Inf Divs were marching towards the area north of Antwerp. The crossings of additional elements 711 Inf Div had been delayed by heavy bomber attacks on town and port of Breskens. 70 Inf Div was in assembly and ready to be ferried across (Sitwest). Speed was essential, the enemy was bound to attack from Antwerp, the forces presently in the area could not cope with such attacks (W.D. A Gp D).

76. The High Command order of 4 Sep (para 60 above) had clothed the commander of Walcheren Island with the powers of a fortress commander. Instructions to such commanders were strict and simple. They were to hold out to the last and better make a good job of it. According to General von Zangen the High Command now designated Walcheren as "Scheldt Fortress North", the Breskens area north of the Leopold Canal as "Scheldt Fortress South", and selected 70 Inf Div to defend the former and 64 Inf Div the latter (von Zangen, op cit). Neither Walcheren nor Breskens were fortresses in the strict sense of the word, of course, but they were called so to define and stress the concomitant obligations of the troops and commanders.

12 Sep

77. With the Breskens bridgehead under constant pressure the forces on the right wing and in the centre were taken back behind the Canal de Derivation de la Lys from Heyst

*The date of the order for the return of 70 Inf Div to Walcheren was not available at the time of writing; the various German narratives of events are at variance and name any day between 8 and 11 Sep.

**Subsequent reports failed to allude to this undertaking. Perhaps it was merely a matter of improving the local tactical situation. In any event the formation was eventually forced to leave the bridgehead by crossing the West Scheldt.

(on the coast) to Lovendegem (7 miles NW Ghent) (W.D. A Gp D and O.B. West Intrep). From the coast to a short distance west of Strooibrug (N Maldegem) the Leopold Canal runs closely parallel to the Lys Derivation. This, and the extensive inundations in the area meant that one half of the new bridgehead front was protected by strong natural barriers. During the day headquarters 67 Corps (with elements 346 and 711 Inf Divs under command as of 12 Sep) received orders to relieve the forces of 88 Corps north of Antwerp west of the Breda - Antwerp road (W.D. 88 Corps). 59 Inf Div was directed to move from the bridgehead to Tilburg to serve as Army Group Reserve (W.D. A Gp D). Air activity over the Scheldt Estuary was brisk; Terneuzen was bombed heavily (O.B. West Intrep). Communications with Fifteenth Army were interrupted (Sitwest).

13 Sep

78. Ferry traffic was seriously hampered by air attacks. In the evening 70 Inf Div commenced to cross the river. Course of the main line of defence was as follows: Leopold Canal to Balgerhoek - Bassevelde - Sas van Gent - Axel - Hulst - Paal on the Scheldt (north of Graauw). The enemy was following the withdrawals with caution (Sitwest). The Germans felt certain that an attempt would be made to push northwards from Antwerp, but there is nothing to indicate that they connected the lessening pressure on the bridgehead with Canadian regroupings for a forthcoming pincer movement on the Scheldt position.

14 Sep

79. Despite bad weather enemy air attacks disturbed the ferry traffic (W.D. A Gp D). Near Moerkerke the opponent succeeded in crossing the Leopold Canal and establishing a bridgehead at Molentje. After intensive artillery preparation this bridgehead was recaptured in heavy fighting. In the afternoon enemy infantry and armour were assembling southwest of Balgerhoek and at the bridge on the Maldegem - Aardenburg road. At 1700 hrs Stekene was lost to attacking armour and infantry. (Sitwest).

80. Headquarters Fifteenth Army were moving to Dordrecht. As of 0001 hrs 15 Sep the Army was to be responsible also for the area Maas (southwest Rotterdam) - Dordrecht (north) - Breda (east) - St. Leonard (east) - Canal fork 4 km NE Antwerp (*ibid*). During the day 67 Corps established Corps headquarters at Esschen (ESE Bergen op Zoom). Lt Col Elmar Warning, G.S.C., took over the functions of Corps C. of S. from Major Kurt Gerber, G.S.C., who had been acting C. of S. since 31 Aug 44. The Corps' mission was to prevent at all cost an enemy advance from Antwerp to the North while Fifteenth Army's withdrawals were still in progress. Corps boundaries were:

on the right:

coast west of Bergen op Zoom -
west of Woensdrecht -
west of Berensdrecht,

*For greater detail see Hist Sec Report No. 183, paras 247 - 249. In this case -- as in many others -- the Special Interrogation Reports supply facts and interpretations not contained in the limited contemporary material on hand.

on the left:

Breda (incl) -
Meer (excl) -
St. Leonard (incl) (at the bend of the
Antwerp - Turnhout Canal about 15
km NE Antwerp) -
Antwerp - Turnhout Canal (incl) to its
confluence with the Maas-Scheldt
Canal just northwest of Antwerp -
East Antwerp.

right neighbour: 70 Inf Div (89 Corps)
left neighbour: 719 Inf Div (88 Corps)

(O.C.M.H., F.S.B., MS B-798, Warning,
67 Corps between Scheldt and Maas,
15 Sep - 25 Nov 44) (981SOM(D178))

15 Sep

81. Bombings from the air caused heavy damage at Breskens and Flushing, but cross river traffic continued (W.D. A Gp D). The forces in the eastern portion of the bridgehead were in a new main line of defence:

Leopold Canal south of St. Jean in Eremo (NNE Eecloo) -
Bassevelde - Sas van Gent - Axel - Hulst -
Meerdonck - Verrebroek - Calloo.

Rearguards at Eecloo - south of Salzaete - Stekene (excl).

(Sitwest)

82. When 70 Inf Div was ordered back to Walcheren, Lt Gen Daser and staff returned to Middelburg immediately (Daser, op cit). To relieve his troops at the front and organize the transfer across the river would take a few days at least. During this period the forces of 70 Inf Div still in the bridgehead were under the command of General Steinmueller (cmdr 331 Inf Div) and staff (Steinmueller, op cit; also Daser, op cit). By 15 Sep the movement had been completed on the whole (von Zangen, op cit), and Steinmueller and his staff were on the way to Grootelint (6 miles west of Dordrecht) to assume command over the sector Voorne - Goeree - Schouwen (the three large islands nearest to the Channel between Hoek van Holland and North Beveland) (Sitwest 14 Sep; also von Zangen, op cit).

16 Sep

83. Due to severe damage to the loading area there was little ferrying activity at Breskens. Terneuzen was repeatedly attacked from the air. Visibility was good again and there was no ferry traffic during the hours of daylight. Enemy artillery harassed the river crossings between Doel and Lilloe (appx 10 miles NW Antwerp). (Sitwest)

17 Sep

84.- On this day all other events were overshadowed by First Allied Airborne Army's great descent in the Eindhoven - Nijmegen - Arnhem area to secure the crossings over the Maas, Waal and Neder Rijn. 88 Corps (including Battle Group Walther), composed of countless splinter groups with a total strength of less than 10,000 men from all Branches of the Armed Forces, would now have to fight on two fronts. (W.D. 88 Corps, 9 - 17 Sep, passim)

85. West of Antwerp Allied forces had passed the Dutch border and were approaching Axel and Hulst. The Germans reported continuation of their efforts to destroy a force in approximately battalion strength which had been encircled at Kijkuit (appx 3 miles NE Axel). Due to good visibility there was no ferry traffic at Terneuzen during the hours of daylight. Withdrawal of 245 Inf Div from the bridgehead was to begin during the night 17/18 Sep (Sitwest). 59 Inf Div, en route to Tilburg as Army Reserve, would be employed to clear the rear area of airlanded troops (W.D. 88 Corps, 17 Sep).

18 Sep

86. In the eastern part of the Breskens bridgehead Sluiskil (on the Terneuzen Canal) and Calloo (on the river Scheldt) were under attack (O.B. West Intrep), and the German rearguards were forced to fall back. Further west 245 Inf Div was in process of being relieved by elements of 64 Inf Div. The last units of 59 Inf Div and 86 Corps, as well as the vanguard of 245 Inf Div crossed the West Scheldt. In the area east of Antwerp an attempt to destroy the bridge at Merxem had failed. (Sitwest)

87. On 7 Sep O.B. West had sought permission to begin with the destruction of the ports of Rotterdam and Amsterdam. At that time Hitler had reserved the decision to himself (para 67 above). Now he gave O.B. West a free hand (W.D. A Gp D). Rundstedt acted immediately:

18 Sep 1800 hrs In view of the developments in the situation, which indicate probable enemy intentions of reaching the IJssel Meer, O.B. West gives orders to begin forthwith with the destruction of the ports of Rotterdam and Amsterdam (ibid).

88. The airlandings had placed the Army Group in a most precarious position, particularly so in the Eindhoven area, where First Parachute Army was under attack from north and south. The severity of this crisis, however, did not diminish Hitler's interest in the defence of the Scheldt estuary. Again he demanded that the entrance to the river be kept in German hands at all events. In his reply O.B. West pointed out that the estuary could not be held indefinitely:

... In the long run the forces available cannot withstand a possible large-scale attack by First Canadian Army. This would require a bridgehead 70 km wide and 15-20 km deep. Owing to the descent of at least three airborne divisions in the Dutch area, sufficient forces for this purpose are no longer available....

(W.D. A Gp D)

19 Sep

89. The Breskens bridgehead was now the target of constant enemy attacks (Schramm, Der Westen). First Canadian Army attacked the Terneuzen sector of the bridgehead with strong forces, including about 200 tanks. Local penetrations forced 712 Inf Div to withdraw to shorter lines. Bouchaute, Asseneded, Sas van Gent and Stuiver (1 mile south of Sas van Gent) were lost. The bridge across the Terneuzen Canal at Stuiver was demolished; the bridges at Othene (2.5 km ESE Terneuzen), and 3 km east of Drievegen across the Otheensche Kreek (4.5 km SE Terneuzen), were kept open for the retreating left wing. Northwest of Antwerp 67 Corps maintained outposts

at Lillo, Orderen and on both sides of Wilmarsdonck. (Sitwest)

20 Sep

90. Heavy artillery fire on Terneuzen made it necessary to confine ferrying activities to the port of Breskens. Elements of 245 Inf Div and 712 Inf Div were taken across the West Scheldt (W.D. A Gp D). Allied attacks on the bridgehead were continuing; an attack north of Assenede was repulsed, but at Sluiskil the opponent crossed the canal. In the evening fighting flared up northwest of Antwerp at Wilmarsdonck and Oorderen (Sitwest). From east of Antwerp 88 Corps reported intensified machine-gun, mortar and artillery fire in the Grobbendonck area (W.D. 88 Corps, Appx A-378, 20 Sep). OKW informed O.B. West of Hitler's acceptance of his submission regarding the defence of the Scheldt Estuary (para 88 above) (Schramm, Der Westen). This was the tacit admission of the Fuehrer's realization that the estuary could not be held indefinitely.*

21 Sep

91. Increased enemy pressure was reported from the area northwest of Antwerp (W.D. A Gp D), where Oorderen was lost in heavy fighting (O.B. West Intrep). Harassing fire was heavy; there was heavy vehicle traffic in the southwestern part of the Albert Docks. 67 Corps reported successful demolition of the railway bridge across the Albert Canal southwest of Merxem. (Sitwest)

92. While some elements of 712 Inf Div were still in the Breskens pocket, the remnants of 245 Inf Div (with Schnelle Abteilung 505, 559 Tank Coy** and 347 Field Repl Bn under command) were now complete on the mainland. As of 1800 hrs 22 Sep they would be responsible for preventing an Allied advance in westerly direction between Turnhout and the Wilhelmina Canal. It would soon be time to withdraw the remnants of 719 Inf Div from the Wyneghem - Herrenthals sector of the Albert Canal to form a line of defence along the Turnhout Canal (W.D. 88 Corps). In view of the Allied successes in the airlanding area O.B. West countenanced a step-by-step withdrawal to the general line Antwerp - Turnhout - Tilburg - Veghel - Helmond - Weert. Needs-be the defence of the Scheldt Estuary and the adjacent islands would have to be carried out by the forces presently located there (64, 70 and 331 Inf Divs). (W.D. A Gp D)

22 Sep

93. Northwest of Antwerp the (Canadian) opponent advanced in the direction of Lillo (O.B. West, Intrep) but was blocked in an attempt to advance northwards from Oorderen (Sitwest). Pressure developed also east of Antwerp on the right wing of 88 Corps, where the (Canadian) opponent had crossed the Albert Canal and established a bridgehead ESE Wyneghem in the sector of 1 Bn 743 Gren Regt (719 Inf Div). At 0855 hrs 88 Corps received the following telephone message:

Enemy in strength of one company in the wooded area southeast of the former bridge at Wyneghem attacking along the highway to Schilde.

*Presumably advance information conveyed by telephone. Formal assent reached O.B. West on 26 Sep (W.D. A Gp D, 26 Sep)

**i.e. Tank Coy of 559 Gren Regt (331 Inf Div)

Fire support from four tanks south of the canal. Committed against this are two and one-half companies and one Engineer platoon of 743 Gren Regt. Due to the fog own artillery reduced to firing according to pre-arranged fire-plan. Observer on way to area of penetration.

(W.D. 88 Corps)

94. At 1115 hrs Corps heard that the Allied penetration had been expanded towards the West and widened to about one kilometre on each side of the site of the former bridge. The commander of 1 Bn 743 Regt had been killed and the regimental commander had taken charge at the bridgehead. At 1700 hrs 88 Corps issued orders for the transfer of Corps headquarters to Dongen (north of the Wilhelmina Canal, due north of Turnhout). During the night Headquarters 719 Inf Div were to move from Turnhout to Alphen (halfway between Turnhout and Tilburg). (Ibid)

95. All troops not earmarked for the defence of the Scheldt Estuary had now reached the mainland, and O.B. West expressed his thanks to the naval headquarters and units who had played a role in moving 82,000 men, 530 guns, 4,600 vehicles, over 4,000 horses and much valuable material across the West Scheldt*. Further inland General of Panzer Troops Hermann Balck had superseded Col Gen Johannes Blaskowitz in the command of A Gp G on 21 Sep (W.D. A Gp D).

DEVELOPMENTS ON THE EVE OF FIRST CANADIAN
ARMY'S ASSAULT ON THE SCHELDT ESTUARY

(23 - 30 Sep)

23 Sep

96. North, northwest and west of Antwerp the day was relatively uneventful (O.B. West, Intrep). The forces left behind to defend the Breskens bridgehead had a total strength of 10,200 men (W.D. A Gp D) (s.a. para 205 below). East of Antwerp 719 Inf Div had completed its withdrawal to the Turnhout Canal by 0435 hrs. On the evening of 21 Sep, 88 Corps had notified the Army of this forthcoming withdrawal during the night 22/23 Sep. At the same time it had suggested that

*Quoting figures supplied by the Naval Special Staff Knuth (the ad hoc Ferry Command), 89 Corps, in its concluding report on the crossings, on 24 Sep gave the following revised totals:

Moved across the Scheldt from Terneuzen and
Breskens from 4 - 23 Sep 44:

86,100 men
616 guns
6,200 horses
6,200 vehicles
6,500 bicycles

(Naval Operations Staff (Sk1), File North Sea -
Norway, op cit, H.Q. 89 Corps, Ops No. 5050/44,
Secret, 24 Sep 44) (981HCN(D16))

67 Corps be directed to take up positions on the Turnhout Canal from east of Merxem to St. Leonard (incl) (W.D. 88 Corps, 21 - 23 Sep). During the day the opponent occupied St. Job in't Goor (on the Turnhout Canal) and with armoured patrols reconnoitred the areas of Oostmalle and Beerse (Sitwest, 23 Sep).

97. To achieve unified command over all German forces west of the Allied wedge in the Eindhoven area, 88 Corps was placed under Fifteenth Army at 1200 hrs. 719 Inf Div was involved in the Corps' fierce struggle in the Veghel area; from every point of view it would be more logical to subordinate the formation to the Corps about to defend the eastern approaches to the Woensdrecht isthmus. According to the post war narratives of 67 Corps, 719 Inf Div was placed under its command on 23 Sep; according to the War Diary of 88 Corps the change-over took place on 24 Sep. — A change of designation worthy of note occurred in the German Air Force, where Luftflotte III (Third Airfleet) was renamed Luftwaffen Kommando West (Air Force Command West). (W.D. A Gp D)

24 Sep

98. From the Breskens bridgehead 89 Corps reported reconnaissance activity near St. Laurent (O.B. West Intrep), harassing fire in the Hoorne - Watervliet area, and see-saw fighting at the southern tip of the Braakman inlet. 67 Corps reported stopping armoured recon elements north of Oorderen and at St. Job in't Goor (Sitwest). While 346 Div repulsed the small forces which had crossed the Antwerp - Turnhout Canal near St. Job in't Goor (at Lichtenberg), 67 Corps was fully aware of the growing threat to its left wing and was apprehensive lest an enemy advance via Maria ter Heide separate it from its neighbour. In addition to this the roads leading north from Ryckevorsel and Turnhout offered themselves to the enemy for break-through attempts (Warning, 67 Corps, op cit). To preserve a site of historical interest (ibid) Turnhout was evacuated without fighting (W.D. A Gp D).

99. In a comprehensive estimate of the situation Field Marshal Model mentioned that in order to obtain reserves and save strength it might become necessary to take Fifteenth Army behind the Waal; 67 Corps, however, to remain in a bridgehead: Bergen op Zoom - Roosendaal - Moerdijk (G.M.D.S. - 75145/5, A Gp B, Weekly Reports and Misc Docs, 20 May - early Oct 44, A Gp B, Ops No. 7743/44, 1600 hrs 24 Sep) (981 A Gp B (D3)). Rundstedt concurred; according to an entry in the War Diary of Army Group D he believed the proposed sacrifice was justified by the necessity of gaining reserves for the expected large-scale operations between Arnheim and Aachen. Later in the day OKW announced over the telephone that the Fuehrer had rejected the proposals contained in the Estimate of the Situation for 24 Sep. (W.D. A Gp D)

25 Sep

100. Few things were more abhorrent to the Fuehrer than suggestions of withdrawal. His reaction was immediate and precise. For Fifteenth Army and First Parachute Army to stand fast in their present lines was one of the main adjurations in a Fuehrer Directive issued by OKW on 25 Sep. (At 0140 hrs according to Schramm.)*

101. West of Antwerp the day was uneventful. East of Antwerp the enemy was pressing northwards and there was

*For details see Part IV of this series of reports.

fighting at Ryckevorsel and near Turnhout where the opponent was clinging obstinately to his newly established bridgeheads (Sitwest). His advance from the bridgehead at the cement plant south of Ryckevorsel had placed 719 Inf Div in a most precarious position. In addition to this the division commander (Lt Gen Sievers) had suffered a breakdown in health and was replaced during the night 25/26 Sep by Lt Gen Schwalbe (formerly cmdr 344 Inf Div, recently in charge at the Breskens bridgehead). For the purpose of eliminating the enemy penetration in the Ryckevorsel area, the Corps decided, with the approval of the Army, to withdraw 711 Inf Div from its sector at the mouth of the Scheldt (from Beveland Isthmus to Lillo) and to commit it for a counter-attack on Ryckevorsel and the cement plant. All available artillery was concentrated under the Corps artillery commander and subordinated to the Division for this attack. To be closer to the left wing, Corps Headquarters were moved to the Breda - Ginnecken area. (Warning, 67 Corps)

26 Sep

102. The day's heaviest fighting took place on the convex left wing of Fifteenth Army, where 88 Corps, with 85 Inf Div on the left in the Schijndel area, 59 Inf Div in the center, and 245 Inf Div on the right, was under pressure from the East, South-east and South.* 245 Inf Div was endeavouring to maintain its hold on the Bladel - Reusel - Voorheide area east of Turnhout (W.D. 88 Corps). West of the Corps boundary 719 Inf Div was in difficulties north of Turnhout and even more so at Ryckevorsel, where the opponent had succeeded in enlarging his bridgehead to a width of 6.5 km and a depth of 2 km (Sitwest). The bulk of 711 Inf Div had reached the Minderhout area, north of Ryckevorsel on the road to Breda; 744 Gren Regt, however, had been left at the mouth of the Scheldt and placed under 346 Inf Div (Warning, 67 Corps).

103. In order to create a much needed extension of the Army front towards the Maas, 712 Inf Div had been brought forward in the meantime to the area east of 's-Hertogenbosch and committed on the left of Battle Group Chill. The formation was expected to destroy the airlanded enemy in the Nistelrode area on 26 Sep, in the Oss area on 27 Sep, and to make preparations for an attack along the Heesch - Grave axis on 29 Sep. (W.D. 88 Corps)

27 Sep

104. When the headquarters staff of 67 Corps on 10 Sep was about to leave the Breskens pocket for duty north of Antwerp, General von Gilsa's 89 Corps Headquarters was made responsible for the defence of the bridgehead (para 74 above). About one week later this headquarters assumed command over the two Scheldt fortresses, but even then it was known to be earmarked for employment further inland (von Zangen, Fifteenth Army). At 1200 hrs 27 Sep, 89 Corps assumed command on the left wing of Fifteenth Army. Corps Headquarters were established at

*85 Inf Div had been virtually wiped out in the Falaise area (H.S. Report No. 50, para 249), the present 85 Inf Div (at the time usually referred to as Battle Group Chill) was composed of the negligible remnants of 85, 84 and 89 Inf Divs and various units of paratroops, the whole under the command of Lt Gen Kurt Chill, who had improvised the defence of the Albert Canal on his own initiative and ever since had operated under 88 Corps with skill and demoniacal energy (W.D. 88 Corps, Text and Appendices, passim).

Burmalsen (north of 's-Hertogenbosch, halfway between Waal and Neder Rijn) (W.D. 88 Corps). Of the troops assigned to the Corps only 712 Inf Div, east, southeast and northeast of 's-Hertogenbosch, was a formation of some substance. Others under command were: Group Teichert (artillery personnel serving as infantry) on the Maas north of 's-Hertogenbosch, miscellaneous air force ground units at Hedel (on the Maas), 29 Fortress Machine Gun Battalion and elements SS Regiment Delfes at Zaltbommel and Rossum (on the Waal). In addition to protecting the Hertogenbosch area (with 85 Inf Div on the right) against attack from the East. 89 Corps Headquarters was also under orders to reconnoitre and prepare future positions on the Waal. For this purpose the headquarters staff of former 344 Inf Div was made available (O.C.M.H., F.S.B., MS B-790, Ekstein, 89 Corps in Holland, 21 Sep - 13 Oct 44) (981SOM(D190)). Thus Fifteenth Army's forces east of the Scheldt Estuary were now under three Corps Commands, 89 Corps on the left, 88 Corps in the centre, and 67 Corps on the right.

105. The tactical picture did not change greatly during the day. - West of Antwerp there was no fighting of significance, east of Antwerp 67 Corps blunted an enemy thrust north of Merxem. At Ryckevorsel the opponent gained some ground, north and northwest of Turnhout there were local skirmishes (O.B. West, Intrep). 88 Corps was under pressure between Reusel and Netersel, 89 Corps' effort to get organized east of 's-Hertogenbosch was disturbed by pressure from the East, which made it necessary to carry out some localized withdrawals (Sitwest).

