

# Guy Simonds and the Art of Command

**Terry Copp**



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# Foreword

I am delighted to have been asked to write the foreword to *Guy Simonds and the Art of Command* for a number of reasons. First, General G.G. Simonds is unquestionably one of Canada's great wartime military commanders and his insights and views on command and leadership are extremely relevant for the education and professional development of military professionals. Although the battlespace the Canadian Army operates in today is significantly different from the one our forefathers fought in, the concepts, principles and application of command and leadership are not. They remain as critical to success, if not more so, now in the ambiguous, complex and lethal environment of fourth generation warfare as they did in the Second World War. Moreover, the insights provided by this examination of General Simonds, particularly the annexes that replicate his actual writings and directives, provide expert advice by a skilled practitioner and commander.

The second reason I agreed to endorse this book is the fact that it is written by a very distinguished Canadian historian, Terry Copp, who is recognized both in Canada and internationally as an expert in military history, especially the period in question. Copp has shown great skill and knowledge in recounting the trials and tribulations, as well as the Herculean feats of the Canadian Army. He has shown a rare commitment to honouring this nation's soldiers, as well as educating his fellow Canadians. This volume is just one more example of Terry's achievements.

Finally, I agreed to write the foreword to this excellent monograph because I fully support the concept of continuing education and study for Canadian Forces personnel. Training and experience are vital for the development of individuals and a first class army. However, education is equally important. We as military professionals, as society's trusted practitioners of violence, must

continually expand our knowledge and understanding of the profession of arms. With so much at stake, namely the lives of those who we may command in harm's way, it is incumbent on each and every one of us who aspires to lead, to be as conversant with the concepts and practice of the profession of arms as possible. Studying the successes and failures of the past is one method to achieve this. Just as critical is learning from the examples, experiences and knowledge of those who came before.

*Lieutenant-General A.B. Leslie*  
*Commander, Canadian Army*

# Preface

The Canadian Forces Leadership Institute (CFLI) is proud to release another publication in its Strategic Leadership Writing Project under the auspices of the Canadian Defence Academy (CDA) Press. Our intention has always been to create a distinct Canadian body of operational leadership knowledge so that professional development centres, military professionals, civilian members of defence, scholars and the public at large could study Canadian examples instead of the traditional reliance on foreign allied examples. After all, our military history is rich with examples, and moreover, they are more pertinent and relevant to our own military culture, temperament and character.

Significantly, our goal is being achieved through the collaborative efforts of CFLI, Canadian Forces personnel, academic institutions and individual researchers and scholars. Through their combined efforts, the body of Canadian-specific military literature is growing and it is providing the necessary examples and reference sources for military and civilian institutions across the country and abroad.

This book, *Guy Simonds and the Art of Command* is a significant addition to the project. Written by Terry Copp, a renowned Canadian military historian, it provides an excellent account of one of Canada's great military commanders. Although an examination of the command and leadership of G.G. Simonds in the Second World War, the lessons drawn out are relevant to this day. Arguably, the art and science of command and leadership are timeless and the value of Simonds' thoughts on these concepts, revealed through an analysis of Simonds' campaigns, specifically his directives, orders and writings, provide important insights into the command philosophy of one of Canada's greatest wartime commanders. Many, if not most, of these insights or "lessons" on command and leadership are as pertinent today as they were when they were written.

GUY SIMONDS AND THE ART OF COMMAND

I believe you will find this book of great interest and value whether you are a military professional, scholar or simply interested in the study of command and leadership. As always, we at CFLI invite your comment and discussion.

*Colonel Bernd Horn*

*Director*

*Canadian Forces Leadership Institute*

# Introduction

The purpose of this book is to document the ideas on leadership and command expressed by Lieutenant-General Guy Simonds while serving as General Officer Commanding (GOC) 2nd Canadian Corps. I have attempted to offer a description of the context within which his views were put forward and have included a brief explanation of the outcome of operational decisions, but this is a book about Simonds' approach to war, not a history of the campaign in Northwest Europe.

Guy Simonds has been the subject of a book length biography, Dominick Graham's *The Price of Command* as well as a number of essays and theses including J.L. Granatstein's superb chapter "Simonds: Master of the Battlefield" in his book *The Generals*.<sup>1</sup> I have drawn upon these sources for background information but relied on my own reading of the primary sources on operational matters, borrowing from my books on the campaign, especially *Fields of Fire: The Canadians in Normandy* and *Cinderella Army: The Canadians in Northwest Europe*.<sup>2</sup>

The text deliberately avoids theoretical discussions of ideas about leadership and command echoing Simonds' pragmatic, analytical approach to both training and operations. Simonds would have found the current fascination with "operational art" and the "operational level of war" of some interest.<sup>3</sup> Simonds would have had no quarrel with current Canadian joint doctrine which defines the operational level of conflict as:

The level at which campaigns and major operations are planned, conducted and sustained to accomplish strategic objectives within theatres or areas of operations. Activities at this level link tactics and strategy by establishing operational objectives needed to accomplish strategic objectives, sequencing events to achieve the

operational objectives, and initiating actions and applying resources to bring about and sustain those events. These activities imply a broader dimension of time and space than do tactics: they ensure the logistic and administrative support of tactical forces and provide the means by which tactical successes are exploited to achieve strategic objectives.

The operational level is not defined by the number and size of forces or the echelon of headquarters involved. In a large scale conflict, a corps may be the lowest level of operational command. However, in smaller scale conflict, operational level activity can take place at much lower levels. Regardless of its size, a military force tasked to achieve a strategic objective, is being employed at the operational level.<sup>4</sup>

Those who wish to study the operational level of war would be well advised to study Simonds' approach to command especially during the battles to open the approaches to Antwerp in October 1944 when he served as Acting Army Commander.

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## ENDNOTES

1. Dominick Graham, *The Price of Command: A Biography of General Guy Simonds*, (Toronto: Stoddart, 1993); J.L. Granatstein, *The Generals: The Canadian Army's Senior Commanders in the Second World War*, (Toronto: Stoddart, 1993).
2. Terry Copp, *Fields of Fire: The Canadians in Normandy*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003) and *Cinderella Army: The Canadians in Northwest Europe 1944-1945*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).
3. Allan English et al (eds), *The Operational Art: Canadian Perspectives*, (Kingston: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2005), p. 7.
4. Canada. *Canadian Forces Operations*, B-GG-005-004/AF-000. 18 December 2000, p. 1-5.

## CHAPTER 1

# From Captain to Corps Commander

**L**ieutenant-General Guy Granville Simonds assumed command of 2nd Canadian Corps in January of 1944. He was forty-one years of age. A tall, immaculately groomed figure, he was known throughout the officer corps as a brilliant, cold, arrogant professional. He lived up to his reputation in the first weeks of 1944, arranging the replacement of Major-General Frank Worthington, GOC 4th Canadian Armoured Division, and a number of staff officers inherited from his predecessor. On 17 February he issued the first of three directives designed to prepare the corps for Operation OVERLORD. Before examining these directives it may be worthwhile to try and understand just where Simonds' evident self-confidence and determination came from.

Simonds had graduated from the Royal Military College of Canada (RMC) in 1925 winning the Sword of Honour and the award for "the best all-round cadet, mentally, morally and physically." After serving with the Royal Canadian Horse Artillery (RCHA) for more than a decade he attended the two-year staff college course at Camberly in the United Kingdom and passed with distinction.<sup>1</sup> During his next posting as an instructor in tactics at RMC, Simonds wrote several articles for the *Canadian Defence Quarterly*<sup>2</sup> (reproduced in Appendix A), which won him further recognition and promotion to the rank of Acting Major.

After Canada's declaration of war, 10 September 1939, Simonds joined 1st Canadian Infantry Division as a General Staff Officer Grade 2 (GSO2) responsible for operations and training. Subsequently during a brief tour as Commanding Officer of 1st RCHA, he was selected to organize a Canadian Junior War Staff College to prepare promising young officers for the rapidly expanding

army. Although this staff training was transferred to Canada after the first fourteen-week course had been conducted, Simonds' reputation was nonetheless enhanced by his performance in organizing it. Subsequent service as GSO1 2nd Division, where he worked effectively with the distinguished Great War veteran Major-General Victor Odlum, won him promotion to the rank of Brigadier and an appointment as Brigadier General Staff (BGS) 1st Canadian Corps.<sup>3</sup>

Simonds' most important responsibility as Lieutenant-General Andrew McNaughton's senior staff officer was to prepare the initial draft of an "Appreciation" of Operation JUPITER a plan to seize enemy airfields in Northern Norway. Prime Minister Winston Churchill pressed the idea upon his reluctant Chiefs of Staff, and when their Joint Planning Committee reported that chances of success were "slight," Churchill "entrusted the planning of 'Jupiter' to General McNaughton."<sup>4</sup> General Sir Alan Brooke, the Chief of Imperial General Staff (CIGS) promptly sent for McNaughton to inform him "privately how matters stood as I did not want him afterwards to imagine that the Canadians should undertake an operation which we considered impracticable."<sup>5</sup> McNaughton must have relayed this information to Simonds, who prepared a detailed analysis and concluded that the operation was "extremely hazardous" and would require very large air, land and naval forces.

Simonds' service as the senior staff officer at 1st Corps and briefly 1st Canadian Army ended in September 1942 when he was given command of 1st Infantry Brigade, a position he held until April 1943 when he was promoted Major-General to command 2nd Infantry Division. Less than a month later, Simonds replaced Major-General Harry Salmon, who was killed in a plane crash, as General Officer Commanding, 1st Infantry Division.

The 1st Division was then in the midst of preparations for its role in Operation HUSKY, the invasion of Sicily, and Simonds' first task was to travel to Egypt to be briefed on the plan for the assault phase of HUSKY. The Canadians were to serve under the command of Lieutenant-General Oliver Leese in 30th British Corps, and the corps BGS provided "the outline of the new and firm plan" that called for landing two brigade groups on the western side of the Pachino Peninsula. Simonds met with Leese and "after further study of the map and model put the [divisional] plan down on paper." He cabled it to London all within 24 hours of his arrival in Cairo.<sup>6</sup>

The Canadian landings in Sicily were largely unopposed, and Simonds' initial concern as divisional commander was the loss of vehicles, guns and signals equipment to U-boats. Once battle was joined the division carried out a series of tasks allotted to it by Corps headquarters. Simonds himself noted that "no written operational order" was issued by his headquarters during the Sicily campaign.<sup>7</sup>

There is some debate about Simonds' performance as a commander in HUSKY and criticism of the style of his leadership<sup>8</sup>, but by the end of the campaign both his corps commander and Montgomery were well pleased with Simonds and his division. Leese's letter of 6 August 1943, written as the Canadians were leaving his corps, went well beyond the conventional congratulations to praise the division's "battle training" and "the manner in which you handled your Division." He continued:

My whole staff tell me how extraordinarily well their opposite numbers in your Division have done and how much they enjoyed working with them. It has made the whole difference to us to have had this very close and helpful co-operation with you. We are all sad that you are leaving the corps.<sup>9</sup>

The 1st Canadian Division had been selected to participate in Operation BAYTOWN, an assault across the Straits of Messina to secure a bridgehead on the Italian mainland. Simonds held a planning conference on 24 August and his verbal instructions were transcribed for the War Diary. The 13th British Corps, commanded by Lieutenant-General Sir Miles Dempsey, had issued the outline plan and once again there was little the divisional commanders could do except fill in the details.

Simonds described the purpose of BAYTOWN as the capture of a beachhead so that the Straits of Messina would be "free for the use of our shipping." The secondary objective was "to draw enemy resources against the beachhead for a later operation to follow on a subsequent date." This reference to AVALANCHE, the landings at Salerno, indicates that Simonds had been briefed on the overall strategy for the campaign. This may explain his emphasis on preparations for exploitation should enemy resistance prove to be weak. "I will not hesitate", he declared, "to pool all transport on the shores to make one brigade mobile and I may reduce the original assault brigades to nothing but a skeleton to do so."<sup>10</sup>

The landings were again unopposed, but Montgomery and Dempsey were in no hurry to press north, and the Canadians spent a frustrating week in the Aspromonte before receiving orders to advance to Potenza. Simonds created a mobile battle group, known as "Boforce" (after Lieutenant-Colonel Bogert, CO West Nova Scotia Regiment), but before he could order it to strike for Potenza, a vital road and rail junction east of Salerno, he had to determine Montgomery's intentions. Writing to Dempsey on 17 September, he asked for clarification of the somewhat vague plan his corps commander had outlined. "I am not quite clear", he wrote, as to whether it was now desirable to make "military noises in that direction as quickly as I can, or whether we should lie doggo until the whole

division is ready to advance.” Given the desperate news from Salerno, Simonds reported that he would rush “Boforce” to Potenza “unless I hear from you to the contrary.”<sup>11</sup> Dempsey agreed to the proposal and Potenza was quickly secured.

Simonds was deeply frustrated by the conduct of the mainland campaign, and when Dempsey directed him to advance from Potenza to Foggia on two widely separated axes, he raised “serious objections” to the orders in a detailed letter<sup>12</sup> that speaks to his growing confidence as an operational commander.

22 Sep 43

*Dear [Lieutenant-General M.C. Dempsey]*

- 1. Many thanks for your letter of 20 Sep 43. I will make a point of passing your congratulatory remarks to the troops.*
- 2. I now have two brigades and divisional troops (less details with 1 Cdn Inf Bde) concentrated around Potenza and by 2000 hrs tonight the route Rotondella-Potenza will be completed for “all weather” traffic.*
- 3. I am continuing active patrolling on all roads radiating from Potenza and, now the route on our left is open, I have given priority to the reopening of the routes Potenza-Gravina and Potenza-Melfi in that order.*
- 4. I see serious objections to locating 1 Cdn Inf Bde Gp in the Altamura-Gravina area and the proposal subsequently to move on two axes Potenza-Melfi-Foggia and Gravina-Spinazzola-Canosa-Foggia. Measured on the map the distance from Potenza to Gravina is 30 miles. Judging by our experience on those roads it will run to 60 or 70 miles as the jeep goes (on the 1/250,000 map the distance Rotondella-Potenza measures some 50 miles – it is 110 miles by road).*
- 5. If I try to advance on a two brigade front on axes separated by 70 miles:-*
  - (a) My wireless communications will not work over such a range and I will have no communication with the right flanking brigade other than by L.O. by road with about a 24-hr turn round. This is quite hopeless in fluid operations where action must be quickly coordinated and support readjusted. It is in no sense comparable to the present situation of 1 Cdn Inf Bde which has a static role and is close to our main forward axis.*
  - (b) I will have to divide my support on two axes or leave the flanking brigade without any.*

*(c) I will have to divide my engineer effort on two axes and in addition have to open long and difficult laterals towards both flanks instead of only one.*

*(d) I will have to make an administrative detachment resulting in loss of administrative flexibility.*

*6. I consider advancing in a single division on such widely separated axes objectionable from both a tactical and administrative point of view. The alternative is to split the division and place the right flanking brigade under command of another formation. This I believe to be contrary to the Army Commander's fixed policy and I certainly consider it unsound because the problem of dissipating the supporting arms and administrative effort still remains.*

*7. I believe there are great advantages to operating the division on a two brigade front providing that the frontage does not result in a loss of control and the loss of the power to concentrate all resources in support of a thrust along one axis. Our experience in Sicily and here is that if a speedy advance is to be maintained along the divisional axis against enemy rearguards, the artillery effort must be concentrated and if speed is to be maintained in the face of demolitions only, then the engineer effort must be concentrated.*

*8. I can see the advantages of placing a brigade wide on my right during a period when we will be tapping out the enemy to the North and East by active patrolling but I consider it should be within wireless range. The recce I would place wider still and make responsible for the deep patrolling.*

*9. If it is desirable to position a brigade in the Grivina-Altamura area would it not be better to place there an Independent Brigade which has its own allotment of supporting arms without cutting into those of a division which in my opinion should always be positioned so that it is possible to concentrate them quickly on a single thrust line. The lateral Brienza-Potenza-Gravina will be through in a day or so. 5 Div with 231 Bde seem to be in rather a cramped area. Would it not be possible to pass 231 Bde across to the Gravina area?*

*10. I realize that the plans are still in a very formative stage but I feel I should now represent:-*

*(a) That my communications, administrative, artillery and engineer resources will NOT allow me to control a divisional battle on two axes separated by some 70 miles.*

*(b) The alternative of splitting the division and its supporting engineers and artillery to form a detached group, if we are working forward to an offensive battle, I regard as unsound. If the enemy is very "soft" it does not matter, but under such conditions recce's can do the wide flanking task better than a detached brigade.*

*11. Surely a strong thrust along the coast axis Bari-Foggia and another strong divisional thrust on the axis Potenza-Foggia linked up by an Independent Brigade, Armour or even Recce, in between will see the enemy out of Foggia at short order. In the country through which we will be moving I would have no worries about my left flank. With the 5th Army pushing forward as I presume it would and with 5 Div echeloned back to the left as I believe is your intention, full insurance will be provided against any enemy threat on our western side.*

*12. The country about here is suitable for the employment of tanks and I would like to have some remain with me – especially when we debouch from the Melfi area into the Foggia plain.*

*13. I may have misunderstood your letter which referred to axes "Potenza-Melfi-Foggia and Gravina-Spinazzola-Canosa-Foggia." If the axes are alternative, the difficulties I mentioned do not arise. If we advance on the axis Gravina-Spinazzola-Canova-Foggia, I consider we would need an Armoured Brigade to cover the advance insofar as the country can be judged from small scale maps.*

*14. I would respectfully urge an early decision as to our axis because with the present lack of good large or medium scale maps, photographic strips covering a wide lane either side of the axis are really a necessity to planning ahead.*

*Sincerely,*

*(G.G. Simonds)  
Major-General  
GOC 1 Cdn Div*

*Lieut.-General M.C. Dempsey, DSO  
Commander, 13 Corps*

Source: War Diary, 1st Canadian Infantry Division, September 1943, Library and Archives Canada (LAC), RG 24, Vol. 10,879.

Simonds fell ill with jaundice shortly after sending this letter. After his return, Simonds again questioned Dempsey's orders asking for a brigade from 5th British Division or the return of the 14th Tank Regiment (the Calgary Regiment) "to form a firm base as 2nd Cdn Inf Bde moves forward."<sup>13</sup> Before matters could develop further, Simonds was informed that he was to take command of the 5th Armoured Division, which, together with 1st Canadian Corps Headquarters, was to arrive in Italy during November 1943. This decision removed Simonds from command of 1st Division one month before it was committed to the major battles for the Moro River, the "gully" and Ortona, battles that might well have benefited from his experience.

The lateral transfer to 5th Division was intended to give Simonds experience with an armoured division before he was promoted to Lieutenant-General and given command of 2nd Canadian Corps. Crerar, who was trying to gain personal credibility as a corps commander in Italy before assuming command of First Canadian Army, failed to explain his intentions, and Simonds initially believed he was being shunted aside. This may have influenced his decision to ignore medical advice and return to full duty before he was ready. His erratic and paranoid behaviour in confrontations with Crerar, his superior officer, was almost certainly due to the lingering effects of jaundice. Crerar, acting with remarkable forbearance, continued to endorse Simonds as the best choice to command 2nd Canadian Corps.<sup>14</sup>

Simonds reached England in early January and assumed command of the corps later in the month. With 3rd Infantry Division and 2nd Armoured Brigade under 1st British Corps for the Normandy invasion Simonds' command consisted of the 2nd Infantry Division, 4th Armoured Division and corps troops. On 2 February he addressed his officers and reportedly told them, "there are some of you in whom I have not much confidence. I will see you tomorrow and tell you why."<sup>15</sup> Among those found wanting were the chief engineer (CRE), the commander of Royal Artillery (CRA) and the senior medical officer (DDMS). Simonds kept Lieutenant-Colonel Robert Moncel, the GSO1 who had been the outstanding student in his 1942 staff college course, but a number of other staff officers were reassigned.

Simonds' "Weekly Progress Reports to Canada" reflect the intensity of the training regime and his determination to find the right combination of senior officers. On 19 February, Brigadier N.E. Rodgers "arrived to take over duties as BGS," and Brigadier Geoffrey Walsh, DSO [Distinguished Service Order] was appointed CRE. A week later the report noted that "Maj. Gen G. Kitching, DSO assumed command of 4th Canadian Armoured Division." New brigadiers were appointed to command all four infantry brigades in the corps. On 17 March

Brigadier Bruce Matthews, DSO, who had served Simonds well as 1st Division CRA, arrived to take over the artillery responsibilities at Corps.<sup>16</sup> Matthews shared Simonds' conviction that artillery was the army's principal weapon and that his job was to ensure that when the medium artillery of 2nd Canadian Army Group Royal Artillery (AGRA) became available it would comprise a seamless artillery plan.

Simonds, who knew the value of close tank-infantry co-operation from direct experience in Sicily, was concerned that the infantry battalions in 2nd Division had little experience working with armour, and on 27 April he ordered 4th Armoured Brigade to detach squadrons "for a period of two weeks to give infantry experience in working with tanks."<sup>17</sup> The decision to mount the Normandy invasion with one independent tank brigade for every two infantry divisions was a serious weakness that Simonds could not overcome.

The 2nd Canadian Corps was scheduled to move to the continent and enter battle to participate in a breakout from an established bridgehead. It was Simonds' responsibility to ensure the corps was ready for such operations, and on 7 February he held his first "Training Conference", attended by all divisional and brigade commanders, the Commanding Officers (COs) of artillery regiments, the GSO1s, as well as corps and divisional administrative (AA&QMG) or logistics officers. Two days later, 4th Canadian Armoured Division began a four-day scheme designed to exercise "formations, arty commanders and staffs in movement, allotment and control of artillery and the production of a divisional fire plan." The divisional artillery was required to practice counter-battery organization as well as "full scale movement and deployment." Exercise CONQUEROR, a more limited study of a set-piece attack on a strongly defended enemy position, allowed Simonds to observe Major-General Charles Foulkes, GOC 2nd Infantry Division and his staff deal with brigade orders, the fire plan and administrative matters."<sup>18</sup> Foulkes, who had been appointed to command the division by General Crerar days before Simonds' arrival, had a poor reputation as brigade commander and no combat experience, so Simonds was determined to supervise every aspect of the division's training.<sup>19</sup> As a follow-up to CONQUEROR, Simonds attended a Tactical Exercise without Troops (TEWT) conducted by 5th Brigade and Exercise JANG conducted by the three divisional field regiments.<sup>20</sup>

Throughout March and April 1944 Simonds orchestrated a series of exercises all directed at breakout attacks and sustaining an advance along a single thrust line. Study periods for all commanders and staffs down to GSO2s were organized, one of which was attended by General Montgomery. The corps, under First Canadian Army, was to advance to the River Seine on the eastern flank where

it was assumed they would meet a German army withdrawing in good order to defend the river line. The Seine in the Canadian sector was a major obstacle, and 2nd Division began training for the assault crossing of a tidal estuary in mid-April. Much of May was spent near the mouth of the River Trent practicing for Operation AXEHEAD, the designation for the Seine crossing. The infantry battalions of 4th Armoured Division used the River Medway for their “assault boating and bridge crossing experience.”<sup>21</sup> Operation AXEHEAD was cancelled once it became evident that the German armies in Normandy had been routed but no one could have foreseen the scale of the defeat of the German armies in May 1944.