28 Sep

106. Again the tactical situation did not change greatly during the day. From the Breskens bridgehead 64 Inf Div reported harassing fire. 67 Corps eliminated a penetration across the Antwerp-Turnhout Canal north of St. Job int Goor. But the newly inserted forces in the Ryckevorsel area (elts 711 Inf Div) were unable to gain ground and barely succeeded in holding the present lines. Enemy tanks advancing along the St. Leonard-Hoogstraten road were eliminated. In the evening there was an attack on the wooded area 1.5 km NE St. Leonard; at the time of reporting the engagement was still in progress. 88 Corps was under moderate pressure at several points. In the sector of 89 Corps, 712 Inf Div was unable to take Heesch. Enemy armoured reconnaissance elements passed through the thin security screen to within 8 km east of 's-Hertogenbosch. (Sitwest)

107. Chief WFSt notified O.B. West of signs showing that the enemy was no longer bent on enveloping the West Wall from the North, but intended to cut off and encircle the whole of Fifteenth Army and the Armed Forces Command Netherlands (Schramm, Der Westen). Quite apart from the possible merits or demerits of this observation, the unwonted absence of catastrophic developments had not led to the rise of any false hopes at the headquarters of Army Groups B and D. To the contrary, the lull was used to prepare some statistical material likely to be helpful in explaining past and future setbacks. O.B. West received and passed on to OKW a memorandum from A Gp B, which cited as the main reasons for the unfavourable developments in Belgium and Southern Holland:

the enemy's almost unhampered control of the air,
his superiority in artillery
(2680 barrels against 821),

his superiority in armour (2300 tanks against 239),

the insufficient number of replacements received (1 - 25 Sep: 50,000 cas against 6,500 repl).

O.B. west in turn recorded that he had lost 516,000 men since the invasion, to which one might add the 95,000 men still in the fortresses. (W.D. A Gp D)

108. Pointing to the increasingly difficult situation in the southern and eastern sectors of Fifteenth Army, Army Group B later in the day asked permission for the employment further inland of some forces to be drawn from 64 and 70 Inf Divs. O.B. West refused to countenance a weakening of the Breskens bridgehead but gave permission to remove and employ temporarily one reinforced Regiment of 70 Inf Div. (Ibid)

29 Sep

109. With activity in the other sectors confined to local engagements, pressure in the Ryckevorsel area increased significantly during the day:

In the afternoon the enemy continued his attacks with numerically superior forces against the southern front of the Army northeast of Antwerp. In addition to establishing two bridgeheads between St. Job in't Goor and St. Leonard (at Locht and NE Eindhoven*) the opponent succeeded in expanding his bridgehead at Ryckevorsel — where he made his main effort — by 2.5 kms towards the West and 3 kms towards the East. To close the resulting gaps in the front, one regimental group will be moved to the front north of Antwerp and this group in turn replaced by 30 Sep by a regimental group of 70 Inf Div. ... Counter-attacks west of Merxplas were slowly gaining ground; south and northeast of Merxplas, where enemy armour had obtained some penetrations, fighting was still under way... (Sitwest)

110. Army Group B's search for forces to bolster the front northeast of Antwerp had been timely. And the withdrawal of one regiment from the islands to help defend the approaches to South Beveland was probably the most effective use that could be made of these forces at the time. They were of course pinned down north of Antwerp and never returned to the islands. Contemporary documents of 67 Corps are not available, but a copy of the order for this transfer was despatched to 88 Corps for information:

Teletype

29 Sep 44, 2400 hrs

To: 88 Corps

During the night 29/30 Sep 67 Corps is to withdraw two battalions from the front north of Antwerp and with them is to clean up the situation between St. Job in't Goor and St. Leonard. One reinforced battalion is to be left behind in

*Sc. Not the town of Eindhoven, but a hamlet SW St. Leonard.

the sector north of Antwerp and is to hold this sector until the arrival of reinforced 1018 Gren Regt, which will be subordinate to 67 Corps. In the night of 30 Sep/1 Oct Reinf 1018 Gren Regt is to be committed full strength in the sector north of Antwerp and the remaining battalion is to be withdrawn. 67 Corps meets Regimental Group 1018 at the Woensdrecht railway station or at the Bath isthmus and conducts it in the direction of Antwerp as far as feasible before the night 29/30 Sep is over. The two companies of 331 Inf Div (on the march to Breda) are at the immediate disposal of the Corps.

Fifteenth Army, 1 Ops No. 10062/44,
29 Sep 44, Secret

signed: von Zangen, Gen Inf

(G.M.D.S. - 63289/5, W.D. 88 Corps, Vol "C"
of Apps, Apps 152-398, Appx C-245, 29 Sep 44)

30 Sep

111. An assault on the Breskens bridgehead could not be far off; 64 Inf Div reported movements of armour, intensified reconnaissance activity and mounting harassing fire, particularly in the Maldegem area. In the sector of 67 Corps, on the left wing of 346 Inf Div, German counter-attacks 2km SW and 1.5 km WNW St. Leonard met with stiff opposition. There had been a violent enemy attack on Het Klooster (2 km SW St. Leonard); German attempts to seal off at Het Klooster were under way (Sitwest). The presence of Allied forces west of the Antwerp-Turnhout Canal in the area of Brecht and Maria ter Heide was threatening the entire defence position north of Antwerp (von Zangen). At the Ryckevorsel bridgehead an enemy attack from Merxplas reached Baarle-Nassau, Grens and Koeckhoven. On the northwestern side of the penetration area the regiment just arrived from north of Antwerp had been able to establish a new defence line, but at the northern perimeter the fighting had engulfed the German artillery positions. The Allied gain of ground in the Merxplas area had been considerable and the penetration into the Army's southern front had reached a depth of 20 kms. Pressure on the eastern wing was growing too, everything seemed to point to a forthcoming concentric assault on Fifteenth Army. (W.D. A Gp D)

112. Indeed, there was now an abundance of signs revealing Allied determination to end a situation where emaciated remnants of formations were preventing the use of valuable Allied divisions in a possibly decisive thrust against the Reich. In the evening the Army issued orders to reconnoitre and prepare three lines of defence:

- (a) Beerendrecht [at the river Scheldt] - Putte -
Wuestwezel - Meer - Baarle Nassau - Hilvarenbeck -
Hooghaghorst [4 miles NE Turnhout];
- (b) Raevels - Poppel - Hilvarenbeck;
- (c) Bergen op Zoom - Roosendaal - Zevenbergen -
Oosterhout - Wilhelmina Canal.

(W.D. 88 Corps, 30 Sep, p. 594)

113. As every interrogator knows, German officers were ever anxious to shift from the embarrassing subject of defeat to long recitals of how much better they would have carried out the Allied operation in question. But frequently they failed to consider that the tactically most tempting solution might not fit into the plans of a higher commander who sees the entire picture and considers political as well as military factors. The German narratives dealing with the fighting east of Antwerp may well be a case in point, for rightly or wrongly, General von Zangen and his Corps Commanders were unanimous in contending that in September the Allies wasted valuable time in Northern Belgium. They state that Allied nibbling here and there made it possible for them by means of lateral movements to establish reasonably cohesive defence lines at a time when a bold westward thrust along the reaches of the lower Maas, or a northward thrust with concentrated forces from the area east of Antwerp would have quickly sealed the fate of Fifteenth Army. (von Zangen, Sponheimer, Reichert et al, passim)

FIRST CANADIAN ARMY CLEARS THE SCHELDT ESTUARY

(1 Oct - 8 Nov)

114. First Canadian Army's function was not to make strategic policy but to carry it out. This it had done in September as well and faithfully as ever. Now, at the beginning of October, it was girding itself for its greatest single contribution to Allied victory, the conquest of the Scheldt Estuary.

115. The German defenders did the best they could. Some formations fought well and stubbornly, others were already too weak to fight fiercely, still others had no chance of coping with the formidable means employed by the Allies to impose their will. For Germany at the time was well on the road to defeat, the air force in eclipse, the navy impotent, the army inadequate in numbers and declining in quality, the High Command unable to bolster Fifteenth Army for the battle of the Scheldt.

116. The forces which the Germans had extricated via Walcheren might be able to make a stand on shortened lines behind the Waal, but they could not hold unaided against determined attack a front that was at the end of September well over one hundred miles wide. A short review of the designations and peregrinations of the German formations within the orbit of Fifteenth Army in September shows the following picture:

17 GAF Fd Div Virtually destroyed south of Seine, remnants north of Ghent on 8 Sep, some remnants subsequently absorbed by 346 Inf Div.

Div H.Q. employed to direct ferrying operations at Terneuzen.

59 Inf Div (less elts surrounded at Dunkirk) in Ghent Canal line on 8 Sep, via Walcheren to Tilburg area in mid-September, with 88 Corps at end of month.

64 Inf Div in Ghent Canal line on 8 Sep, as other formations left via Walcheren gradually assumed responsibility for entire Breskens pocket.

70 Inf Div bulk of forces moved from Walcheren to Ghent area (5 - 7 Sep), in Ghent area on 8 Sep, returned to Walcheren (11-15 Sep), one regt to area N Antwerp (28 Sep).

85 Inf Div (also know as "Battle Group Chill")

composed of: Lt Gen Chill (para 102 fn), negligible remnants 84, 85 and 89 Inf Divs, elements of Hermann Goering Replacement Training Regiment and the crack Sixth Parachute Regiment under Lt Col von der Heide.

early Sep: defence of Albert Canal, subsequently in 's-Hertogenbosch - Schijndel - Veghel area (in October pitted against Canadian forces north of Antwerp).

226 Inf Div (less elts lost at Le Havre)
"Battle Group 226 Inf Div" reached Dunkirk on 6 Sep, subsequently encircled.

245 Inf Div "Battle Group 245 Inf Div"
Ghent Canal area (early Sep), via Walcheren to mainland (18-22 Sep), on right wing of 88 Corps at end of Sep.

331 Inf Div Remnants north of Ghent (8 Sep), subsequently via Walcheren to mainland and absorbed by 346 Inf Div.

Div H.Q. made responsible for defence of the islands Tholen, Schouwen and Overflakkee (troops: misc emergency units).

344 Inf Div Dissolved. Negligible remnants to 346 Inf Div

Div H.Q. directed ferrying operations at Breskens, later (under 89 Corps) reconnoitred Waal positions (Subsequently reformed from remnants of other divisions)

346 Inf Div "Battle Group 346 Inf Div"
north of Ghent on 8 Sep, via Walcheren to area N Antwerp (9 - 12 Sep), (absorbed remnants 17 GAF Fd Div, 331 Inf Div and 344 Inf Div), fighting NE Antwerp at end of month.

347 Inf Div from Dutch coast to Antwerp area early Sep, subs transf to Aachen area.

711 Inf Div on Ghent Canal on 8 Sep,
via Walcheren to mainland (10-12 Sep)
subs under 67 Corps variously NW, N, and
NE Antwerp.

712 Inf Div withdraws to Ghent Canal (8 Sep),
fails to break through towards Antwerp
(11 Sep),
driven to shorter lines in Breskens
pocket (19 Sep),
moved out across West Scheldt (20-22 Sep),
under 89 Corps on left wing of
Fifteenth Army (26 Sep).

719 Inf Div from Dutch coast to Albert Canal and
Antwerp area (early Sep),
Fighting in Turnhout-Ryckevorsel area
at end of September.

(supra, passim)

117. Radical changes had taken place in the com-
position and location of Fifteenth Army since the end of
August 1944 (para 41 above). From the coast to east of
Zaltbommel on the Waal, on the last day of September the
Army was disposed as follows:

64 Inf Div	Breskens Pocket
70 Inf Div	(less elts) Walcheren
67 Corps with	346 Inf Div elts 70 Inf Div (u/c 346 Inf Div) 711 Inf Div 719 Inf Div
	plus
	280 Aslt Gun Bde and 559 GHQ Hy A Tk Bn;
88 Corps with	245 Inf Div 59 Inf Div (less elts) 85 Inf Div ("B Gp Chill")
89 Corps with	Battle Group 712 Inf Div*.

(G.M.D.S. - OKH, Sitmaps West, Sitmap 30 Sep 44)
(Photostat 981HC(D 128))

118. To clear the Scheldt Estuary, First Canadian
Army must secure control of the Woensdrecht isthmus, defeat
64 Inf Div in the Breskens pocket, occupy South Beveland

*Until 13 Oct, when H.Q. 89 Corps was transferred to
A Gp G, and 712 Inf Div placed under 88 Corps.

(W.D. 88 Corps, op cit)

and take Walcheren. These four undertakings were of course integral parts of the entire operation, but for the sake of clarity the relevant information has been set forth below in four separate sections.

Operations North of Antwerp (1 Oct - 8 Nov)

119. Canadian operations north of Antwerp served the twofold purpose of wresting control of the Woensdrecht isthmus from 67 Corps and clearing the western flank of Second British Army by pushing on to Moerdijk on the Hollandsch Diep. As seen above (passim), delaying resistance to the advance of First Canadian Army's forces in the area NW, N and NE Antwerp was being conducted at the turn of the month by Headquarters 67 Corps with the following under command in the areas shown:

1018 Gren Regt (of 70 Inf Div)	-	NW and N Antwerp (u/c 346 Inf Div),
346 Inf Div	-	Merxem - Lochtenberg - Brecht,
711 Inf Div	-	Ryckevorsel,
719 Inf Div	-	Merxplas - Baarle-Nassau.

1 Oct

120. According to the Daily Situation Report of O.B. West (2 Oct for 1 Oct), the day's main activity on Fifteenth Army's front took place in the Ryckevorsel area, where sharply concentrated enemy forces advanced in north-easterly direction*. In the area NNE Merxplas there was heavy pressure on Zondereigen, where 30 enemy tanks had broken through on both sides of that place**. An enemy advance in the direction of Baarle-Nassau was intercepted south of the town, and locally available reserves were committed to a counter attack. ((G.M.D.S. - H22/61, O.B. West (A Gp D), Daily Sitreps 2 - 31 Oct 44 (for days 1 - 30 Oct), 2 for 1 Oct) (981CW(D54)) (Daily Situation Report cited "Sitwest"))

2 Oct

121. Pressure on the southern front of Fifteenth Army continued; the lack of reserves made it necessary to fall back to the shorter line: Baarle - Hertog - Poppel - bend of the Canal SE Tilburg. There was fighting with guerillas in Merxem and Schooten. Enemy armour was advancing along the road from St. Job in't Goor to Maria ter Heide. Individual enemy tanks advanced to 2.5 km north of Baarle-Nassau. There was intensive movement of armour on the road Merxplas - Weelde. (Sitwest, 2 Oct)

122. Colonel Warning notes that at this time the Corps' lack of manpower was being counter-balanced to some extent by the addition of fire power:

The next days [2-5 Oct] developed into main-battle days of the first degree on both wings. There was one crisis after another. At the Corps' urgent request the Army made available several assault gun brigades or battalions, in all three or four units with some 50 - 60 assault guns or assault tanks altogether.

*See page III above, Notes 2 and 4

**Presumably 30 tanks all in all.

During the next few weeks these units were hurled as "fire brigades" from one point of fierce fighting to another and they performed distinguished feats in defence and counterattack.

It was in large measure due to the commitment of these units that the enemy breakthroughs could again and again be prevented or sealed off and the enemy advance to the Maas could be delayed for weeks. I still remember individually the distinguished 255 Asslt Gun Bde and 656 GHQ Asslt Arty Bn. I have forgotten the tactical numbers of the others, but they were excellent too. (Warning, 67 Corps)

According to the OKH situation maps, however, the assault gun and anti-tank elements under 67 Corps late in September and in the early days of October were 280 Aslt Gun Bde and 559 GHQ Hy A Tk Bn. 255 Aslt Gun Bde joined 67 Corps later with Battle Group Chill (von Zangen, Fifteenth Army). With regard to 656 GHQ Aslt Gun Bn no contemporary evidence has come to hand.

3 Oct

123. At Merxem the opponent was pressing forward in northerly direction; from the penetration area at St. Job in't Goor he had advanced with tanks to Maria ter Heide and Braschaat. Northwest of Turnhout enemy forces attacking from the Zondereigen area in brigade strength and with 40-50 tanks had taken Baarle-Nassau and the area west of it; a breakthrough to Tilburg and Breda had become a distinct possibility. The forces on the right wing had been forced to fall back to the line Lillo - Maria ter Heide; further east an attempt was being made to seal off along a line Staakhevel - 3 km W Baarle-Nassau - 1.5 km E Baarle-Nassau - 2 km NE Baarle-Duc - Poppel. (Sitwest, 3 Oct)

124. At the High Command the danger of Fifteenth Army's landfront being torn apart apparently caused nervousness and apprehension. For while it may not be extravagant to assume that Field Marshal von Rundstedt had a fair picture of the strategic aspects of the situation, during the day General Jodl instructed him as follows:

3 Oct Chief WFSt directed O.B. West's attention to the information indicating that the enemy's supply and operations were being hampered by the defence of the port, and that the enemy therefore would try to gain possession of the Estuary. For this reason the line Antwerp - Tilburg - 's-Hertogenbosch was to be defended to the last, with the left wing clinging to the Waal. If the Army allowed itself to be dislodged from the Maas, the Breskens bridgehead and the West Scheldt would be lost. (Schramm, Der Westen)

125. Fifteenth Army knew only too well that some substantial formation was needed to stabilize the situation south of Tilburg and Breda. As it could not expect any help from the outside and had to rely entirely on its own resources, the Army had no choice but to incur an increased risk on the left wing. At 2315 hrs Fifteenth Army, therefore, directed 88 Corps by telephone to instruct Battle Group Chill (85 Inf Div) to disengage its forces and prepare for transfer. 85 Inf Div was notified immediately by telephone. (W.D. 88 Corps, 3 Oct)

4 Oct

126. Quite apart from increasing the risk in the Hertogenbosch area, the decision to pull out Battle Group Chill meant that it would be unable to participate in a projected attack on the Allied corridor between Eindhoven and Nijmegen. These disadvantages had to be accepted because it was more important at the moment to shore up the front southwest of Tilburg (G.M.D.S. - 75144/27, A Gp D (O.B. West), W.D. 1 - 31 Oct 44, 4 Oct) (981CW(D60)). On 4 or 5 Oct the headquarters of 67 Corps were transferred from Esschen to Breda (O.C.M.H., F.S.B., MS B-236, Sponheimer, 67 Corps, 7 Jun - 30 Oct 44) (981SOM(D180)). This would make it easier to control the forthcoming operations on the left wing of the Corps (*ibid*), and at the same time remove the headquarters from a locality that might soon be within the fighting area.

127. The main development of an otherwise uneventful day occurred at Lillo, where an enemy penetration was expanded to the area east of Berendrecht. About 3 km NW Baarle-Nassau on the road to Breda, a defence had been created in the form of a number of tactical points. 2 km west of Poppel some enemy tanks had broken through towards the North. 85 Inf Div was in the process of being relieved (*Sitwest*, 4 Oct); advance elements of 85 Inf Div were en route to the Goirle - Tilburg area (W.D. 88 Corps, 4 Oct).

5 Oct

128. In the meantime fighting had grown in intensity and First Canadian Army gained ground near Baarle-Nassau and in the Berendrecht - Putte area.

On the afternoon of 5 Oct Second* Canadian Army launched a strong attack with armoured support from east of Baarle-Duc towards the North. The enemy succeeded in pushing back the front of Fifteenth Army from one to two kilometres. The enemy thrust was intercepted by local reserves; it was not yet necessary to commit the elements of 85 Inf Div which had reached the area.

(*Sitwest*, 5 Oct)

In heavy fighting in the Baarle-Nassau area the enemy reached Ulicoten and broke into the southern part of Alphen and the area north of Poppel.

(G.M.D.S. - 75809, O.B. West (A Gp D),
Daily Intreps, 26 Sep - 31 Dec 44,
5 Oct) (981CW(D34))

2200 hrs 5 Oct, Teletype Fifteenth Army to 88 Corps:

85 Inf Div is being placed under 67 Corps with the mission to restore the situation on the eastern wing of the Corps by means of a thrust on Poppel, and of closing the gap NE Baarle-Nassau by deployment in depth.

(W.D. 88 Corps, 5 Oct)

*This was presumably an error in transmission. All other German sources show awareness of First Canadian Army being west of the Turnhout - Tilburg road, and Second British Army east of it.

NW Antwerp

In the afternoon Berendrecht was lost again. Fort de Starbroeck was occupied by the enemy. Counter-attacks from the area 2 km SE Ossendrecht towards Berendrecht broke down in enemy fire at the southern rim of the wooded area west of Putte.

(Sitwest, 5 Oct)

With the enemy attack on Berendrecht - Starbroeck the battle for possession of the isthmus of Woensdrecht had entered its decisive stage.

(Warning, 67 Corps)

6 Oct

129. The Canadian drive for control of the road to Beveland made further progress:

Thrusting from the Berendrecht - Starbroek area the enemy succeeded in making a breakthrough which brought him into the area southeast of Ossendrecht (Warning, 67 Corps).

At 1500 hrs an enemy attack with infantry and four tanks on the Regimental Command Post of 744 Gren Regt ([u/c] 346 Inf Div) east of Ossendrecht was repulsed. Blocking line 3 km SW Ossendrecht - Ossendrecht - road fork Ossendrecht-road to Butte held by forces organized for all-round defence at focal points (stuetzpunktartig besetzt) ...

SW Tilburg

85 Inf Div has launched a concentric attack on Maerle [N Poppel]. NW Alphen small enemy forces have infiltrated [our lines].

(Sitwest, 6 Oct)

7 Oct

130. Again the area south of Woensdrecht was the scene of the most significant developments on the front of Fifteenth Army:

The situation south of Woensdrecht has taken a serious turn. It has become necessary to pull out forces from the assault group of 85 Inf Div to move them to the right wing of the Army for the purpose of restoring the situation by counter-attack, as otherwise the overland connection with the Island of Walcheren is in danger.

(Sitwest, 7 Oct)

Counter-attack on Ossendrecht bogged down in concentrated enemy fire at the southwestern end of Hoogerheide. Towards evening several enemy tanks broke into Hoogerheide. (Ibid)

North of Overbroek and at Brecht Allied pressure was growing. In the concentric attack on Maerle, 719 Inf Div had reached the area 1.5 km NW Maerle, 85 Inf Div the area 1 km N Maerle. (Ibid)

8 Oct

131. During the night 7/8 Oct the opponent had entered Hoogerheide. In violent fighting the south half of the village was lost (Warning, 67 Corps). Furious attacks in the area 1.5 km NW Calmpthout were repulsed. At 1800 hrs, however, the enemy forced an entry with armoured reconnaissance vehicles and armoured personnel carriers. The break-in was sealed off. Front line: 4 km NW Santvliet - centre of Hoogerheide - 3 km SE Hoogerheide - 2 km NW Vossenbergh (here penetration to 1.5 km NW Calmpthout) - 1 km W Franscheheidehof [SW Fransche Heide] - 1 km N Maria ter Heide - northern outskirts Brecht - N Hetklooster - Gammel - Achtel - Ulicoten - thence unchanged (attack on Gammel repulsed; recce activity near Alphen; see-saw fighting in Maerle - Poppel area). (Sitwest, 8 Oct)

9 Oct

132. Fighting for the road to Walcheren continued. German attempts to regain Hoogerheide were making very slow progress and finally came to a halt in the centre of the locality. - Approximately 2.5 km west of Woensdrecht the opponent had reached the railroad line; the situation there was tense (Sitwest, 9 Oct). O.B. West's Intelligence Report for the day did not mention the German counter-attack on Hoogerheide but reported an enemy advance to the area 500 metres north of Hoogerheide. Advancing from the Calmpthout area the opponent reached the crossroads at Achterbroek. (O.B. West Intrep, 9 Oct)

133. Left neighbour of 85 Inf Div south of Tilburg was 245 Inf Div. Like most other formations it was badly in need of reinforcements. On the morning of 9 Oct reinforcements arrived, but the draft consisted of 246 recruits between the ages of 17 and 18. Untrained. Combat value zero. The immediate result was a reduction of the formation's fighting strength by the number of officers and men required to handle and train the draft. (W.D. 88 Corps, 9 Oct)

134. During the day O.B. West sent Jodl an "Estimate of the Situation"*. It bore the blunt hint: "For submission to the Fuehrer". According to Rundstedt the point of greatest danger to the entire western position was at Aachen. On Fifteenth Army's front the point of greatest dangers was north of Antwerp, where the enemy was striving to gain control of the land connection with Walcheren. The strength of the enemy in the Nijmegen - Arnhem area precluded any withdrawals. To gain forces for the right wing of Fifteenth Army it would be necessary, therefore, to shorten the lines between Tilburg and 's-Hertogenbosch.

(A Gp B, Weekly Reports and Misc Docs, op cit.
O.B. West Ops No. 850/44, 1130 hrs 9 Oct 44)

10 Oct

135. On this day bitter fighting in the Breskens sector overshadowed operations north of Antwerp. In the Woensdrecht - Hoogerheide area 346 Inf Div repulsed an enemy attack. Northeast of Antwerp the anti-tank ditch west of Maria ter Heide was traversed by enemy forces composed in each case of one platoon with tank support. The penetration areas were sealed off

*For details see Part IV of this series of Reports.

(Sitwest, 10 Oct)*. The crossing of the anti-tank ditches brought about the collapse of the front between Cappellen and Maria ter Heide. A new main line of resistance was installed just north of Calmpthout (Warning, 67 Corps). On 10 or 11 Oct (not 17 Oct), Maj Gen Steinmueller (whose 331 Inf Div had opposed the Canadians south of Rouen) took over command of 346 Inf Div from Lt Gen Diestel (Ibid).

11 Oct

136. During the day Canadian forces succeeded in cutting through from the West Scheldt to the East Scheldt at the narrowest part of the isthmus, north of Bath. In the evening, however, a counter-attack from east to west by elements 346 Inf Div restored contact with 70 Inf Div in the small area north of the railroad line. 70 Inf Div reported that its own counter-attack south of the railroad line in easterly direction towards Woensdrecht was slowly gaining ground. North of the railroad line contact had been re-established with the attacking elements of 346 Inf Div (Sitwest, 11 Oct). The counter-attack was to be continued on the next day; Battle Group Chill was being moved from the general area south of Tilburg to Bergen op Zoom (Ibid).

137. In the early evening of 10 Oct Fifteenth Army had warned 88 Corps in several telephone conversations of the growing probability that 85 Inf Div would have to be moved to the right wing of 67 Corps. An Army Order to that effect was subsequently received by 88 Corps at 2152 hrs (W.D. 88 Corps, 10 Oct). Corps Order No. 34, issued at 0930 hrs 11 Oct, contained the following paragraph:

Battle Group Chill is to be relieved by 245 Inf Div by 1800 hrs 11 Oct. In the event of bad weather (no enemy air activity) the last elements must be relieved by 2000 hrs, in the event of good weather by 2200 hrs. The Battle Group thereupon reaches Bergen op Zoom by means of motor transport.

(W.D. 88 Corps, Vol "C" of Apps, op cit, Appx C274, 11 Oct 44)

To this group 59 Inf Div was to contribute one battalion headquarters and two reinforced grenadier companies (ibid, Appx 275), 88 Corps the elements of 559 GHQ Hy A Tk Bn still with the Corps (ibid, Appx 276).

138. Thus once again Battle Group Chill was being rushed to the focal point of fighting as a "fire brigade". But even this well led group with its high content of young personnel of uncorroded morale would fail to stem the Canadian advance for long. Warning writes:

On 11 Oct Lt Gen Chill was ordered to move his Battle Group into position in the woods south of Esschen on 12 Oct and, following artillery preparation, move forward in westerly direction and attack in order to reach the mouth of the Scheldt northwest of Ossendrecht by thrusting south of Huijbergen and Hoogerheide, thereby cutting off the enemy in

*The antitank ditch was traversed due to the poor performance of the Regimental Group from 70 Inf Div, which was committed in that sector (von Zangen, Fifteenth Army).

Hoogerheide from his rear communications and re-establishing sure access to Walcheren Island. - 255 Assault Gun Brigade, which had taken part in the attack on Hoogerheide under Lt Col von der Heide and had suffered losses there, was to take part in this attack but could not be relieved in time by elements 346 Inf Div, and for this reason remained in its positions in and on both sides of Hoogerheide.... (Warning, 67 Corps)

139. North of Maria ter Heide the German forces had been able to repel an attack, but SSW Calmpthout and WNW Maria ter Heide they had been forced to yield further ground (Sitwest. 11 Oct).

12 Oct

140. 85 Inf Div had been withdrawn from a night-engagement, moved during the night and re-committed immediately without rest. According to General Sponheimer this was one of the main reasons for its failure to obtain a full success on 12 Oct (Sponheimer, 67 Corps, op cit). Furthermore good weather had made it possible for the opponent to obtain full air support. This meant that German attacks were feasible only late in the evening or early in the morning (Sitwest, 12 Oct).

In the attack of Battle Group Chill the bulk of the forces reached the line 1 km SSW Eiland-- 1.5 km SE Eiland - 2.5 km ESE Eiland. The spearheads were 3 km SE Hoogerheide on the Hoogerheide-Putte road. (Ibid)

At 1445 hrs an enemy attack in the Woensdrecht - Hoogerheide area was repulsed (ibid).

At 1600 hrs an armour-supported enemy thrust from Maria ter Heide was brought to a halt 2 km NW of that locality (ibid).

141. In his comments on the Chill attack Warning deploras the disastrous effects of having to pull units piecemeal from one tight spot to re-commit them immediately at another one - also piecemeal. To this one might say that the Allies had every intention of placing Fifteenth Army in an awkward position. His closing observation is of greater interest:

If a mobile defence and a foresighted shortening of the front had permitted reserves to be pulled out at the right time and brought as a unit to the isthmus, the attack of such a unit would probably have broken though and the isthmus would have been held considerably longer. (Warning, 67 Corps).

142. With the surprise element now absent in the operations of Group Chill the prognosis was unfavourable; South Beveland would soon be isolated; any fighting south of the Maas a mere delaying action*. With this, and probably even more

*A teletype message on 12 Oct 44 from A Gp B to Gruppenfuehrer and SS Lt Gen Kammer [or Kammler] (connected with German 'V' weapons), indicates that at this time the Germans were first considering the possibility of launching V-1 and V-2 flying bombs against Antwerp. This to destroy the harbour

so with prospective developments further inland in mind, Rundstedt turned his thoughts to future command arrangements:

The expanding of the coastal and land fronts of A Gp B, the multifarious character of the tasks in this area and the anticipated large-scale attacks of the enemy, which could lead to the formation of several fronts in this zone, are showing that it is impossible to leave this whole area in the long run under the command of one single Army Group Headquarters. (The ultimate employment of five Army commands and fifteen Corps commands is envisaged.) O.B. West therefore proposes the early dispatch of a third Army Group Headquarters, to be charged with the defence of the Dutch area, with Fifteenth Army, Armed Forces Commander Netherlands and First Parachute Army under command, thus freeing Headquarters A Gp B for the focal area.

(W.D. A Gp D, 12 Oct)

13 Oct

143. Guarded and laconic references to the fighting at the entrance to the isthmus were indicative of Battle Group Chill's lack of success.

On 13 Oct too, our attacks at the Woensdrecht isthmus were greatly hampered by heavy air activity.

(Sitwest, 13 Oct)

In difficult fighting in woods the attack of 85 Inf Div against the tenaciously fighting opponent gained only little ground (ibid).

On the extreme left wing of Fifteenth Army, Headquarters 89 Corps departed for duty with A Gp G, and 88 Corps' sector was widened to include the area previously under 89 Corps (ibid) (s.a. para 117fn). A graphic picture of O.B. West's forces on 13 Oct 44 appears as Appendix "B" to the present Report. This Appendix consists of the O.B. West portion of the OKH Schematic Order of Battle of the German Armies, issue of 13 Oct 44 (G.M.D.S. - OKH, Periodic Schematic Orders of Battle of the German Army) (Photostat of complete document: 981.045(D1)).*

(Footnote continued from page 47)

installations so effectively that they would be useless to the Allies even after the approaches to the port had been cleared.

(A Gp B, Operationsbefehle (Ops Orders), Teletype A Gp B to Kammer, 2230 hrs 12 Oct 44. Cited in: O.C.M.H., Research Section, Lucien Reichler, German Defence of the Gateway to Antwerp, p. 23) (981.013(D102))

Note: Flying attacks began on 13 Oct and went on for many months thereafter. They were a nuisance to the Allied forces in Antwerp, but were never a serious threat to the port.

*For April May and June 1944 issues see Appx "G" to H.S. Report No. 40, op cit; for July and August 1944 issues see Appx "K" to H.S. Report No. 50, op cit.

14 Oct

144. Battle Group Chill was losing the initiative. In the Ossendrecht area German forces were attacking from southeast of Hoogerheide towards Ossendrecht; Canadian forces were attacking northeast of Ossendrecht (O.B. West, Intrep, 14 Oct).

Fighting for the Woensdrecht isthmus is continuing with mounting bitterness. The opponent has launched a counter-attack on 85 Inf Div ... Enemy thrusts - in some cases with tank support - from the South and Southwest towards Meerhuis (3.5 km E Hoogerheide) have been repelled after a temporary penetration. A small local penetration is being eliminated.

(Sitwest, 14 Oct)

Enemy reconnaissance thrusts from Maria ter Heide towards Achterbroek have been repelled forward of the main line of resistance (ibid).

Intensified enemy harassing fire on the entire battle positions of 711 and 719 Inf Divs (ibid).

With the concurrence of OKW, O.B. West transferred his command post to Ziegenberg (8 km W Bad Nauheim) (ibid). (Bad Nauheim is situated appx halfway between Frankfurt a/M and Giessen). (For previous location see para 60 above).

15 Oct

145. Battle Group Chill was on the defensive now:

Holding on to a narrow corridor north of the railway line to South Beveland the right wing of Fifteenth Army resisted heavy enemy attacks. (Sitwest, 15 Oct)

Artillery harassing fire and sudden fire concentrations on the sector of 85 Inf Div. Heavy fighter-bomber attacks on battery posns and command posts (ibid).

[Further inland:]

In the Overbrook - Brecht area three enemy armoured thrusts were repelled (ibid).

The arrival of the elements of 245 Inf Div which are to be relieved by the incoming 256th Volksgrenadier Division should gradually impart some firmness to this front (ibid)*.

*"Volksgrenadier Divisions" (VGD's) appeared first in the autumn of 1944. They were reorganized infantry divisions of reduced establishment and increased ratio of automatic weapons. Many were good divisions, not to be confused with the dismal last ditch levies called "Volkssturm". The latter were all individual battalions and were never formed into brigades or divisions (Narrator). - After the attempt on his life, Hitler wanted to infuse new spirit into the Army. Since he hated the General Staff Corps, but could not do without it, he named Himmler to command the Replacement Army, and through him carried out the formation of new SS formations and the creation of the Volksgrenadier divisions, which operated directly under Himmler's jurisdiction. (von Tippelskirch, Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges (History of the Second World War), Athenäum Verlag, Bonn, 1951, p. 499)

146. Plagued by lack of rolling stock and harassed by frequent air attacks, 256 VGD (main elements: 456, 476 and 481 Gren Regts and 256 Arty Regt) at the time was turning up little by little in the general area south of Tilburg (W.D. 88 Corps, passim). The divisional commander, Colonel (later Maj Gen) Gerhard FRANZ, made his initial call at the headquarters of 88 Corps at 2325 hrs 15 Oct (ibid, 15 Oct).

16 Oct

147. First Canadian Army had won the battle for the isthmus:

In the area of the Scheldt Estuary a permanent recapture of the land connection with Walcheren can no longer be expected. O.B. West, therefore, consents to the flooding of the area.

(W.D. O.B. West, 16 Oct)

67 Corps

85 Inf Div: At 1800 hrs the enemy who had penetrated Woensdrecht was dislodged in a counter-attack. The penetration has been reduced to 1 km in width and 500 m in depth. Continuing heavy artillery fire and fighter-bomber activity in the whole divisional sector.

346 Inf Div: Armoured reconnaissance thrusts NW and NE Maria ter Heide and N Brecht were repulsed.

719 Inf Div: Strikingly active enemy air reconnaissance.

(Sitwest, 16 Oct)

17 - 19 Oct

148. The bitter fighting had subsided. It was followed by three days of minor engagements, probing and patrolling. - On 17 Oct Battle Group Chill repulsed a drive in the direction of the Woensdrecht church (Sitwest, 17 Oct). On the same day enemy thrusts from west of Hoogerheide, north of Maria ter Heide and north of Brecht were brought to a halt (O.B. West, Intrep 17 Oct). On 18 Oct an enemy penetration 500 metres north of Woensdrecht was eliminated in a counter-attack. An armoured thrust SW Huijbergen was repulsed (O.B. West, Intrep 18 Oct). On 19 Oct some armoured reconnaissance raids were beaten off, eight enemy tanks put out of commission and one 5 cm anti-tank gun destroyed (Sitwest, 19 Oct).

149. Fifteenth Army had no intentions of giving up the Bergen op Zoom - Roosendaal sector without a stiff fight. - According to an Army Order received by 88 Corps late on 17 Oct, the relief of 245 Inf Div by 256 VGD was to begin during the night 18/19 Oct. Every outgoing unit of 245 Inf Div was to reach the Roosendaal area in two successive night marches (W.D. 88 Corps, 17 Oct). The regimental group first to get under way was to move to the area south of Bergen op Zoom, the second one to Wouwsche Plantage (appx 5 miles ESE Bergen op Zoom) (W.D. 88 Corps, Vol B of Apps, Appx B 407, 18 Oct 44)* On 4 Oct O.B. West had decided to make 667 Aslt Gun Bde available to A Gp B (W.D. O.B. West, 4 Oct). On 15 Oct the Brigade was complete in the Rijen area (between Breda and Tilburg). It was

*This was the plan. In the event, however, 245 Inf Div was employed in the abortive attempt to stabilize the situation in the Wuestwezel area (paras 152 - 157 below).

composed of three batteries, each battery consisting of four 10.5 cm gun hows and six 7.5 cm aslt guns. (W.D. 88 Corps, Vol B of Apps, Appx B 409, 18 Oct 44)

20 Oct

150. Before the Germans were able to draw a long breath the lull in fighting came to an end and First Canadian Army was surging forward in its many-pronged drive to the Hollandschdiep:

The day was characterized by increased enemy activity on the whole front of the Army Group. The strong pressure on the right wing of Fifteenth Army's land front, and the air attacks on the bridges and ferries across the Waal can be taken as preparation for an attack on Fifteenth Army to free the rear for a main thrust towards the East (Sitwest, 20 Oct).

In the area of Fifteenth Army the enemy has resumed his attacks on our front south of Roosendaal, simultaneously bombarding the bridgehead in the rear area (W.D. O.B. West, 20 Oct)

On the southern front of Fifteenth Army the enemy has expanded the area of attack further eastwards. South and southwest of Roosendaal he has effectuated several penetrations. (Ibid)

151. 67 Corps reported:

Enemy recce thrusts on the entire front of 85 Inf Div were repulsed. A [German] assault troop captured the commanding height 1 km south of Eiland in the outpost area. [Eiland appx 1 km out of Huijbergen on the road to Hoogerheide].

West of Dorp [appx 1.5 km N Calmpthout] at 1700 hrs enemy armour had advanced to the north tip of the lake 3 km NW Dorps [Stappensven Lake] and to the railroad line [at a point] 5.5 km NNW Dorp. South of Calmpthout enemy infantry with tanks reached the western fringe of the wooded area 3.5 km E Calmpthout at 1730 hrs.

At 1730 hrs single enemy tanks on road Maria ter Heide - Breda, 4 km NE Wuestwezel.

At 1900 hrs enemy penetrated Wuestwezel.

The break-in Overbrook - Het Kloster was extended towards the North to within 2 km NE Wuestwezel. Fighting still in progress.

At 1600 hrs 15 tanks were in the southern part of Loenhout.

Very heavy artillery and mortar fire on the whole Corps sector.

Brisk fighter-bomber activity in the sectors of 85 and 346 Inf Divs.

(Sitwest, 20 Oct)

21 Oct

152. The German forces east of the isthmus were under strong pressure:

The enemy attack ... (two to three divisions with about 200 tanks) ... resulted in a deep penetration at the front of 346 Inf Div. To seal off and counter-attack all available reserves have been committed. Arrangements have been made to speed up the moving-in of additional infantry reserves by means of motor transport.

(Sitwest, 21 Oct)

67 Corps

Reconnaissance thrusts in the Woensdrecht - Nederheide area [Nederheide: 500 m NW Hoogerheide] were repulsed.

At 1600 hrs tank-supported enemy attacks from the East on Woensdrecht were repelled.

Enemy thrusts from the area east of Huijbergen were brought to a halt 4 km south of Esschen.

In the area south of Schriek [2.5 km SE Esschen] 2 Bn 6 Para Regt was pushed back by strong enemy forces.

The attack of Regimental Group 245 Inf Div reached the area 1.5 km NE Wuestwezel and there bogged down in heavy enemy defence fire.

An armoured thrust from Loenhout [appx 2.5 km E Wuestwezel] was repelled at its eastern exit.

The penetration is being sealed off at the moment by weak elements 346 Inf Div and 2 Bn 6 Para Regt on the line: northwestern corner of the wooded area 3 km east of Huijbergen - 1 km SE Schriek - 1.5 km south of Achtmaal (Achtmaal: 7.5 km N Wuestwezel).

(Ibid)

153. 245 Inf Div had been relieved too late to reach the area south of Bergen op Zoom - Roosendaal before the resumption of the Canadian drive on 20 Oct. One group was now near Wuestwezel (para 152 above), the balance of the Division was en route.

In the Antwerp region the enemy has widened his penetration. Our own counter-measures have not taken effect as yet. The elements of 245 Inf Div to be moved-in are still under way (W.D. O.B. West, 21 Oct)

256 VGD assumes command in the old sector of 245 Inf Div at 0000 hrs 22 Oct. Cmdr 245 Inf Div and staff are to report at the headquarters of 67 Corps at Ginneken (south of Breda) at 0000 hrs 22 Oct. (W.D. 88 Corps, Vol C of Apps, op cit, Appx C 290, Corps Order No. 41, 2240 hrs 21 Oct 44)

22 Oct

154. Heavy fighting had now also flared up on the left wing of Fifteenth Army in the area of 's-Hertogenbosch.

The situation on 22 Oct was characterized by the continuation of the heavy attacks on the southern front of Fifteenth Army and the launching of an attack from the East towards 's-Hertogenbosch ... thus clearly revealing the Allied intention to cut-off the German forces south of the Maas and Waal by taking possession of the most important bridges.

By committing all available reserves it was possible to intercept the enemy advancing from the South in a thin blocking line and to prevent a breakthrough east of 's-Hertogenbosch. In order to form further reserves, orders have been issued for a strengthening of the front in the southern penetration area and a localized withdrawal to prepared positions on the front of 88 Corps. A continuation of the heavy attacks on 23 Oct is to be expected. (Sitwest, 22 Oct)

155. 67 Corps reported:

At Woensdrecht several tank-supported attacks were repulsed. Strong enemy pressure from the Southeast on Spillebeek (Spillebeek: some 3 km NE Huijbergen on road from Hoogerheide to Esschen). Enemy penetrated the locality. Enemy infantry advanced to 1 km SW Esschen. At 1600 hrs enemy armour took Schriek. The Regimental Group 245 Inf Div captured Kruisweg but was forced back to Braaken in a concentric attack. (Kruisweg: 1 km N Wuestwezel; Braaken: appx 2 km NE Wuestwezel). (Ibid)

156. Concerning 245 Inf Div's attack in the direction of Wuestwezel, Warning writes:

The attack, echeloned in depth, of 245 Inf Div to which assault gun units had been subordinated, at first gained ground until west of Wuestwezel; but then it broke down in the concentrated fire of the enemy artillery and against the enemy flame-throwing tanks, which appeared for the first time in the fighting described here. The Division did not succeed in regaining the town itself in spite of gallant attacks. The attacks were discontinued on the orders of the Corps Commander. Actually the objective was not attained - the gaps were not closed. (Warning, 67 Corps).*

157. Some additional information on the action at Wuestwezel has been supplied by General Sponheimer**:

After a short period of assembly in the area southwest of Zundert, and following an artillery

*In the eyes of the Corps Commander, however, the gap was closed when 245 Inf Div, after failing to recapture Wuestwezel, assumed a defensive posture halfway between Zundert and Wuestwezel (Sponheimer, 67 Corps).

**Note: Sponheimer's and Warning's accounts were prepared from memory and are not reliable as to dates.

concentration by the bulk of the Corps' artillery and the artillery of 346, 711 and, to some extent, 719 Inf Div, accompanied by two very weak assault gun brigades, the counter-attack of 245 Inf Div was carried southwards west of the Zundert - Wuestwezel road....

Owing to the steadily mounting casualties the Corps suggested that it be allowed to desist from an attack on Wuestwezel proper. Army concurred....

(Sponheimer, 67 Corps)

23 Oct

158. Fifteenth Army was still offering stiff resistance at all pressure points, but an end would have to be made to this process of attrition if any worthwhile forces were to reach the area north of the Maas.

On the southern front it was possible during the day to repulse all attacks in bitter fighting and to destroy the bulk of the tanks which had broken through. In the evening a fairly strong enemy attack pierced the land connection with South Beveland north of Hoogerheide, and another one, supported by 20 tanks, the thin line of outposts north of Nispen [Nispen: some 2 kms NNE Esschen on the road to Roosendaal]. Fighting there is still in full swing.

With the disengagement of the last battalion of 245 Inf Div in the old sector during the night 22/23 Oct, Fifteenth Army has exhausted its possibilities of moving reserves from its own command area to the focal points.