The documents reproduced below offer a remarkably detailed picture of Simonds’ ideas on leadership and command during this period of preparation for OVERLORD. The ideas expressed were based on his experience as a staff officer and his service commanding at the brigade and divisional level. They constitute one of the most important sets of statements about leadership and command in Canadian history and deserve to be read with care.

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## ENDNOTES

1. Granatstein, p. 147.
2. Guy Simonds, “The Attack: An Army that Can Attack, A Division that Can Defend,” *Canadian Defence Quarterly* No. 15 (July 1938): 413-417 and “What Price Assault Without Support,” *Canadian Defence Quarterly* No. 16 (Jan 1939): 142-147 and No. 16 (July 1939): 379-390. The articles are reproduced in Appendix A.
3. Granatstein, p. 154.
4. Martin Gilbert, *Road to Victory: Winston S. Churchill 1941-1945*, (London: Stoddart, 1986), p. 144.
5. Alex Danchev and Daniel Todman, (eds), *War Diaries 1939-1945: Field Marshall Lord Alanbrooke*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2001), p. 278.
6. Memorandum of a conversation between Lieutenant-General Simonds and Major A.T. Sesia, 12 March 1944, LAC RG24, Vol. 10,878.
7. Major A.T. Sesia, “Interview with General Simonds.” No Date (Sicily), LAC RG24, Vol. 10,878.
8. Bill McAndrew, “Fire or Movement? Canadian Tactical Doctrine Sicily,”

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9. Letter, Sir Oliver Leese to Simonds, 6 August 1943, LAC RG24, Vol. 10,878.
10. "Operation Baytown," 28 August 1943, LAC RG24, Vol. 10,879.
11. Simonds to Dempsey, 17 September 1943, LAC RG24, Vol. 10,879.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Simonds to Dempsey, 21 October 1943, LAC RG24, Vol. 10, 879.
14. A very different interpretation of this incident is offered by Graham, pp. 115-123.
15. Granatstein, p. 163.
16. The weekly progress report may be found in LAC RG24, Vol. 13,711.
17. *Ibid.*, 30 April 1944.
18. *Ibid.*, 12 February 1944.
19. Interview Terry Copp with Brigadier (Retired) George Pangman. Galt Ontario, 1990, LCMSDS Archives.
20. Weekly Progress Report, 19 February 1944.
21. *Ibid.* 18 May 1944.

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*SECRET*  
*1-8/Ops*  
*Main Headquarters*  
*2nd Canadian Corps*

*17 Feb 44*

*To All Formation Commanders 2nd Canadian Corps*

*OPERATIONAL POLICY – 2 CDN CORPS*

*1. A corps operates in a "territorial corridor" covering the communications along which it moves and is maintained. The number*

*and types of divisions, independent brigades and artillery groups included in it will depend upon the nature and width of the allotted frontage and the task of the corps. It is impracticable to lay down a clear-cut doctrine for the employment of a corps when its composition is, and must be, variable. It is practicable to define the probable roles and methods of employing the different types of divisions operating within the corps under specific conditions.*

*2. The probable role of 2 Cdn Corps will be to pass through a beach-head which has been secured by assaulting forces and attack, wear down and destroy German troops which oppose it, within the corps "corridor" defined by the Army Commander.*

*3. Once a firm lodgement has been secured on the continent and we are able to build up reserve formations within a beach-head, the German armies will probably try to sap the strength of Allied armies in a series of defensive battles. The main battles will be fought on successive positions chosen by the Germans. When driven from one position the Germans may give ground, gaining time to re-organize on the next rearward position on which they have elected to fight again. 2 Cdn Corps will be prepared:*

- (a) to follow up and harass whenever the Germans give ground*
- (b) attack when the Germans make a stand to fight a defensive battle*

*4. The sequence in which these types of operations may occur cannot be foreseen. Once a firm beach-head has been established, the Germans may decide that the ground on which they find themselves is unsuitable for a main battle and they may step back to a position some distance in the rear. Alternatively, they may stabilize the initial beach-head operations in front of a position on which they are prepared to fight. In the first case the immediate operation of 2 Cdn Corps would be to follow up; in the second case the first operation would be an attack against an organized defensive position.*

#### *FOLLOWING UP A GERMAN RETIREMENT*

*5. When the Germans decide to give ground to some depth they may endeavour to gain time by extensive demolitions in conjunction with the liberal use of mines and booby traps. Demolitions may be covered by small rear parties, including machine guns, multiple light flak and anti-tank guns. The purpose of these detachments will be to inflict casualties and impose caution on the advancing troops. Such rear parties operate*

*on the “hit and run” principle and they will seldom make a prolonged stand. Determined infiltration, with quick artillery support controlled by forward observing officers will usually dislodge these rear parties. Such detachments are most likely to be found covering demolition of the crossing of a continuous obstacle or narrow “bottle necks”.*

*6. Where the ground favours it, the Germans may occupy a rearguard position on principles similar to our own. They may intend to hold such a position to gain a specific period of time – from midday until it is dark, 24 hours, 2 days, 3 days. Such positions will be strong in machine guns, anti-tank guns, and will be backed by reserves of tanks, self-propelled guns and small bodies of infantry. They are unlikely to be wired or protected by extensive minefields. The Germans so disposed will “see-off” attempts at infiltration by our leading troops. A well prepared and co-ordinated brigade attack organized by leading divisions will usually succeed in overrunning these rearguard positions.*

*7. Either infantry or armoured divisions may lead in a follow-up. Divisions will be directed on centres of front-to-rear and lateral communications as their objectives. The securing of those restricts the enemy power of manoeuvre and lateral switching of formations, whilst the opening of front-to-rear communications for all types of traffic is essential to maintain the momentum of our own advance, and the opening of lateral communications, as they are secured gives us the power to switch formations and concentrate against any part of the enemy defensive position when the Germans make a stand.*

*8. Either infantry or armoured divisions should advance on a single thrust line, disposed in depth on a one-brigade front, opening a two-way maintenance route as they advance. Leading brigades should be preceded by strong reconnaissance across the whole front of the division. In the case of the infantry division, infantry brigades may be passed through one another, the leading brigade being directed on to ground of tactical importance and there forming a firm base through which the next brigade can be passed. Thus, the division will be disposed in depth with successive brigades established on a firm base covering centres of communication. In the case of the armoured division, the infantry or armoured brigade will lead, depending upon the suitability of the country for the employment of infantry or armour. When the infantry brigade leads the armoured brigade forms the firm base from which it operates and when the armoured brigade leads the infantry brigade forms the firm base from which the armour operates.*

9. *When the enemy detect the thrust line on which the division is operating they tend to concentrate their strength astride it. It is then advantageous to move a reserve brigade to a flank to force the enemy to dissipate his strength on a wider frontage. When a second brigade is thrown wide of the leading brigade in this manner, it may be possible to site the divisional artillery so that the whole of it may support either brigade. But the weight of artillery support must NOT be divided.*

10. *Advancing on a single thrust line with brigades disposed in depth had the following advantages:*

(a) *The divisional artillery, even if reinforced by a proportion of medium and field artillery from the corps, is only sufficient to support attack by one brigade.*

(b) *If the Germans are using demolitions extensively, the divisional engineers are only sufficient to open and maintain one all-weather two-way traffic road.*

(c) *With the division in depth, with rearward brigades established on firm bases, the leading brigade may be pushed along its thrust line without worrying about flanks. Any move of the enemy against a flank can be dealt with by a counter-thrust from one of the brigades held in depth.*

(d) *The leading brigade, operating from a firm base, can act with great boldness, for there is always a solid anchor on which recovery can be made if the Germans make a sudden, strong counter-thrust.*

(e) *By passing one brigade through another the staying power of the division is preserved, so that on coming up to the main position on which the Germans intend to fight, the division is fit for a main attack.*

(f) *The depth in which the division is disposed given great flexibility for manoeuvre.*

11. *The divisional artillery and engineers should be centralized under the control of the CRA and CRE, respectively, and operate in support of the leading brigade. The necessity for strong reconnaissance across the whole divisional front has already been indicated. This must include engineer reconnaissance across the whole divisional front, so that engineer examination of alternative crossings of obstacles proceeds*

*simultaneously and an early decision as to the place of crossing may be made without premature commitment of engineer resources to what may later prove to be a difficult and slow crossing.*

*12. When an infantry division leads in the advance an armoured regiment will be placed under its command, and one medium regiment will always be either in support or under command of a forward division, whether infantry or armoured.*

### ATTACK

*13. When the Germans decide to stand and fight a defensive battle, attack without adequate reconnaissance and preparation will not succeed. The attack must be carefully organized and strongly supported by all available artillery. The frontage of attack must be limited to that on which really heavy support may be given. The essence of the German system of defence is the counter-attack. His forward defences are not thickly held in terms of men, but are strong in automatic weapons and well supported by mortars, sited up to three or four thousand yards in rear of forward defended localities. These mortars are capable of bringing very heavy fire to bear in front of, or within, the German defensive position. A well planned infantry attack, with ample fire support, will penetrate such a position with comparative ease, but the first penetration will stir up a hornet's nest. As long as fresh reserves are available the Germans will counter-attack heavily and continuously, supported by self-propelled guns brought up to close range and by any mortars which have not been over-run in the initial assault. The success of the offensive battle hinges on the defeat of the German counter-attacks, with sufficient of our own reserves in hand to launch a new phase as soon as the enemy strength has spent itself. The defeat of these counter-attacks must form part of the original plan of attack which must include arrangements for artillery support and the forward moves of infantry supporting weapons – including tanks – on the objective. Further, in selecting the objectives, the suitability from the point of view of fighting this “battle of counter-attacks” must receive important consideration. The following points must be considered in the initial planning:*

*(a) The depth of initial objectives. To over-run the German mortar positions requires penetration of his forward defences to a depth of some four thousand yards. Unless these mortars are dislodged, or dealt with by a pre-arranged counter-battery programme (this is often very difficult, owing to the siting of the*

*mortars behind very steep cover) the effect of mortar fire makes mopping up and reorganization on the objective a most difficult task for the infantry. The Germans do not hesitate to engage a position on which their own troops are still holding out.*

*(b) The phase of the attack at which the bulk of the artillery is to be moved forward must receive early consideration. There is bound to be a pause during this phase when the leading troops on the objectives are going to be without the full support of the artillery. This is the period at which the employment of all available air support is most useful to tide over the gap. When the Germans really stand to fight, it is seldom that the full depth of their defences can be penetrated without a forward displacement of the bulk of the artillery.*

*(c) The way in which the Germans support their infantry in the counter-attack must be clearly understood. They move tanks or self-propelled guns to within close range of the objective they are trying to retake. These do not support by neutralizing fire, in the ordinary sense, but with aimed shell fire directed through telescopic sights at a range at which individual infantry dispositions can be picked out. The moral and material effect on our own troops of this type of fire is considerable.*

*14. Any one of the following have proved effective in making the German tanks or self-propelled guns stand off at a range which greatly reduces their effect:*

*(a) Anti-tank guns well up with the leading infantry.*

*(b) Tanks following close behind the leading infantry.*

*(c) Medium artillery concentrations directed onto the enemy tanks or self-propelled guns by a forward observing officer with the leading troops.*

*The initial plan of attack should legislate for at least two of these forms of support being available to leading infantry on arrival on their objective.*

*15. For a defensive battle the Germans generally dispose their main position behind an anti-tank obstacle or thick mine-fields. The initial attack, therefore, must be made by infantry to secure gaps through minefields or a bridgehead across an obstacle.*

*16. The infantry division is the "sledge-hammer" in the attack against an*

*organized defensive position, for it is strong in infantry and has the staying power to carry an attack through in depth. The armoured division is a “weapon of opportunity” for it has not strength enough in infantry to carry through an attack in depth through an organized defence and still retain fresh infantry to co-operate with the armour in more fluid operations for which it is specifically designed. The armoured division, however, must be prepared to deal with a rearguard position, for after we have made a successful break through a defensive position the Germans will try to cover their withdrawal and reorganize behind a rearguard formed some distance in rear of their main position. The armoured division, on passing through to exploit, may find their task that of clearing a way through such a rearguard position, before they can disorganize the enemy’s further withdrawal by thrusting deeper.*

*17. In the planning of an attack, as in all military operations, the correct allocation of troops and simplicity of command arrangements are of great importance. The correct allocation of troops is best assured if each commander thinks in terms of formations or units “two below his own command”. Thus the divisional commander should think in terms of unit tasks and the brigade commander in terms of squadron or company tasks. By “grouping tasks” so that each “group of tasks” comes within the power of achievement of each of his immediately subordinate formations or units, each commander will arrive at a correct allocation of troops without breaking up existing organization – the latter always a bad practice in battle where team work counts for so much. Each commander should explain to his immediate subordinates how he visualized the tasks “two below his own command” when he allots them their tasks and issued his orders. It simplifies command arrangements if each distinct phase of an operation can be carried through to completion without changes of responsibility in respect to command and changes of commanders of supporting arms working with the infantry or armoured commander concerned. Operations should be “phased” accordingly. A new phase – the transfer of responsibility between units and formations and their commanders for continuance of operations in a given area of the battlefield – necessitates a pause and pauses always give valuable time to the enemy. The higher the level at which transfer takes place the longer the pause necessary (a company can be quickly passed through another company – to pass one battalion through another takes longer – to pass a brigade through a brigade is a matter of hours). It is therefore advantageous to operate formations and units in depth on narrow frontages, giving them “staying power”, rather than on wide frontages*

*necessitating early relief by passing through new formations or units. If on examination, a plan of attack shows complications in command arrangements or a number of apparently unnecessary phases or pauses, it is a good indication that the allocation of troops has been badly done and the whole plan should be reconsidered.*

*18. A sound, simple plan bases upon:*

- (a) The ground*
- (b) Enemy dispositions and probable intentions*
- (c) The support available*
- (d) The characteristics and capabilities of our own arms and troops*

*And pressed home with resolution, will usually succeed. Complicated, involved plans seldom succeed.*

*(Sgd) G.G. Simonds Lt Gen  
Comd 2 Cdn Corps*

Source: LAC, RG 24, Vol. 10,799.

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*58-1/SD  
Main Headquarters  
2nd Canadian Corps*

*19 Feb 44*

*To All Formation Commanders 2nd Canadian Corps*

*EFFICIENCY OF COMMAND*

*1. If well trained, directed and led, the Canadian soldier is unsurpassed by any in the world. Coupled with a rugged courage, ready adaptability, initiative and amenability to sound discipline, the average standard of intelligence of our soldiers is very high indeed. If properly directed in battle, this intelligence is a great asset, for it makes troops very quick to take advantage of the breaks on the battlefield. But if indifferently*

*directed or led, this same intelligence becomes a great disadvantage, for Canadian soldiers are quick to detect a badly planned or organized operation or wavering indecision in leadership, and their confidence is more easily shaken than is the case with a more stolid soldiery. They result in failure with heavy casualties and a loss of confidence requiring a long time to recover. The responsibility which falls to those who undertake to lead Canadian troops in battle is not a light one.*

*2. In battle, every command from the highest to the lowest, is a one man job and a whole time job. Once he has made his plan, communicated it clearly to his subordinates and made certain they understand what they have to do, a commander must be looking and thinking ahead – thinking of what the enemy may be doing, how they may react and planning his own future moves. This he cannot do unless he has full confidence of his subordinates. He cannot concentrate his attention on the future if he is worrying about the capacity or determination of his subordinates to do their duty. He will be much dependent upon their knowledge and judgement in representing to him the situation and condition of their troops and this in turn will influence his own assessment of a situation. A commander must have subordinates in whom he has full confidence – if he tries to carry weaklings in battle, his own duties will suffer correspondingly. This may well result in a failure with serious consequences and is an injustice to the troops.*

*3. I regard it as a first duty of every commander and commanding officer to see to it that the command of his subordinate formations or units is in fit, competent and energetic hands. In this matter there can be no compromise and I consider a commander or commanding officer who tolerates ineffective subordinates is himself unfitted for the responsibilities of command. There is no lack of material to provide first class leadership in all levels of command in the Canadian Army. It is the duty of every commander to see that the best use is made of this material. Commanders who for reasons of age, character, inefficiency or indifference are unfitted to hold command in the field, must be removed and those who sow promise of ability to carry higher responsibilities must be tested and given opportunities.*

*4. As a guide to commanders in assessing their officers, I attach as an annexure a list of the qualities which I consider are essential. They are in no sense in any order of priority – all must be present in some degree. Some of these qualities are inherent and some may be acquired. It must be recognized that many men who are quite prepared to serve their*

country to the best of their ability, have a 'ceiling' beyond which they cannot go.

5. *In judging the usefulness of officers to the service a commander is justified only in having regard to military qualities. Personal friendships, length of service and past services rendered in other capacities must not be permitted to influence judgement as to the usefulness of an officer now in his present post or a post for which he is being considered, except insofar as the last indicated special abilities. I specially caution commanders against allowing personal prejudices or considerations other than the military usefulness of officers, to influence their judgement. They must carefully and conscientiously examine each doubtful or promising case and act as their conscience dictates. Each case should be discussed with his superior commander before action is taken. Doubt must not be used as an excuse for doing nothing. Everyone makes mistakes and mistakes may be made, for battle is only the final test and we cannot wait for that to set our house in order. If in doubtful cases, injustices may be done, bear in mind that it is better to do injustice to an individual than to the many for whom that individual will be responsible and who will suffer the consequences if he fails in his duty.*

#### REMOVAL OF OFFICERS

6. *I fully appreciate that the removal of officers who may have given long and faithful service, particularly when they may be personal friends with whom one has been associated in the same regiment, is a most distasteful duty. Nevertheless, it is a duty that must be faced and a commander who shirks it is unlikely to possess the resolution to drive through a difficult situation in battle. It is a duty too easily postponed and I will remind you, that as long as an ineffective commander remains in command of a formation or unit, the training, efficiency and morale of all the troops in it suffer accordingly. Consideration of its effect on an officer's family has occasionally resulted in dilatory action in dealing with those who are believed to be ineffective. Such matters must not receive consideration and if they come to the mind of a commander dealing with such a case he must answer this question:*

*'I know this officer has given long and faithful service and he and his family may suffer if I take action to remove him. But he is responsible for the training and leadership in battle of some hundreds of Canadian soldiers, who are voluntarily risking their lives in the service of their country and who also have families*

*and friends. Just because I do not know them, or their families and friends as well as I know this officer, am I justified in taking the risk that their service and sacrifice may be nullified, out of consideration for him?’*

*7. Officers who commanders of commanding officers consider unsuitable to their posts will be recommended for removal on an adverse report or recommendation for change of employment. I require that these reports shall be strictly honest, stating clearly the reason why the officer is considered unsuitable. Recommendations for other employment will only be made when the initiating officer has first hand knowledge that the officer under report is full qualified and conscientiously believes him competent for specific employment. Otherwise, they will be recommended for review by higher authority or for a disposal. I will not subscribe to a recommendation that an officer be employed in a training capacity, if he has not proven a success in a unit, unless he is being removed for age or physical disability alone.*

#### RECOMMENDATION FOR PROMOTION

*8. Promotion will be based upon promise of ability to perform a task in a higher sphere and not upon past services rendered except where the latter clearly indicate special abilities. Length of service in a particular appointment does not in itself establish any claim to advancement. Assessment must be based upon the constructive contribution made by an officer in the appointment he is holding, not upon the length of time he has held it. Opportunities must be taken to test promising officers in their administrative and tactical ability to carry the responsibilities of a higher command. All commanders will carefully review recommendations for promotion submitted by them through their formations, and in doubtful cases will take steps to test and amend previous recommendations as required.*

*9. I cannot stress too strongly the very high importance which I attach to this question of efficiency in command. In the stress of action mutual confidence between a commander, his superior commander, his subordinate commanders and his troops is vital to success. With the most careful combing out and selection, taking into account all the qualities on which it is possible to base sound judgement, there will still be a proportion who cannot stand up to the final trial of battle itself, and only the actual test of battle will show it. No pains must be spared to ensure that these are very few in number.*

*10. 2nd Canadian Corps will go into battle with most of its units untried and may be involved in heavy fighting from the outset. Their first real action comes as a shock to the best of troops and only good direction and leadership can bring them through with a heightened instead of a lowered morale. Courage in leadership is not enough. Cool headed direction and skill must be there also. This requires the application of a sound battle training in actual battle. It will not be there unless troops have been trained and are led into battle by fit, competent and determined commanders.*

*(Sgd.) G.G. Simonds, Lt Gen*

*Comd 2 Cdn Corps*

Source: LAC, RG 24, Vol. 10799.