East of 's-Hertogenbosch the bravely fighting infantry of 712 Inf Div was able to repel the infantry attacks in the main line of resistance at the cost of heavy casualties*. In the area of Rosmalen [appx 5 km NE 's-Hertogenbosch] and south of it the fighting against tanks which have broken through is still in progress. To bolster this thin front A Gp B has despatched the assault gun company, one rifle company and one platoon of engineers of 363 [VGD] Inf Div as the last available reserve of A Gp D

(Sitwest, 23 Oct)

67 Corps

Enemy attack (two to three battalions and about thirty tanks) NW Hoogerheide. Enemy has advanced to dyke 3 km NNW Woensdrecht, thereby interrupting the land connection [with South Beveland]. Bitter fighting in Woensdrecht and on height 19.8 (north of Woensdrecht). Local penetration at Nederheide.

* "712 Inf Div has only 600 men infantry left, and these are not from the Division, but from a parachute battalion" (W.D. 88 Corps, 2300 hrs, 23 Oct). - "712 Inf Div for all practical purposes to be counted as 'destroyed'" (Ibid, 0630 hrs, 24 Oct).

Own counter-attack 2.5 km west of Esschen collided with enemy armoured attack with 20 tanks. Seven [of these] were put out of commission. Armoured attack from the West on the northern outskirts of Nispen was brought to a halt. Several armoured thrusts astride the Esschen - Nispen road were repulsed. (Ibid)

159. Nevertheless the combat value of 85 and 245 Inf Divs had been greatly reduced in the meantime, and the Army had no further formations capable of intervening with any prospect of success.

Now a withdrawal of the whole front had to be carried out, come what might, regardless of OKW orders, if the whole Corps was not to be sacrificed and the way to the Maas open to the enemy. As a result of the Corps' strong insistence, permission was given for the whole front to be taken back to the general line: Halsteren - south of Roosendaal - south of Breda - north of Alphen. This withdrawal movement was carried out during the nights 22/23 and 23/24 Oct.

(Warning, 67 Corps)

24 Oct

160. The Allied drive against Fifteenth Army continued with undiminished vigour.

At the Woensdrecht isthmus [the elements of] 70 Inf Div were forced back to a dyke position 3 km further west.*

North of Calmpthout it was possible to repel the enemy attacks except for some small penetrations.

On the eastern front [of Fifteenth Army] 12 Brit Corps, attacking with 51 Inf Div, 53 Inf Div and 7 Armd Div, broke through the front of 59 Inf Div and penetrated the northeastern part of 's-Hertogenbosch. The enemy advance was brought to a halt approximately 4 km behind the previous main line of resistance....

(Sitwest, 24 Oct)

67 Corps

85 Inf Div: Combat outposts have been forced back to a line 2 km north of Woensdrecht - north of Zandvoort [Zandvoort: 2 km NNW Hoogerheide] - multiple road junction at Vijfsprong [2 km NE Hoogerheide].

In the area Wouwsche Plantage - Nispen - south of Kruisstraat [2 km east of Esschen] fluctuating fighting with enemy armour.

Following a successful counter-attack, [German] defending groups are standing fast on both sides of Wouwsche Plantage. Violent fighting in progress.

*Subsequent developments in South Beveland have been set forth below in the section: "The Capture of South Beveland" (paras 242-255).

[German] counter-attack on infantry forces that had made a break-in west of Nispen was shattered by an enemy attack with ten tanks....

An enemy attack along the railroad line leading northwards west of Esschen was repulsed. An attack by enemy armour from Esschen towards the Northwest was brought to a halt by artillery concentrations.

(Ibid)

161. The situation at 's-Hertogenbosch reflected the extreme weakness of Fifteenth Army's left wing, where the absence of any substantial forces was inviting the opponent to open a gap and stream northwards, cut off Fifteenth Army and take the ports of Rotterdam and Amsterdam. Remedial action was imperative.

162. West of Arnheim, on the extreme right of adjoining First Parachute Army, under 22 SS Pz Corps, was 363 VGD (Sitmaps West, op cit, Sitmap 23 Oct) (Photostat 981HC(D132)) and Sitmap 28 Oct (Photostat 981HC(D133)). Already O.B. West had robbed Peter to pay Paul by moving small elements of 363 VGD across the Army boundary to Fifteenth Army (para 158 above). East of Arnheim, under 2 SS Pz Corps, was 10 SS Pz Div (Sitmaps West, 23 and 28 Oct). O.B. West and A Gp B now agreed to move one regimental group of 10 SS Pz Div to the left wing of Fifteenth Army. It would reach its destination on 26 Oct (Sitwest, 24 Oct). 2 SS Pz Corps was in a position to accept this risk as a result of the opponent's withdrawal of some valuable formations from the Arnhem - Nijmegen sector for his drive on Fifteenth Army (W.D. O.B. West, 24 Oct).

163. The infusion of one regimental group was of course a mere palliative. Reporting that Fifteenth Army was burning out, Army Group B asked for the allocation of the next VGD to become available. O.B. West replied that this formation (272 VGD) would not be ready before the early part of November, and asked the Army Group whether 9 Pz Div, then in tactical reserve west of Wesel, could be transferred to Fifteenth Army. Army Group B countered with the suggestion of a spoiling attack to be carried out under H.Q. 47 Pz Corps from the area of 86 Corps*. O.B. West agreed in principle (W.D. O.B. West, 24 Oct). - However tempting it might have looked on the situation map to lop off the Arnhem bulge by slicing through from the Venlo area towards Hertogenbosch, it had been amply demonstrated in the recent past that such an undertaking was beyond the capabilities of the German forces within reach. But the mere threat of doing so would attract some Allied forces and thus lessen pressure on the Fifteenth Army.

25 Oct

164. In the area north of Calmpthout fighting remained confined to local undertakings. The Germans concluded from this that the opponent was regrouping for a renewed thrust on Roosendaal. On the left wing of Fifteenth Army, British forces captured the southeastern part of 's-Hertogenbosch. This left only the western part of the city in German hands. Due to the continuing heavy drain on manpower Fifteenth Army's situation was becoming more and more critical: "The question

*Cmdr 47 Pz Corps: Gen Pz Tps Freiherr Heinrich von Lüttwitz.

of reinforcements must be re-examined" (Sitwest, 25 Oct). In the area north of Antwerp 67 Corps lost some ground:

Wouwsche Plantage was lost to an enemy attack with 20 tanks (including flame-throwing tanks) from the South and Southwest.

2 km SW Wouwsche Plantage enemy forces accompanied by tanks have made a break-in.

An enemy penetration at Zandven (5 km SW Wouwsche Plantage) was repelled....

(Ibid)

165. In the meantime O.B. West had made up his mind to go through with the contemplated spoiling attack. To the entry recording his decision the following was added:

Whereas A Gp B intended to commit only 9 Pz Div, O.B. West gives the order to move the bulk of 15 Pz Gren Div to the west bank of the Maas, so that it can be brought up quickly in the event of a success by 9 Pz Div. This widening of the Venlo bridgehead has the added merit of disturbing the enemy assembly of troops in the Nijmegen - Sittard sector. O.B. West reports to OKW accordingly.

(W.D. O.B. West, 25 Oct)

26 Oct

166. South of Roosendaal the Germans managed on the whole to hold their ground, but east of Tilburg and southwest of 's-Hertogenbosch their lines were pierced anew. Only a falling back to shorter lines could make it possible to form new reserves. Accordingly a withdrawal was made to the general line Roosendaal - Breda - Dongen - canal southwest of 's-Hertogenbosch. Rear elements in quiet sectors were to remain in their present lines (Sitwest, 26 Oct). By committing seven infantry divisions, three or four panzer divisions and six panzer brigades against Fifteenth Army, the Allies had shown that their main objective at the moment was to drive Fifteenth Army behind the Waal. O.B. West formally recorded his inability to provide additional support for Fifteenth Army. (W.D. O.B. West, 26 Oct)

167. The forces of First Parachute Army which had been moved across the Army boundary to Fifteenth Army were now in process of being organized as a battle group (ibid). The projected relief attack had not been launched as yet; the command posts of the formations concerned were in the following locations:

Tac H.Q. 47 Pz Corps: Baarlo (7 km SW Venlo),
H.Q. 9 Pz Div: Eind (5 km W Baarlo),
H.Q. 15 Pz Gren Div: Schaepshuysen (10 km W Moers).

(Sitwest, 26 Oct)

168. Early in October Field Marshal von Rundstedt had pointed out that an additional Army Group Headquarters was needed in the West (para 142 above). With large scale operations

looming in the Aachen region, and Fifteenth Army beset by many problems, it was now even more important to let Army Group B focus its attention on the centre of gravity. Rundstedt therefore now renewed his request for an additional Army Group Headquarters or at least a provisional command staff for the group of forces composed of Fifteenth Army, Armed Forces Commander Netherlands and First Parachute Army. (W.D. O.B. West, 26 Oct)

27 Oct

169. At 0215 hrs 27 Oct Jodl told Westphal on the telephone that the Fuehrer wanted the withdrawal movements of Fifteenth Army to be carried out as slowly as possible. O.B. West and Army Group B took pains to record that the orders issued had been formulated in that sense (W.D. O.B. West, 27 Oct). Irrespective of all this, however, the German forces from Bergen op Zoom to 's-Hertogenbosch were being speeded on their way by strong Allied pressure.

Heavy fighting continued on 27 Oct. Driving northwards towards Bergen op Zoom and Roosendaal with strong infantry and armoured forces, the enemy gained further ground but was intercepted by a counter-attack of our own assault guns [assault gun units]. On both sides of Alphen and Tilburg the enemy broke again through our lines. Tilburg was lost. Hard fighting [under way] to intercept the enemy before he reaches the line Breda - Dongen. (Sitwest, 27 Oct)

170. 67 Corps reported:

In the evening the enemy penetrated Bergen op Zoom. Counter-thrust has started. Enemy thrusts were repulsed: north of Zoomvliet (5 km ESE Bergen op Zoom), north of Wouwsche Hil (6 km SW Roosendaal) and near Haaink (4 km SW Roosendaal).

Individual [Allied] tanks advanced near Vijfhoek (7.5 km SW Roosendaal) and to the railroad right-of-way at Bulkenaar (SW Roosendaal). Since 1725 hrs counter-attack under way along road Wouw (5 km W Roosendaal) - Wouwsche Plantage.

At 1430 hrs enemy armour forced our rear elements back to a short distance north of Zundert and took Zundert. Infiltrated enemy elements were brought to a halt at Klein-Deckel (6 km NE Zundert). Enemy armour with infantry in forest Chaamsche - Bosschen (4.5 km N Baarle-Nassau). Gilze (W Tilburg) occupied by the enemy. (Ibid)

88 Corps reported:

Concentric enemy attack on Tilburg forced our rear elements to fight their way through to the railroad embankment north of the locality. There were many casualties. At 1615 hrs the enemy penetrated Loon op Zand (8 km N Tilburg). Issuing from the western part of 's-Hertogenbosch the enemy advanced northwestwards in embittered fighting. (Ibid)

171. The relief attack from the Venlo area was launched at 0615 hrs. According to a report issued by A Gp B at 1130 hrs, 9 Pz Div had been gaining ground. Whether the attack could be carried forward smartly or would bog down

depended on the resistance that was expected to materialize within the next few hours. Only in the first case could it serve its purpose of forcing the Allies to divert forces from the front of Fifteenth Army (W.D. O.B. West, 27 Oct). Against enemy resistance that was stiffening in the afternoon, 9 Pz Div advanced to the line SE Liesel - 2 km WNW Meijel. 15 Pz Gren Div was to follow closely and in close order to exploit a possible success without delay (Sitwest, 27 Oct). In the evening 9 Pz Div was still forging ahead. Further southwest 344 Inf Div had joined the attack but was encountering increased resistance (W.D. O.B. West, 27 Oct).

28 Oct

172. The limited German withdrawal (para 166 above) was not followed by a let-up in Allied pressure; southeast of Breda the new line was pierced by infantry with fifty tanks before the Germans were able to install themselves properly.

Supported by all the artillery within the area of penetration, 719 Inf Div has launched a counter-attack to regain the mainline of resistance. At 2000 hrs the attacking formation reached the Tilburg - Breda road. As all the Army's assault guns are committed on the other focal points west of Roosendaal and in the area of 's-Hertogenbosch, this attack cannot be supported adequately by mobile anti-tank weapons.

Elsewhere on the front the opponent has been repulsed on the whole.

47 Pz Corps' attack has been gaining ground slowly against growing enemy resistance. With Liesel and Asten remaining the objectives, and with the commitment of the entire 15th Panzer Grenadier Division, this attack will be continued on 29 Oct.

(Sitwest, 28 Oct)

173. 67 Corps reported:

Enemy thrusts north of Bergen op Zoom were repulsed. After hard fighting enemy forces advancing with tanks and flame-throwing tanks took Heerle [6 km WSW Roosendaal]. Strong enemy armour (30 tanks) advancing from the Vijfhoek - Akker area [a short distance south of the Roosendaal - Bergen op Zoom railroad line, appx 6 km and 4.5 kms out of Roosendaal] took Wouw. This penetration was sealed off at the northern outskirts of Wouw. Fighting in Vinkenbroek [some 2.5 kms WSW Roosendaal]. Bulkenaar was taken by the opponent. Enemy break-in astride the Tolberg - Hulsdonk road was eliminated in a counter-attack. On the Nispen - Wouw road there are 60 - 80 tanks and motor vehicles. Enemy detrucking activity at Oekel [south of Rijsbergen] harassed by our artillery. - Enemy break-in in the direction of Dongen [13 km ENE Breda]. 719 Inf Div, ([for this] under 67 Corps), attacked at 1700 hrs and at 2000 hrs reached the Breda-Tilburg road and recaptured Heusdenhout [3 km E Breda]. (Ibid)

174. Still fighting with 85, 346, 245 and 711 Inf Divs in the line from west to east, 67 Corps on 28 Oct reported the following divisional boundaries:*

85/346	Kp 29 (1.2 km NW Nispen) - 1 km NE Haaik - KP 2 - road fork 1 km E Boeik - 300 m S Turfhoofd - along canal to Kp 4;
346/245	1.5 km ESE Sprundel - road fork Etten (346) - crossroads Leur (346);
245/711	Klein Oekel - 500 m SW church Ulvenhout - road fork Bredasche Weg;
67 Corps/88 Corps	Reijen (88) - crossroads S Laareind - Heikant (67)

(Ibid)

175. Early in the day A Gp B had reported its intentions. Once the Liesel - Asten line had been reached, it would extend the relief attack towards Boxmeer - Oploo. O.B. West agreed in principle, but during the day the picture changed, 47 Pz Corps met with resistance from forces which had apparently not been drawn from the front of Fifteenth Army but moved up from somewhere else (W.D. O.B. West, 28 Oct). Failing to provide relief for Fifteenth Army the attack would be of no avail.

176. In view of the rapidly deteriorating situation of Fifteenth Army, O.B. West now reported to OKW that a further clinging to the given mission (to remain south of the Waal) would lead to the complete extinction of Fifteenth Army. In that event it would be necessary to create a new front north of the Waal, but there would be no forces available to carry out the task (W.D. O.B. West, 28 Oct).

29 Oct

177. First Canadian and Second British Army were pressing northwards at full tilt, and in spite of Hitler's orders to the contrary there could now be no longer any thoughts of Fifteenth Army remaining south of the water barrier.

Expanding the penetrations on the land front of Fifteenth Army, enemy infantry and armoured forces broke through in northerly and northwesterly direction east of Bergen op Zoom, southwest of Roosendaal, west of Sprundel and southeast of Breda. Southwest of 's-Hertogenbosch it was possible to bring the enemy attacks to a halt on the canal front at Kaatsheuvel.

To prevent any further rolling up of the front which has been torn on numerous places, and therewith the destruction of large elements of Fifteenth Army, orders have been given for a fighting withdrawal to the general line:

*Topographical Map of the Netherlands, 1:50,000, German Army High Command Edition, Sheet 49 East, Bergen op Zoom. (Series on hand at cartographical sub-section, Historical Section (G.S.).

Nieuwvossemeer - Steenberg - Stampersgat - canal south of Zevenbergen - Oosterhout - Waspik - Maas to the Afwaterings-Canal, thence as before.

(Sitwest, 29 Oct)

178. 67 Corps reported:

85 Inf Div Fighting in the penetration area northeast of Bergen op Zoom continues against increased enemy pressure. In the course of this fighting 15 [Allied] tanks have been put out of action.

346 Inf Div In the late hours of the afternoon a deep enemy penetration [obtained] with heaviest artillery and fighter bomber support, was sealed off on the western outskirts of Roosendaal. East of Roosendaal several enemy attacks were repulsed. After hard fighting the eastern wing of the Division was pushed back to the line: SW Rucphen - western outskirts Achterhoek - crossroads north of St Willebrord. St Willebrord has been occupied by the enemy. Enemy attack from St Willebrord on the crossroads to the North in progress. Heavy motor vehicle traffic (troop reinforcements) on road Zundert - Rucphen.

245 Inf Div On western wing situation obscure. Enemy penetrations northwest and northeast of Rijsbergen have been eliminated by counter-attacks. Heavy artillery and mortar-fire on main line of defence and gun positions.

711 and
719 Inf Divs Still bitter fighting in Ginnecken. Strong enemy attack with 30 tanks and three battalions under way from the area northeast of Ginnecken towards the North. At 1700 hrs armoured thrust along Tilburg - Breda road towards the eastern outskirts of Breda. One battalion of 711 Inf Div was cut off east of Breda. Enemy advance with tanks from Heusdenhout in northerly and north-easterly direction was brought to a halt south of the railroad-line Tilburg - Breda. In Rijen some strong points are still holding out. (Ibid)*

179. The German forces engaged in the spoiling attack in the Liesel - Asten area were still eeking out small gains, but the current crisis of Fifteenth Army had passed its climax, the battle was lost and any withdrawals of Allied forces from that front at this late stage would be of scant significance. - Mainly to make it possible for the formations engaged to come to a halt on defensible lines, O.B. West granted A Gp B's request for permission to continue the operation for another day. (W.D., OB West, 29 Oct).

180. Field Marshal von Rundstedt had always been a soldier and a soldier only. To him the army was an instrument of the political power; a military revolt in times of war an utter impossibility. Westphal says: "Such principles may seem old fashioned today. But nobody can jump over his own shadow". He continues:

*According to 88 Corps, thirty enemy tanks had reached Kleindongen (256 VGD), whilst 59 Inf Div had succeeded in repelling two enemy thrusts near 's-Hertogenbosch (Ibid).

Anyone who knew Rundstedt knows how much he suffered... when he had to stand by in powerless rage while command mistakes were being heaped upon command mistakes. Many times he trembled with agitation when his well considered suggestions were rejected time and again and the highest command forced him to attempt the impossible and the harmful....

(Siegfried Westphal, "Heer in Fesseln" ("Army in Chains") Athenäum Verlag, Bonn, 1950, p. 202)

181. The 29th of October was one of those days on which the commander in the field was forced to spend more energy on wrestling with the High Command than with the enemy. No doubt the defence of the Scheldt Estuary was a forlorn hope; this shaky tooth would be knocked out within the next few days. If Hitler wanted to prolong the war - which he was clearly bent on doing - it was imperative to save the remnants of his Fifteenth Army for a stand behind the Waal.

182. At 1030 hrs 29 Oct A Gp B informed O.B. West of the deterioration in the situation at Roosendaal and Breda. The Army Group wanted to be told immediately whether Fifteenth Army should fight on to its destruction or withdraw behind the Waal. At 1040 hrs Westphal called Jodl, who promised to obtain Hitler's decision by 1300 hrs. After hearing Jodl's verbal report Hitler indicated that he expected Fifteenth Army to stand fast south of the Maas. Elements in danger of being destroyed might be taken back to enlarged bridgeheads. Of particular importance was the western wing of the Army, where access to the islands of Schouwen and Overflakkee must be blocked so firmly that the enemy could not take the Estuary from the rear. General Student was to assume overall command over Fifteenth Army and the Scheldt defence even before the arrival of his staff (para 184 below). Later in the day Army Group B reported a further deterioration in the situation. O.B. West informed OKW of the exact wording of this message and asked for an immediate reply. (W.D. O.B. West, 29 Oct)

183. In the evening O.B. West received the Fuehrer's directive for the further conduct of the operations in the area of Fifteenth Army*. While commanding Fifteenth Army to hold on with all its power to the line Bergen op Zoom - Breda - 's-Hertogenbosch - south of the Maas, it provided the hoped-for loophole allowing the Army to fall back in wide bridgeheads south of the Maas if circumstances demanded it. - At 2225 hrs Army Group B reported additional deteriorations in the situation and decided to withdraw into two large bridgeheads. On the basis of the directive received O.B. West concurred and reported to OKW accordingly. (W.D. O.B. West, 29 Oct)

184. Alternately dealing with reality and dwelling in fairy-land, - Hitler's directive contained the welcome provision for a separate command organ under O.B. West for the forces in the Netherlands. Accordingly at 0000 hrs 30 Oct Armeegruppe Student assumed command over Fifteenth Army, Armed Forces Commander Netherlands and First Parachute Army. At the same time command over 86 Corps, 47 Pz Corps and Corps Felber

*(OKM, Sk1, File North Sea-Norway, op cit, OKW/WFSt/Ops No. 773955/44, Secret, 29 Oct 44) (Photostat HCN(D16)). A reproduction and translation of this directive will be found in Part IV of the present series of Reports.

(Venlo Sector) was transferred from First Parachute Army to Fifth Panzer Army (Sitwests, 29 and 30 Oct). The next paragraph of the directive informed O.B. West of Hitler's decision to forego the pending organization of 8, 9, and 10 Para Divs in favour of compensating Fifteenth Army for its losses by placing at its disposal the battalions set aside for these divisions. Next day O.B. West noted in his War Diary that such battalions could not be moved up for the reason that such battalions did not exist (W.D., O.B. West, 30 Oct).

30 Oct

185. First Canadian Army was quick in exploiting the withdrawals on the right wing of Fifteenth Army's land front. - In the sector of 85 Inf Div pressure developed in the direction of Steenberg; in the adjoining sector 346 Inf Div was being pushed back in the direction of Oudgastel - Stampersgat; along the whole line Allied armour and infantry were either forging ahead or moving into assembly positions for attacks in the immediate future. (Sitwest, 30 Oct)

186. In the meantime the German spoiling attack had attracted strong British forces to the Liesel - Heusden area and was petering out in heavy fighting. 15 Brit Div and 4 Brit Armd Bde had come in from Fifteenth Army's front and stopped the attack*. - During the night 30/31 Oct 15 Pz Gren Div would be withdrawn into reserve, and 9 Pz Div settle down to defend the line Liesel - Sluis. (Ibid)

187. On 30 Oct General Sponheimer went to Germany for an urgent operation. Before leaving his tactical headquarters at Zevenbergen** he turned over the command of 67 Corps to Lt Gen (later Gen Inf) Karl Püchler (Warning, 67 Corps). Püchler had acquired considerable experience as an itinerant substitute corps commander and was well regarded. He was posted to 67 Corps in an acting capacity on 28 Oct, and on 9 Nov was promoted to the rank of General of the Infantry. (OKH Personnel Files, op cit, Photostat Püchler)

31 Oct

188. The day's most important development on Fifteenth Army's landfront was an Allied thrust from the Ramsdonk area towards Keizersveer. At 1700 hrs Col Gen Student appeared at the command post of 88 Corps. He had himself posted on the situation, demanded that the Keizersveer bridgehead be held, and continued on his journey. Little later, however, 18 Allied tanks broke through at Ramsdonkveer and were heading for Keizersveer. This made the situation at the bridgehead hopeless. Moreover it was most important to the Germans that the bridge should not fall into Allied hands intact. Fifteenth Army, therefore,

*On 28 Oct 44, 15 Scot Div was in the Tilburg area on the left wing of Second British Army. Early in the afternoon the formation was alerted for a quick transfer to the area where the American forces, who had absorbed the initial punch of the spoiling attack, were now hard pressed. On 29 Oct, 15 Scot Div, and (further south) 4 Brit Armd Bde, established themselves on the ground. Next day they killed the attack. For a most interesting account of this intervention see: Martin, Lt Gen H.G., History of the 15th Scottish Division, 1939-1945, William Blackwood & Sons Ltd, Edinburgh and London, 1948.

**Corps Headquarters were at Dordrecht (Sitwest, 30 Oct).

authorized the evacuation of the bridgehead, and at 2255 hrs the Keizersveer bridge was blown by German engineers. At the end of the day Headquarters Fifteenth Army were transferred from Dordrecht to Bilthoven. (W.D. 88 Corps)

189. During the month now ending the German position in the Netherlands had deteriorated gravely. Resistance in the Breskens area and on South Beveland had been reduced to last ditch stands in tiny pockets; an assault on Walcheren was imminent; the two Corps further inland were under severe pressure in shrinking bridgeheads. Nevertheless another week would pass before resistance south of the Maas would come to an end.

1 Nov

190. As several German groups by now had been forced back to the south bank of the Maas, O.B. West gave permission to blow bridges where this was necessary (G.M.D.S. - 75144/28, A Gp D (O.B. West), W.D. 1 - 30 Nov 44, 1 Nov) (981CW(D61)). The day was characterized by a series of inconclusive local engagements; an exception was a deep Allied penetration along the Breda - Dordrecht railroad line. In a counter-attack launched at 1800 hrs, the Germans recaptured part of the lost ground. (G.M.D.S. - H22/62, O.B. West (A Gp D), Daily Sitreps, 2 - 16 Nov 44 (for 1 - 15 Nov), 1 Nov) (cited "Sitwest") (981CW(D55))

2 Nov

191. Resuming the counter-attack along the railroad line, the Germans regained the remaining portion of the penetration area in very heavy fighting. A thrust in company strength along the road Bergen op Zoom - Steenberg was repulsed 2.5 km south of Steenberg. Southwest of Steenberg the opponent was moving into assembly positions. Otherwise the day was uneventful. (Sitwest, 2 Nov)

3 Nov

192. But the breathing spell was short. On 3 Nov the German forces were driven further back in the areas north of Standaarbuiten and northeast of Oosterhout. Northwest of Oosterhout the Allies were bridging at three places and moving up tanks. Stampersgat was lost; fighting in all penetration areas was heavy; German casualties were considerable (Sitwest, 3 Nov). In the afternoon OKW directed O.B. West to ensure the timely destruction of the Moerdijk bridges:

The Moerdijk bridgehead is to be occupied by a covering force under a responsible commander who will answer with his head if the bridges fall into enemy hands intact.

(W.D. O.B. West, 3 Nov)

193. Operations south of the Maas would soon come to an end. On the basis of Army Group B's evening report the following was entered into O.B. West's War Diary:

In the area of 67 Corps the landfront of Fifteenth Army has been pierced again on several places. Counter-attacks with all available reserves have been laid-on, but there is no doubt that the present front of 67 Corps cannot be held.

To prevent the cutting-off and consequent destruction of the westernmost division [85 Inf Div] the formation will be moved eastwards during the night to the east bank of the river Dintel. Subsequently the bulk of the division will be taken to the north shore of the Maas, while some elements will be left behind to strengthen the defending forces southwest of Moerdijk.

The removal of effective elements to the north shore is urgently required also for the reason that no other forces are on hand to organize a defence on the north shore. (Ibid)

4 Nov

194. Allied efforts to wipe out the remaining bridgeheads were progressing well. - North of Standaardbuiten and northwest of Oosterhout strong infantry forces were pressing forward in the direction of the Moerdijk bridges (Sitwest, 4 Nov). 85 Inf Div had been withdrawn behind the Dintel; and 346 Inf Div was now responsible for the area still in German hands west of the Dintel (W.D. O.B. West, 4 Nov). An attack was under way in the Dinteloord area. An attack on Klundert was repulsed. An armoured break-in had been made by about one hundred Allied tanks north of Breda in the Wagenberg - Made area. Further east, 88 Corps' Heusden bridgehead was imperiled by a break-in south of Drunen (some 5 kms south of Heusden). (Sitwest, 4 Nov)

195. According to Warning most batteries of 85 and 346 Inf Divs had been withdrawn across the Moerdijk bridges during the night 3/4 Nov and emplaced on the north bank. Allied efforts to destroy the approaches to the bridges had been foiled by strong anti-aircraft defences and by engineers who repaired all damage quickly. (Warning, 67 Corps)

5 Nov

196. This was the last day of heavy fighting south of the Hollandschdiep and Maas. Allied forces made massive gains, German forces still on the south side were chopped up, ferrying traffic was continuous, by evening only small forces were left south of the water barrier (W.D. O.B. West, 5 Nov). One small bridgehead was at Willemstadt; Moerdijk was still in German hands; Heusden was lost in the evening (Sitwest, 5 Nov).

6 Nov

197. Evacuation of the Willemstad and Heusden bridgeheads was completed during the day; reconnaissance thrusts and an attack in battalion strength with tank support on the Moerdijk bridgehead were defeated by artillery fire (Sitwest, 6 Nov). In concordance with the progress of Fifteenth Army's withdrawal movements the time had come to demolish the Moerdijk bridges and this was done (during the night 5/6 Nov) (W.D. O.B. West, 6 Nov (first entry of day; based on morning report of A Gp B)).*

*Warning gives an obviously wrong date for the demolitions. Much detail on the Moerdijk crossings has been set forth in the Special Interrogation Reports Schwalbe, Sander and Diestel. Only Diestel mentions the date: "The bridge was finally blown on 5 Nov on the order of Maj Gen Sander, whose 245 Inf Div was the last to cross". According to the O.B. West War Diary the demolitions must have been carried out during the night 5/6 Nov. Canadian War Diaries support this view. At 1020 hrs 6 Nov Tac R informed First Canadian Army of the demolitions (W.D. G.S. H.Q., First Canadian Army (Nov 44): Appx 20: Ops Log (6 Nov 44), serial No. 29)

198. Resistance on Walcheren was coming to an end, the Scheldt Estuary was lost, casualties had been heavy. Nevertheless Fifteenth Army had succeeded in blocking the entrance to the port of Antwerp for over two months after the city had been captured (Sitwest, 6 Nov). This had prevented the enemy from taking advantage of the good weather period in September and October for an intended offensive against Western Germany (G.M.D.S. - H22/292, A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, 1 Oct - 10 Nov 44, Sitrep 7 Nov for 6 Nov) (981AGpB(D5)). If the Allies did not push on towards the North it would be possible to move substantial forces from the east-west Waal-Maas sector to the north-south front of the Maas. With Antwerp open the Allies would launch a major drive to the Rhine. Strategical reserves had to be placed accordingly. Sixth Panzer Army would be moved to the area of O.B. West. There it would be positioned in a manner allowing intervention in several directions and be placed under A Gp B as an OKW reserve.** (W.D. O.B. West, 6 Nov)

7 - 8 Nov

199. On 7 Nov the Moerdijk bridgehead was under continuous artillery fire. The covering force withstood several attacks and lost but little ground (O.B. West, Intrep 7 Nov). On 8 Nov an attack from the South on the bridgehead bogged down in German artillery fire, but the opponent achieved a break-in 3.5 km east of Moerdijk. Stormy weather made it impossible to supply the force in the bridgehead, and an order to evacuate was issued (Sitwest, 8 Nov). The greater part of the covering forces crossed the river on 9 Nov (Sitwest, 9 Nov).

200. The blandly worded German situation reports mentioned neither the opponent who had forced the Army to withdraw, nor the plight of the covering force which had been left behind on the wrong side of the broken bridge. On 13 May 1940, on the way from Breda to Rotterdam, the 9th German Panzer Division had proudly rolled across the Moerdijk bridges. It was different now. According to General Sander:

They had to make their way back as best they could, alternately swimming and climbing from girder to girder which lay in the water. Quite a number were drowned as the current was very powerful and the weather for such a hazardous undertaking could not have been more unpleasant. A gale was blowing and the waves and the current made swimming extremely dangerous, especially when in the dark there were the broken girders to contend with.

(Special Interrogation Report Sander, p. 9,
981.023(D6))

Clearing the Breskens Pocket
(6 Oct - 3 Nov)

201. The time was long past where the German High Command in weighing the matter in the abstract military sense and apart from the aspects of human compassion might have contemplated the sacrifice of a good division with any vestige of equanimity. But with Hitler unwilling to throw in his hand, the strategical objective of preventing the Allies from mounting a major offensive against the industrial heart of Germany still in the autumn of 1944 well justified the expenditure of a good

*For details see Part IV of this series of Reports.

formation in a last ditch defence of the Breskens bridgehead. Selected for the bitter task was Maj Gen Eberding's 64th German Infantry Division.

202. This formation had been thrown together hastily during the latter part of June and in July 1944 at Wahn, near Cologne. It was largely composed of personnel that had been siphoned off the stream of personnel returning to the Eastern front from furlough (215Cl.98(D60), W.D. First Canadian Army, G Int Files, German Army, 64 Inf Div, PW Interrogations; Mil Int Div, War Dept, Washington D.C., Order of Battle of the German Army, 1945, p. 160). True enough, it had its share of category personnel, and its share of weaker creatures who turned up early in the game at the Canadian cages with tales of low morale and woe. But all in all it was a good division with a hard core of trained and willing fighters, of whom Lt Col Siegfried Erfurth, the stern commander of 1038 Gren Regt, said at the end: "They completely surprised me with the resistance they put up". (Ibid, PW Interrogation Erfurth)

203. The decision to charge 64 Inf Div with the defence of "Scheldt Fortress South" had been made shortly before the middle of September (para 76 above). The main reason for this choice was the fact that this formation was in better shape than any of the divisions which had been pulled to pieces in Normandy and further decimated in the retreat from the Seine:

64 Inf Div was selected for this important task on the suggestion of OKW because of all divisions south of the Scheldt that came in question it was the strongest in men and equipment, and was well led.

The fighting power of the Division was enhanced considerably by the munitions of war, particularly pieces of artillery, anti-tank guns, ammunitions and food supplies, that were handed over by the divisions leaving the bridgehead.

(von Zangen, Fifteenth Army, op cit, pp. 47 - 48)

204. The main elements of 64 Inf Div were: 1037, 1038 and 1039 Gren Regts (composed of two battalions each), 164 Arty Regt and 64 Fus Bn.- On 13 Aug the Division had been shipped by rail from the Wahn area to the Channel coast. Near the end of the month it was taken off the Atlantic Wall and committed in the St. Omer region. Subsequently it participated in various engagements incidental the the general German withdrawal towards the Northeast. At the beginning of September it was fighting southeast of Bruges (O.C.M.H., F.S.B., MS D-384, Schmidt, Operations against American Troops in France, p. 1) 981SOM(D254)*. During the middle of September the formation relieved the divisions moving from the Leopold Canal to the mainland via Walcheren. At the end of September it was braced for the attacks that were bound to come. (Above, passim)

*Col Schmidt was O.C. 1037 Gren Regt (64 Inf Div), but his account deals almost exclusively with the fighting in September. This is explained by the fact that he left the bridgehead early in October (215Cl.98(D60), Report by Capt Kulbach on the Interrogation of various Prisoners of War from 64 Inf Div, 15 Oct). Later on Schmidt was captured by the Russians, and in due course prepared the short study in question. On closer inspection it appears that his knowledge of American fighting methods was largely based on his encounters with the Algonquin Regiment. This is a Canadian unit, but since being a Russian prisoner is not overly comfortable, one might be inclined to forgive this bit of ambiguity. The German text is in Russian hands; what we have is a translation from Russian into English. The document contains some interesting bits of information, but it must be approached with due caution.

205. The completion of Fifteenth Army's withdrawal across the Western Scheldt left the Breskens bridgehead with the following strength in men and weapons:

Personnel (including 64 Inf Div and miscellaneous Army, Navy and Air Force elements)

Army	268 offr	8,523 men
Navy	19 offr	1,031 men
Air Force	13 offr	1,146 men
<hr/>		
Total	300 offr	10,700 men

Weapons (including naval artillery of 204th Naval Artillery Battalion)

455 light machine guns
34 heavy machine guns
38 81-mm mortars
1 120-mm mortar
9 37-mm)
11 57-mm) antitank guns
7 75-mm)
11 75-mm infantry guns
104 20-mm)
8 quadruple-mounted 20-mm)
15 37-mm) antiaircraft guns
3 twin-mounted 37-mm)
23 88-mm) antiaircraft guns
6 20-mm Oerlikons
2 French 25-mm guns
2 40-mm guns
2 French 75-mm guns
5 Czech 83.5-mm guns
13 105-mm howitzers
13 Czech 105-mm howitzers
7 75-mm field guns (new type)
1 80-mm Czech field gun
6 Russian field guns (caliber unknown)
3 French 75-mm field guns
2 Belgian 75-mm field guns
5 150-mm howitzers
16 French 150-mm howitzers
1 105-mm cannon*

(A Gp B, Operationsbefehle, A Gp B to O.B. West, 1500 hrs 23 Sep 44, cited from: Heichler, German Defence of the Gateway to Antwerp, op cit, pp. 14 - 15) (981.013(D102))

*Exclusive of antitank and antiaircraft guns there were, therefore, 82 pieces 75-mm and larger in the bridgehead on 23 Sep 44. However, at the end of September nine 105-mm guns were moved from the bridgehead to the area north of Antwerp (Information received by Historical Section (G.S.) from General Eberding on 6 Jul 54). Deducing these barrels from the Army Group B figure leaves 73 guns. A reasonably conservative interpretation of the information received from General Eberding (loc cit) would allow an estimate of about 65 guns 75-mm and larger in the bridgehead after the removal of the nine 105-mm guns. The correct number would seem to lie somewhere between 65 and 73.

6 Oct

206. The first five days of the month had been uneventful (Sitwests 1 - 5 Oct). O.B. West's situation report for 6 Oct did not mention any unusual developments at the Leopold Canal. The Daily Intelligence Report originating at the same headquarters recorded the beginning of the Canadian operation "Switchback" with the brief remark: "at Migerkerke [sic] and Strooibrug the enemy formed bridgeheads across the Canal" (O.B. West, Intrep 6 Oct).

7 Oct

207. The German situation reports showed no traces of alarm; 64 Inf Div seemed to be capable of coping with the attacks. - The bridgehead 2 km east of Strooibrug was eliminated (Sitwest, 7 Oct); a penetration 1.5 km east of St. Laurent had been sealed off (Intrep, 7 Oct).

8 Oct

208. Several thrusts in easterly direction from the bridgehead west of St. Laurent were repulsed. Canadian forces which had crossed the Canal at Oosthoek and east of it were driven back. A German thrust to eliminate the bridgehead 1 km east of Strooibrug had foundered in tenacious resistance (flame-throwers, covering fire from tanks). (Sitwest, 8 Oct)

9 Oct

209. Very heavy artillery fire on the Strooibrug - St. Laurent sector seemed to be heralding fresh attacks. But the main event of the day was the Canadian crossing north of the arm of water west of Terneuzen.

Today the enemy launched a decision-seeking attack on the Breskens bridgehead. Whilst maintaining strong pressure against the southern front of 64 Inf Div, he landed with four to five battalions and some tanks on the northeastern tip of the bridgehead and succeeded in establishing a new bridgehead 3 km deep and 6 km wide. About $3\frac{1}{2}$ battalions (among them two companies from 70 Inf Div, which could be moved across the water only due to the prevailing mist) were set against the enemy and to begin with sealed off the bridgehead. The situation is still tense.*

(A Gp B, Daily Sitreps, 1 Oct - 10 Nov 44,
op cit, 10 Oct for 9 Oct)

210. Major General Eberding's infantry regiments were in line on the Leopold Canal, the divisional reserves were centrally located under his own control (23503.021(D1), 3 Cdn Inf Div, Ops, Interviews, Interrogation Eberding by Maj Gen Spry,

*Two infantry companies and one engineer platoon of 70 Inf Div moved across the West Scheldt to the Hoodplaat bridgehead on 9 Oct (Daser, op cit, p. 24). According to the statements of German soldiers captured in the Hoofdplaat area they were: 8 Coy 1019 Gren Regt (corroborated), 4 Coy 1019 Gren Regt (uncorroborated) and 1 Pl 1 Coy 170 Engr Bn (uncorroborated) (215Cl.98(D61), W.D. First Canadian Army, G Int Files, 70 German Inf Div, P.W. Interrogations).

1 Nov 44). As we know well, Eberding defended the bridgehead stoutly and much longer than expected. From the German point of view, however, it seems that the bridgehead might have been held longer, had it been defended by a more brilliant officer. When the Canadians launched their frontal attack, Eberding apparently regarded the situation with the calm of one who has well disposed and is ready for any emergency. - Such thoughts as he may have given to the possibility of an Allied waterborne assault at the Braakman inlet had been dismissed on the assumption that the opponent did not have the requisite equipment in the area where it would be needed (loc cit). This was an error, for the quick success of the Canadian landing north of Biervliet hastened the collapse of the bridgehead. Eberding's neglect of the Braakman sector was probably due less to over-reliance on the principle of concentration than to lack of imagination and familiarity with amphibious operations. He did his faithful best, but his best was not the absolute best.

211. Eberding was born in 1895 in Silesia. He entered the Army in September 1914. His High Command Personnel Card shows the following career:

2 Lt	1915	(Jun)
2 i/c Coy	1917	(Apr)
Coy Cmdr	1919	(Oct)
Discharged	1920	(Dec)
Re-entered	1923	(Jun)
First Lt	1925	(Oct)
Capt	1932	(Oct)
Maj	1936	(Aug)
Lt Col	1939	(Dec)
Col	1941	(Oct)
Maj Gen	1943	(Aug)

(OKH, Personnel Files, op cit,
File Eberding)

212. By the middle of 1942 he was considered a competent and experienced regimental commander. The first hint of his approaching the ceiling of his capabilities came in September 1942, when it was reported that his preoccupation with the interests of his own regiment made him inclined to lose sight of the bigger picture. Subsequently his superiors were apparently well satisfied with his services until, in November 1943, he was graded "average", and in May 1944 Field Marshal Model urged his transfer to the OKH Reserve. Model expressed the opinion that he was not fit to command a front-line division and suggested employment as commander of a Security Division. Eberding's Corps Commander at the time mentioned his gift for training and rejuvenating decimated divisions, but the Army Commander felt he was not good at discriminating between the important and the unimportant. In August 1944 the Commander of Armeekorps Narwa praised his good qualities but rated him "average" - "Suited to command a Security or Training Division" (loc cit). This may have been a fair appraisal, for while he did a good job of welding heterogeneous forces into a formation putting up stiff resistance, he failed to sense the dangers lurking at the Braakman.

213. Fortune had never smiled on Eberding. On 27 Oct 44 a captured soldier of 64 Inf Div said to the Canadian interrogator Capt E.G. Kulbach, C Int C: "It is common gossip amongst the troops that Eberding is in the process of wiping out his 'sixth' division" (First Canadian Army, G Int Files,

PW Interrogations, 64 Inf Div, op cit). And while this particular German soldier may not have been in a position to assess Eberding's role in a sequence of operations that may have been lost causes from the outset, he was certainly right in respect of the number of divisions that suffered disaster under Eberding. - Listed in chronological order they were: 38 Inf Div, 62 Inf Div, 357 Inf Div, 285 Security Div, 227 Inf Div and 64 Inf Div (OKH, Personnel File Eberding, op cit; also Mil Int Div, War Dept, Washington D.C., Order of Battle of the German Army, op cit, passim).

10 Oct

214. On this day 64 Inf Div lost ground northeast of Strooibrug, and at their new bridgehead the Canadian forces took Hoofdplaat after bitter fighting (Sitwest, 10 Oct).

11 Oct

215. On the southern front of 64 Inf Div the Middelbourg - St. Laurent sector was under heavy artillery fire. At the new bridgehead German counter-attacks were delayed by air attacks and damaged roads. After finally getting under way at 1930 hrs, they failed completely. (Sitwest, 11 Oct)

12 Oct

216. Two Canadian attacks in the western portion of the Hoofdplaat bridgehead were beaten off during the early afternoon, but a new attack, supported by flame throwing tanks and accompanied by heaviest fire of destruction, had been launched at 1530 hrs and was still in progress (at reporting time) (Sitwest, 12 Oct).

13 Oct

217. Landing craft near Hoofdplaat were harassed by German artillery fire. Towards evening Canadian forces broke through on both sides of the road Biervliet - Maagd van Gent. The penetration was sealed off on a line 3 km E Ijzendijke - 4 km E Watervliet. (Sitwest, 13 Oct)

14 Oct

218. 64 Inf Div, hitherto under 67 Corps, was now placed directly under Fifteenth Army. At Strooibrug the opponent had been reinforced by armour. An enemy penetration 3 km E St. Laurent had been sealed off. At Watervliet and north of it Canadian tanks and infantry were at the northern rim of the flooded area. A German counter-attack in company strength had collapsed. Steentjen (1 km N Watervliet) had been taken by the enemy. A renewed attack northeast of Driewegen had led to the loss of Nieuwland. By means of an attack from north to south the opponent had established contact with his southern forces. Due to the continual heavy fighting the strength of 64 Inf Div had been reduced in some cases to one third of earlier strength. (Sitwest, 14 Oct)

15 Oct

219. Good progress was made in the reduction of the Breskens Pocket:

Supported by numerous tanks, strong forces of First Canadian Army on 15 Oct renewed their attacks on the eastern front of "Scheldt Fortress

South". On this front, which had already been pushed back in the earlier fighting, the enemy succeeded in obtaining several deep penetrations against the tenaciously fighting defenders who were suffering in particular from the ceaseless air attacks. Up to now it has not been possible to seal off the penetrations....

Enemy thrusts with tanks on the road Hoofdplaat - Nommer Fee [sic; presumably Nummer Een], from Roodenhoek towards the Northwest, as well as on the road Braakman South - Ijzendijke have been intercepted....