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*Annexure to letter GOC  
19 Feb 44*

ESSENTIAL QUALITIES IN THE LEADER

*1. These qualities are in no sense listed in any order of priority. All must be present in some degree. For instance, drive and self-confidence unless balanced by knowledge and judgement may be positive dangers. It is the degree and balance in which they are present in an individual which will determine his “service ceiling”.*

*2. Certain of these qualities are inherent and certain may be acquired – thus knowledge, physical fitness and skill at arms may be acquired, given the mental and physical capacity. It is the duty of every commander to develop the art of leadership in those under his command and commanders should mark for special training and trial, those who have the inherent qualities.*

MORAL QUALITIES

*(a) Character – Resolution, determination and the drive to get things done. The generation of good ideas and intentions becomes useless theorizing unless they show results in the form of high morale, battle discipline and fighting efficiency of a formation or unit. A man who originates good ideas and intentions but who is unable to get them put into practice may be useful in pure research*

*or in an advisory capacity, but is quite useless in any executive command. A man who has the character, determination and drive to get things done, even if barren of original ideas, may draw inspiration elsewhere and will be useful as an executive even if his lack of original imagination limits the field of his usefulness.*

*Often when I have enquired of an officer as to why orders which I have issued are not being followed, I have received the reply “orders have been issued about it”. Such a reply shows complete lack of realization of the responsibility of that officer to “get things done”. It is the result that counts – the issue of clear orders is only a means to an end and the end is not obtained if orders are ignored. An officer is not given a responsible post in command of men, to act as a human loud speaker machine and repeat orders in parrot fashion. He is there to get results – to “get things done”. His determination to get results must be made quite clear to his subordinates before and on the day of battle.*

*(b) Loyalty – Every commander has the right to assume the loyalty of his subordinates unless by his own action, inefficiency or lack of judgement he has sacrificed that loyalty. Concerted action, cohesion and co-ordination – essentials to success in battle – can only be achieved if all subordinate commanders down through the chain of command are determined loyally to enforce the instructions and decisions of their seniors. Unco-ordinated individual efforts may result in brilliant exploits but unless directed towards a common end they will make small contribution to success in war. History is full of examples of the success of a disciplined soldiery against a mob of fanatically brave individuals. The “all star” team – a collection of brilliant individual players suddenly brought together and lacking cohesion, seldom succeeds against the well drilled “good” team which has trained as such and has unity of direction. There is ample scope for individual brilliance and initiative in modern war – the latter is essential – but this characteristic must be directed towards the attainment of a common object and not into divergent channels on the whim of individuals.*

*(c) Self Confidence – A commander who has not confidence in himself, cannot inspire confidence in his superiors or subordinates. Troops who lack confidence in their leaders do not win battles.*

*(d) Sense of Duty – Sincerity and honesty of purpose. In war, the*

*issues at stake are far too great to allow room for individual selfishness or prejudices. The proper fulfillment of his duty, as his conscience dictates, must be the most important consideration in a soldier's life. If sense of duty is lacking in the leader, it cannot be expected to be present in the troops. Without it, the determination to see through the doubtful battle will not exist.*

### MENTAL QUALITIES

*(e) Knowledge – A commander cannot inspire confidence unless he has a thorough knowledge of his job. Without it he cannot gain the confidence of his superiors or his subordinates and this will result in wavering and indecision in battle.*

*The knowledge required of a commander varies with the size of his command. He must understand the technique of handling the various arms and types of units which he may be called upon to control in battle. He must know the technique of how to command – how to delegate to his subordinates and his staff, how to control, how to position himself on the battlefield and make use of his communications, and, most importantly of all, he must have an understanding of human nature and how to “get at” men. (Knowledge of human nature coupled with determination combine to make the art of “man mastership”).*

*Knowledge must come from hard study and harder thought.*

*(f) Judgement – Judgement is the application of knowledge to particular problems and situations. War is a risky business and in battle a commander is constantly called upon to face risks. A battle plan from which all risks have been eliminated is one so obvious that the enemy will probably have it countered before it will have materialized in action. Battle planning and execution are largely problems of balancing risks. It is judgement backed by knowledge that must decide for a commander what risks are acceptable and what risks are unacceptable. If judgement be faulty, bad risks will be taken, failures will result and the confidence of the troops will be lost.*

*(g) Initiative – Every commander in every grade must be prepared to act on his own knowledge and judgement without having to lean on his superior. If his knowledge and judgement tell him that certain action should be taken, he should take it. This he will fail to*

*do unless he possesses the quality of initiative.*

*(h) Mental Alertness – Time is vital in war. Commanders must be quick to grasp the essentials of an operational plan and of orders and instructions issued to them and quick to grasp a situation and the significance of events as they occur.*

PHYSICAL QUALITIES

*(j) Physical Fitness – Unless a man is physically fit, he cannot remain mentally fit in the stress of battle. Every commander is responsible for keeping himself and his troops in a physical condition which will enable them to withstand the mental and physical strains to which they may be subjected.*

*(k) Skill at Arms – An officer must possess the necessary skill at arms in the weapons he may be called upon to handle in battle.*

*(l) Youth – A man is never too young for a job, but he may well be too old, for age reduces speed of mental and physical reaction. If an officer is fit to command a unit at twenty-five, he will be twice as good at thirty-five. I am not suggesting that experience is not valuable – on the contrary it is very valuable indeed. But experience must be very clearly distinguished from the number of years a man has lived or the number of years he has served in a certain capacity or the number of different appointments he has held. Experience is only useful insofar as it represents knowledge acquired or knowledge confirmed by practical application. A man who has prepared himself for a certain type of work by previous thought and study, will gain more by practical application than one who has stepped into the same work without preparation. Some can serve a life span in a single appointment and absorb less about all its aspects than another may pick up in two weeks.*

*(GG Simonds)*

*Lt. Gen Comd 2 Cdn Corps*

Source: LAC, RG 24, Vol. 10,799.

*21/Gen/1/A Main Headquarters  
2nd Canadian Corps*

*26 Feb 44*

*To All Formation Commanders 2nd Canadian Corps*

*HONOURS AND AWARDS*

*1. The correct allocation of honours and awards is of great importance, since it affects morale. If decorations are distributed too freely they lose their value in the eyes of the Army as a whole and to the recipients. Conversely the recognition of valuable service by the award of a decoration is a just encouragement to others and in the best interests of the Service – particularly when considered in relation to promotion which must be based upon the promise of ability to perform a task in a higher sphere and NOT upon past services rendered.*

*2. The regulations governing honours and awards are given in Royal Warrants and official publications. The views and policies given below are intended to guide and assist Commanders in submitting recommendations. They will provide the basis upon which I will scrutinize all recommendations when passing for consideration by higher authority.*

*3. Active soldiering is a risky business and the normal performance of duties, varying in each sphere and with the role of the Arm, is inseparable from the element of risk. Commanders must bear in mind that the purpose of a campaign medal is to give recognition to the performance of normal duties in a Theatre of Operations where risks form part of the day to day business of soldiering. The idea that special honours should be liberally awarded to individuals for normal performance of their duties “because it is all they get out of it”, cannot be entertained for it cuts across the fundamental principle of military service. A soldier serves to do his duty and serve his country – not “for what he gets out of it”. On the other hand the soldier who bears the responsibility and runs the risks of actual combat with the enemy deserves some distinction to show he has withstood the test.*

*4. A proper allocation of honours and awards should –*

- (a) Give recognition to exceptional acts, or duties performed*

*with outstanding ability, or recognition of exacting duties performed unflinchingly during a difficult or long period.*

*(b) Encourage aggressiveness and skill and the offensive spirit.*

*(c) Discourage foolhardiness or the unnecessary and useless risk of lives and equipment. I look to every Commander to strictly discourage any form of “medal hunting”.*

*(d) To give recognition to acts of such outstanding gallantry that they are an example to the Army for all time.*

*5. The value of the service rendered is the first consideration in any award. The service rendered may be measured in terms of effect against the enemy or in terms of outstanding gallantry affording an example and inspiration to the whole Army, or in terms of a valuable contribution, effecting the efficiency or well-being of the Army or the general war effort.*

*6. Awards for Services in Combat with the Enemy (VC, DSO, MC, DCM, MM)*

*(a) With the exception of personnel of the Medical, or Chaplain's Services which are dealt with under a separate heading below, recommendees by their act or acts must have made, or contributed directly to, an effective blow against the enemy – the direct contribution to the success of battle, on the battlefield – is the standard by which such recommendations will be judged. Except in most extraordinary circumstances, acts of gallantry NOT directly contributing to damage to the enemy (such as rescuing of our own personnel, salvage of equipment,, extricating a unit or sub-unit from a difficult position) will NOT be considered for these awards even if performed in the presence of the enemy and under fire.*

*(b) The act or acts forming the basis of recommendations must be in the line of duty (for example, an artillery FOO [Forward Observation Officer] who, in the heat of battle leaves his OP [observation post] and joins in the infantry fight may put up a very gallant show, but if it was possible for him to have continued giving support to forward troops by remaining at his OP then he should not be considered for an award. To give an award in such a case encourages foolhardiness as opposed to performance of duty).*

*(c) The act or acts for these awards must have been carried out*

*under fire and the citation must so state.*

*(d) Except in very special and extraordinary circumstances and for Chaplains and Medical personnel, the above rules exclude the award of these decorations to personnel of the Services whose duties do not require them to directly deal a blow against the enemy. This should be realized by the personnel of such Services when it is decided that their contribution is best made in their service rather than in a unit which takes direct action against the enemy, and accords with the principle that a soldier's duty is to render the service for which he is best fitted by experience and training. The Provost Service is an exception in that control of traffic in the forward area at difficult diversions or bottlenecks, under hostile fire, contributes directly to a blow at the enemy in that it may be dependent upon the forward movement of supporting arms.*

*(e) Chaplains and Medical personnel are eligible for these decorations, for their primary duties are concerned with the physical and spiritual welfare of casualties on the battlefield. Acts of rescue under fire are legitimate cases for awards to officers and soldiers of these Services as it is in their "line of first duty". Commanders and Commanding Officers must remember however that medical personnel and clerics wear the Red Cross, giving them a measure of protection not available to combat personnel. There have been instances where the enemy have obviously refrained from firing at soldiers or vehicles bearing the Red Cross, and in assessing acts by medical personnel and clerics, this must be considered.*

*(f) Except for the VC [Victoria Cross], recommendations for the above decorations may be either "immediate" or "periodical". The immediate recommendation is for a single act and the majority of deserving cases can be covered by the immediate award. Certain categories of Staff Officer, through a long period of valuable service in the area of contact may be recommended for a periodical award.*

*(g) As a general guide, (except in the case of medical officers or Chaplains) to earn the DSO the act or acts for which an officer is recommended must have contributed directly to the success of the battle, at least and unmistakably on the brigade level, and more usually on the divisional level.*

*For the award of the MG [machine gun] an officer should have contributed directly to the success of the battle, at least and*

*unmistakably on a battalion level, and more usually on a brigade level.*

*(h) In the case of the VC the act must be so outstanding as to provide an example to the Army for all time and its effect in damage to the enemy and furtherance of operations must be marked beyond question and of first importance. Whenever a case is considered for a recommendation for the VC, as far as operational circumstances permit, the Brigade Commander concerned should visit the ground accompanied by the eye-witnesses of the act. Each eye-witness should be called forward, out of hearing of others, and describe to the Brigadier, on the ground, exactly what he saw. These accounts should be taken down at the time and eventually attached to the recommendation.*

*(i) It is quite legitimate to give recognition to outstanding work of a unit by an award to its commanding officer, for there would be no question as to who would bear the responsibility if it did badly.*

7. Awards for Gallantry for Acts not in Combat with the Enemy (GC, GM, Commendations for Gallantry)

*Passive acts of gallantry, not directly contributing to damage to the enemy, or outside the area of contact, may be rewarded by the GC, or GM, and recommendations should be submitted accordingly.*

8. Awards not requiring an Element of Gallantry (CB, CBE, OBE, MBE, BEM, CM, Mention in Despatches)

*These awards are intended for recognition of valuable service rendered NOT necessarily in combat with the enemy. Those who have not had the opportunity of directly contributing to damage to the enemy may nevertheless have rendered exceptional service, and should receive first consideration for these awards. Anyone, providing they qualify within the regulations laid down for each decoration, is eligible to earn, for exceptional services, a periodical award of one of these decorations.*

*9. It must be remembered that, in their final form citations are published in the Gazette. They must be accurate as to fact, include essential details such as date, time and place and be worded in good, simple English. Citations for immediate awards must be based on one or two specific acts during a particular phase and if drafted to cover a period will not gain acceptance. Carelessness in submitting citations results in delays to collect details, in rewriting and in getting signatures on redrafted*

*documents when there is always the possibility that the original initiators may have become casualties. It is important that deserving cases should be rewarded certainly and without delay.*

*10. Commanders and Commanding Officers should be careful to see that outstanding acts by individuals of supporting Arms and Services, working under command or in support, are brought to the attention of the Commander of the Arm or Service concerned, otherwise there is always the possibility that deserving cases may be overlooked.*

*11. I particularly caution Commanders and Commanding Officers against submitting recommendation for individuals who render them personal services, such as their drivers or orderlies. Commanders must bear in mind that these individuals are very much "under their eye". They must compare their services with those of the infantry section leader who during a period of operations may daily lead his section into battle in the forward area. The place for individuals of the former type to earn decorations, is serving with their units, and such personnel are eligible for a general campaign medal. I do not mean that such individuals should be excluded if, in very exceptional circumstances, they carry out an act of gallantry beyond their duties. But it has an adverse effect on morale of fighting troops if those in positions of little or no responsibility but close to the Commander and under his personal observation seem to come by decorations more easily than the front line soldier.*

*12. The final criterion of a good or bad award is the reaction of the troops. If the troops feel it is a good award, it is a good award. If awards are criticized by the fighting troops they are bad awards. Before forwarding any recommendation, at each level, the Commander should ask himself the question "would the front line soldier, if he knew the facts, consider this well deserved".*

*(Sgd.) G.G. Simonds*

*Lt Gen*

*Comd 2 Cdn Corps*

Source: LAC, RG 24, Vol. 10,799.



## CHAPTER 2

# Normandy: The July Battles

The battle of Normandy did not develop according to plan. Much attention had been paid to the problems of getting and staying ashore, and these operations were brilliantly successful. However, Montgomery, his army commander Lieutenant-General Miles Dempsey and the corps commanders, Lieutenant-General John Crocker (1 Corps) and Lieutenant-General G.C. Bucknell (30 Corps), paid less attention to plans for breaking out of the bridgehead. They seem to have assumed that the Germans would wear themselves out in large, patterned counter-attacks, creating the conditions for a breakout battle. When heavy losses in the bridgehead forced Rommel and his generals to establish a new defensive perimeter drawing in all available troops to prevent an Allied breakthrough, the battle was transformed.

All across Normandy, German defences were echeloned in depth, with forward outposts, a lightly manned main defensive line and strong local reserves including tanks and/or self-propelled assault guns available to carry out immediate local counter-attacks. This defensive zone was 700 to 1000 metres deep, supported by artillery, mortar and Nebelwefer positions camouflaged in woods or on reverse slopes. Allied air superiority and the crushing power of naval guns made the assembly of large forces for a major counter-attack nearly impossible, so emphasis was placed on dispersing armour into “penny packets” to provide immediate tactical support. According to German reports from the battlefield the Panzer Division had become an “anachronism.” In Normandy “Panzers could only be employed piecemeal in support of infantry at most in squadron strength.”<sup>1</sup>

Montgomery’s first attempt to overcome the enemy’s defences, Operation EPSOM was launched on 25 June with Lieutenant-General Richard O’Connor’s

8th British Corps ordered to attack on an eight-kilometre front between Norrey-en-Bessin and Tilly-sur-Seulles. O'Connor, like Simonds, had been planning and training for a breakout battle, but the situation confronting his corps was rather different than the one either he or Simonds had envisaged in England. The right flank of the EPSOM start line was classic Normandy *bocage* – small, hedge-rowed fields in hilly, broken countryside. O'Connor decided to squeeze his three “unblooded divisions,” 15th Scottish, 43rd Wessex and 11th Armoured through a three kilometre wide corridor in the relatively open country on the left flank. His troops would have to overcome a regiment of 12th SS Panzer Division plus powerful Panzer Lehr units holding the high ground north of the River Odon with strong reverse-slope positions. Once this was accomplished the corps would have to cross the heavily wooded valley and the Odon River before attacking the flat-topped ridge south of the river known by its altitude as Hill 112.<sup>2</sup> The II SS Panzer Corps had reached Paris from Poland on 24 June and its lead elements, together with I SS Panzer Division, were within a day’s march of the Odon battlefield.<sup>3</sup> This was not the kind of force ratio envisaged in planning breakout battles.

O'Connor drew upon 30th Corps to stage a protective advance on his right flank but both this attack, Operation MARTLET, and the advance by 15th Scottish Division were slowed by determined Panzer battle groups. O'Connor believed he had to commit 11th Armoured Division to gain momentum though it was supposed to be used to exploit success. On Day 2 the combined forces of the two divisions fought their way to the river, seized an intact bridge and reached the lower slopes of Hill 112, forming the infamous “Scottish Corridor” – a three-kilometre wide, eight-kilometre deep spike driven into the heart of the enemy defences that quickly became a salient, subject to withering fire from three sides.

Montgomery ordered O'Connor to press ahead using 43rd Division to widen the corridor on the left flank. This decision forced the Germans to employ II SS Panzer Corps in a series of piecemeal attacks. Thanks to Ultra, 8th Corps was forewarned and was able to dig-in and prepare to meet the SS battle groups. EPSOM ended when II SS Panzer Corps was halted “by the most intense artillery fire [including] British naval artillery.” After suffering “grievous losses” the Germans abandoned the Odon and reformed their defences on Hill 112.<sup>4</sup>

Operation EPSOM was a considerable success because it forced the enemy to use a panzer corps brought from the eastern front to prevent a breakthrough. Once committed, it proved difficult to withdraw 9th and 10th SS Divisions from the battle zone, foreclosing the opportunity to mount a corps-level counter-attack before the Allied build-up was complete. On the other hand, EPSOM proved to be a very costly battle for 2nd British Army, which suffered more than 5000 casualties, 75 per cent of them in infantry battalions, in a single

week.<sup>5</sup>

O'Connor believed the key lesson of EPSOM was that Normandy had become more like a First World War battlefield requiring bite and hold tactics. He argued that the German positions south of the Odon could best be overcome in a series of engagements "that would so soften the enemy... that when we wanted to pass the river we should have little difficulty in doing so."<sup>6</sup> Simonds, whose information about the battle was largely second hand, remained convinced that assaulting tanks and infantry could, in the "initial phase of an attack... aim at penetration of not less than 4000 yards... to capture German mortar positions or force their re-disposition" simplifying the "business of mopping up." This could be accomplished he believed if the assaulting troops kept up with their covering fire.

Simonds stressed this approach in a document drafted at his Tactical Headquarters in Normandy on 1 July. During the following week he witnessed Operation WINDSOR, the attack on Carpiquet and its airfield and Operation CHARNWOOD, the assault on the northern defences of Caen. Finally on the afternoon of 11 July 1944, 2nd Canadian Corps became operational under Second British Army and Simonds began preparations for his first corps-level operation. The 3rd Canadian Infantry Division rejoined the corps a few days later and on 16 July Simonds gathered the officers of 3rd Division and 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade together to introduce himself and his "policy in the tactical handling of troops and in administration generally." (The draft document of 1 July and the transcript of his 16 July talk are reproduced at the end of this chapter.)

After the capture of Caen on 8-9 July Montgomery issued a new directive. The Americans, he noted, were now facing some 70 infantry battalions and 250 tanks so progress in the *bocage* was bound to be slow. It was up to 2nd British Army to stage operations that would have a direct influence on the American effort<sup>7</sup> by attracting enemy forces to the eastern flank. This meant mounting a new offensive east of the Orne. Montgomery decided to transform 8th Corps into a force composed of three armoured divisions and to order O'Connor to stage an armoured *blitzkrieg* from the Orne bridgehead east of Caen towards Falaise. The Canadian role in Operation GOODWOOD, known as Operation ATLANTIC, was outlined in some detail by the Army Commander, General Dempsey. The 2nd Canadian Corps was to clear the industrial suburbs of Caen on the right flank of the 8th Corps advance and then secure the western end of the ridgeline south of Caen. Simonds had little opportunity to influence the initial stages of the operation, which were determined by the air and artillery plans, but on the night of 19 July he made his first major command decision in Normandy. Operation GOODWOOD was grinding to a halt on the slopes of what the British called

Bourguebus Ridge. The 8th Corps had lost more than 300 tanks to enemy armour and anti-tank guns, and both 11th and the Guards Armoured Divisions had to be withdrawn to recover from their losses. General Dempsey told Simonds to relieve the armoured divisions as quickly as possible and complete the consolidation of the bridgehead around Pt. 67 – Ifs – Hubert Folie, a task that was completed by the evening of 19 July.<sup>8</sup>

Simonds thought that much more could be accomplished. One brigade of 2nd Canadian Division had seized the Pt. 67 – Ifs area and was holding it against small-scale German counter-attacks. Simonds believed that if a second brigade attacked through this position securing a grip on the northern, reverse slope, of what the Canadians called Verrières Ridge, most of the objectives assigned to the corps in the GOODWOOD plan would be reached. He ordered Major-General Charles Foulkes, GOC 2nd Canadian Division, to employ 6th Brigade with the Essex Scottish from 4th Brigade under command, to carry out the attack the next day, 20 July.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately it took much more time than Simonds had hoped to move the brigade, marry it up with the armour and arrange the fire plan. By the time the attack got underway the enemy's battle groups were in position on their reverse slope. When heavy rain ended both air support and artillery observation, the Germans overwhelmed the advancing troops with a series of well-orchestrated counter-attacks.

Operation GOODWOOD was a failure at the tactical level. No vital ground had been gained and Allied casualties vastly exceeded those inflicted on the enemy. Fortunately the German generals tried to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory when Field Marshal Günther Von Kluge decided “the enemy must be thrown back across the line Caen-Troarn by concentric attacks.”<sup>10</sup> These counter-attacks cost the Germans precious, irreplaceable resources and achieved little.