(Sitwest, 15 Oct)

220. Referring to the importance of the Breskens bridgehead O.B. West now asked OKW for two parachute battalions to be used in an attempt to eliminate the penetration west of the Braakman Inlet (W.D. O.B. West, 15 Oct). OKW considered the possibility of reinforcing the garrison by parachute descents of para troops, but weighty reasons were militating against it (Schramm, Der Westen, p. 215). At the same time O.B. West made inquiries regarding the possibility of further contamination with mines of the waters east of the Breskens bridgehead. Both, Air Force and Navy answered in the negative. (W.D. O.B. West, 16 Oct)

16 Oct

221. Bitter fighting at the hitherto existing focal points failed to produce decisive changes in the situation:

64 Inf Div: At 1730 hrs a new heavy attack with tanks and flamethrowers at Eade was repulsed in close combat with heavy casualties on both sides. Enemy tank attacks between St. Kruis and the road to the Zacharias Polder were repelled. Enemy forces which had broken through south of Roodenhoek were intercepted at Oudeland. A penetration north of Molentje was sealed off. An armoured attack 500 metres north of Ijzendijke was brought to a halt. A heavy attack by armour 2 km NE Waterland Oudeman is still in progress. A blocking line has been formed east of Waterland Oudeman. (Sitwest, 16 Oct)

222. 64 Inf Div's task was of course not so much the retention of a piece of ground as the protection of the southern coastal batteries guarding the entrance to the estuary. Advancing Canadian units were now getting within range of these guns:

In the afternoon our own sea-target and anti-aircraft guns were firing on the area south of Hoofdplaat [literal translation: were committed in].

(O.N.I. - Tambach Collection, W.D. German Naval Operations Staff (Seekriegsleitung), W.D. 1 - 31 Oct 44, 16 Oct) (Hist Sec (G.S.) Microfilms, Reel No. 14)

17 Oct

223. Canadian forces made further gains:

Strong enemy pressure on the eastern flank of the Breskens bridgehead. Enemy penetrations at

Hoodenhoek and Ijzendijke. From Roodenhoek the enemy moved northwards to [the area] south of Sasput.

(O.B. West, Intrep, 17 Oct)

18 Oct

224. Canadian pressure was continuing:

Enemy attempts to collapse the eastern part of the Breskens bridgehead were thwarted in heavy fighting. Nummer Een has been taken by the opponent. Enemy attacks on both sides of Waterland, at Ijzendijke and east of Schoondijke were repelled. (O.B. West, Intrep 18 Oct)

Enemy attack on Motorgem (1 km SW Nummer Een) in progress. Since 1700 hrs enemy attack with tanks from Waterland Oudeman towards the West. Josina Hoeve (2 km NW Waterland Oudeman) has been taken by the enemy. (Sitwest, 18 Oct)

19 Oct

225. At mid-day Army Group B reported a considerable contraction in the size of the Breskens bridgehead. The German held area was now only 20 km wide and 8 km deep (W.D. O.B. West, 19 Oct). 64 Inf Div had been able to stop an enemy advance with tanks on the western outskirts of Halte Nummer Een, but southwest of Klein Brabant (ESE Oostburg) the enemy had penetrated the formation's lines at 1600 hrs. At the end of the day the Division reported the following forward line:

Afwatorings Canal to south of Oostkerke - Bruges-Sluis Canal to Sluis - Uitwaterings Canal to Baakkersdam (2.5 km S Oostburg) - Klein Brabant (2.5 km E Oostburg) - Schoondijke - 2 km W Sasput - western outskirts of Halte Nummer Een (appx 1 km W Nummer Een).

(Sitwest, 19 Oct)

20 Oct

226. There was little change in the situation; 3 km east of Oostburg and west of Sasput Canadian forces achieved local penetrations (O.B. West, Intrep 20 Oct).

21 Oct

227. Canadian forces captured the port of Breskens:

Advancing along the coast the enemy penetrated Breskens. An attack on Sluis was repelled. Attacks on Oostburg are still in progress.

(O.B. West, Intrep 21 Oct)

Canadian forces have entered and blocked the port of Breskens (Sitwest, 21 Oct).

Batteries Flushing South, Nieuwe Sluis and Cadzand fired several effective concentrations against enemy aggregations of artillery*. In a

*For tabulation of German Naval Batteries in the Scheldt Estuary see page XXII below.

switch of positions, Battery Hamilton moved to Knocke. From 0900 hrs to 1100 hrs Breskens was under heaviest drum-fire. Since 1200 hrs house-to-house fighting in Breskens.

(W.D. Naval Operations Staff (Sk1),
op cit, 21 Oct)

22 Oct

228. During the morning the Walcheren Batteries Flushing North, Flushing West, Flushing East and Dishoek delivered fire concentrations on Breskens. Northwest of Breskens the garrison of Fort Frederik Hendrik was preparing for close combat. Batteries Nieuwe Sluis and Cadzand were firing on enemy targets (Ibid, 22 Oct). At 1700 hrs enemy forces with tanks and flame-throwing tanks took Schoondijke after violent fighting. At the cost of heavy casualties the enemy achieved a break-in east of Oostburg. Two attacks with tanks and flame-throwers against Fort Frederik Hendrik were repulsed. (Sitwest, 22 Oct)

23 Oct

229. Information from the bridgehead was scanty. - An existing gap in the southern part of the front had been closed by a withdrawal to the southern outskirts of Oostburg. At 1900 hrs Canadian forces penetrated Fort Frederik Hendrik. Fighting there was continuing. (Sitwest, 23 Oct)

24 Oct

230. The opponent carried out several attacks in the Oostburg - Boerenhol area; there was a break-in at Kruisdijk; Boerenhol was occupied by the enemy. Attacks at Oostburg and Schoondijk were repulsed. 64 Inf Div intended to hold the line Oostburg - 1 km E Groede - Zandertje (2.5 km NW Breskens). (Sitwest, 24 Oct)

25 Oct

231. Heavy fighting in the bridgehead continued, Oostburg and Groede were taken by the enemy (A Gp B, Sitrep, 25 Oct.)

26 Oct

232. 64 Inf Div repelled several attacks and eliminated local penetrations. At the point of penetration 2 km SE Groedel a German counter-thrust was under way (Sitwest, 26 Oct). Batteries on Walcheren were firing on land targets south of the Scheldt. During the night 25/26 Oct, 130 tons of ammunition had been moved to Cadzand by a fishing cutter and two flat-bottomed motor boats. Owing to the retrograde movement (of the ground forces) Battery Nieuwe Sluis would have to be evacuated during the night 26/27 Oct. After that the battery crew and 60 men of H.Q. Pl 203 Naval Coast Arty Bn would fight as infantry. (W.D. Naval Ops Staff, op cit, 26 Oct)

27 Oct

233. A convoy carrying 400 casualties from Cadzand to Flushing made port without incident. The Walcheren Batteries Flushing North, West and East, as well as Domburg, Zouteland and Dishoek laid harassing fire on the port of Breskens and on land targets south of the Scheldt. In the

bridgehead, Battery Hamilton would have to change position.
(W.D. Skl, 27 Oct)

28 Oct

234. The naval batteries in the Flushing area were firing on land targets south of the Scheldt. Since 0530 hrs they were being bombarded from the air. On the south shore of the Scheldt, Battery Hamilton lost its new battery position at Kruishoofd. The fixed guns of Battery Cadzand were demolished when the enemy reached the immediate vicinity. (What was left of) 203 Naval Coast Arty Bn carried on the fight with two 15 cm guns from Cadzand and an infantry troop. No further news came in from Batteries Breskens, Nieuwe Sluis and Hamilton. At 0200 hrs 64 Inf Div reported that it had driven back the enemy at Cadzand; the main factor in the success of the counter-attack had been the excellently placed fire of the Walcheren Batteries.
(W.D. Skl, 28 Oct)

29 Oct

235. The situation reports of the ground forces carried no references to the situation on the Breskens bridgehead, but some relevant information was recorded in the War Diary of the Naval Operations Staff. Early in the day the commander of 203 Naval Coast Arty Bn had reported a serious shortage of 15 cm ammunition and a total remaining strength of 9 officers and 243 men. The situation was considered at the highest levels; in the end he was told to stay put; an attempt to move-in ammunition was promised for the night 29/30 Oct; the bridgehead was to be defended to the last cartridge. (W.D. Skl, 29 Oct)

236. When the situation of the Naval Artillery Battalion came up for consideration, the high authorities weighing the matter were in possession of a teletype communication from "Admiral Netherlands" praising the performance of the naval artillery in the defence of the Breskens bridgehead. The dearth of original German documents for this phase makes this document a welcome source of information on the role played in the bridgehead by the coastal artillery. According to the Admiral's report, 203rd Naval Coast Artillery Battalion, consisting of five batteries, had provided excellent fire support for 64 Inf Div, particularly after the Canadians had landed at Hoofdplaat. Following the loss of Breskens it had re-opened the port of Cadzand by removing the foreshore and mine obstacles which were blocking it. This had made it possible to bring in several convoys with urgently needed ammunition and supplies for 64 Inf Div, as well as to evacuate several hundred casualties. In the end the batteries were lost, but the guns were destroyed before the opponent captured the positions. Valuable services had also been rendered by 5 Bty 810 Naval Antiaircraft Bn (Battery Flushing South) (see tabulation para 265 below) and by the Flak Platoon Breskens. (Naval Operations Staff (Skl), File North Sea - Norway, *op cit*, Admiral Netherlands, G 26384/44, Ops 2 A, 2005 hrs 28 Oct 44)

30 Oct

237. As far as the Germans were concerned the bridgehead was now lost. Eventually the Situation Report would carry an appropriate eulogy; in the meantime the reports would deal with operations not yet in the realm of the irrevocable. - O.B. West reported merely: "Command Post of 64 Inf Div [now] at Knocke" (Sitwest, 30 Oct). According to the War Diary of the Naval Operations Staff there were not enough bottoms available

to take any substantial elements of 64 Inf Div to Walcheren; in view of an existing (unspecified) Fuehrer Directive this meant that they could not leave the bridgehead. Admiral Netherlands reported that 203 Naval Coast Arty Bn had been completely cut off from all other German forces and that it would be possible to evacuate the unit via the port of Cadzand. In reply to his request for an immediate decision he was told that the Cadzand garrison was to hold out as long as there was ammunition and a gun capable of being fired. Personnel no longer required could be withdrawn. Naval Chief Command North (MOK Nord) expressed the opinion that the opponent would require about six weeks to take Walcheren and clear the Scheldt. Accordingly he would be able to use the Port of Antwerp sometime in December 1944, or January 1945. (W.D. Sk1, 30 Oct)

31 Oct

238. 64 Inf Div was under strong pressure from the East; there was no longer any cohesive main line of resistance; Battery Cadzand was embroiled in close combat. After ceaseless artillery fire Canadian forces had reached the area 5 - 6 km ENE Westkapelle (Westkapelle in Belgium, east of Knocke). In Fort Hazegras (5 km NE Westkapelle) the Regimental Staff Erfurth had been overpowered (Erfurth: O.C. 1038 Gren Regt). A German counter-attack from the area 4.5 km WSW Cadzand had resulted in a German advance of 1 km. NE Sluis an enemy attack was in progress. A penetration at the crossing of the Canals at Oostkerke had been sealed off. In the western part of the Leopold Canal the water level had fallen by 70 cm; the Canal was therefore no longer an obstacle. At Battery Cadzand and at the command post "Schneeweiss" (?) the cores of the positions were still in German hands. (Sitwest, 31 Oct)

239. A further withdrawal to shorter lines was no longer feasible; the remnants of the Division were fighting in their present positions; possibilities of coming to the aid of the Division did not exist (W.D. O.B. West, 31 Oct). At 1825 hrs Walcheren Batteries Dishoek and Zoutelande fired 20 rounds each against land targets (south of the Scheldt). At 1800 hrs 203 Naval Coast Arty Bn reported a remaining strength of 6 officers and 86 men. All its guns were out of commission; the strongpoint could no longer be reached from the sea; the garrison could neither be supplied nor evacuated. (W.D. Sk1, 31 Oct)

1 Nov

240. Fighting in the bridgehead was approaching its end. In the afternoon the headquarters staff of 64 Inf Div was fighting against tanks and guerillas. After this no further signals were heard (A Gp B, Sitrep 2 Nov for 1 Nov). Allied forces had landed on Walcheren (O.N.I., Tambach Collection, W.D. German Naval Operations Staff (Sk1), 1 - 30 Nov 44, 1 Nov) (Hist Sec (G.S.), Microfilms, Reel No. 15).

2 Nov

241. "Scheldt Fortress South" had fallen. - Nothing more had been heard from 64 Inf Div. The formation had fought bravely and made a substantial contribution to the defence of the Estuary (W.D. O.B. West, 2 Nov). The last messages from the bridgehead had been received by the Navy. At noon 203 Naval Coast Arty Bn had signalled: "Have terminated resistance"; at 1320 hrs Flushing reported: "Cadzand no longer answering". (W.D. Sk1, 2 Nov)

The Capture of South Beveland

(24 - 31 Oct)

242. On 23 Oct Canadian forces reached the land route to South Beveland and Walcheren at a point approximately 3 km NNW Woensdrecht (Sitwest, 23 Oct - para 158 above). For all practical purposes, of course, this important artery had been cut a few days earlier when Woensdrecht found itself in the zone of fire and all traffic began moving by sea (Schramm, Der Westen, p. 127).

243. The Canadians were now in the starting line for the assault on South Beveland. The entire German force west of the isthmus consisted of 70 Inf Div (less 1018 Gren Regt, plus elements under command) and various units of the Naval Coast Artillery. Broadly speaking, 1019 Gren Regt was responsible for the defence of Walcheren, 1020 Gren Regt for the defence of South Beveland. Shortly before the assault on South Beveland some German units moved from Walcheren to South Beveland.

244. The lack of original contemporary documentation makes it necessary to base a description of the German dispositions in South Beveland on the information supplied in General Daser's narrative. The Regimental Command Post of 1020 Gren Regt was at Goes. Early in October the Regiment's two battalions were disposed as follows:

one battalion on the south coast from the southwestern tip 3 km NW Borssele to Ellewoutsdijk (incl);

the other battalion divided in two groups:

two reinforced companies at the South Beveland Canal,

one company at the isthmus of Bath.

When the inundated area on Walcheren was growing at mid-month and the Allied forces were making progress north of Antwerp, relatively speaking considerable forces were shifted from Walcheren to South Beveland:

the Divisional Combat Post and the Divisional Artillery Commander were transferred from Middelburg on Walcheren to s'Heer Ardenskerke (4 km SW Goes) on South Beveland;

the command post of the Fortress Stamm* Regiment was moved to Ovezande in the southwestern part of South Beveland;

the Fortress Stamm Battalion hitherto in the Vrouwenpolder - Veere coastal sector of Walcheren was moved to the Ellewoutsdijk - Hoedenskerke coastal sector of South Beveland. This battalion, as well as the battalion of 1020 Gren Regt immediately west of it in the Ellewoutsdijk - Borssele sector, were placed under the commander of the Fortress Stamm Regiment;

*see para 259fn below.

the Divisional Fusilier Battalion was moved from Middelburg on Walcheren to Kapelle (4 km southeast of Goes on South Beveland) and placed directly under Div H.Q.;

the Divisional Engineer Battalion was transferred to South Beveland to prepare anti-tank obstacles and arrange for the timely demolition of the Canal bridges at Vlakte and near Wemeldingen as well as of the Sloe Dam between South Beveland and Walcheren. Battalion headquarters were at Kloetinge; one company each at Krabbendijke, Schore and Ovezande;

of the two artillery battalions still with the Division the Lt Arty Bn was positioned west of Rilland, the Hy Arty Bn north of Borssele (whence in mid-October it delivered fire on the Hoofdplaat area).

(Paraphrased and rearranged from Daser, op cit)

245. All these changes had been completed by about 20 Oct. Shortly afterwards the attacks on the narrow entrance to South Beveland began. The area was defended by 6 Coy 1020 Gren Regt and one company of the Fusilier Battalion, each reinforced by one heavy machine gun platoon. Fire support was furnished by two light batteries and one troop of a heavy battery. (Ibid, p. 25)

24 Oct

246. On 24 Oct the Canadians began pushing the cork from the bottleneck into the bottle. By late evening the German forward elements on the isthmus were in the line Paviljoen (1 km NE Bath) - 1.5 km SW Separatiedijk - Separatiedijk. Fighting was continuing. Rilland had been bombed heavily from the air. (Sitwest, 24 Oct)

25 Oct

247. According to Army Group B the focal point of the day's fighting was at the isthmus of Bath, where 2 Cdn Inf Div was making headway towards the West. 70 Inf Div reported an enemy thrust from Rilland (which had evidently been taken in the meantime) against the German blocking positions 2.5 kms west of that locality. Further north the opponent had pushed on to the area 600 metres southeast of Roelshoek. Roads and main line of defence were under heavy artillery fire. (Sitwest, 25 Oct)

26 Oct

248. The German forces on the isthmus were driven back to a blocking position astride Krabbendijke and were about to be withdrawn behind the Beveland Canal. At the southeastern tip of the peninsula Allied landing attempts had failed on some points but had succeeded near Baarland. Later the Baarland lodgment area had been extended to the railroad line east and west of Westdorp. A short distance further west the opponent had been stopped 1.5 km north of Oudelande. (Sitwest, 26 Oct)

27 Oct

249. Shortly before midnight 26/27 Oct a flotilla of German boats (K-Flott 215: Battle Flotilla 215) left Flushing for operations at the site of the landings on South Beveland. All boats of the Flotilla ran aground on a sand bank near Terneuzen. They reported lively enemy supply traffic. On the evening of 27 Oct elements of this flotilla would be committed against the ferry traffic on the Scheldt (W.D. Skl, 27 Oct). How many boats returned from the sand bank and how many, if any, were committed during the following night we do not know.

250. East of the South Beveland Canal Canadian forces were feeling their way forward to the bridgeheads. At 1800 hrs some enemy tanks were east of the Vlakte-Bridge (where railroad line and road traverse the Canal). Attacks on the bridge were repulsed. (Sitwest, 27 Oct)

251. Renewed landing attempts at Hoedekenskerke were foiled but the Baarland bridgehead was still expanding. Some Allied tanks had reached the area 2 km NE Ellewoutsdijk and there was strong pressure on Molenberg (5 km west of Hoedekenskerke). (Ibid)

28 Oct

252. Canadian forces crossed the Beveland Canal. At 1900 hrs single tanks were seen advancing on the road from Wemelding to Kapelle. Despite the fact that no bridge was available, Canadian infantry elements succeeded in reaching Biezelinge and Kapelle. Allied strength in the bridgehead had grown to not less than one armoured battalion and one infantry brigade. To bolster the front additional German forces were being moved in from Walcheren. (Sitwest, 28 Oct)

29 Oct

253. In the meantime, however, Canadian forces had taken Goes and pierced the German lines at Gravenpolder. Substantial elements of 70 Inf Div were now moving back to Walcheren "to assure the continued blocking of the Scheldt Estuary from the North" (Sitwest, 29 Oct). In part at least this quick reversal of policy was a result of the Fuehrer Directive of the same day (para 183 above) which had stressed the decisive importance of the heavy batteries on Walcheren, called for fanatical resistance on the island and countenanced a withdrawal to Walcheren and North Beveland if South Beveland should become untenable.

30 Oct

254. The bulk of the German forces on South Beveland withdrew to Walcheren and formed a bridgehead east of Arnemuiden. All weapons were taken along. Subsequently the German artillery opened fire on enemy tanks northwest of Nieudorp on the west shore of South Beveland. (Sitwest, 30 Oct)

31 Oct

255. During the latter part of the day the German rearguards at the eastern end of the causeway were dislodged and the causeway broken at point KP 62 by a mine crater 25 metres wide and 10 metres deep (Sitwest, 31 Oct). All of South Beveland was now in Canadian hands. Subsequent developments at the causeway are part of the Walcheren story.

Flooding and Capture of Walcheren
(3 Oct - 8 Nov)

256. The Defence of Walcheren Island ("Scheldt Fortress South") was in the hands of Lt Gen Wilhelm Daser, Cmr 70 Inf Div*. His personality and career have been described in: Special Interrogation Report Daser (981.023(D6)). He was a well-meaning man from the Palatinate. He had shown little in the earlier phases of the war and would show little on Walcheren. Quite likely, however, he received just as much or more co-operation from his tired dyspeptics than any driving Prussian could have obtained. How much longer better troops might have held out is hard to say. The main mistake of the German defence of Walcheren seems to have been faulty use of the artillery, which raises the question whether or not more competent infantry officers could and would have demanded the kind of artillery support that might have defeated the Westkapelle landing**. Evidently General Student was dismayed at finding Walcheren defended by troops of doubtful combat value. In his post war comments he writes:

(on assuming command in Holland at the end of October)

I discovered that a division composed of men with chronic ailments had been entrusted with this vital, perhaps most important sector of my new front. Thus, the excellent and up to date coastal batteries on the island were protected by inferior troops. I decided to send 6 Para Regt to Walcheren as immediate reinforcement. The Naval Commander Netherlands was instructed to assemble the necessary river crossing equipment in a hurry. However, it was already too late, the British attack occurred the day after I assumed command.***

(Student, 1 Para Army and A Gp H, op cit, p. 16)

257. As we know, 70 Inf Div was a "Stomach" division; the sole such division employed in the West. With millions of men under arms, and the incidence of gastric cases high, it was inevitable that ultimately there would be a veritable little army of stomach sufferers on the borderline of employability. For various medical and administrative reasons these men were gradually separated from other categories and banded together in "Stomach" companies and battalions. In step with the progressive deterioration of the manpower situation their leisured life came soon to an end; at first they were used for light tasks, later for heavier tasks and finally for combat duty.

*For earlier references to Daser see page VI below.

**The naval coast artillery at Flushing had been knocked out completely before the assault, but at Westkapelle some barrels were still firing at the time of the landing (Daser, p. 39).

***The question of reinforcing the Walcheren garrison had been considered by the High Command in the early days of October:

On 30 Sep the Naval High Command had asked for a strengthening of the Walcheren garrison. On 11 Oct WFSt considered the matter and ultimately rejected the suggestion on the grounds that Fifteenth Army was to hold its present positions and to do this needed all its forces. (Schramm, Der Westen, p. 216)

This was a harsh measure, but conditions of life had become harsh for all Germans. It was also a somewhat futile measure, for stomach sufferers have little energy to spare and are inclined to sulk and shirk. That his men put up a good fight in some spots speaks well for Daser.

258. 70 Inf Div was built on the cadres of 165 Res Div. The latter was a formation engaged in the training of replacements for the eastern front. At the beginning of 1944 it had been transferred from eastern France to Walcheren and South Beveland (Daser, p. 10). On 3 Feb 44 Daser was placed in command of this Division (ibid, p. 3). Early in May he was notified that the formation was to be transformed into a 70 Inf Div to be organized nearby. From the middle of May onwards, companies and battalions of men with gastric complaints arrived from Germany and were quartered in the eastern parts of South Beveland and north of Antwerp. By the end of June the young trainees of 165 Res Div had been replaced by gastric cases. (Men who were totally unfit for combat duty had been segregated and formed into a battalion for duty at Antwerp.) The divisional commander, his staff officers and the regimental commanders of the disbanded 165th Reserve Division were now holding corresponding appointments in 70 Inf Div. On completion of the exchange of personnel the percentages of gastric cases were about as follows:

Div H.Q.	Nil
Regimental and Unit H.Q.'s	50%
Infantry	90%
Artillery	75%
Engineers	10%
Signals	30%

(Ibid, pp 11-12)

259. When the substance of 165 Res Div was being drained-off and the empty vessel re-filled with gastric units, the designation was changed to 70 Inf Div, but there were no major changes in composition. The main elements were:

Division Headquarters

Reconnaissance Platoon (mot)

Fusilier Battalion (2 reinf coys)

Three Infantry Regiments of two battalions each

(battalions composed of three infantry companies and one machine gun company)

plus

one infantry gun company and one anti-tank company per regiment

Artillery Regiment

two light artillery battalions of three batteries each

plus

one infantry gun company and
one anti-tank company per
regiment

Artillery Regiment

two light artillery battalions
of three batteries each

plus

(under tactical command)
one GHQ Artillery Battalion
composed of three heavy (15cm)
batteries

Engineer Battalion

three companies and one light
bridging column

Signal Battalion (two companies)

Fortress Stamm Battalion*

(of Fortress Stamm Regiment
Geyer (later completely under
70 Inf Div))

Armenian Battalion (left area in August)

Eastern Battalion (left area in August)

(Ibid, pp 10, 11, 16)

260. Upon the return of the elements that had been
committed in the Ghent area, 70 Inf Div was disposed as follows:

Walcheren

Div HQ.
Recce Pl
Fus Bn [70]

1018 Gren Regt
1019 Gren Regt

Arty Regt [170]

Engr Bn [170]
Sigs Bn [170]
Fortress Stamm Regt [89]**

*Fortress "Stamm" units were permanent fortress units
composed of lower category personnel and usually used to man
fortifications and heavy weapons in coast defence sectors.

**In July and August 1944, 70 Inf Div had only the First
Battalion of 89 Fortress Stamm Regiment under command. Early
in September the Second and Third Battalions of the Regiment
were withdrawn from the Breskens - Blankenberghe area, placed
under 70 Inf Div in the Ghent sector, and shortly thereafter
transferred to Walcheren. (Daser, pp 11, 13, 17, 18; Daser
Interrogation p. 3)

Division	Middelburg
Arty Regt	Middelburg
1020 Gren Regt	1 km N Oostkapelle
Fortr Stamm Regt (89)	Nieuwland

Elements of 2 Bn 1019 Gren Regt and remnants of two Fortress Stamm Battalions were in the area from Fort Rammekens to the Sloe-Dam; the remnants of the Fusilier Battalion between the Sloe-Dam and the Walcheren Canal; (the remnants of) 1020 Gren Regt in the area Domburg - Vrouwenpolder. (Ibid, p. 29)

264 Clearly the infantry protection for the German artillery on Walcheren was utterly inadequate. This, however, was not so much the result of obtuseness and indifference - as implied in the after-action observations of the Navy - than of the manpower squeeze which had made it necessary to commit elsewhere the greater part of the infantry originally earmarked for Walcheren. Amongst other things the Navy had the following to say:

(Skl to OKW/WFSt and Admiral at Fuehrer H.Q.)

Nowhere can batteries provide their own infantry protection.... It has been seen again that the batteries fell prey neither to air attacks nor frontal attacks from the sea, but were taken by land attack from the rear or flanks. It is necessary that at long last heed be paid everywhere to a lesson that has by now been so abundantly demonstrated in the West.

(W.D. Skl, 13 Nov 44)

265. But while it is true that the small infantry forces on Walcheren could do little to protect the batteries, it is also true that larger forces would hardly have been able to postpone for long the elimination of artillery positions that were exposed to unhindered bombardment from the air, sea and land. The real strength and substance of the German defence of Walcheren was embodied in the various Naval Coast Artillery and Antiaircraft Batteries. Their composition appears on Appendix "C" to the present Report*. This document shows the situation on 1 Apr 44, but there are no presently known reasons to believe that there were any material changes after that date, except, perhaps, for the addition of some 94-mm guns**. The approximate location of the batteries in question appears on Appendix "E" to the present Report (introduced in para 272 below). On the basis of these two Appendices it would seem that before being reduced by bombardment the German Naval Artillery on Walcheren was composed in essence of the following:

*Appx "C" to the present Report is a reproduction of page seven of the following document: G.M.D.S. - 52099/2, Volume of Appendices to W.D. 89 Corps, Jan - Jun 44, Appx 85, 13 Apr 44, Misc Orders of Battle, 27 pages) (Photostat 981089(DI)).

**According to a report from A Gp B to O.B. West, naval coast artillery gun strength on Walcheren on 22 Sep 44 was 55 guns and 12 anti-aircraft guns of the following calibres:

- 2 75-mm Belgian infantry guns
- 4 75-mm British infantry guns
- 10 94-mm cannon
- 12 150-mm cannon
- 4 220-mm coastal artillery pieces
- 23 coastal artillery pieces of unknown calibres
and
- 12 105-mm antiaircraft guns

(Cited from: Heichler, op cit, p. 12)

202nd Naval Coast Artillery Battalion

(H.Q. Domburg)

Battery	75mm and up	Calibre
Oostkapelle (4/202)	4	94mm (brit)
Domburg (5/202)	4 1 2	220mm 150mm 75mm
Westkapelle (6/202)	4	150mm
Zoutelande (7/202)	5	75mm
Dishoek (8/202)	4 2	150mm 75mm
Sea Target Bty Kernwerk- Flushing (9/202)	3	150mm

810th Naval Anti-Aircraft Battalion

(H.Q. Flushing)

Flushing North (2/810)	4	105mm A.A.
Flushing West (3/810)	4	105mm A.A.
Flushing East (4/810)	4	105mm A.A.
(5/810 at Breskens; s.a. para 236 above)		
6/810 (Flushing area and Veere)	2 5 8	40mm A.A. 37mm A.A. 20mm A.A.
7/810 (Flushing area) (elts at Breskens)	5	37mm A.A. 20mm A.A.
8/810 (Flushing area) (elts at Breskens)		Searchlight Battery

266. In addition to the guns listed above there were on Walcheren a number of anti-landing guns (75mm), small anti-aircraft guns, anti-tank guns and mortars, but there is not sufficient documentary evidence to calculate their number. And whatever the artillery set-up may have been, by 1 Nov, particularly in the Flushing area, it had ceased to be of much significance:

Very little effective opposition could be offered to the assault against Flushing on 1 Nov. All the coastal artillery guns on the south shore had been destroyed either by flooding, or bombing or counter-battery fire. There were only machine guns and a few Czech land defence guns* available to deal with the landing force.

(Special Interrogation Report Daser, p. 10)

267. At the end of October there were no elements of 70 Inf Div's organic artillery in the Flushing area. All had left Walcheren earlier, and what flooded back at the end of the month in the retreat from South Beveland was committed in the defence of the eastern approaches to the island, namely two light batteries (troops) at Arnemuiden, and three heavy batteries (troops) east of Nieuwland. (Daser, p. 29)

268. The ranking German Naval Officer on Walcheren was the Sea Defence Commander of South Holland, Naval Captain (Kapitän sur See) Aschmann. Under him the senior naval artillery officer on his staff was responsible for the conduct of the fire fight against sea targets. That is, as long as none were within range of what was considered divisional artillery range, in which case coast artillery fell automatically under command of the sector commander (in this instance Daser) for action against land and sea targets alike. (Daser, p. 15)

269. German defence installations on Walcheren have been described in Daser's post war account. A translation of the passage in question appears as Appendix "D" to the present Report.

270. During the greater part of September the Allied air forces had been engaged on targets further inland:

[but] near the end of the month the Sloe-Dam between Walcheren and South Beveland was repeatedly covered with heavy bombs, and as a result the rail and road traffic was interrupted at times, and badly disturbed for a considerable period of time (Daser, p. 21).

271. On 26 Sep a lively Allied air reconnaissance was carried out over the island (Sitwest, 26 Sep). This was a harbinger of things to come, for late in the afternoon of 1 Oct the German Air Force stronghold northeast of Domburg was bombed from the air and lost two major pieces of sea-searching and coast-watching radar equipment (one "Mammut" and one "Würzburg Riese") (W.D. O.B. West, 1 Oct). A much more serious development occurred on 3 Oct, when O.B. West recorded that two waves of Allied aircraft had carried out heavy bombing attacks on Walcheren and South Beveland and had succeeded in breaching the dyke on the south coast of Walcheren. There was now "danger of flooding" (Ibid, 3 Oct):

On 3 Oct the concrete dyke near Westkapelle on a breadth of thirty meters was demolished by the enemy air forces, as a result of which a low-

*i.e. Anti-Landing Guns (Landungsabwehrgeschütze)

lying area east and southeast of Westkapelle was flooded. The incoming tide broadened the break still more. In order to seal off the flood, a dam was built in a large arc along the approximate line: northeast of Domburg - Aagtekerke - Zoutelande. Strongpoints on the old dykes were not flooded; batteries which were in danger of being flooded changed their positions in time.

(von Zangen, Fifteenth Army, p. 72)

By using all available military and civilian labour forces it was possible to throw up within ten days a dam along a slight elevation of the ground on a line: Zoutelande - Meliskerke - Mariekerke - het Klooster (1 km NW Gripskerke) - Oostkapelle. It was shored up with props and fascines, was 9 km long, on the average 1.7 metres high and 1.5 metres wide at the base, and backed up the flood which had meanwhile penetrated as far as this line.

(Daser, p. 22)

272. If the Germans counted on gaining valuable time by defending Walcheren gun by gun and ditch by ditch, they must have been sorely disappointed to see the inundations on the island grow from day to day until there was not enough dry land to put up any kind of effective defence. By 23 Oct all areas lying open to flooding were covered with water. A map showing the extent of the inundations at that time was submitted to the Naval Operations Staff early in November. Photostatic reproductions of this map and the covering letter appear as Appendix "E" to the present Report. (Naval Operations Staff (Sk1), File North Sea - Norway, op cit, FI No. 3072/44, Secret, 4 Nov 44)

273. From 3 - 23 Oct O.B. West's Daily Situation reports and entries in the War Diary carried little information on Walcheren beyond glumly repetitive statements announcing further expansions of the floods:

The break in the dyke on Walcheren has become wider. Preparations for the creation of emergency dams are under way....(W.D. O.B. West, 5 Oct)

The enemy has continued his air attacks on the dykes on Walcheren. New gaps for influx of water....(Ibid, 7 Oct)

Growing inundations of Walcheren....(Sitwest, 9 Oct)

Further expansion of the inundations on Walcheren....(Sitwest, 16 Oct)

Continuing flooding of Walcheren through gaps in the dykes resulting from enemy air activity.... (Sitwest, 16 Oct)

In the afternoon fresh bombing attack against dyke on west coast of Walcheren. Evidently the enemy intends to eliminate our defence also by means of inundations caused by these attacks.... (W.D. O.B. West, 17 Oct)

Walcheren inundated except for north of line Vrouwenpolder - Oostkapelle - Aagtekerke and the areas Kleverskerke, Arnemuiden and Nieuwland.... (Sitwest, 18 Oct)

Further rise in water level at break in dyke near Westkapelle. Influx of water also at ebb-tide....(Sitwest, 19 Oct)

274. A brief description of the developments in the Flushing area has been provided by Daser:

In the middle of October the concrete flood-wall on the northwest corner of Flushing, and at the same time the narrow dam one kilometer southwest of Fort Rammekens were destroyed, each with 500 - 600 aerial mines with time fuses. The flood surging in immediately inundated the areas in the vicinity of the gaps, later on a part of Flushing and the district as far as West and East Scouburg, and finally the whole area as far as the anti-tank ditch and wall.(Daser, p. 23)

275. Apart from flooding news the situation reports carried little information on Walcheren. On 16 Oct the island was shelled for the first time by Allied artillery (Sitwest, 16 Oct). The inundations on Walcheren necessitated a regrouping of forces. Some units were sent to South Beveland to strengthen the forces there against Allied landings (W.D. O.B. West, 18 Oct). On 21 Oct, 70 Inf Div reported artillery fire on the lock and harbour entrance of Flushing (Sitwest, 21 Oct). During the last week of October, with the fall of Breskens a matter of days, with Walcheren largely under water, and the port and defences of Flushing being shelled and struck from the air, the historic island was ripe for assault.

1 Nov

276. On 1 Nov Allied forces invaded Walcheren on several places in a hazardous and gallant undertaking. O.B. West reported:

70 Inf Div: At Flushing and on both sides of Westkapelle the enemy landed with forces of altogether about one infantry brigade and several armoured units. He succeeded in penetrating Flushing and, on both sides of Westkapelle, in gaining ground with tanks toward the Northeast and Southeast.... The enemy advance in northeasterly direction along the coastal road Westkapelle - Domburg has reached the area 1 km SW Domburg. In the northern quarter of Flushing the enemy has pushed forward to the bridge across the canal. A counter-attack at 1800 hrs forced the enemy [to fall] back across the narrow part of the canal.... The three anti-aircraft batteries around Flushing have only one single barrel left ready for use, the port battery Flushing one gun fit for action to some degree.(Sitwest, 1 Nov)

As Walcheren cannot be reached by sea or land, the length of the fighting there depends entirely on the steadfastness of the garrison which cannot possibly receive support from the outside. (W.D. O.B. West, 1 Nov)

277. A short reference to the fate of the Naval Coast Artillery batteries on Walcheren was made on 6 Nov in the introductory paragraph to a Situation Estimate of the Naval Chief Command North:

Upon the enemy landing on Walcheren early

on 1 Nov, the batteries Dishoek, Zoutelande and Westkapelle, which controlled the Scheldt Estuary, were eliminated after brief fighting due to lack of infantry defence. The battery Kernwerk and the antiaircraft batteries Flushing had been destroyed for the most part by enemy action before the landing.

(Naval Operations Staff (Sk1), File North Sea - Norway, op cit, Naval Chief Command North, Estimate of The Situation, 6 Nov 44, No. 2617F -one-plus, Secret)

2 Nov

278. On 2 Nov the Sea Defence Commander of South Holland received the sort of signal that commanders have ever received in similar circumstances:

Personal

Berlin, 2 Nov 44

Dear Aschmann,

For the past four weeks my whole heart has been with you in your brave struggle. If ever a fight to the finish is of strategical importance, it is so in your mission to keep the enemy from using Antwerp. Give my greetings to your brave men. You are not fighting alone, with you are the whole Navy, nay, the whole German nation which you are protecting with your tenacious resistance.

Dönitz

Grand Admiral

(Ibid, No. 39447/44, Dönitz to Aschmann, 2 Nov 44)

279. But as ever too, noble words were no remedy for a hopeless situation:

In the face of inundations and heavy enemy air activity the fighting on Walcheren continues under the most difficult conditions. The enemy has made further gains of ground.... In continuing his advance from the Northwest towards Flushing he has occupied the strongpoint southeast of Zoutelande. In Flushing there is still street fighting. At the causeway between Walcheren and South Beveland the enemy is bringing up reinforcements. (Sitwest, 2 Nov)

In Flushing fighting persists. At the west-coast the enemy continues his advance towards the Northwest [sic] and Southeast. Of the naval batteries, which represent the main blocking effect of Walcheren, only two (plus two naval anti-aircraft batteries [tps]) are clear for action. (W.D. O.B. West, 2 Nov)

It is to be expected that within a short time the north shore of the Scheldt too will have been taken by the enemy. O.B. West has no remedy at his disposal. It will then be possible merely to harass the port of Antwerp with flying bombs. (Ibid)

3 Nov

280. Good progress was made on this day in the elimination of German resistance on Walcheren:

On Walcheren the enemy kept attacking with undiminished vehemence. In the western part of the island he advanced past Domburg and past Zoutelande, in the eastern part there is hard fighting east of Arnemuiden and against newly landed enemy forces southeast of Nieuland.

At 1415 hrs armoured enemy forces penetrated the strongpoint "Zoppot" (NE Domburg)*. Enemy forces advancing in southeasterly direction from the northern front at Flushing captured strongpoint "Tannhäuser" (2 km NW Flushing)* and are advancing further towards the city. At Flushing the command posts of the "Defence Area Flushing" and the former** command post of the Sea Defence Commander have been taken by the enemy after hard fighting. (Sitwest, 3 Nov)

281. Additional information was recorded in the War Diary of the Naval Operations Staff:

3 Nov Since 0200 hrs enemy is firing on Flushing with four to five batteries....

Early in the morning Canadians forced their way into the command post of the Sea Defence Commander....**

Towards noon 810 Naval Flak [sic] was overpowered in close combat with superior forces....

(W.D. Sk1, 3 Nov)

282. Various morsels of information on the fate of the Naval anti aircraft batteries in the Flushing area were supplied to the Naval High Command by the Naval Chief Command North, on 6 Nov 44, on the basis of information received through channels from the Sea Defence Commander Holland.

810 Naval A. A. Bn (Course of action as reported up to 6 Nov):

Flushing-North: last barrel [was firing] barrage fire against landing craft off Flushing. After that barrel out of commission battery personnel employed in infantry role between Souburg and Middelburg. Strength at the moment unascertainable.

Flushing-West: one barrel destroyed by drum-fire at the beginning of the landing, last barrel fired on landing craft for a

*No additional information on hand.

**At the time of capture this was the headquarters of 1019 Gren Regt. The Sea Defence Commander had moved to Vrouwenpolder (Daser, p. 19), and on 2 Nov "Dear Aschmann" (para 278 above) had left Walcheren and was now ensconced in the battery position "Renesse" on the island of Schouwen (Source for date and location: W.D. Sk1, 2 Nov).

short time, then was destroyed by mortar fire. Crew of battery, together with headquarters battery committed in defence of A.A. command post. Last signal at 1345 hrs 3 Nov.

Flushing-East: last barrel was destroyed by the barrage at the beginning of the landing. Crew was distributed to infantry positions. No further reports.

Flushing-South
[incl]
(Emergency Flak
Veere): Fired on Sloe-dam. By continuous harassment of enemy dam-construction work delayed passage of tanks from South Beveland. Present strength only 1 Offr, 3 NCO and 44 men. Plus 22 men from 7 Tp and other non-specialists.

6 Tp (Lt A.A. Bty Veere);

two 4 cm and one 2 cm gun destroyed, two 3.7 cm guns temporarily out of action, now clear for action again. At the moment [6 Nov], therefore, clear for action: 2 medium and 5 light guns.

7 Tp (Lt A.A. Bty Flushing):

Fired on landing craft off Flushing; after weapons lost, remnants of crew to 6 Tp Lt A A Bty and to Searchlight [bty] on West Walcheren. Participated in fighting for A.A. command post.

(O.N.I. - Tambach Collection, Naval High Command, Naval Operations Staff (Sk1), File North Sea - Norway (contd), Naval Command North (MOK Nord), No. 3144F-one-plus, 6 Nov 44, Secret) (981HCN(D17))

4 Nov

283. Northeast of Domburg the Germans lost further ground after hard fighting. Allied forces subdued the strong-points northwest of Flushing. At the narrows of Arnemuïden the Germans succeeded in holding off the invading forces. The port of Middelburg was under fire from artillery. There were air attacks on the northeast coast of Walcheren. (Sitwest, 4 Nov)

5 Nov

284, German efforts to hold the area of the Sloe-Dam and Arnemuïden failed. The bulk of the German forces there was destroyed. In Middelburg supply troops and emergency units were engaged in fighting with armour and guerillas. The remnants of the German group that had been dislodged from strongpoint Hamster were now blocking the opponent 2.5 km NE Domburg. Battle noises could be heard from the area 1.5 km east of Middelburg. Harbour and railway terminus Middelburg were the main targets of ship's artillery off Flushing. The German artillery had been eliminated completely (Sitwest, 5 Nov). According to a radio signal from 70 Inf Div, German resistance on Walcheren was drawing to a close. Apart from dropping supplies from the air by night there were no possibilities of lending support to the German troops on Walcheren. (W.D. O.B. West, 5 Nov)

6 Nov

285. Towards 1600 hrs the opponent forced his way into Middelburg. At 1715 hrs the Microwave Station of 70 Inf Div reported off the air; at 1745 hrs 468 Flak Bn signed off (Sitwest, 6 Nov)*. According to the evening report of A Gp B, Middelburg was still in German hands, but attack was imminent (W.D. O.B. West, 6 Nov)**. The pressure on Middelburg was coming from the directions of Flushing and Nieuwland. At Veere the Germans had been pushed back to the demolished lock on the east side of the town. The western part was still in the hands of naval personnel (400 men under a Naval First Lieutenant). (W.D. Skl, 6 Nov)

7 Nov

286. The German elements still offering resistance in the northern part of Walcheren were under attack at all points. In heavy fighting they were compressed into a very small area at the water-tower 2.5 km northwest of Vrouwenpolder. Veere was lost. (Sitwest, 7 Nov)

8 Nov

287. In the northern part of Walcheren there was fighting for the last positions. At 0837 hrs the Wireless Station of 70 Inf Div reported for the last time and signed off. (Sitwest, 8 Nov)

288. That was the end of the Walcheren story. Many precious lives had been lost in the assault. But many more had been saved by the brilliant imagination and persistence of the Canadian soldier who made the principal payment in water instead of blood.

289. This report has been prepared by Capt. A.G. Steiger, Historical Section (G.S.).

A. G. Steiger, Capt.
for (C.P. Stacey) Colonel
Director
Historical Section (G.S.)

*No other references to this unit have been encountered. It is believed to have been a searchlight unit. (Order of Battle of the German Army, Mil Int Div, Wash D.C., op cit, p. 466)

**Late in the afternoon of 6 Nov, Daser and staff surrendered to British forces at Middelburg (W.D. 7th/9th Royal Scots, 6 Nov 44).