As the German attacks eased, Montgomery, under pressure from Eisenhower, announced that he would launch a new series of left-right blows on either side of the Orne beginning with an attack by 2nd Canadian Corps on 25 July.<sup>11</sup> Dempsey gave Simonds verbal orders for this operation, code-named SPRING, on 22 July, allocating both 7th and Guards Armoured divisions to the corps. Dempsey wanted Simonds to conduct a limited operation designed to secure the second phase objectives of GOODWOOD. There was no suggestion of a breakout and O'Connor, who expected the British armoured divisions to return to his corps in a few days, sought out Simonds to make sure that there would be no repetition of GOODWOOD tactics. After the meeting, O'Connor wrote to the commander of the Guards Armoured Division urging him to “go cautiously with your armour... you are not doing a rush to Paris – it is the capture of a wood by combined armour and infantry; so as an operation, not quite the same background



as the last.”<sup>12</sup>

Verrières Ridge is barely discernable at its eastern end, but towards the Orne a wide u-shaped valley separates Pt. 67 and St. André-sur-Orne from Pt. 88 and the village of May-sur-Orne. Intelligence reports from Ultra and other sources had established the German order of battle, and Simonds knew that the corps would confront a well dug-in enemy with ample local reserves. His solution was to try and secure the ridge in a two-phase attack beginning in full darkness. If the first phase battalions could secure the small villages on the crest of the ridge then three fresh infantry battalions supported by armoured squadrons, artillery and the tactical air force might penetrate the enemy’s defences at first light capturing or forcing the withdrawal of his mortar and anti-tank guns.

Operation SPRING turned out to be the worst single-day disaster experienced by the Canadians since the Dieppe raid of August 1942. Except in the centre, where the first phase objective, Vèrrieres village, was below the crest, allowing the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry to secure a defensible position, the initial advance broke down in confusion. Simonds, misled by fragmentary reports, ordered the second phase to begin and the enemy savaged the battalions that attempted to cross the ridge.<sup>13</sup> Simonds offered his own analysis of SPRING shortly after the battle and in a report written for the official historian, which has been reproduced for this chapter.

## ENDNOTES

1. German views on Allied Combat Efficiency, Appendix D, II Canadian Corps Intelligence Summary No. 90, LAC RG24, Vol. 13,714. See Terry Copp, *Fields of Fire: The Canadians in Normandy*, pp. 93-94.
2. L.F. Ellis, *Victory in the West*, Vol. 1, pp. 267-287. See also Lloyd Clark, *Operation Epsom*, (London, 2004).
3. The progress of II SS Panzer Corps was tracked by Ultra. See F.H. Hinsley, *British Intelligence in the Second World War*, Vol. III, Part 2, pp. 197-198.
4. Copp, *Fields of Fire*, p. 86. The quotation is from the War Diary of O.B. West.
5. *Ibid.*, Note 27, p. 293.

6. O'Connor Papers, 11 July 1944, Liddel Hart Archives, 5/3/16.
7. C.P. Stacey, *The Victory Campaign*, p. 165.
8. For Operation GOODWOOD see Ellis, pp. 327-353.
9. Copp, *Fields of Fire*, pp. 147-148. Stacey, pp. 174-176.
10. War Diary, Panzer Group West, 18 July 1944.
11. Stacey, p. 183.
12. O'Connor Papers, O'Connor to Adair, 23 July 1944.
13. Copp, *Fields of Fire*, pp. 167-183.

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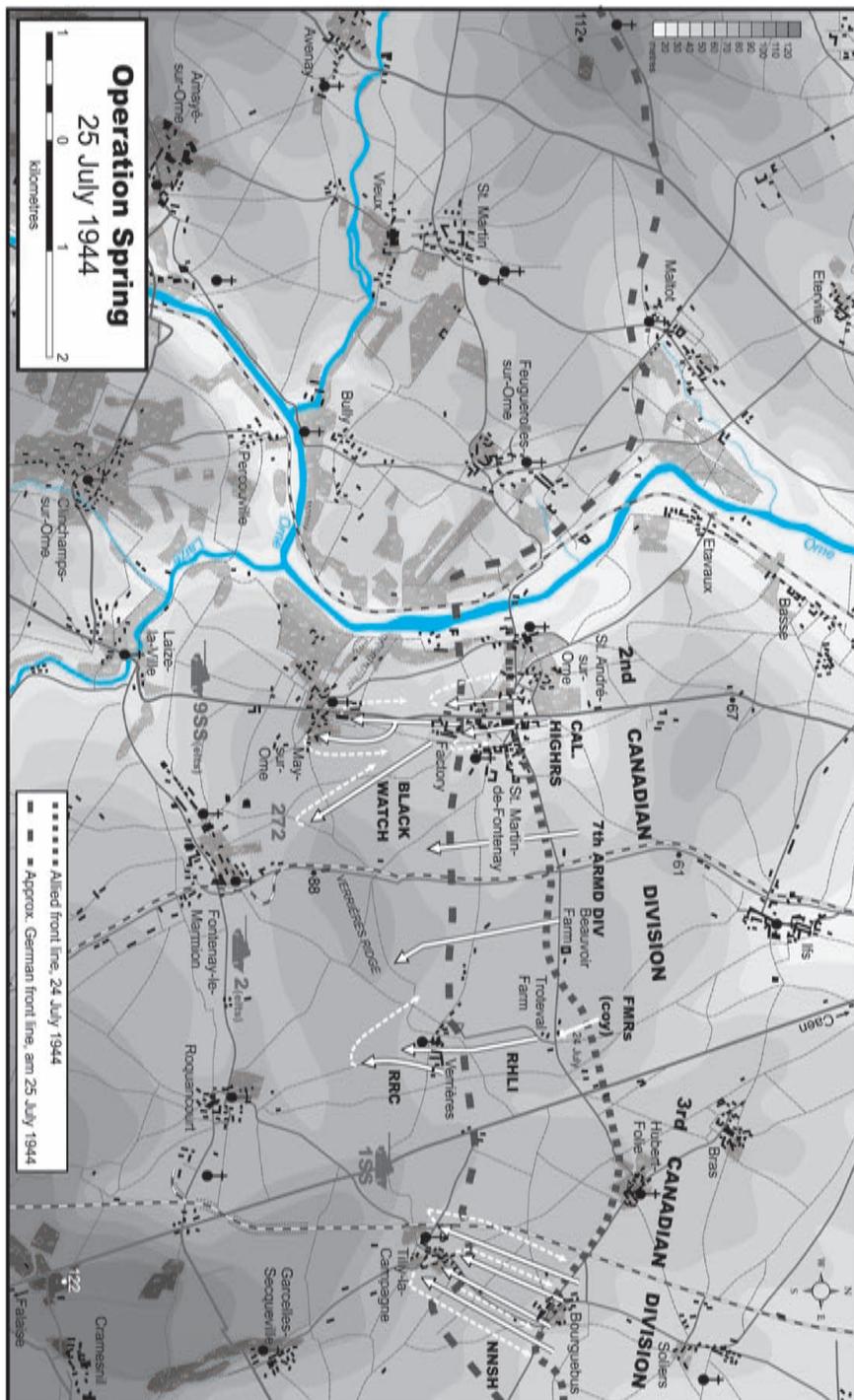
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**DRAFT**  
**POLICY—TACTICAL HANDLING OF TROOPS**

There are certain lessons which have been brought out repeatedly in operations throughout the war and they must receive the continuous attention of all officers if our troops are to have the success which is well within their capacity.

The Effect of Artillery Fire

The effect of bombardment whether from aircraft or from guns is 90% moral. The actual casualties to the defenders inflicted by covering fire is always a very small proportion of their total numbers. Sudden and intense bombardment, however, has a very considerable moral effect. It will keep down the heads of all, except the outstandingly brave, and the leaders will probably become casualties through blast or splinter effect. It must be realized, however, that this moral effect is not prolonged and good troops are very quick to recover as soon as a bombardment lifts. The effect of covering fire during an attack, whether in the form of concentrations on specific defended areas or in the form of a barrage, is to paralyse the defenders for a short period. It is, therefore, vitally important to the success of an assault that the assaulting troops shall follow closely their covering



Map drawn by Mike Bechthold ©2006

fire and must enter the enemy position very quickly after the bombardment lifts. The risk should be squarely faced that in accepting a few casualties by being too close to the covering fire, in the long run will result in far fewer casualties in the capture of the enemy position. If troops hang so far behind their covering fire that the defence can recover from the shock of bombardment and re-man a position before the assaulting tanks and/or infantry close, casualties will be far heavier than the few which may result by leaning on our own supporting fire.

The essence of the German system of defence is the counter-attack and it should be taken as a rule that a counter-attack will come very soon after our leading troops reach their objective. There are three detailed operations which must be carried out very quickly following the seizure of an objective by our leading troops:-

(a) The position must be mopped up, i.e., the original defenders must be killed or captured before they can recover from the effect of the bombardment. This requires a detailed search of the position itself within a matter of minutes of the arrival of the leading troops.

(b) Troops must be quickly disposed on the objective to repel the counter-attack which is certain to come, and

(c) Recce patrols must be pushed out to find whether or not the situation is favourable to a rapid exploitation beyond the objective.

The organization of an attack requires that specific bodies of troops should be detailed to each of these tasks. The troops which are to secure the objective against counter-attack must include tanks or anti-tank guns.

The initial phase of an attack should aim at a penetration of not less than 4000 yards. It is necessary to penetrate to this depth to capture German mortar positions or force their re-disposition. If local German counter-attacks can be supported by pre-arranged mortar fire they are very much more difficult to contend with. The meeting of the counter-attack and the business of mopping up is very much simplified if German mortar positions have been overrun.

Attacking infantry must move steadily forward behind their covering fire and apart from those specifically detailed to mop up the intervening ground, troops must not stop and must not open fire until the objective is reached. There are two reasons for this, experience has shown that if troops stop to occupy a firing position it is extremely difficult to get them on the move again and they lose their covering fire; secondly, all the ammunition

which the infantry man can carry into battle will be needed to repel counter-attacks when the objective is reached.

### Patrolling

The foremost units must maintain contact with the enemy. This contact should be maintained by patrols rather than the main body of forward units being placed on tactically unsuitable ground. Much has been written about patrols and patrolling, but much of what has been written has been and is being ignored. Recce patrols should be as small as possible (two or at the most, three men). The men must be specially selected for their suitability for this type of work and very highly trained. It is not a question solely of the courage of the individual. There is a type of man who has the heart of a lion but is utterly useless at patrolling, a menace to anyone who accompanies him though he may be invaluable in the rough and tumble of infantry fighting. Generally speaking from the point of view of their suitability for patrolling, men can be grouped into two types. There are those who like plenty of company when things are hot – these are no good for patrol business. There are those who like to play a lone hand or work with one or two tried companions – this is the type of man who is excellent for a scout. There are those with all the characteristics of courage and daring but who are quite incapable of moving quietly or unobtrusively and they are useless for the patrol business. Specially selected and trained men should be grouped in each unit in a special platoon. This is necessary because only certain men are suitable and they should be kept especially for the work. Whenever the unit is forward these patrols should work out and should keep the unit continuously in the picture as to what the enemy are doing on its front. Details of the minefields, wire obstacles, localities and when they are occupied should all be obtained from working recce patrols. Nothing is more dangerous than to sit down in front of the Boche and not know what he is up to.

### Forming a “Patrol Base”

The distance over which patrols can work during the hours of darkness is strictly limited, especially when the hours of darkness are few during short summer nights. It may well be that the most suitable tactical disposition of a unit nearest to the enemy may be too far away to permit for patrols to work out to contact with the enemy and get back again while it is dark. In such a situation a patrol base should be formed forward within

patrolling range of the enemy position. A detached and tactically well sited company can operate from this base and will be able to “see off” any minor enemy offensive operations directed against it. The location of the patrol base should be varied where the ground allows of alternative positions.

### Fighting Patrols

The employment of a fighting patrol is only justified for a specific operation with a specific object, generally the object will be to secure prisoners and identifications. It is quite wrong to send out a fighting patrol on an undefined mission towards the enemy to take prisoners, and until sound information has been produced as a result of the work of recce patrols, there will be few opportunities for the sound employment of fighting patrols. When recce patrols have produced a clear picture of what the enemy is doing, then a plan may be made to take out a particular enemy position by a fighting patrol. Such an operation is a minor attack and must be as carefully planned and given time for thorough recce by its leaders. Badly organized fighting patrols usually result in not securing identifications of the enemy but getting ambushed and giving useful information to the enemy.

(G.G. Simonds)  
Lieut-General  
GOC 2 Canadian Corps  
Tac HQ, 2 Canadian Corps  
1 July 44

Source: War Diary, 2nd Canadian Corps, July 1944, LAC, RG 24

**ADDRESS BY  
LIEUT.-GENERAL G.G. SIMONDS, CBE, DSO**

General Officer Commanding 2nd Canadian Corps, to Officers of 3rd Canadian Infantry Division and 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade, at the Chateau near Cairon (962744, Sheet 7F/1) on 16 July 1944  
(reported by Major A.T. Sesia)

I have called this conference first to get you together and to welcome 3 Cdn Inf Div and 2 Cdn Armd Bde into 2 Cdn Corps, and secondly to say how proud I am to have them in this Corps after their fine performance during the past month since D-Day. I am sorry to say that of the Divisions in the Canadian Army your Division is the one that I know the least. In all my previous contacts with the Canadian Army there was not a formation with which I was not closely associated, but your Division was the one with which I had had the least contact. I wanted to get around to see the troops and I had intended to do so yesterday, but unfortunately circumstances prevented me from doing so. However, I expect that I shall be able to get out to see them in a very short time.

I wanted to take this, the first opportunity that I could, to put before you my policy in the tactical handling of troops and in administration generally. First of all, I would like to say a word or two on just where we stand. The Russian offensive in the East is going extremely well. From the latest reports the Russians are some thirty to forty miles from the East Prussian frontier. Here in the west, the German formations are all committed including two which arrived recently from Russia. As far as we can determine, the Germans are short of men and equipment, and we have not so far encountered any fresh formations, nor do there seem to be any in sight. Opposite us is the "works" so to speak. I think you remember General Montgomery's remarks when he spoke to all formations prior to D-Day and said that we had the war "in the bag" if we made an all-out effort. My view is that we will have the war "in the bag" this summer or at least in a matter of weeks if we pursue the advantage we now hold. I cannot stress too highly what effect this all-out effort will have on the enemy and its advantages to us particularly from the point of view of our own troops. If the war drags out, normal wastage will ensue and casualties will mount up. On the other hand, by making use of an all-out effort our casualties may be initially high, but in the long run they will be less. I think it is safe to

compare the enemy in his present situation to a boxer who is groggy on his feet, and needs but the knockout blow to finish him off. I ask all Commanders here present to put first and foremost into their minds the idea of the all-out effort. You must always remember that if you rest, so does the enemy; and the final outcome takes considerably longer. You must therefore call on your troops for this all-out effort.

I want it to be absolutely clear in your minds that occasions will arise when I will make heavy demands from you at a time when your troops are tired, but the enemy is groggy. This produces great results and saves casualties. There is always a tendency on our part to look at our troops after a particularly stiff engagement and consider them tired without appreciating, at the same time, that the enemy is more so. I think that the German's position as a whole is not far from the point of cracking up unless he produces fresh formations. His prospects of producing fresh formations from Russia are at present very slim although he may produce some from Italy. There is no doubt that he may have a certain amount of reinforcements to draw from but these cannot materially alter his present position.

### Operational Points

I would now like to mention a few operational points which I consider essential. First, we must have the Offensive Spirit. This is absolutely essential, and the drive must always come from the top. It has always been written that the Commander inspires his troops. With us Canadians it is different. Our Commanders are inspired by the troops. I have always found the troops tired when the commander is tired, yet one has only to mingle in with the troops themselves to find that the Offensive Spirit and the will to carry an all-out effort is always present with the Canadian soldier, and it should not be destroyed by the flagging spirit of a Commander who is tired. The Offensive Spirit does not mean running up against a stone wall. If a Commander finds himself up against stiff opposition he must keep finding a way to break through the enemy. It is fatal to stop. He must never sit down. He must always be doing something.

Secondly, once you are committed to an offensive operation there is no holding your hand, regardless of casualties. As a Commander you must consider at the outset whether the losses incurred are going to be worth the final assault. You must determine whether these losses are going to be the minimum you can afford in relation to the value of the objective.

We can't fight the Boche without incurring casualties and every soldier must know this. My point of view is that if I can't embark upon an operation to take a certain feature, for example, unless it will be useful to me later, the operation is not worthwhile. But if the operation is worthwhile and I call it off with 50% casualties incurred, then I have achieved nothing but a waste of lives; if I continue and incur a further 20% casualties and bring the operation to a successful conclusion, then the operation is worthwhile. I speak of casualties in grossly exaggerated figures. In no operation yet I have participated where casualties were not between 15% and 25% and, even at that, 25% is still a grossly exaggerated figure. You must have realized by now, after your experience during the past month, that it is inevitable in infantry warfare that casualties become greatly exaggerated. In the fog of battle communications become disrupted and units have become separated, and when the "survivors" start coming in they report that their section, platoon or company has been wiped out. It must always be realized that when a soldier is separated from his comrades he feels that he is the sole survivor, and it is only after reorganization, possibly three or four days later, that one realizes that casualties have been far lower than at first feared.

### Patrolling

Another very important point in connection with the Offensive Spirit is the question of patrolling. Before the war and even during its early days the doctrine of patrolling varied between the advantages of a recon patrol and a fighting patrol. Since that time the definition of both has become confused. From experience I say that both types of patrolling must be clearly defined. A recon patrol goes out to get information and bring it back. Recon patrols should be small and made up of experts who know how to creep about in the dark and in daylight, without being observed. They must consist of men who are individualists and who enjoy the work. Obviously the type of man required must be one who possesses personal courage. But courage is not all that he must have. You may have a man who possesses considerable courage but who, when he crawls five feet in the dark, cannot do so without cursing. There are also men who possess great courage if they are in company with others but are ineffective if they become isolated. On the other hand, there are men who like to play alone or with a companion or two. Fighting at the present time is not confined on a continuous front – both sides have wonderful opportunities for good scouting. WE must always bear in mind that the Boche keeps very still in

daytime. For the experienced there are all sorts of outward signs which scouts learn to interpret. When, for instance, all movement has ceased in a village we accept it that the Boche is there. When civilians are seen returning to the village, then it is a pretty fair indication that the Boche has gone.

A word on fighting patrols. In no sense should a scouting platoon be used as a fighting platoon. In no sense should fighting personnel be allowed to be held above others in your command. This is bad for morale. Fighting patrols go on definite missions to take prisoners, and they go in on information picked up by the recce patrol. When the fighting patrol is working, the recce patrol should be either resting or seeking further information in another sector. Under no circumstances should you have your scout platoon at work when fighting is in progress for they should be working hard when you are sitting down. Each company should have two scouts in each platoon who are experts, and whose job it is to keep you informed at all times as to what you are likely to run into. In this connection I would like to say that the teaching in the battle schools is, to my mind, wrong. Briefly, when a company is going into the attack and thinks it is bumping into opposition, the forward platoon sits and another is sent on a left or right flanking move. The Boche sits down and lets the platoon come in and withholds his fire when withdrawing but the first thing the forward platoon knows is that it has run into machine gun fire from 1000 yards behind. Scouts should precede the platoon and be on the alert at all times to prevent their platoons from walking into this Boche trick. I warn you not to fill yourselves with apprehensions of the enemy's tactics, because you should not have apprehensions at all. If you are aware of the Boche's tactics, and I realize that you have all been in battle, you will also know that although the Boche is a very good soldier he is no match for the Canadian soldier. Our troops have been brought up with a different mentality, are individualists and imaginative and it is up to you not to kill these qualities. The Boche, on the other hand, follows a set drill in his tactics and seldom deviates from it.

An important phase in patrol activity which must never be lost sight of is the accurate interrogation of the patrol when it comes in. Patrols at the present time should be organized at least on a Brigade level and preferably on a Division level. The handling of these patrols and their interrogation when they return must in some respect be the same in which an RAF Intelligence Officer interrogates air crews when they return from a mission. This interrogation must be complete in every respect. An example of an incomplete interrogation occurred last night when one of our patrols

reported that a Boche was seen to throw away his rifle and run when he was approached by a patrol from 7 Cdn Inf Bde. As far as I am concerned I do not know that the man who threw down his rifle was a German. He may well have been a frightened farmer. The patrol had not brought back the rifle in question. I say that if this patrol was close enough to see the man at night, and also see that he had thrown down his rifle, then it should have retrieved that rifle.

### General Remarks

I am of the opinion that troops underestimate the effect of artillery fire. I will admit that only 5% of artillery fire has a material effect, and that 95% has an effect on morale; but it is in following up this effect on morale that the benefit from artillery fire is derived. In my experience I would say that the Boche recovers easily from a barrage in approximately ten minutes. With the Italian it was different. It took at least three quarters of an hour before he would show up his head and look around after a barrage. It is vitally important that the landing assault troops must follow closely on the heels of the firing. During the last war it was always said that full use of a barrage was not made unless our troops suffered casualties from it. In other words, unless we follow closely behind a barrage and take advantage of its effect upon the enemy its value is worthless. We must, therefore, be prepared to accept casualties from shells falling short.

The essence of German defence is the counter-attack. You should never be surprised when he counter-attacks. You should be surprised if he fails to counter-attack. The Boche is very effective with his mortar. Without his mortar he is not effective and it has been proven time and again. I have known instances where a hundred bodies, by actual count, of German dead were found lying about a small position most of whom were killed by small arms fire. The Boche usually sites his mortar 3,000 to 4,000 yards behind his FDLs [Forward Defensive Lines]. In the attack, the initial assault wave should go through at 3,000 or 4,000 yards behind his FDLs [Forward Defensive Lines], in order to break up the mortar organization. This can be done with speed of movement on the part of the assaulting troops and will thereby cost the Boche very heavy casualties and break up his counter-attack. To achieve this, the leading troops must go through without bothering about mopping up and also by side-stepping opposition. However, the Boche who has been sidestepped must not be left alone for he can be a source of considerable annoyance. Mopping up must be done as quickly as possible behind the assaulting wave. The two requisites,

therefore, for this type of engagement are: (1) Speed in the assault wave, and (2) cleaning up in the mopping up wave. These requisites are the only method by which speed is obtained and access into the depth required. Between both requisites a gap will inevitably follow, and this gap should not be large. The moppers-up should be organized into section columns so that one can deal with a pocket while the others go on. They should be supplied with plenty of grenades and small arms. I am convinced that attacks in short phases of 1,000 to 1,500 yards each are not effective and become very heavily mortared.

With the increase of high velocity ammunition, armour, especially when working with infantry, should not be employed unless behind good covering fire and clear of minefields. It is all-important that when moving alone tanks should cover the movement of other tanks. If a regiment is moving in bounds, one squadron should always be employed to cover the movement of the others against the possibility of well-sited 88 mm guns. As far as the infantry is concerned the tank assists the infantry with fire from its gun. It is essential that the closest possible contact between both arms exist and I suggest that representatives from both arms with 18 sets should be interchanged. The infantry officer with the armour could then say what he wants, and the tank officer with the infantry could decide how to do it.

My final point concerns Battle Stamina. A “flash in the pan” formation is useless. It has to be good to the end. This will only be the case if the Commander down to the platoon commander or the equivalent will nurse Battle Stamina. This hinges on two factors: (a) Physical and (b) Morale.

(a) Physical Factor — Good unit administration must be exercised at all times to keep out sickness. Commanders should be careful to leave selected personnel as LOBs [Left out of Battle]. This becomes most important particularly in the case of heavy fighting. It is a vital mistake for a Commander to LOB an officer or man of whom he is not certain. He must find out once and for all in battle whether or not a man can prove himself favourably or otherwise. Not to do so is the worst mistake that can be made to encourage malingering or the tendency to go easy hoping to be left out. By placing such a man into battle it is possible that he will prove himself a worthy soldier, or if not, he will crack up or become a casualty. From the psychological point of view this must be kept in sight at all times.

(b) Morale Factor – Morale is hinged to discipline. There is no substitute for discipline. Just prior to the war wild ideas on discipline were

let loose. The present form of discipline existing in the British Army has withstood the test of battle, for centuries, and is suited to our temperament. The worst thing a Commander can do is to relax on discipline. The Guards Battalions have a form of discipline which is unique in itself, but it must be realized that they Guards are not much different than other men except that they have been chosen for the number of inches between their heads and feet. The methods employed to achieve this discipline among the Guards is not, however, suited to the Canadian temperament but the evidences of results obtained should be the same.

If you explain to the Canadian soldier what is required of him and give him a good reason for it he will produce the goods every single time and do it twice as well as any other individual. From the national point of view we must look to our contribution in this war in every respect. We must ask ourselves what, from the national point of view, will Canada get out of this war materially? The answer is: Nil. In fact, when the war is over we will probably have to dig down deeper than ever before into our pockets to pay for it. On the moral side, however, what do we get out of it? The answer is: A great deal. We not only increase our own self-respect as a Nation, but we also increase the respect for Canada from all other nations who have come to realize her greatness. The opinion formed of Canada and Canadians by peoples in Europe and Britain will be based upon the impression created by the Canadian troops they see about them. It is a fact that we are ordinarily judged by the external appearance and conduct of our troops. Hence their importance.

Every effort must be made to ensure that the discipline and deportment of our troops is kept up to the highest standard. I made it a strict rule in the Mediterranean, and I intend to carry it out here, that any cases of offences against the civil population will not be dealt with by the soldier's CO, but by Court Martial. Every unit has its "bad eggs" and it is they, (fortunately less than 1% of the total number of troops involved), who commit these offences and they must be dealt with in no uncertain terms. This will have its effect on other troops who might be inclined to commit the same offences. One of the offences that is likely to be met up with is that of looting. Many cases of looting are due to misunderstanding on the part of the troops. There has not been much of it, but when it has occurred it was generally due to troops passing by a wrecked building or house and, seeing that its occupants had fled, thought nothing of picking up items more in the way of souvenirs than anything else. This misunderstanding must be dispelled by the officers.

It is very important that when things are bad the reins should be kept tight. Don't do nothing. Commence smartening up, holding parades, etc. Discipline among the officers and NCOs [Non-Commissioned Officers] should always be at its highest. It must always be borne in mind that troops are inclined to get morbid after hard fighting, especially in the winter months. I hope that this war will be over before the winter months set in. Bad weather is bad for the troops.

One point that I insist upon and which you may consider eccentric is that I place great stress on saluting. First of all, I think that in any formation we should act as a team, and it is inconceivable that in any other form of team, members should walk by each other and not give some form of recognition. As with everything else, salutation in the Army is regulated by a universal method. Personally, I hate passing by a group of troops without giving them some form of salutation. There are, perhaps, some reasons why saluting drops off. In some units it is likely that troops do not salute because they resent it. It is up to the officers and NCOs in that unit to seek out the cause for this resentment and remove it. Another reason is that troops sometimes just don't bother saluting. They follow the line of least resistance. Some say "The hell with it! I saluted three officers this morning and that's enough for the day!" A third reason for not saluting is that the soldiers do not see when officers pass by. They will not see if they walk with their heads down. An alert soldier walks with his head up. It is the business of officers to see that their soldiers are alert. A fourth reason is that officers never take the trouble to explain the custom of saluting and why it is done. Officers should gather their troops about them at least once a week and explain to them these and other points which soldiers either forgot or have not known. I think that we publish far too many orders and never enforce them. One reason why these orders are neglected is because officers lose sight of the fact that in their unit there may be a heavy turnover of new people who are not informed on these things. In theory, everybody is supposed to know what is published in orders, but in fact, it is not so. Officers must keep their troops in the picture at all times. The Canadian soldier does not give his best when he is not in the picture.

It is a peculiar fact, but it is true, that usually troops in the forward areas are far more meticulous about saluting than those at the Base. In the Middle East it has invariably been found that the standard of saluting was 100% in the Forward Areas and at Base no one bothered about it. It is an indication of a lack of morale and the fighting spirit. Saluting will be continued in the field except in certain cases. Soldiers when not actively employed or when not engaged in battle, will salute. Officers will return

the salute and speak to soldiers. On the line of march officers will salute seniors while ORs will continue to march at ease. If, for instance, a party of engineers are working on a roadside, I do not expect that every time an officer passes they will throw down their tools and salute. My experience is that troops like saluting if it is done properly and if the custom is properly explained to them. I lay stress on what seems to be little things. Little things are important in battle. In battle men risk lives. You can't get them to do the big things if they are not made to do the little things.

Source: LAC, RG 24, Vol. 17,506.

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OPERATION "SPRING"  
*by G.G. Simonds, Lieut.-General*

G.O.C.  
Canadian Forces in the Netherlands  
31 January 1946

Whilst I agree with the proposed text of the statement of the Minister of National Defence, I have the following comments to make which may help to a better understanding of the background of operation "Spring".

Of all the operations of the war the "holding attack" is that least understood by the layman for casualties seem to be out of all proportion to apparent gains. It is also, for the same reasons, the most trying for a commander and his troops. Yet to achieve great and decisive results against a skilful enemy, the hostile reserves must be drawn in, pinned and worn down before the real "coup-de-grace" can be delivered. In all military history, to force an able commander to expend his reserves there has been discovered no alternative to the "holding attack." To effect its purpose, such an attack must be directed against an objective about which the enemy is highly sensitive and for the protection of which he is certain to react. In the Normandy bridgehead the "Caen Hinge" was just such an objective and it was inherent in the operational conditions of mid-July that any attack directed against it would meet violent opposition and consequent heavy fighting.

Conditions at the time of operation “Totalize” – the “breakthrough” south of Caen – were very different from those at the time of operation “Spring”. Between the 25 July and 7 Aug the Germans had to shift reserves to meet the American breakout at Avranches and the advance of 12 British Corps of Second Army towards the upper Orne had forced a further reduction of the German strength south of Caen. In my original appreciation and outline plan for operation “Totalize”, I considered a “breakthrough” contingent upon these conditions and I stated:

The plan is submitted on the assumption that the right wing of Second Army has secured, or imminently threatens to secure, a bridgehead east of the R. Orne, thus loosening the enemy grip on his northern pivot.

As is now well known, the plan of the C.-in-C. F.M. (then General) Montgomery, was to draw in and pin the enemy on the latter’s sensitive eastern flank thus creating a situation favourable to the break out on the western flank. Every formation in the Anglo-Canadian Armies had to bear its share in the series of holding attacks on the eastern end of the bridgehead. The task was to draw the German armoured strength east of the Orne and to hold it there until the American attack at Avranches gained momentum. This was successfully achieved and the troops who bore the brunt of the heavy, unspectacular fighting south of Caen deserve just as much credit for the final result as do those who made the obvious gains at the other extremity of the front. General Eisenhower gave this as his own view in a public statement, which I know to be sincere.

## The Objective

The ultimate objective for operation “Spring” was the high ground north of Cintheaux – the key to the German main defence system south of Caen and a necessary stepping stone to our advance down the Caen-Falaise road. Based upon enemy strength as known prior to the attack, the attainment of the objective was feasible and the attack might open an opportunity for deeper exploitation.

There were two alternative approaches for the attack – astride the Caen-Falaise road or on the axis Soliers-Bourguebus. In the latter case the left flank was very exposed and the left wing of the assault would have to move over ground offering no cover. More important still, a partial success on this line of attack would not improve our tactical position. An attack astride the Caen-Falaise road had its right flank exposed to fire from enemy positions on the west bank of the Orne, but the built up area St. Andre-sur-

Orne – May-sur-Orne offered a good deal of cover and even a partial success astride this axis would give us the very important Verrieres ridge. I therefore decided to attack astride the Caen-Falaise road. It was later, in operation “Totalize”, that the breakthrough was made along this same axis.

### Timing

In operation “Atlantic”, carried out in conjunction with 8 British Corps operation “Goodwood”, 2 Canadian Corps had gained the initial bridgehead east of the Orne opposite Caen. At the end of this operation we held the northern reverse slopes of the Verrieres ridge. From the crest of the ridge the Germans overlooked nearly the whole of the bridgehead on the east bank of the Orne. The deployment for any major attack had to be done in darkness. With troops which had not much battle experience it was, in my opinion, essential to give them as much time as it was possible to allow, for forming-up. Deployment could not start until after dark and it was equally important in my mind that the timing of the attack should be such that we should be in possession of the crest of the Verrieres ridge before daylight. These conditions left very little latitude in the choice of “H” hour.

### Support

The assault was launched under support of a very heavy field and medium artillery barrage with superimposed concentrations on known centres of resistance.

### Assessment of the Operation

I find analysis of an operation like the attack of the Black Watch at May-sur-Orne a most distasteful task for it means criticism of some, who, whatever mistakes they made, made them in good faith and paid the supreme sacrifice in the course of their duty.

In view of the eleventh hour reinforcement of the German positions east of the Orne, as revealed in the early stages of the attack, there will be doubt whether the original objective was attainable. In the forenoon I made the decision not to launch the two armoured divisions but I ordered 7 Armoured Division forward to reinforce the success of 4 Cdn Inf Bde and to make certain that the important gain of the Verrieres ridge was not lost. The capture of the ridge in operation “Spring” established the firm base

which later made possible the mounting of operation “Totalize” under much more favourable conditions.

I have stated above that in face of enemy strength as revealed by the attack there will be doubt as to whether the original final objective was attainable. The whole plan was fully discussed with and approved by General Dempsey, G.O.C.-in-C. Second Army (under which 2 Canadian Corps was operating) both before and after the operation. I considered at the time (and I have found no evidence since to change my view) that the objectives of May-sur-Orne, Verrieres and Tilly-la-Campagne could and should have been taken and held without heavy casualties and that in the event, the casualties of certain units were excessive. That we failed to capture and hold May-sur-Orne and Tilly-la-Campagne and that we suffered what were, in my opinion, excessive casualties was due to a series of mistakes and errors in judgment in minor tactics.

I do not express the above view with the object of directing criticism on officers, some of whom lost their lives in this action or later. I would prefer not to make a statement and certainly not be quoted in this connection at this time, but as a matter of historical record, when this operation can be examined in all its aspects, I feel under an obligation to express my frank opinion.

I have introduced many divisions into their first battles – Canadian, British, American and Polish – and I am convinced that no amount of training can compensate for actual battle experience. It seems that nothing but the actual experience of battle will forcibly imprint on men’s minds the great importance of certain tactical measures, no matter how often they have been reiterated in training. On many occasions in summing up on training exercises, and as final reminders on visiting units on their arrival in the bridgehead, I personally emphasized the great importance of:-

- (a) The security of the start-line before an attack.
- (b) The necessity of closely following artillery supporting fire.
- (c) The importance of mopping-up which required a detailed search of the ground.
- (d) The quick establishment of a firm base to meet the inevitable counter-attack.

Non-observance of some or all of the above tactical measures was in my opinion the cause of failure to secure initial objectives and of

unnecessary casualties in operation “Spring”.

### Security of the Start Line

In mobile operations there is no continuous “front” but a firm base is established on a series of pivotal localities. Between these localities both sides are free to patrol – especially during darkness. The best German troops were always very aggressive and good at this patrolling. Therefore, before an attack it was essential to patrol the area forward of the start line to ensure that German patrols had not been infiltrated between the forward localities, and having made certain the area was clear, to station strong standing patrols to prevent hostile patrols from penetrating and interfering with the forming-up of assaulting troops. In operation “Spring” though mobile patrols were sent out and reported the start line clear, certain units did not leave standing patrols on the ground to cover deployment. In fact, German patrols did penetrate and this was the cause of some confusion during deployment and delay on the part of some units in crossing their start line.

### The Necessity of Closely Following Artillery Supporting Fire

With good troops in field defences the neutralizing effect of the most intense artillery supporting fire is only temporary. The better the troops the quicker is the recovery following the cessation of shelling. It is therefore most important that the assaulting troops should cross the start line on time and press home the assault on each successive objective immediately covering fire lifts. Some latitude is allowed by arranging for a barrage to dwell for a specified number of minutes on the “opening line”, but if this pause is prolonged it gives the enemy warning of the direction and frontage of attack. From my appreciation of events at the time, I am certain in my own mind that there was a period during the attack on the morning of 25 July when May-sur-Orne could have been entered and cleared without heavy casualties. Owing to inexperience and failure to appreciate the vital importance of time and how fleeting are such opportunities, the favourable period was allowed to pass unexploited.

### The Importance of Thorough Mopping-Up

This is perhaps the hardest of all lessons to teach other than by experience. Until the soldier has actually witnessed it, it is hard to realize

the complete absence of obvious evidence of the presence of the enemy in an area which he may actually hold in considerable strength. The best German troops were very clever at concealment and also knew the value of withholding fire so as not to disclose their positions too early. When a hostile locality was entered under supporting covering fire, it was necessary to properly organize at once a detailed search of the area to clear out the lurking enemy. The various reports that May-sur-Orne was cleared by troops who had penetrated well into the village, showed that this detailed search had never been properly organized and thorough.

It has been a source of deep regret to me that a fine battalion like the Black Watch suffered so heavily in this attack. I would prefer to make no statement on the subject for I dislike even suggesting criticism of those who lost their lives, but if a statement is required from me as a matter of record, I consider that the losses were unnecessarily heavy and the results achieved disappointing. Such heavy losses were not inherent in the plan nor in its intended execution. The action of the Black Watch was most gallant but was tactically unsound in its detailed execution.

Source: LAC, RG 24, Vol. 12,745.



## CHAPTER 3

# Totalize and Tractable

The American breakthrough at St. Lô transformed the battle of Normandy, requiring Montgomery, as commander of the land forces, to make one of the most important decisions of his career. He decided to reinforce success by shifting the weight of 2nd British Army to the American flank and join Bradley in pushing the German army back to the Seine; pressing on a swinging door rather than trying to break the hinge on the hills south of Caen. He cancelled the series of left-right-left blows to be delivered on either side of the Orne and ordered Dempsey to shift 2nd British Army to the Caumont sector to launch Operation “Bluecoat.”<sup>1</sup>

Montgomery believed that the enemy could not afford to weaken his positions south of Caen because a breakthrough there would trap most of the German forces in Normandy. He ordered First Canadian Army, now responsible for the sector from the Orne to the sea, to “draw up plans for an actual attack Caen-Falaise,” but noted on 29 July, “no large-scale effort was required immediately.”<sup>2</sup> Montgomery then transferred 3rd British Division and 8th British Armoured Brigade to 2nd British Army leaving Crerar with four infantry divisions and one armoured brigade to hold the long left flank. Crerar ordered I British Corps “by positive action and deception to persuade the enemy that an advance towards Vimont was in preparation” while 2nd Canadian Corps employed similar methods to suggest that an advance to Falaise was imminent.<sup>3</sup>

As the Caumont offensive gained momentum, von Kluge ordered 9th SS Panzer Division west to join the rest of II SS Panzer Corps in blocking the British advance. By 1 August there were four Panzer divisions on the American front, three facing the British, and just two (1st SS and 12th SS) left east of the Orne. This situation cried out for a major attack in the Caen sector to cut off the Germans west of the Orne, but both Montgomery and Eisenhower were still convinced the

Germans would begin a retreat to the Seine pivoting on a strong hinge south of Caen.<sup>4</sup> Fortunately for the Allies, Hitler intervened, ordering von Kluge to cut off Patton's Third Army at Avranches. This decision ended any possibility of re-establishing a new and continuous main line of resistance; it also doomed the German armies in Normandy to destruction no matter what strategy the Allies pursued.

Montgomery's concept of future operations had not changed on 4 August, when he issued a new directive. "The enemy front," he declared, "is now in such a state that it could be made to disintegrate completely." The First Canadian Army was ordered to join a general offensive "to gain such ground in the direction of Falaise as will cut off the enemy now facing 2nd Army." With the Americans advancing to Alençon, British 8th Corps to Argentan, 30th Corps to Thury-Harcourt, and 12th Corps clearing the west bank of the Orne, the Canadians were to help "force the enemy back across the Seine" by a carefully staged advance toward Falaise.<sup>5</sup>

Simonds had begun studying the problems of mounting such an operation on 29 July. The lessons learned in Operation SPRING were very much on his mind, and in his first "Appreciation" he outlined new ideas for overcoming the German defences. "The ground" he noted:

is ideally suited to the full exploitation by the enemy of the characteristics of his weapons. It is open, giving little cover to either infantry or tanks and the long range of his anti-tank guns and mortars, firing from carefully concealed positions, provides a very strong defence in depth. This defence will be most handicapped in bad visibility, smoke, fog or darkness, when the advantage of long range is minimized.<sup>6</sup> (The full document is reproduced below.)

Simonds decided on a night attack, as in SPRING. But this time he proposed to use heavy bombers to neutralize the enemy defences and armour to get through the enemy gun screen in sufficient depth to disrupt the German defences. The tanks were to be accompanied by carrier-borne infantry, which he proposed to mount in stripped Priests, the self-propelled M7s, which 3rd Division gunners had just traded in for the standard, towed 25-pounder guns.

When Simonds first described his intentions for Operation TOTALIZE, he spoke of a breakthrough with Falaise as the objective.<sup>7</sup> His outline plan was far more cautious. The operation was to take place in three distinct phases. Phase 1 would be a night "break-in" supported by heavy bombers, which would bring the 2nd Canadian and 51st Highland divisions through the first German defence line

on Verrières Ridge. Phase 2, a daylight attack on the next ridgeline, Hautmesnil-St-Sylvain, was to be led by 4th Armoured Division with the 3rd in support. Simonds believed that a second massive strike by heavy bombers would be required, even though many of the enemy positions in the fallback zone, created on Rommel's orders, were currently unoccupied. Phase 3 would require the Polish Armoured Division, which was to join the corps on 5 August, to parallel 4th Division's advance to the high ground north of Falaise.<sup>8</sup>

This outline plan was based on accurate intelligence about enemy dispositions on 31 July. Simonds believed that with both 1st SS and 9th SS divisions holding the forward defences, the main battle would be fought in Phase 1, and that Phase 2 would involve dealing with counter-attacks from 12th SS, which was in close reserve. Simonds was careful to integrate his plan with British operations on his flanks. Another attack on Verrières Ridge while the enemy held the high ground west of the Orne would have to be avoided. TOTALIZE, he insisted, would only work if the 2nd British Army had secured or was close to securing a bridgehead across the Orne, "thus loosening the enemy grip on his Northern pivot."<sup>9</sup>

On 2 August Simonds learned that 9th SS Panzer Division had withdrawn "a sizable battle group including tanks" from the Canadian front. The next day he received confirmation that Sepp Dietrich's I SS Panzer Corps was now reduced to two Panzer divisions. By the morning of 5 August, evidence of further changes in the enemy order of battle,<sup>10</sup> and reports that 12th British Corps was about to cross the Orne, led Simonds to order units holding the line to seize the villages on Verrières Ridge. Attacks on la Hogue, Tilly, and May-sur-Orne were repulsed with significant losses, demonstrating that the ridge was still strongly held. Prisoners of war, captured during the night, reported that a new infantry division, the 89th, was relieving 1st SS, which was said to be withdrawing to Bretteville-sur-Laize to form a mobile reserve.<sup>11</sup>

The next morning Simonds decided to radically revise his plans for TOTALIZE. He seems to have believed that 89th Division would be a much less formidable opponent than an SS Panzer division, and to have concluded that the major battle would occur at "the Bretteville-sur-Laize position," where "tanks and infantry are most likely to be encountered."<sup>12</sup> He now proposed to attack this area with both armoured divisions, and to require those divisions to continue south to their final objectives without pausing to reorganize.<sup>13</sup> It was this analysis that informed his decision to retain the use of heavy bombers in Phase 2.

The significance of these changes would become fully apparent only after the battle had been joined, but Simonds and his commanders certainly knew that

the choke point in the initial plan was the narrow gap between Cintheaux and Robertmesnil, a distance of less than 3 kilometres. In the original plan, 4th Division was to deploy on both sides of the Caen-Falaise highway; now it was restricted to the west side of the road, where the “gap” of less than 1500 metres was dominated by the substantial stone-walled village of Cintheaux. The Poles, to the east, had slightly more room to manoeuvre, but the scattered woods south of Robertmesnil provided perfect cover for anti-tank guns and armour.