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GERMAN PERSONAL NAMES

- ASCHMANN, Naval Captain, Sea Defence Commander of South Holland, Senior Naval Officer on Walcheren:
268, 278, 280fn, 281, 282
- BALCK, Hermann, Gen Pz Tps, Cmdr A Gp G (21 Sep - 23 Dec 44):
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- BITTRICH, Willi, SS Gen, Cmdr 2 SS Pz Corps:
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- BLASKOWITZ, Johannes, Col Gen, Cmdr A Gp G (10 May - 21 Sep 44):
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- BLUMENTRITT, Guenther, Gen Inf, C. of S. O.B. West and A Gp D (24 Sep 42 - 9 Sep 44):
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- CHEVALLERIE, Kurt von der, Col Gen, Cmdr First Army (2 Jun - 6 Sep 44):
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- CHILL, Kurt, Lt Gen, Cmdr 85 Inf Div (Battle Group Chill) (10 Feb - 7 Dec 44):
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- CHRISTIANSEN, Karl Friedrich, Gen G.A.F., German Armed Forces Commander in the Netherlands:
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- DASER, Wilhelm, Lt Gen, Cmdr 70 Inf Div (15 May - 27 Nov 44) (Captured 6 Nov 44):
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DIETRICH, Sepp, SS Col Gen, Cmdr Fifth Panzer Army
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DÖNITZ, Karl, Grand Admiral, C.-in-C. German Navy:

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EBERBACH, Heinrich, Gen Pz Tps, Cmdr Seventh Army
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EBERDING, Knut, Maj Gen, Cmdr 64 Inf Div
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von der Heyde, Lt Col, Cmdr 6 Para Regt:

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HIMMLER, Heinrich, Reichsfuehrer SS, Cmdr Replacement
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HITLER, Adolf (Fuehrer)

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HOECKER, Hans Kurt, Lt Gen, Cmdr 17 GAF Div:

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JODL, Alfred, Col Gen, Chief WFSt:

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KAMMER or KAMMLER, SS Lt Gen, thought to have been
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KESSELRING, Albert, Field Marshal, O.B. Southwest:

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KLUGE, Guenther von, Field Marshal, O.B. West (3 Jul -
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KLUGE, Wolfgang von, Lt Gen, Cmdr 226 Inf Div:

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KNOBELSDORFF, Otto, Gen Pz Tps, Cmdr First Army
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KREBS, Hans, Lt Gen, C. of S. A Gp B (from Sep 44):

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KUNTZEN, Adolf Friedrich, Gen Pz Tps, Cmdr 81 Corps:

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LÜTTWITZ, Freiherr Heinrich von, Gen Pz Tps, Cmdr
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MANTEUFFEL, Hasso-Eccard von, Gen Pz Tps, Cmdr Fifth
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MODEL, Walter, Field Marshal, O.B. West (17 Aug -
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MOHNKE, SS Standartenfuehrer, (Group Mohnke):

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NEUMANN, Friedrich, Lt Gen, Cmdr 712 Inf Div:

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POPPE, Walter, Lt Gen, Cmdr 59 Inf Div:

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PÜCHLER, Karl, Lt Gen (later Gen), Cmdr 67 Corps:
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- SCHERFF, Walter, Lt Gen, Chief Hist Sec OKW:
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- SCHLEMM, Alfred, Gen Pz Tps, Cmdr First Parachute
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- SCHRAMM, Percy, Major, (Historian), War Diarist WFSt
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- SCHWALBE, Eugen Felix, Lt Gen, Cmdr 344 Inf Div:
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- SCHWERIN, Graf Gerhard von, Lt Gen, Cmdr 116 Pz Div
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Books

von Tippelskirch, <u>Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges</u> (History of the Second World War)	145fn
Westphal, <u>Heer in Fesseln</u> (Army in Bonds)	180

Principal Appointments

in the West

(for Autumn 1944)

1. 1. 1944 - 31. 12. 1944

1. Jul 44 - 17. Aug 44 270 Günther von Wangen
17. Aug 44 - - 42 Walter Model
1. Sep 44 - 10. Nov 44 270 Adolf von Sandtstedt

2. 1. 1945

1. 1. 1945

1. Dec 44 - 17. Jan 45 270 Erwin Rommel
17. Jan 45 - 17. Apr 45 270 Walter Model

2. 1. 1945

10. Apr 45 - 31. May 45 270 Gen. Gen. Johannes Blomburg
31. May 45 - 13. Jun 45 270 Gen. Gen. Hermann Guderian

3. 1. 1945

11. Jun 45 - 10. Jul 45 270 Gen. Gen. Kurt Student

4. 1. 1945

Ref: para 11

10. Jul 45 - 10. Aug 45 270 Gen. Gen. Kurt Student

5. 1. 1945

1. Sep 45 - 1. Sep 45 Gen. Gen. Ernst von dem Bach-Zelewski
1. Sep 45 - 1. Sep 45 Gen. Gen. Ernst von dem Bach-Zelewski
1. Sep 45 - 1. Sep 45 Gen. Gen. Ernst von dem Bach-Zelewski

PRINCIPAL APPOINTMENTS IN THE WEST

(for period under review)

O.B. WEST (until 8 Nov 44 also known as A Gp D)

3 Jul 44 - 17 Aug 44	GFM	Guenther von Kluge
17 Aug 44 - 4 Sep 44	GFM	Walter Model
4 Sep 44 - 10 Mar 45	GFM	Gerd von Rundstedt

ARMY GROUPS

Army Group B

31 Dec 43*- 17 Aug 44	GFM	Erwin Rommel
17 Aug 44 - 17 Apr 45	GFM	Walter Model

Army Group G

10 May 44 - 21 Sep 44	Col Gen	Johannes Blaskowitz
21 Sep 44 - 23 Dec 44	Gen Pz Tps	Hermann Balck

Army Group Studen (prov)

31 Oct 44 - 10 Nov 44	Col Gen	Kurt Student
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Army Group H

10 Nov 44 - 28 Jan 45	Col Gen	Kurt Student
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ARMIES

First Army

2 Jun 44 - 6 Sep 44	Gen Inf	Kurt von der Chevallerie
6 Sep 44 - 29 Oct 44	Gen Pz Tps	Otto von Knobelsdorff
29 Oct 44 - 1 Dec 44	Gen Inf	Kurt von Tippelskirch

* Date on which upgraded from a working staff to command (under O.B. West): 88 Corps (Netherlands), Fifteenth Army and Seventh Army.

Seventh Army

29 Jun 44 - 23 Aug 44 SS Gen Paul Hausser
24 Aug 44 - 31 Aug 44 Gen Pz Tps Heinrich Eberbach
31 Aug 44 - 19 Feb 45 Gen Pz Tps Erich Brandenberger

Fifteenth Army

15 Aug 43 - 23 Aug 44 Col Gen Hans von Salmuth
23 Aug 44 - 17 Apr 45 Gen Inf Gustav von Zangen

Nineteenth Army

29 Jun 44 - 15 Dec 44 Gen Inf Friedrich Wiese

Fifth Panzer Army

9 Aug 44 - 10 Sep 44 SS Col Gen Sepp Dietrich
10 Sep 44 - early 1945 Gen Pz Tps Hasso-Eccard von
Manteuffel

Sixth Panzer Army

13 Sep 44 - May 1945 SS Col Gen Sepp Dietrich

First Parachute Army

4 Sep 44 - 31 Oct 44 Col Gen Kurt Student
31 Oct 44 - 28 Mar 45 Gen Para Tps Alfred Schlemm

Armed Forces Commander Netherlands

1 Sep 44 - 26 Jan 45 Gen G.A.T. Karl Friedrich
Christiansen

O.B. West

Order of Battle

13 Oct 44

981.045(D1)

Ref: para 143

13 OCT. 44

ARMED FORCES HIGH COMMAND

PERIODICAL SCHEMATIC ORDERS OF BATTLE OF GERMAN ARMIES.

O. B. WEST-(A GP D)
SECTION OF CHART.

DIVISIONS	CORPS	ARMIES	ARMY GROUPS
64 [†] , 70 [†] , 85 [©] , Battle Gp 346 [†] , 711 ^{†©} , 719 ^{†©}	67	15	B 319 ^{†©} ----- 3 Para 6 " 5 " undergoing rehabilitation
245 [†] ; 59 ^{†©} ,	88		
Battle Group 712 ^{†©} H.Q. 344	89		
363 V.Gr.	12 SS	I PARA Div. No. 526	3 Para 6 " 5 " undergoing rehabilitation
9 Pz, Battle Group 9 SS Pz, Battle Group 10 SS Pz	2 SS PZ		
Div. No. 406 ^{xx} , Battle Group 84, Div No.100 ^{xx}	2 PARA		
Battle Group Walter (107 Pz Bde), Div.No. 180, Div. No. 176 ^{xx}	86		
183 V.Gr, Remts 49 ^{†©} , 116 Pz, 108 Pz Bde	1 SS PZ	7 3 Pz Gren (coming)	256 V.Gr. 361 V.Gr.
246 V.Gr, 12 V.Gr.	81		
275 [©] , 89, Battle Group 347 ^{†©}	74		
Remts 1 SS Pz, Remts 12 SS Pz, Div.No.172 ^{xx} , Battle Group 2 SS Pz, Battle Group 2 Pz	66	D simultaneously	OB WEST
Remts 353, 36 V.Gr [©]	80		
Remts 265 ^{†©}	25	I 5 PZ	G 30 SS Gren Div (Russian No. 1)
416 [©] , 19 V.Gr, 462	82		
17 SS Pz Gr, Remts 553 V.Gr, 559 V.Gr, 48	13 SS		
11 Pz, 15 Pz Gr	58 PZ	19	
21 Pz, 16 V.Gr [©]	47 PZ		
716 ^{†©} , 198 [©]	64	4 LW FD#	
338 [©]			
159, 189, 106 Pz Bde	85 for special employment.		

O

K

W

† static, © without Asslt Gun Bn # Lw Fd - German Air Force Field V.Gr. - Volks Grenadier Remts - Remnants
xx Divisions with the prefix "No." were "Heimatdivisionen" (i.e. home divisions, not yet fully manned, trained or equipped)

Appendix "C"
to H.S. Report No. 69

Naval Coast Artillery on Walcheren

April 1944

981089(D1)

Ref: para 265

Stand: 1.4.44

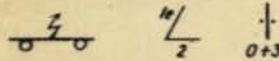
Küstenverteidigungsabschnitt A 1

Marine

202



Domburg

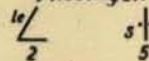


9./202	8./202	7./202	6./202 ⁹	5./202	4./202
Seezielbatterie Kernwerk Vlissingen	Dishoek	Zoutelande	Westkapelle	Domburg	Oostkapelle

*) u. 41. Fu. Meß-Kp. Utrecht



Vlissingen



8./810	7./810	6./810	4./810	3./810	2./810
Raum Vlissingen 1 60cm Scheinw. in Veere	Raum Vlissingen	Raum Vlissingen Je ein 37u. 2cm Gesch. in Veere	Vlissingen Ostbatterie	Vlissingen Westbatterie	Vlissingen Nordbatterie

Daser

Defence Installations on Walcheren

(Translated Excerpt)

Ref: para 269

In accordance with the principal combat mission: "To repel any enemy attack from the West, and in particular in combination with the neighbouring division to the South to block the Scheldt Estuary and the port of Flushing", the west coast of Walcheren from Vrouwenpolder to Fort Rammekens (both included) was built up -- "fort-like" as far as possible -- by a number of concrete strongpoints and resistance nests that were re-inforced by field works. The northwest coast of North Beveland and the southwest coast of South Beveland were provided with field works sited in the main between individual minor strongpoints.

Organized for defence by field works were:
facing east: the isthmus of Bath and a line about
3 km east of the west coasts of North
and South Beveland,

facing both ways: the Walcheren Canal north of Middelburg,
and the South Beveland Canal,

for all-round defence: the town of Goes.

The northern limit of the "Fortress Area Flushing" was a line of field works and individual bunkers connected by antitank ditches and walls.

a) Strongpoints

On the main coastal points and in the rear area there were accommodated in a series or group of concrete gun emplacements and bunkers, proof against shell fragments, and shell-proof against calibres up to 15 cm:

all naval coast batteries (with the exception of the 22 cm battery east of Domburg),

three heavy (15 cm) batteries and a portion of the light batteries of the Divisional artillery [while on the island],

nearly all anti-landing guns, anti-tank guns, infantry guns and mortars at the coast,

anti-tank weapons and heavy infantry weapons at the anti-tank ditch,

crews of guns and heavy infantry weapons, observers,
radio and telephone posts,

command posts of the Division, the infantry and artillery regiments, the Senior Naval Officer, the naval coast artillery and flak unit,

a part of the reserves,

ammunition and food.

The walls of the bunkers were up to one metre thick, the roofs up to 2.5 metres. Some were covered with armour plates, many with revolving panzer cupolas, a great many were provided with panzer doors, all with heating and air conditioning installations and gas traps (air locks). All strong points were prepared for close and all-round defence by reinforced field works and were surrounded by wire entanglements and mine belts.

b) Resistance Nests

Field fortification type resistance nests were established between individual strongpoints and at the other positions. The resistance nests were surrounded by ditches and provided with bunkers and machine gun positions splinterproofed with iron rails, wood, stones and earth.

c) Wire-Obstacles

All strongpoints and resistance nests, as well as entire batteries and individual positions for guns and heavy infantry weapons were encircled by a wire entanglement 50 metres wide.

d) Off-shore Obstacles

At first individual pylons 20-30cm thick, iron posts and rails were embedded, later on only triangular jacks of 30 cm and thicker wood, rammed in and fastened together with iron clamps. Waterproof anti-tank mines or grenades were attached to the obstacles. As far as they were available, wire cables as broad as a finger were stretched between them. Concrete boxes loaded with mines or explosives were set up at different elevations from the ground.

e) Anti-tank Ditches and Anti-tank Wall

Connecting up with existing water courses, a water ditch was dredged out from the coastal road from halfway between Flushing - Zoutelande via Koudekerke - Klein Abeele (1.5 km south of Middelburg) towards Fort Rammekens. The ditch was 10 km long, 8 - 10 metres wide and 1.5 - 2 metres deep. Beginning at the end of the ditch, a concrete anti-tank wall, 1.3 km long, 2.5 metres high and 1.5 metres wide was erected.

f) Mine Obstacles

consisted of:

mine belts

around the individual strongpoints and resistance nests,

lines of mines

forward of the main line of resistance on the northwest and southwest coast of Walcheren,

large fields of anti-tank
and anti-personnel mines

in the rear area, principally east of Westkapelle. They were fenced in and marked with warning signs,

dummy mine fields

on fairly large stretches of ground in the rear area.

g) Anti Landing Obstacles

On all surfaces suitable for the descent of paratroops or air-landing troops, especially on Walcheren and South Beveland, strong tree trunks were dug in and pounded in firmly at intervals of 15 metres. They were between 15 cm and 30 cm thick, were inserted 1.5 metres below ground and protruded 3 metres above ground; some were wired and equipped with anti-personnel or improvised mines. The lumber for this was taken to some extent from the roads with several rows of trees right on the spot, but to a greater extent from the wooded areas south of Bergen op Zoom and from outside of the divisional sector. They were moved in by rail, vehicle convoy and ship.

In addition to this the former airfield 2 km south of Middleburg was made unserviceable for landings by ditches and earth cast up.

The "fort-type" installations (concrete constructions, anti-tank ditches and anti-tank wall) were created in accordance with a building programme of the Fortress Construction Staff at 89 Corps Headquarters under the direction and supervision of a Special Construction Staff of the Division by the Todt Organization and civilian construction firms. At the time of the invasion, on 6 Jun 44, the installations were 75% completed; by the time of the attack on the island group itself in October 1944 they had been completed. All obstructions and field-type installations were built by the troops themselves. All mines were laid by engineers.

The blocking and destruction of the ports and the preparatory work thereto were the task of the Navy.

Walcheren

State of Flooding on

23 Oct 44

Ref: para 272

THE FLOODING OF WALCHEREN

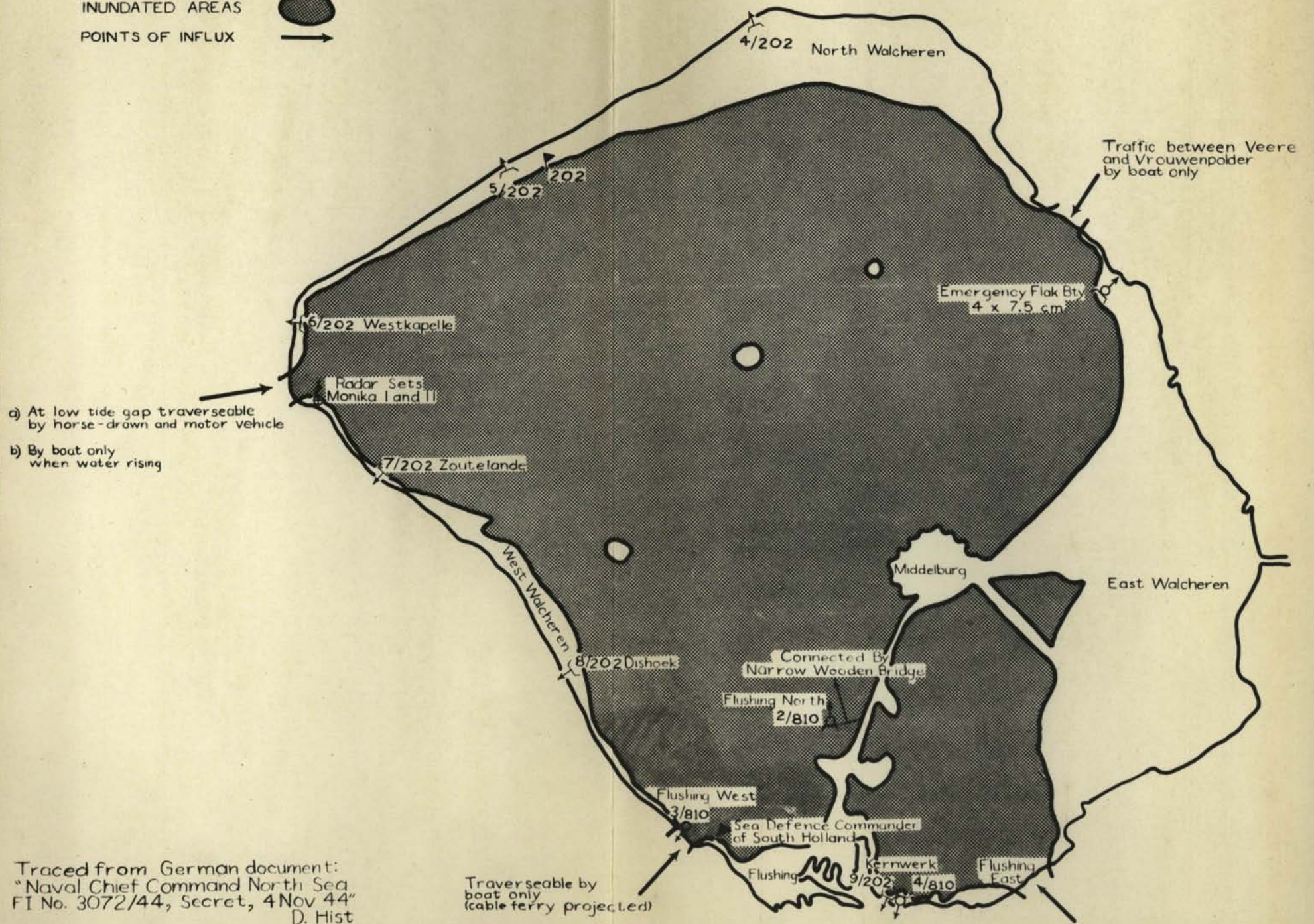
STATE ON 23 OCT 44

SCALE OF ORIGINAL DOCUMENT 1:50,000

INUNDATED AREAS



POINTS OF INFLUX



Stand 1.13.11 47

M. 1:50000

Überflutung
→ Einbruchstellen

Überbrückung Deichbruch
im Winter mit Boot
Vrennenpolder

Grass Weidestoppel
Fluss Meckelnitz
Überbrückung Deichbruch
a) Bei niedr. Wasser mit
Pferdefuhrwerk und 4-6 W
b) Mit Boot nur bei Stauwasser
Fluss Zoutelande

The outline of the flooded
area has been inked over
for clarity.

66/Bod
Capt
Cartographer

Überbrückung
nur mit Boot
Seilfähregeplant

Verbindung
durch Heulotry
Flüssingen Süd
4/100

Flüssingen
West
3/100
Sekt n. Südp.

Flüssingen
Ost

(Mittelbed)
Heulotry
4/100

Ost-Walcheren

Marineoberkommando Nordsee
FI Nr. 3072/44 Gkdos.

Wilhelmshaven, den 4. November 1944.

An
Oberkommando der Kriegsmarine -1 Skl-.

Betr.: Überschwemmung Wächeren.

✓ In der Anlage wird eine Skizze übersandt, die die Überschwemmung auf der Insel Wächeren nach dem Stande vom 23.10.44 zeigt. Der Zustand der Überschwemmung hat sich bis zur Feindlandung am 1.11.1944 vermutlich nicht mehr geändert.

Eingegangen am	11.11.44
15. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8.	11.11.44
9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15.	11.11.44
16. 17. 18. 19. 20. 21. 22.	11.11.44
23. 24. 25. 26. 27. 28. 29.	11.11.44
30. 31.	11.11.44

Im Auftrage.
Jm Entwurf des Besuchs.



Jb
an fob

Kustsch

Message

from

Grand Admiral Dönitz

to

Naval Captain Aschmann

(2 Nov 44)

Ref: para 278

Dringlichkeitsvermerk: Kr

Fernschreibnummer:

Uhrzeitstempel:

MBBS 26 943

2/11 1500:24

Marine-Nachrichten-Dienst

weiter an:	Tag	Uhrzeit	Nolle	durch	Sprech-Nr. des Bearbeiter:
11BUZ	2/11	1520	117	M-Sch	Gra

Zur Beachtung!

- Fernschreiben Telegrammatil - kein Brief.
- Nur dringende Nachrichten, sonst Kurzbrief oder Brief.
- Genügt Vorlage bei Empfangsbearbeiter am nächsten Tag (Dienstbeginn) nur Rangbezeichnung „A“ und „U“ anwenden.
- Dringlichkeitszeichen „KR“ und „SD“ nur bei Operativen und Nachrichten nachrichtlich zulässig. Dringlichkeitszeichen „S“ nur bei Nachrichten deren Inhalt sofortige Vorlage auch Nachts erfordert.
- Mischschreiben (Erganz. Nachrichten) und schließt Lesfehler bei Abgabe aus. Mischschreiben hat sichere und schnelle Übermittlung zur Folge.
- Unleserliche, unvollständige, unwichtige, zu lange Fernschreiben und solche, deren Verfügungsdaten nicht mit dem Aufgebote übereinstimmen, werden vom MNO zurückgewiesen.
- Fernschreiben ohne Telegrammatil kürzt MNO ohne Beachtung.

B.Nr. 1/Skl. I West 3944/74 geheim
(Abteilung) (S. Nr.)~~Geheim~~

Berlin, den 2. November 1944

I) Fernschreiben an: Kr Seeko Süd-Holland
Kapitän z.S. Aschmann persönlich.Schluss!

Lieber Aschmann!

Seit 4 Wochen bin ich mit meinem ganzen Herzen bei Ihrem tapferen Kämpfen. Wenn je ein Einsatz bis zum letzten von strategischer Bedeutung ist, so ist es bei Ihrer Aufgabe, dem Gegner die Benutzung Antwerpens streitig zu machen. Grüßen Sie mir Ihre braven Männer. Ihr kämpft nicht allein. Die ganze Kriegsmarine, sogar das ganze deutsche Volk, das Ihr durch Euer hartes Durchhalten schützt, sind bei Euch.

D ö n i t z

Grossadmiral

B.Nr. 1/Skl. I West 3944/74 geheim

II) Bei 10/11/11/11

III) An 1/11/11/11

+ 1/11/11/11

Chef/Skl. 1/11/11

1/11/11/11

1/11/11/11

Chef Skl. 1/11/11

+1/Skl. 1/11/11

I) 2/11

I West

1/11/11