Simonds hoped that the bombing program arranged for Phase 2 would neutralize the enemy defences in this area. In a 1947 lecture to British officers studying TOTALIZE on the ground in Normandy, Simonds recalled that he had originally planned to go through the “very narrow gap” with one armoured division, but “when it appeared that the layback position [Hautmesnil – St Sylvain] was held in greater strength” he decided “in order to save time to launch the two divisions together with their tails organized behind them ready to fan out as they came through the gap.”<sup>14</sup>

Saving time seemed especially important on 6 August because the Allied commanders now believed, in Montgomery’s words, that “the enemy was falling back, unwillingly, to some new line.” There was no indication yet of where the line might be, but “he is definitely trying to pivot on the Caen area.” The enemy, Montgomery wrote, “would be in an awkward situation... if he lost his positions astride the Falaise road... and if he lost Falaise itself.” Montgomery, influenced by the news that 12th Corps was across the Orne just north of Thury-Harcourt, assigned the capture of Falaise to the Second British Army and ordered the Canadians to attack toward Falaise. If Falaise was secured it was to be handed over to the Second Army. The Canadians were then to turn northeast and advance to the Seine on the axis Lisieux-Rouen.<sup>15</sup> That night, reports from Ultra of a major German offensive at Mortain were decrypted,<sup>16</sup> and for the first time, Allied commanders began to think about encircling the German armies rather than pushing them back to the Seine. Operation TOTALIZE was to be transformed from an attack designed to assist the Second British Army, into the wing of vast pincer movement, but no new resources were allocated to carry out this much more ambitious task.

For the corps and divisional staff officers, the greatest challenge posed by TOTALIZE was traffic control. The Phase 1 divisions occupied a wide area north of Verrières-Tilly line, and the two armoured divisions had to be kept out of the way. Both were, however, supposed to move forward by the morning of 8 August, with 3rd Division following the Poles across the Orne bridges.<sup>17</sup> So long as everything went smoothly, these moves could be made within the rigid timings laid down in the operational orders. But no one could remember the last time

things had gone according to plan.

The most complex part of TOTALIZE was the artillery fire plan developed under the supervision of Brigadier Bruce Matthews, the Corps Commander Royal Artillery (CCRA). Operational Instruction No. 5, issued at 0900 hours on 7 August, outlined the tasks to be carried out by the divisional field regiments and the four Artillery Groups Royal Artillery (AGRAs) allotted to TOTALIZE. There was to be no preliminary artillery program, so a great deal of attention was paid to counter-battery tasks scheduled for H + 100 minutes, when the assault would be underway, and H + 7 hours, when dawn would provide the enemy with visibility. The Service Corps was to ensure that 350 rounds per gun were dumped at medium gun positions and that up to 650 rounds per gun were available to the field regiments.<sup>18</sup>

Simonds had orchestrated one of the most remarkable operations of the war. On both sides of the Caen-Falaise highway, hundreds of armoured vehicles, marshalled into columns, were advancing over the crest of the ridge. Each column, four vehicles abreast, was led by a gapping force composed of two troops of Shermans, two troops of mine-clearing flail tanks, and a troop of armoured engineer vehicles (AVREs) to mark the route with tapes and lights. Next came the assault force led by Sherman tanks, followed by elements of an infantry battalion riding in “unfrocked priests” or universal carriers. Mortars, medium machine guns, self-propelled and towed anti-tank guns, bulldozers, and finally more tanks, known as the “fortress force,” which were to guard the dispersal area and form a firm base, completed each phalanx.<sup>19</sup>

With the rest of 12th SS assembling in obedience to Hitler’s orders to join in a renewed attack at Mortain, the forces opposing the first phase of TOTALIZE were effectively reduced to the 89th and 272nd Infantry Divisions. The 272nd covered the eastern flank, including la Hogue and the high ground at Secqueville; the 89th was responsible for the 8000 metres stretching west towards the Orne. The 272nd was all too familiar with the kind of attrition warfare waged by the Allies, but the 89th, which had trained in Norway before joining 15th Army in the Rouen area, had never been in action as a unit, though most of the officers and NCOs were veterans of the Eastern Front. Once established in France, General Heinrichs, an experienced infantry officer, supervised intensive training with emphasis on support weapons. The 89th was a “pocket division” composed of two infantry regiments each of three battalions, but it also included a Fusilier battalion as a divisional reserve, a full-strength engineer battalion, an artillery regiment, and three anti-tank companies including the one equipped with 88s.<sup>20</sup>

The 89th relieved 1st SS Panzer Division on the night of 6 August

“without exceptional difficulty.” The troops were told they were facing “not particularly highly trained” Canadians, who were holding the line with armoured divisions behind them.<sup>21</sup> The 1055th Grenadier Regiment took over the carefully prepared positions at Tilly-la-Campagne and Rocquancourt, with one battalion in reserve at St-Aignan. The 1056th Regiment deployed two battalions up around May and Fontenay, with a third battalion at Caillouet. Heinrichs placed his headquarters at a quarry near Bretteville-sur-Laize and established a second anti-tank gun screen “level with the divisional command post.” The Fusilier battalion was positioned just east of Bretteville. Contact was established with the flanking formations, 1st SS Panzer Corps headquarters, and the mortar brigade stationed to the rear of the divisional sector. The Luftwaffe regiments of the Flak Corps, with their dual-purpose 88s, were much too grand to communicate with a mere division and operated independently throughout the battles of August. The same was true for Kurt Meyer and the 12th SS, which functioned as the corps reserve, with minimal contact with Heinrichs and his officers.<sup>22</sup> Accounts of TOTALIZE that rely on Meyer’s postwar interviews, have neglected the role of 89th Division and ignored the reality that the defence of the Caen sector was directed by Sepp Dietrich and the headquarters of 1st SS Panzer Corps. Dietrich had two infantry divisions, a mortar brigade, the corps artillery, and the Luftwaffe flak regiments, as well as 12th SS, under command.

The bombing that preceded the ground attack failed to have any serious impact on the enemy, but the dust raised by the explosions and the craters that pitted the landscape interfered with the progress of the attacking troops. When the armoured columns topped the crest of the ridge, airborne particles and ground mist and dust thrown up by the vehicles limited visibility to a few feet. Slight detours, taken inadvertently or to avoid craters, led to so much confusion that only one of the four Canadian columns followed the assigned route east of Rocquancourt. All accounts of the first hours of TOTALIZE describe a confused situation that almost, but never quite, collapsed into chaos. In the end, most of the isolated groups and single vehicles worked their way forward, overcoming or avoiding enemy fire.

At his tactical headquarters Simonds was attempting to co-ordinate the Phase 2 advance of his two armoured divisions with the bomber attack on the enemy’s secondary defensive position. Simonds had always insisted the bombardment, to be carried out by the 8th USAAF, was the key to a breakthrough and when he learned when the last bomb would fall, final orders were issued. Groups of B-17s began their attack at 1226 hours and the last bomb fell at 1345 hours. Two groups correctly identified their targets and delivered “good concentrations” on Bretteville-sur-Laize and St. Sylvain villages that anchored the German defences. Unfortunately, other groups were “badly disorganized” by flak

and bombs fell over a wide area including the suburbs of Caen, where Canadian and Polish troops suffered more than 350 casualties from this “friendly fire.” This tragedy had no effect on the forward troops who crossed their startlines shortly after the bombing ended.

There was now little a corps commander could do to influence the battle and as reports of halting progress reached his headquarters it was evident that the heavily defended “very narrow gap” at Cintheaux was causing serious problems. Cintheaux was finally secured and the quarry at Hautmesnil reached, but as the sun set the leading elements of both divisions began to dig in. Simonds, who had been hoping for a breakthrough, was very unhappy with his armoured divisions, but from the enemy’s perspective TOTALIZE had ripped open prepared defences and forced Dietrich to try and organize a new position to block the advance to Falaise. The 271st Infantry Division was ordered to disengage with the British troops in the Orne bridgehead and take over positions from north of Thury-Harcourt to the River Laize.<sup>23</sup> The 89th Division, which had lost about half its combat troops, was to establish contact with the 271st at the Laize and hold the Urville-Bretteville-le-Rabet area. Heinrichs created an ad hoc unit out of his supply troops to reinforce the right flank, and co-ordinated his plans with elements of 12th SS.<sup>24</sup> To the east, the 272nd Division was responsible for the area St-Slyvain-Vimont.

Dietrich and Eberbach wanted these positions held until 85th Division, due to arrive in the next thirty-six hours, had dug in on a new defensive line to be created north of the Laison. Eberbach persuaded von Kluge to transfer two Panzer battle groups, one of which deployed twelve Tigers, to reinforce Dietrich’s corps.<sup>25</sup> While von Kluge juggled his forces, Simonds ordered his armoured divisions “to press on by night aided by searchlights.”<sup>26</sup>

Three battle groups attempted to carry out these orders. The Poles cleared the hamlet of Robertmesnil and a nearby woods but did not attempt a further advance. Halpenny Force (Canadian Grenadier Guards and the Lake Superior Regiment [Motorized]) reached its first objective, Bretteville-le-Rabet and fought a sustained action to secure it, capturing over 200 prisoners. Worthington Force (the British Columbia and Algonquin Regiments), tasked to seize Hill 195 west of the Caen-Falaise highway, lost direction and ended up five kilometres to the east on Pt. 140. They reported that they were on their objective, a mistake that prevented the medium artillery from providing fire support.

Simonds’ ability to influence the battle at the sharp end was limited by RAF directives on the employment of tactical air. Early on the morning of 9 August, Worthington and his men watched as two Typhoons “circled overhead

and then let fly... with their rockets and machine guns.” When recognition panels were displayed and yellow smoke was burned, “the planes rocked their wings in acknowledgement [and] returned at half hour intervals all day long rocketing and strafing the enemy.”<sup>27</sup> There was, however, no method of communicating with the men on the ground; nor was there any procedure for informing brigade, divisional, or corps headquarters about the situation.

The American 9th Tactical Air Force (9TAF) had begun the battle for Normandy by employing a doctrine closely modelled on the one developed by the RAF, but was far more willing to learn from experience than the RAF’s 2TAF. By late July its commander, Major-General Pete Quesada, had implemented a system known as Armoured Column Cover, which enabled direct communication between aircraft assigned to an armoured command and an air officer with the tanks.<sup>28</sup> This system was employed to good effect after the “Cobra” breakout, yet it was unacceptable to the RAF, which resisted all attempts to tie air resources to specific army formations or to establish direct communication between tactical ground commanders and the tactical air force. Much is made of the RAF system of “cab rank,” which allowed air officers attached to army units to call down air strikes on specific targets, but this was a poor substitute for intimate cooperation of the kind that was developed between American ground forces and their tactical air groups. If the BCR [British Columbia Regiment]-Algonquin battle group had been an American formation, it would have had no difficulty identifying its location or relaying information to the corps commander well before it was destroyed by the enemy.

Simonds, unhappy with what he saw as excessive caution on the part of the armoured divisions, ordered the Poles to seize Pt. 140, cross the Laison, and clear the south bank of the river. The Canadians were told to secure the high ground west of the highway as far south as Pt. 206 and exploit to Falaise.<sup>29</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel Dave Stewart, CO of the Argylls, was quite prepared to try and fulfill the general intent of his orders, but not by the sacrifice of his battalion. When told that the Argylls were to seize Pt. 195, he and his scout platoon reconnoitred a circuitous route around the enemy defences and posted scouts along the way to ensure that no one got lost. Company locations on the objective were selected from the map, as were anti-tank gun positions. The men muffled their equipment and moved in single file as silently as possible. At 0430 hours, just before first light, the Argylls were digging in in preparation for counter-attacks. The Lincs (the Lincoln and Welland Regiment) occupied Pt. 180 protecting the right flank.<sup>30</sup>

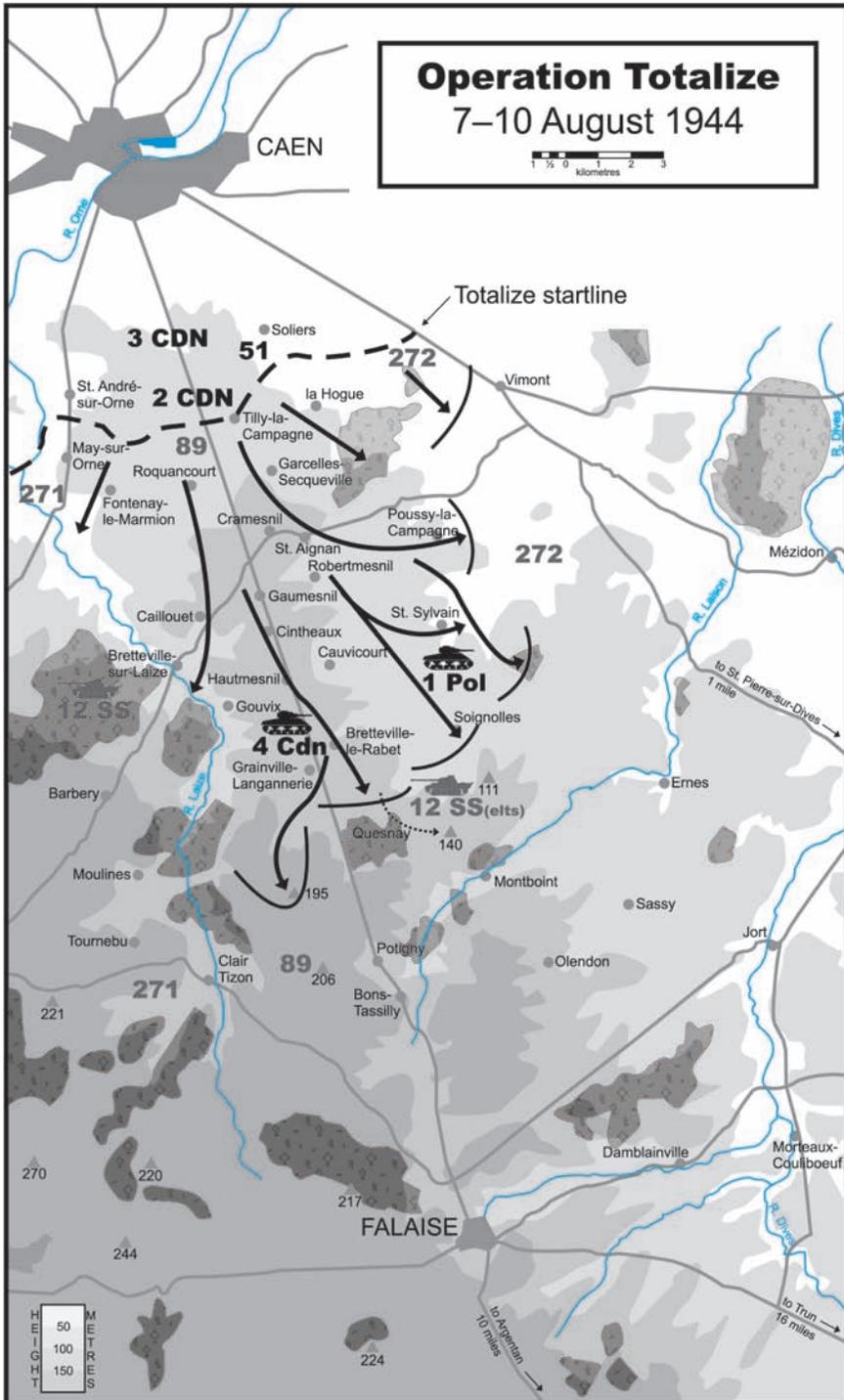
East of the highway, the Polish Armoured Division, unable to deal with the tanks of the 12th SS, had spent the day fighting for St-Sylvain and Soignolles.

Shortly after midnight the liaison office at General Maczek's headquarters reported that an attempt to capture the Pt. 140 feature had been repulsed by an enemy counter-attack of "an estimated 40 tanks." The woods to the south were thought to be strongly held.<sup>31</sup> The Poles were attempting to advance into positions that the 12th SS was holding while 85th Division completed its deployment.

Simonds was determined to continue the offensive on 4th Division's front, so he issued orders to push the armour through the Argylls to Pt. 206. The Grenadier Guards were in the process of carrying out a cautious, phased move to Pt. 195 when they were told to prepare a co-ordinated daylight attack with artillery. However, they got no further than the "cornfield to the north of Point 195" before 88 fire from the left flank and a counter-attack, which included robot tanks, ended any thought of further advance.<sup>32</sup> The Argylls and Lincs had been dealing with counter-attacks since dawn, but with the men dug in, anti-tank guns in place, artillery DF tasks arranged, and Typhoons available, the enemy suffered heavy losses trying to retake Hill 195.<sup>33</sup>

A similar fate awaited the Queen's Own Rifles (QOR) and North Shores. Simonds knew that 85th Division had begun to arrive in strength, so he gambled that a hastily arranged attack on Quesnay Woods might gain control of the area before the enemy was ready. His CCRA arranged to employ the guns of four field regiments and two AGRAs, but in the absence of any detailed knowledge of enemy positions, the fire plan could not produce sufficient density in any one area to do more than temporarily suppress enemy fire. Acting brigadier Jock Spragge received his orders less than four hours before the attack. The divisional recon regiment reported that the woods were strongly held, and Spragge had few illusions about the difficulty of the assignment he had been given. The battalions were told to "sweep the woods" southeast from the village of Quesnay, but this proved utterly impossible.<sup>34</sup> According to German sources, Quesnay's guns and mortars were defended by two hundred Panzer Grenadiers and as many as twenty-three tanks, with the infantry dug in along the forward edge of the woods.<sup>35</sup> Both the QORs and the North Shores suffered significant casualties in a gruesome battle that lasted well into the night.

Operation TOTALIZE came to an end in the Quesnay Woods as Simonds decided to pause and re-organize. Early on the morning of 11 August he issued new orders, which included an outline of a "break-in attack... to be made under cover of a smoke screen with infantry carried forward in Priests." This was to take place in seventy-two hours; the 4th Canadian and 1st Polish Divisions were to be withdrawn while the infantry divisions took over the defence of the deep salient that had been created in the past three days.<sup>36</sup> The human cost of TOTALIZE included more than 600 Canadian dead – the inevitable price of a large-scale



offensive. It was estimated that the enemy lost over 3,000 men, including 1,270 taken prisoner and a similar number killed in action.<sup>37</sup>

By any reasonable standard, TOTALIZE was a very successful operation. The corps had broken through a strong defensive position manned by a fresh, full-strength infantry division and advanced 14 kilometres toward Falaise. The breakthrough did not become a breakout because 89th Division fought with considerable skill, as did the battle groups of 12th SS. The arrival of the lead elements of 85th Division on 10 August added significantly to the enemy's strength and convinced commanders on both sides that the new defensive position north of the Laison could be held against improvised attacks. It was time to pause and reorganize.

Guy Simonds was never willing to accept such a realistic assessment of TOTALIZE. On 13 August he organized a "private talk" with commanders down to and including regimental COs.<sup>38</sup> According to Major-General Kitching, Simonds gave a "very tough and unpleasant briefing" in which he "blasted armoured regiments for their lack of support for infantry... he demanded much greater initiative from armd regts – drive on – get amongst the enemy etc. Forget about harbouring at night – keep driving on. Arrange your supply accordingly. Don't rely on the infantry to do everything for you."<sup>39</sup>

Preparations for TRACTABLE, the second great armoured assault on the German defences north of Falaise, began on 12 August, when Simonds outlined his concept to the divisional commanders. No formal operation order was issued; instead, staff officers produced their own "Outlines of Instructions" to assist in the planning. The primary object of TRACTABLE was "to gain command of the enemy's communications through Falaise" by seizing the high ground northeast of the town. There was some uncertainty about subsequent objectives because Montgomery kept changing his mind. When Simonds met with his officers on the morning of 13 August, he noted that "Falaise is only a name"<sup>40</sup> – it was the east-west roads through the town that mattered. Unfortunately, Falaise was more than a name to Montgomery, and Simonds was forced to include the capture of the town in his initial plan. The object of TRACTABLE became to "exploit south-eastwards and capture or dominate Trun," *after* the high ground north and east of Falaise was secure.<sup>41</sup>

If Trun rather than Falaise had been the primary objective of TRACTABLE, Simonds would surely have shifted the corps' axis of advance to the east to take advantage of the open country and good north-south roads between Jort and St-Pierre-sur-Dives.<sup>42</sup> Simonds was well aware of the opportunities on his left flank. He ordered the Polish Armoured Division to form a "special group" for

reconnaissance in the area, and he moved the balance of that division into corps reserve, but the Phase 2 objectives for TRACTABLE were unchanged.<sup>43</sup> This meant that 4th Division was to turn west toward Falaise, into the heart of the German defences, instead of continuing south to Trun and closing much of the gap. On the morning of 13 August, Simonds explained his plan to the divisional and brigade commanders. The problem, he noted, was exactly the same as in TOTALIZE – to obtain a breakthrough in sufficient depth to push past the enemy’s gun screen and to set the armour behind his positions so as “to deny him freedom of manoeuvrability.” (The text of his appreciation is reproduced at the end of this chapter.)

TRACTABLE was much more than a replay of TOTALIZE; it incorporated lessons learned and proposed new and innovative ideas. There was, however, one serious flaw – the failure to appreciate that the Laison River, little more than a small creek by Canadian standards, was in fact a serious tank obstacle. An after-action report issued by 2nd Armoured Brigade suggested that in future, tank commanders rather than engineers ought to be consulted when deciding what was likely to be a tank obstacle.<sup>44</sup>

The Canadian attack struck directly at 85th Infantry Division, which was positioned on the reverse slope of the high ground north of the Laison River. The 85th was as good an infantry division as the Germans possessed at this stage of the war. Raised in February 1944, with cadres drawn from veterans of the Eastern Front, it had ample time to train while serving with 15th Army in the Somme sector.<sup>45</sup> The division was responsible for an 8-kilometre sector from Quesnay Woods to Mazières, and it deployed both its infantry regiments north of the Laison. The divisional artillery, some of the anti-tank guns, and the Fusilier battalion were south of the river. So was each regiment’s reserve battalion. But the decision to concentrate most of the division’s combat troops and many of the Flak Corps’ 88s north of the river played into Simonds’ hands. The enemy’s inability to mount any kind of serious counterattack when the Canadians were at their most vulnerable (i.e., while waiting to cross the Laison) indicated just how successful TRACTABLE was at penetrating a heavily defended reverse-slope position.

It is again important to note that the defence of the Laison was conducted by 1st SS Panzer Corps, not by Kurt Meyer and 12th SS, which played only a marginal role in TRACTABLE. The approach to the Laison began precisely at 1140 hours, when the message “Move Now” was relayed. The artillery and waves of medium bombers had been at work for thirty minutes before the lead tanks crossed the startline. On the right flank, the Fort Garry Horse advanced in the approved fashion, two squadrons abreast. They burst through the forward

defences, enjoying a “great run over open country with the tank gunners taking all likely targets by speculative shooting.” On reaching the river near Montpoint, they encountered anti-tank guns, including 88s’ “cutting down good sized trees.” A crossing was improvised, and then a usable bridge was discovered. Most of the regiment got across the river, and by 1700 hours the advance was resumed. The Garrys were pretty well on their own, and even though the area was “stiff” with anti-tank guns and “pockets of infantry,” they fought their way through, reaching their first objective at 2230 hours. The Garrys lost almost one-third of their tanks and suffered a number of crew casualties, but the extraordinary determination of the regiment led to a considerable success.<sup>46</sup>

The 1st Hussars struck more determined resistance north of the river. As one squadron commander reported, it was essential “to maintain speed for any hesitation was rewarded by determined attacks from enemy infantry.” The Hussars also ran into German tanks, and reported destroying two Tigers. The lead squadrons lost direction and ended up well to the east in 4th Armoured Brigade’s zone. The enemy continued to contest every move, and Lieutenant-Colonel Colwell described the fighting on the river bottom as the most hectic of the operation. Never, he remarked, had the regiment killed so many of the enemy or thrown so many hand grenades. In addition, hundreds of prisoners were taken. The Hussars reached their initial objective to the east of the Garrys during the night, but by then the regiment was at half-strength.<sup>47</sup>

The 4th Armoured Brigade advanced with the two Guards regiments leading, followed closely by the BCRs and Lake Superior Regiment (Lake Sups). There was ample room, and each regiment deployed all three squadrons up, over an 800 metre front. By now many of the tanks were festooned with extra armour made out of loosely attached tank tracks. The neat formations quickly collapsed as smoke, dust, uneven ground and enemy resistance were encountered. In the woods south of Pt. 140, the Foot Guards ran into an enemy strongpoint that had escaped the medium bombers. The approaches were mined, and both MK IV tanks and anti-tank guns had to be dealt with while the rest of the regiment passed on. In the river valley a series of miniature close engagements took place that resulted in losses on both sides and many enemy prisoners.<sup>48</sup> The confusion on this part of the front was compounded by the greater width of the Laison, which turned improvised crossings into tank traps.

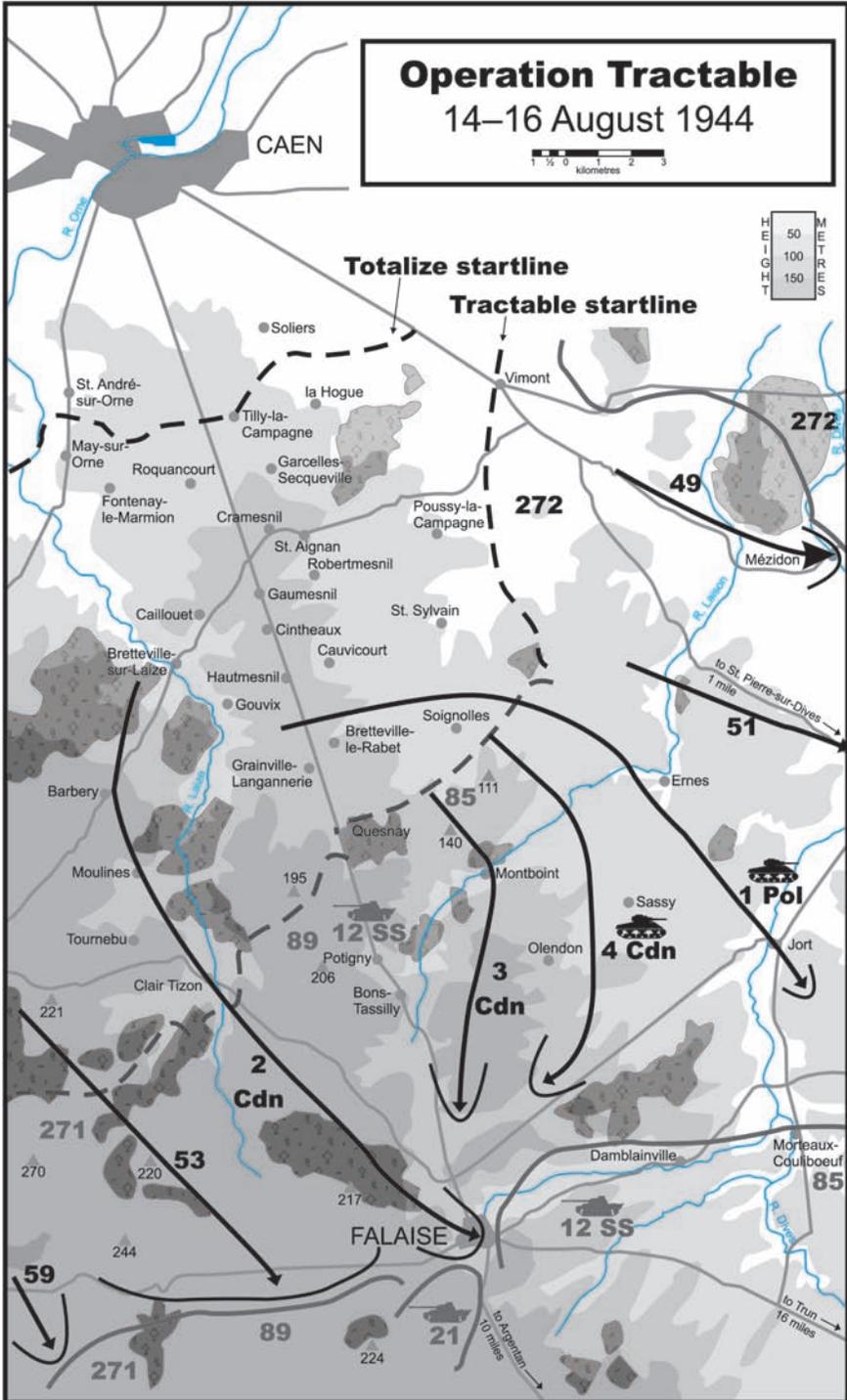
The main crossing point at Rouvres had to be shared with the Hussars and the BCRs, but small groups edging east found intact bridges at Maizières, Ernes (which was “vaguely in our hands”),<sup>49</sup> and Ifs-sur-Laison, well to the east of the divisional boundary. The road to Trun was wide open but the assigned objectives were still at Falaise. Attempts to reorganize the scattered squadrons were

complicated by the loss of Brigadier Booth, who was wounded in action, and by the need to transfer command to Lieutenant-Colonel Scott of the Foot Guards.<sup>50</sup> However, the squadron and troop commanders knew their jobs, and the immediate objectives at Olendon-Sassy were secured despite continued resistance and losses from anti-tank guns. Fortunately, the BCRs and Lake Sups moved forward to help. Just outside Sassy, the Lake Sups encountered a large enemy force and captured 250 prisoners.<sup>51</sup>

While the armoured brigades were fighting their way onto the high ground south of the Laison, the two mounted infantry brigades cleared the valley behind. This was 3rd Division's first experience riding into battle, and apart from bruises from the rough ride, the troops were exhilarated by their part in the "charge of the light brigade."<sup>52</sup> Resistance in the eastern, 8th Brigade sector was scattered; the biggest problem was enemy artillery and mortar fire.<sup>53</sup> To the west, 9th Brigade found the area, where the Garrys had broken through, alive with enemy infantry and at least two Tiger tanks.

While the battles of the Laison raged, Bomber Command struck accurately at Quesnay Woods and the targets around Potigny, but 77 of the 811 bombers misidentified their targets and wreaked havoc among Canadian and Polish troops in the rear areas. The "short bombing" had no direct effect on the forces committed to TRACTABLE, most of whom only learned of the tragedy the next day. The vast majority of the bomber crews identified their targets correctly, and accurate bombing devastated the enemy anchor position in Quesnay Woods as well as areas held by 89th Division east of the highway.<sup>54</sup>

By the evening of 14 August it was apparent that though both armoured brigades were firm on their intermediate objectives, a continued advance to the high ground overlooking Falaise would have to wait until morning. On the British-Canadian front west of Falaise, leading troops were 8 to 10 kilometres from town. But the main Falaise-St-Pierre-sur-Dives road was still available to the enemy, as were the two other east-west routes through the town. Montgomery's report to London, timed at 2200 hours, noted this reality and offered the "opinion" that, although a "good many enemy" had escaped eastwards, a "good many" were still inside the ring. His solution was to order Bradley "to stop the enemy from turning southeast [as] we want those who escaped us here to be pushed against the Seine."<sup>55</sup> Montgomery made no move to reinforce the First Canadian Army or to change the orders directing 2nd Canadian Corps to Falaise. His decision to stop Patton at Argentan on 12-13 August might be defended as prudent in view of reports of an impending counter-attack, but thirty-six hours later no such attack had occurred. Why was Montgomery unwilling to order the Americans to resume their advance north? Even if the Canadians reached Falaise



the next day, the enemy could still use a number of secondary roads north of Argentan to leave the pocket. The most likely answer is that Montgomery no longer believed the enemy could be encircled at Argentan-Falaise, and was intent on trapping those who had escaped the air forces at the Seine. This left the Canadians with the unbelievable task of trying to block the exodus of tens of thousands of German troops determined to avoid entrapment. On the morning of 15 August they discovered just how difficult this was going to be. The 12th SS Division had been ordered to employ its surviving units to provide anti-tank support to the four infantry divisions holding positions north of Falaise. The combat strength of the 85th, 89th, 271st and 272nd Divisions had been reduced by at least 50 per cent, but all four divisional headquarters still exercised good control, and cooperated in creating a continuous line of strongpoints north of the Condé-Falaise-St-Pierre-sur-Dives highway.<sup>56</sup>

TRACTABLE is usually described as an “operational failure” because it failed to meet Simonds’ expectations.<sup>57</sup> It should be noted, however, that if 4th Division had captured the high ground northeast of Falaise and then entered the city, the stated objective – to advance to Trun – would have been further delayed. TRACTABLE ought to have been a great success. The Canadians broke through the best-organized defensive position left to the Germans in Normandy and on 14 August achieved the long-sought freedom to manoeuvre armoured divisions at the operational level. Montgomery’s orders to take Falaise before exploiting to Trun sidetracked 4th Division.

On the morning of 15 August, Simonds ordered the Polish Armoured Division to move around the enemy defences and seize the crossings over the River Dives at Jort and Vendouvre.<sup>58</sup> If successful, this would open the way to Trun and outmanoeuvre the enemy dug-in around Falaise. The Poles started east at 1100 hours, moving in two columns over the Caen-Falaise highway and cutting through the rear areas of 3rd and 4th divisions. The Poles operated with their divisional reconnaissance regiment, 10th Mounted Rifles, out in front, and it was the 10th that “reconnoitred the crossings and after their daring capture went on to Courcy.”

While Montgomery and Bradley concentrated on the long envelopment at the Seine, the German commanders were preparing to evacuate the remaining troops – around 100,000 – who were still in the pocket. The Allied landings in the south of France on 15 August had convinced Hitler that Normandy – perhaps all of France – was lost, and he authorized an immediate withdrawal behind the Dives. To accomplish this, both Argentan and Falaise were, he insisted, to be held as “corner pillars.”<sup>59</sup>

The enemy had made enormous sacrifices in the struggle to hold Falaise

and the northern shoulder of the pocket. Since 8 August, the First Canadian Army had destroyed the combat power of two fresh, full-strength infantry divisions and further weakened three others, including 12th SS. According to the headquarters of 1st SS Panzer Corps, by noon on 15 August, 85th Division could muster only one-and-a-half battalions of infantry and a battery of 88 mm guns. The 89th, 271st, and 272nd were only slightly better off, and the Hitler Youth were said to have only fifteen tanks left.<sup>60</sup> The German army had maintained a cohesive front in the British and Canadian sectors, but at a price no army could afford to pay.

Montgomery's nightly message reflected his continuing commitment to pushing the enemy up against the Seine. His major initiative was to send 7th Armoured Division across the river at St-Pierre-sur-Dives and then turn it "in a northeasterly direction" to Lisieux. Closing the gap was still not a priority, and Ultra reported that five of the six Panzer and SS divisions, still inside the pocket, were planning to break out between Argentan and Sees. The Americans, Montgomery believed, would have to concentrate on holding this attack. He did mention the Canadians: "If we can get 2nd British Army tomorrow to Putanges and the left wing of 2 Canadian Corps to Trun we shall be pretty well placed." The balance of his report dealt with plans for swinging detachments from 20 U.S. Corps "up onto the Seine."<sup>61</sup>

One of the greatest weaknesses of Ultra intelligence was that it provided strong evidence of enemy intentions but only indirect evidence of capabilities. Hitler had ordered a breakout south of Argentan, but von Kluge insisted it was impossible, so as we have seen, Hitler agreed to a withdrawal behind the Dives on the afternoon of 16 August.<sup>62</sup> This was to take place along the highways through Trun, Chambois, and Gacé, and along the secondary roads paralleling the main escape routes.<sup>63</sup>

Most accounts of Montgomery's actions on 16 August suggest that he ordered Bradley to "push on from Argentan towards Trun and Chambois,"<sup>64</sup> but there is no direct evidence for this. What we do know is that the confused command situation at Argentan, involving the transfer of authority from the Third to the First U.S. Army, prevented any such attack from taking place for the next forty-eight hours.<sup>65</sup> This meant that the burden of blocking the enemy's desperate drive to escape encirclement would be borne by Simonds' two understrength armoured divisions and the tactical air forces. This situation was the result of a series of misjudgements made by Montgomery and Bradley. Though it is possible to understand the choices they made, it is clear that they were responsible for command decisions that offered the enemy ample opportunity to escape encirclement.

## ENDNOTES

1. *Operation "Bluecoat"*, (London, 2005).
2. Stacey, p. 201.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Montgomery Letters of 1 and 2 August, BLM 94/7, 94/8. Eisenhower wrote to Marshall on 2 August emphasizing the need to secure Brittany, Chandler, p. 2048.
5. Directive M516, BLM 126/17.
6. The original "Notes" Appreciation and Outline Plan for TOTALIZE are grouped in File 225C2.0'2 (D10), RG 24, Vol. 10,799. Afterwards, Totalize File.
7. Notes, Corps Commanders Conference, 30 July 1944. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. II Canadian Corps Intelligence Summary, 2 August 1944.
11. *Ibid.*, 5 August 1944.
12. *Ibid.*, 6 August 1944.
13. Letter, G.G. Simonds to H.D.G. Crerar, 6 August 1944, TOTALIZE File.
14. British Army of the Rhine (BAOR) *Battlefield Tour Operation Totalize* (Germany, 1947).
15. Directive M517, 6 August 1944, BLM 126/18.
16. Ralph Bennet, *Ultra in Normandy*, (London, 1979), p. 115.
17. War Diary, 2nd Canadian Field Historical Section, 6 August 1944.
18. Royal Canadian Artillery, II Canadian Corps, Operational Instruction No. 5, 7 August 1944, LAC, RG 24, Vol. 10,799.
19. Canadian Military Headquarters (CMHQ) Historical Section, *Canadian Operations 1 -2, 3August* (London, 1948), paragraph 43.
20. Colonel H. Neitzel, "Activity of the 89th Infantry Division," July 1946, MS B-012.

*Totalize and Tractable*

21. Colonel H. Neitzel, "89th Infantry Division in Battles on the Invasion Front," MS B425, Grenadier Regiment 1056, Regimental Order 4 August 1944, II Canadian Corps Intelligence Summary, 8 August 1944.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
23. Meyer, *History*, p. 124.
24. Neitzel, "89th Infantry Division in Battles," p. 7.
25. Meyer, *History*, p. 126.
26. Stacey, *Victory Campaign*, p. 225.
27. Monk, p. 5.
28. General Brereton reported the success of column cover to his RAF colleagues on 27 July 1944. Notes of C in C Meetings, Stanmore, May 1944 to August 1944, PRO, Air 37/1126.
29. War Diary, 1st Canadian Army, Ops log, 9 August 1944.
30. Robert L. Fraser, *Black Yesterdays, The Argylls War* (Hamilton, 1996), pp. 226-227. Hayes, pp. 31-32.
31. Ops log, II Canadian Corps, 10 August 1944.
32. War Diary, Canadian Grenadier Guards, 9 August 1944.
33. Fraser, pp. 227-229.
34. War Diary, 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade, August 1944, Appendix 3, "The Attack on Quesnay Woods." Brigadier Blackader, the acting divisional commander, outlines a plan for another three-phase operation, with 8th Brigade launching the first phase. War Diary, Historical Officer, 3rd Canadian Infantry Division, 10 August 1944.
35. Meyer, *History*, p. 180.
36. Outline Plan, Future Operations, 11 August 1944. 2 pp. TOTALIZE File.
37. Prisoner of war figures are from II Canadian Corps intelligence summaries. 12th SS casualties, Meyer, *History*, p. 182. *Canadian Fatalities: Canadian Army Statistics – War 1939-1945*, Fatal Casualties North West Europe, LAC, RG 24, Vol. 18,825.
38. GOC's Activities, 1-30 August, Totalize File.
39. Quoted in Graham, p. 154.
40. See notes on Corps Commanders Outline Talk, 1000, 13 August, LAC, RG 24, Vol. 13,751 and Outline of Instructions, 4th Canadian Armoured

Division, 1200, 13 August, War Diary, 4th Canadian Armoured Division.

41. “ ‘O’ Group Conference by GOC 2 Canadian Corps 13 August 1944,” 3 pages. War Diary, 2nd Field Historical Section, August 1944.

42. Stacey, p. 237. The new orders were presented to Simonds after his final review of TRACTABLE on the morning of 13 August.

43. The 51st Highland Division, restored to I British Corps, and the 49th West Riding Division were responsible for the long eastern flank, stretching back to Caen and beyond. The Highlanders were to protect the Canadian flank, following up enemy withdrawals.

44. The 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade, Operation “Tractable,” LAC, RG 24, Vol. 10,992.

45. Meyer, *History*, p. 184. Despite heavy losses in TRACTABLE, enough of the division survived Normandy to become the core of Battle Group Chill, the force that the Fifteenth Army used as its “fire brigade” in holding the line north of Antwerp in October 1944. The division was reported to consist of 3,000 men on 1 September 1944. Zetterling, p. 236.

46. The War Diary of the Fort Garry Horse lacks detail. This account is based on the regimental history, *Vanguard*, pp. 55-57. See also Eddie Goodman, *The Life of the Party*, and the interview with Goodman in Portugal, vol. 3, p. 1476.

47. Both the War Diary and regimental history lack detail. The quotations are from “Memorandum of an Interview with Lieutenant-Colonel R.S. Colwell and Major J.E. White,” 20 August 1944, DHH. This interview, with “Lessons Learned,” was widely disturbed within the Royal Armoured Corps. 21 Army Group RAC Liaison Letter No. 3, LAC, RG 24, Vol. 10,554.

48. War Diary, Governor General’s Foot Guards, 14 August 1944.

49. War Diary, Canadian Grenadier Guards, 14 August 1944.

50. Lieutenant-Colonel M.J. Scott commanded the brigade for the next twenty-four hours despite a broken ankle.

51. War Diary, Lake Superior Regiment, 14 August 1944.

52. War Diary, Stormont Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders, 14 August 1944.

53. War Diary, Régiment de la Chaudière, 14 August 1944.

54. Unfortunately, No. 2 ORS did not investigate the accuracy of bombing in TRACTABLE or examine evidence of German losses. The very detailed investigation carried out by the RAF only looked at the ground where the

short bombing occurred. PRO Air 14/861.

55. M 93, 200 hours 14 August.

56. Meyer, *History*, p. 185.

57. English, pp. 298-299.

58. Montgomery first assigned Falaise to the Canadian Army, then to the British, and finally, on 14 August, back to the Canadians. Stacey, pp. 249-250.

59. Blumenson, *Battle of the Generals*, p. 222.

60. Meyer, *History*, p. 187.

61. M 97, 2245, 16 August 1944

62. Hinsley, p. 262n and pp. 264-266.

63. Little attention has been paid to the enemy's use of the roads to and from Gacé, including the N138 to Bernay. The Chambois-Gacé road was closed on 19 August by 2nd French Armoured Division.

64. Stacey suggests that Bradley was given such orders by phone about the same time (1530 hours) that Crerar was told to accelerate the capture of Trun. Montgomery made no reference to such orders in his nightly summary. Stacey, *Victory Campaign*, p. 251.

65. Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, p. 527.

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## **RESUME OF REMARKS BY LIEUT.-GENERAL G.G. SIMONDS, CBE, DSO**

GOC 2nd Canadian Corps, at "O" Group Conference held at 2nd Canadian Corps Conference Room, the Chateau, Cairon, on 30 July 1944 at 1000 hours (reported by Major A.T. Sesia).

General Simonds said that he wanted every Commander to understand that at the present time the task of 2 Cdn Corps is a holding one and certainly not the type that Commanders and troops will look forward to. Our next operation will probably be a breakthrough and when that operation

has been mounted no division will stop until every reserve has been employed. There will be no holding back whatever. Naturally, continued the GOC, such an operation would not be mounted unless the prospects are more than good but he told the assembled officers to bear in mind that he will not stop because the forward battalions are stopped, nor will he stop until every reserve has been employed and used up. General Simonds explained that he took this view because he has felt that the time has now come when we must consider that if we are going to put an end to this war at all it can only be done by a knock-out blow. The enemy, weakened as he is on all fronts, can still resist for a long time with the resultant unnecessary loss of lives to us. He said that we must be prepared to accept initial casualties but in the long run it would pay much higher dividends in (a) finishing the war, and (b) reducing the overall wastage of casualties that would normally ensue from a war of attrition.

General Simonds then went on to discuss the strategic picture as it affected 2 Cdn Corps on its immediate front. He commenced by likening the Germans position in the Caen sector to that of the situation he had found himself last winter in Italy when the main pivot of his defensive role lay in Pescara. He said that the Caen pivot is the enemy's Pescara of Normandy. The defence of Rome rested with the "Rome Line" which extended laterally across the Italian Peninsula to Pescara. If he were denied the laterals from Rome to Pescara he would either have to denude his stronghold in Pescara to reinforce Rome, or fall back on both fronts. Here in Normandy the main pivot of his defences and the determining points between an orderly withdrawal or a rout rested with the strength with which he held the Caen sector. A glance at the map revealed that so long as he held Caen in spite of his weakening position on the American front he was still able to swing back northeastwards in an orderly fashion and later, if need be, commence a gradual withdrawal to the North keeping control at all times. This explained his sensitivity in this particular sector, and it was more important to him to keep concentrated as much armour and heavy weapons as he could. The position that he holds by occupying the high ground in front of us places him in the same advantageous situation that Pescara did for him. He can't let go unless the situation deteriorates, and it will continue to be his pivot back behind the River Odon.

Our immediate task is to make the threat to this pivot so serious that he will not dare to reduce the strength of the force which he now holds there. For that reason it is up to us to continue to make a show of force, and if necessary, from time to time to move armoured brigades in daylight down to the forward areas and trickle them back under cover of darkness.

General Simonds said that it is his task to watch for the opportunity when the Boche weakens that pivot and then crack through. Once this takes place his whole position in Normandy collapses. This is the time when there will be no holding back, because it will be the finish of the enemy as far as this phase of the war is concerned, unless he decides upon a general withdrawal.

General Simonds said that from his experience in fighting the Boche he has found that if we attack him on a narrow front he recognizes it as a holding attack and lets it spend itself out, and then counter-attacks in his own time. By far the greatest contributing factor in a holding role is to contain a large concentration of armour and guns. This is at present being achieved and so far there has been no indication that he has moved any of his better Panzer divisions from the Corps front.

General Simonds said that effective 1730 hours this evening 4 Cdn Armd Div will have completed their take-over from 3 Cdn Inf Div who are going back to rest, and that to ease this Division gradually into the "feel of things," he is contemplating a small-scale operation to recover Tilly la Campagne. He considered that it would be advantageous for us to dominate the feature on which this town stands and it would minimize enemy observations of our movements.

For the future, the GOC said that if all continues to go well on the American front to look for instructions for a break-through to Falaise. He considers that for this operation he should employ not less than three infantry divisions and two armoured divisions with an armoured brigade with each infantry division, and possibly a third armoured brigade in reserve. He said that he would not mount the operation without complete air support. The main problem which we are going to be up against is how to get our armour through the gun screen. It was possible in the past for our medium guns to knock out and "brew up" enemy armour and gun emplacements. But now he has anti-tank guns and tanks with long effective fields of fire. One or two effectively concealed 88mm guns could knock out a whole regiment of tanks before discovered. Our mediums can still knock out the old Mk IV but the Panther and Tiger tanks are a different proposition. At the present time the solution seems to rest in the employment of heavy four-engined bombers and rocket-bearing Typhoons. A 4,000 lb "block buster" will turn over a Panther or Tiger tank on a direct hit or near miss. Our rocket-bearing Typhoons have proved very effective during recent days, but it must be realized that in employing air support in this manner that there is a definite time-lag which gives the Boche an opportunity to recuperate from the effects of the attack by the time either

our armour or the infantry get through.

General Simonds said that he was certain in his own mind that the best solution to this problem would be to employ armour at night, although he knew that the armour people themselves were reluctant to attempt this. He felt that if effectively carried through, it could be possible at night to bring armour up forward at least 5,000 yards. He realized the disadvantages such as the enemy's effective flares for spotting, the difficulty in keeping direction and the dust raised by air bombing which would make it almost impossible to see ahead. He thought, however, that by employing this armour at night and using moonlight or artificial light from searchlights, if there was cloud cover, the tanks will get up to the gun screen, and he wants the armoured formations to practice moving forward to objectives in the dark. He said that our light AA could deal with enemy flares and, of course, artillery support would be available to the shoot up area where the flares came from. He was not minimizing the risk of such operation but risks had to be accepted if armour was to be brought to the line of guns. For air support, he would call for a heavy bomber force such as that used in the attack on Caen and this would be employed at dusk. He would then arrange for these bombers to make a return trip and resume their attack as early after first light as it was possible for the bombers to refuel and return. The whole bomber effort would depend a great deal on this "turn around."

General Simonds then reiterated some of his main points and the conference ended.

Source: LAC, RG 24, Vol. 17,506.

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## APPRECIATION

### 31 JULY 44

1. Object – To break through the German positions astride the road Caen-Falaise.
2. The Germans have a forward prepared defensive position with its F[orward] D[efended] L[ocality] on the general line May-sur-Orne 0259 – Tilly La Campagne 0760 – La Hogue 0960 and a rearward partially

prepared position on the general line Hautmesnil 0852 – St Sylvain 1354. The high ground point 122 in 0756 is the key to the first and the high ground about Hautmesnil 0852 the key to the second. Both are obvious objectives and ones for which the Germans will fight very hard.

3. The positions are manned by as good troops as the German Army possessed. The area is the pivot, which, from the German point of view must be held as long as they fight West of the River Orne. The position is presently manned by 1 SS [Panzer Division] Right and 9 SS [Panzer Division] Left. Available information indicates that each division has one infantry regiment forward, supported by all the available tanks and Sps, whilst the other infantry regiment works on the rear position, and is available to form the nucleus of a defence in the event of a “break in” forward. The Germans apparently rely on being able to get tanks and Sps back, but ensure that some infantry will be available in the rearward positions from the onset, in the event of forward positions being over-run. Two “break in” operations are required to penetrate the German defence. 12 SS [Panzer Division] Div may be regarded as in close reserve opposite our front and counterattack against our East flank must be expected.

4. The ground is ideally suited to full exploitation by the enemy of the characteristics of his weapons. It is open, giving little cover to either infantry or tanks and the long range of his anti-tank guns and mortars, firing from carefully prepared positions, provides a strong defence in depth. This defence will be most handicapped in bad visibility – smoke, fog or darkness, when the advantage of long range is minimized. The attack should therefore be made under such conditions.

5. During the last few days we have attacked, and done everything possible to indicate that we intend to continue attacking, the positions opposite to us. Tactical surprise in respect to objectives or direction of attack is therefore impossible. Tactical surprise is still possible in respect to time and method, but very heavy fighting must be expected.

6. If all available air support is used for the first “break in” there will be nothing for the second except diminished gun support, unless a long pause is made with resultant loss of speed. If on the other hand the first “break in” is based upon limited air support (heavy night bombers), all available gun support and novelty of method, the heavy day bombers and medium bombers will be available for the second “break in” at a time when gun support begins to decrease, and it should be able to maintain a high tempo to the operations.

7. In essence, the problem is how to get the armour through the enemy gun screen to sufficient depth to disrupt the German anti-tank gun and mortar defence, in country highly suited to the tactics of the latter combination. It can be done by:-

(a) Overwhelming air support to destroy or neutralize enemy tanks, anti-tank guns and mortars.

(b) Infiltrating through the screen in bad visibility to a sufficient depth to disrupt the anti-tank gun and mortar defence.

8. It requires practically the whole day-bomber lift to effect and if two defence zones are to be penetrated, a pause with loss of speed and momentum must be accepted. It is considered that this may be avoided if the first zone is penetrated by infiltration at night but this can only be attempted with careful preparation by troops who are to do the operation.

The plan is submitted on the assumption that the Right wing of Second Army has secured, or imminently threatens to secure, a bridgehead East of the River Orne, thus loosening the enemy grip on the Northern pivot.

Source: LAC, RG 24, Vol. 10,799.

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58-1/SD  
Main Headquarters  
2nd Canadian Corps

29 Jul 44

*To All Formation Commanders  
2nd Canadian Corps*

LEADERSHIP AND THE FIGHTING SPIRIT

*1. I wish the attention of every officer and soldier in 2nd Canadian Corps directed to the citation for the Victoria Cross awarded to Major J.K. Mahony of the Westminster Regiment (Motor). It is given in full in Canadian Army Overseas Routine Order No. 4826 of 15 July, 1944, and also in Canada's Weekly dated 21 July, 1944. All officers should read and think about this themselves and immediately an opportunity offers to get troops together; it should be read over to them, and its lessons explained.*

2. *The points in this episode to which I would particularly draw attention are the following”*

(a) *I believe that this action was the first major offensive operation in which the Westminster Regiment (Motor) was engaged. Because of the undefeatable combination of courage and skill in leadership on the part of Major Mahony, they fought like well tried veterans.*

(b) *There was no question of “giving in” because Major Mahony’s company had “lost touch” with the remainder of the battalion or was “cut off” or under “overwhelmingly heavy fire”, though the fire power brought to bear upon this company by the Germans might well have been interpreted as “overwhelming” by less determined troops.*

(c) *Under the leadership of Major Mahony they fought on, confident that if they did their part the fight would swing in their favour and confident also that the rest of the unit would get through to them to assist them, as soon as the favourable situation created by their own action made it possible.*

3. *The whole episode is a fine example of determined, courageous and skilful leadership. Leadership on the part of Major Mahony and a will to fight on the part of his company. As the citation states, it is truly an inspiration to the Canadian Army for all time.*

(Sgd.) G.G. Simonds, Lieut-General  
GOC 2nd Canadian Corps

Source: LAC, RG 24, Vol.

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## **“O” GROUP CONFERENCE BY GOC, 2 CND CORPS, 13 AUG 44**

This conference was called to have a final review of the operation (Operation TRACTABLE – Hist Offr) which commences tomorrow. There is a good deal to be done still and I will get on with it as quickly as I can.

The object of the operation is to gain command and communications passing through Falaise. Falaise is only a name. The object of the operation is to gain control of communications passing through Falaise, and the first stage is to capture the high ground above Falaise itself. If we succeed and command both routes (from West to East through Falaise – Hist Offr) there is no question in my mind that after we get ourselves positioned we can push from there and capture the town itself.

Now the problem is exactly the same as we had the other day, viz., to strike first of all for a break-through of depth and secondly to get through the enemy gun screen. Armour and guns failed to gain a break-through in the attack the other day (Operation TOTALIZE – Hist Offr). This time the attack will be under cover of a smoke screen.

There are certain points vital to the operation which we must understand from the very beginning. The first is that the very heavy supporting, and long, preliminary bombardment and softening-up process immediately before an attack warns the enemy of an impending attack and gives him time to react. My aim is to have the leading battalions get away and the subsequent battalions follow in depth to prevent him from mortaring behind the initial Start Line and Forming Up area. Secondly, to organize an attack reduced in depth so that the infantry in the advance may reach the first objective, mop up, and then completely consolidate, gives the enemy time to move his reserves quickly and group around a frontage of penetration. To overcome that I intend to move the leading infantry in converted carriers (i.e. Priests and M.14 half-tracks from 79 Armd Div – Hist Offr) to get them over the final 100 yards.

Again, the enemy may have 88 mm guns sited in depth. The whole purpose of the employment of armour is to get in position to deny him freedom of manoeuvrability and this means to get the armour behind his positions proper. The final objective for 4 Cdn Armd Div is the high ground Versainville 1538 – Damblainville 2038. The attack will be on a two divisional front. On the right 2 Cdn Inf Div with under command 2 Cdn Armd Bde less one regiment (27 Cdn Armd Regt which will continue to operate with 2 Cdn Inf Div). On the left 4 Cdn Armd Div with under command during the First Phase one infantry brigade of 3 Cdn Inf Div. Boundaries of the attack and inter-divisional boundaries will be marked on the map and will be issued. The Start Line is the line of track Estrees La Campagne (1149) – Soignolles (1350). Forming Up Place for 2 Cdn Inf Div will be the valley between Bretteville le Rabet (1050) and Renemesnil (1152) and Forming Up Place for 4 Cdn Armd Div and one infantry brigade

for the first phase will be this valley south of St Sylvain (1353) where the Polish Armd Div have been positioned for the last two days.

The leading troops of the armoured brigades will cross the Start Line formed up very close, and go straight through across the river line (River Laizon) to their final objectives, viz., Versainville – Damblainville. They will be followed by the two infantry brigades in armoured carriers who will come straight on the river line, bale out, clear the area along the river, cross it and push south.

At this stage the follow-up brigade of 3 Cdn Inf Div and the lorry-borne brigade of 4 Cdn Armd Div will pass through the leading infantry brigade and go straight to their objectives, point 175 (1441) – Epancy (1641). A recce regiment will accompany the leading armoured brigade to mop up the area when the armour attack gets there. From information that we have the left flank of the attack is more or less open, and 4 Cdn Armd Div's aim will be to use the armoured cars to test out the country in that it has cleaned up its objective. 3 Cdn Inf Div will from a pivot at Sassy (1845) which will be taken over by 4 Cdn Armd Div. The latter division will also form a pivot at point 175 (1441) and armoured cars will operate between the two pivots.

(Due to the great rate of speed at which the Corps Commander was delivering his talk, it became impossible at this point to continue taking down his remarks in shorthand, and what follows is a resume of the gist of his remarks – Hist Offr).

General Simonds then went on to discuss the difficulties in command that the nature of the operation involved during the first phase. With infantry and armoured brigades operating together yet each having a different role after securing its objectives, led the Corps Commander to say that he did not want, for instance, the GOC 4 Cdn Armd Div worrying about clearing up small pockets of enemy left behind while he was still probing forward with his armour.

General Simonds said that he wanted the leading armoured brigade formed up on as wide a front as it can move and suggested that the armoured brigades could move through the smoke screens (which will be laid in front of enemy defences) with the tanks about fifteen yards apart. The idea was simply to get as much of the armour as possible through the enemy defences in the shortest time. Each armoured brigade will move on at least a two-front regiment. Smoke barrages will precede the advancing forces. The actual formation of the smoke screens will be dependent on

wind conditions at the time that the attack goes in, but there is only one direction from which the wind will come that will rule out the operation altogether and that is a wind blowing directly in the face of the advancing armour and troops. Wind conditions during the past few days would indicate that at the time of the attack they will be most favourable. Smoke screen flares should be laid in density and FOOs will allow their Ops leading the armoured regiments to adjust the rate of fire and intensity according to the rate of advance and wind conditions.

General Simonds considered that twelve miles in the hour was practical and that that was the speed of the rate of advance at which he aimed. He said that the leading armoured brigades would be very much in the same formation as they were last spring in the demonstration that was put on in England at Ashdown Forest for the Prime Minister of Canada when the tanks drove past in formation.

In addition to the smoke screen which will commence before H-hour and is to be fully effective at H-hour, at H minus 5 medium guns will be employed on counter-battery work in addition to taking on all 88 mm guns which are indicated. Between H minus 15 and H minus 5 medium and fighter bombers are going to be asked to attack known enemy positions in woods and orchards. This attack has to go in before the laying of the smoke screen commences, and will have to be continued until H minus 5 (commencing shortly before H minus 15).

General Simonds said that he settled, that morning, that on H plus 2 the heavy bombers were going to attack targets in the area where the bulk of the tanks of the two enemy SS divisions (2 Pz SS and 1 Pz SS Divisions) are at present concentrated. He hoped that heavy bomber concentrations would be brought to bear at about the time that the enemy tanks will be moving in any strength. In addition to the air programme, all 88 mm positions would be dealt with by pre-arranged concentrations on call by medium batteries and 9 AGRA which will support 5 Cdn Armd Bde and 2 AGRA which will support 4 Cdn Armd Div.

In conclusion General Simonds said that he realized that putting in this attack was pressing some of our troops who were tired but that it was quite definite now that the enemy was preparing to withdraw from the area and that to delay this attack any longer would destroy all advantages gained up to this time.

58-1/SD  
Main Headquarters  
2nd Canadian Corps

17 August, 1944

1. Will you please convey to all troops under your command my sincere appreciation to their fine achievements in the attacks beginning with our assault against the enemy positions south of Caen on the night 7/8 August, 1944, and leading to the capture of Falaise. I believe that these achievements will have a decisive influence on the great battles now raging throughout France.
2. To gain surprise and speed in the break-through it was necessary to mount two difficult operations, making great demands on our troops. The outcome has more than justified the confidence I have always had in their skill and resource, their courage and their powers of endurance.
3. We still have much to do and I require that all troops under command of 2nd Canadian Corps shall put forth every effort to prevent the enemy recovering from the blow he has just suffered. There must be no relaxation of drive and pressure until the enemy has been finally destroyed. We have made a good start and I am certain we have it in our power to make a better finish.

(Sgd.) G.G. Simonds, Lieut-General  
GOC 2nd Canadian Corps

Source: LAC, RG 24, Vol. 10,799.

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SD 58-1  
Main Headquarters  
2nd Canadian Corps  
23 August, 1944

TO BE READ BY ALL OFFICERS

1. On the evening of the 13th August, 1944, an officer of the 8th Cdn Recce Regt, 2 Cdn Inf Div, travelling in a Humber scout car, lost his way

*and ran into the enemy. He was shot dead, his driver taken prisoner. On searching the body of the officer it was found that he was carrying Copy No. 8 of a 2 Cdn Inf Div Instruction which outlines the whole Corps plan for the attack on the 14th August, 1944.*

*2. The German prisoner who gave this information stated that it was his opinion that but for the capture of this order, we would have made a clean break through to FALAISE on the evening of 14th August, 1944. Though the information came into their hands very late, it enabled the enemy to make quick adjustments to his dispositions which undoubtedly resulted in casualties to our troops the following day, which otherwise would not have occurred, and delayed the capture of Falaise for over twenty-four hours.*

*3. Great trouble was taken to gain a tactical surprise in this operation and it involved many intricate troop movements with corresponding demands on the physical powers of troops before the launching of the attack. Because of the carelessness of individuals we failed to reap the full benefit of what otherwise would have been a complete surprise.*

*4. There have been other instances where officers and ORs have shown gross carelessness in the unnecessary production of written orders, their reproduction and the handling of marked maps and operational documents in the forward area. By so doing they endanger the success of an operation and the lives of their comrades. I intend to take the sternest disciplinary action if I have any further occasion to believe that officers or ORs are being careless in this matter. In the particular instance I have noted, the officer primarily concerned has paid the supreme penalty.*

*(Sgd) G.G. Simonds, Lieut-General  
GOC 2nd Canadian Corps  
Time of Signature 2115 hrs.*

Source: LAC, RG 24, Vol. 10,799.

## GUY SIMONDS AND THE ART OF COMMAND



**Lieutenant-General Simonds with generals Miles Dempsey (left) and Montgomery (centre).**  
*Courtesy Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies (LCMSDS).*



**General Sir Bernard Montgomery confers with Lieutenant-General Simonds at  
2nd Canadian Corps Headquarters, Normandy France, 24 July 1944.**  
*Photographer Donald Grant, LAC, PA 129125.*



**Lieutenant-General Simonds observes the Canadian Grenadier Guards crossing the Seine River, Elboeuf France, 28 August 1944.**

*Photographer Harold Aikman, LAC, PA 116585.*



**Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay visit to Simonds' Canadian Army Headquarters in Belgium, November 1944.**

*Courtesy LCMSDS.*



**Prime Minister Winston Churchill (foreground) accompanied by (left to right) General Crerar, Field Marshal Alan Brooke, Lieutenant-General Simonds, and Field Marshal Montgomery overlooking the Rhine Crossing near Kranneburg Germany, 4 March 1945.**

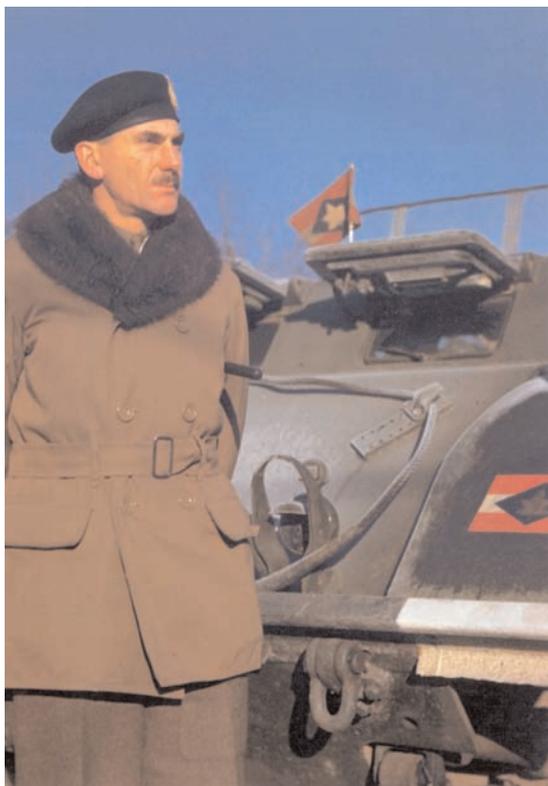
*Photographer Barney Gloster, LAC, PA 143952.*



**Senior Officers of the First Canadian Army. (Front Row L to R): Major-General Maczec, General Crerar, Lieutenant-General Foulkes, Major-General Hoffmeister. (Back Row L to R): Keebler, Matthews, Foster, Moncel and unknown.**

*Courtesy LCMSDS.*

GUY SIMONDS AND THE ART OF COMMAND





**G.G. Simonds, arguably Canada's best commander in World War II.**  
*Courtesy LCMSDS.*



## CHAPTER 4

# Acting Army Commander

When Guy Simonds was first told that 2nd Canadian Corps would be responsible for freeing the approaches to Antwerp as well as securing the Channel ports he seemed to regard the limitations on the resources available to him as a challenge to his ingenuity rather than a cause for concern. After the siege of Boulogne was underway he turned his attention to the Scheldt and the “Appreciation” drafted by the Plans Section of First Canadian Army. This document, prepared under the supervision of Brigadier Church Mann and Lieutenant-Colonel George Pangman, focused on Operation INFATUATE, described as the “capture of the islands of Zuid Beveland and Walcheren.” The Army planners did not address the corps-level tasks of reaching South Beveland from Antwerp or freeing the Breskens Pocket, their job was to develop a method of employing naval and air resources as well as the promised parachute regiment of 17th U.S. Airborne. The Appreciation also noted the availability of 5th Assault Regiment Royal Engineers equipped with Landing Vehicles Tracked (LVTs) known as Buffaloes.<sup>1</sup> Five possible courses of action were outlined, including two that could be executed if airborne troops were not available. None of the proposals involved an amphibious assault on Walcheren. Simonds was not impressed. (The appreciation and Simonds’ response are reproduced at the end of this chapter.)

A proposal to “sink” Walcheren by breaching the dykes was already under consideration at Army Headquarters, where Crerar had begun discussions with Montgomery’s Chief of Staff, Major-General Francis de Guingand, and Admiral Bertram Ramsay, the Allied Naval Commander-in-Chief. Ramsay backed the plan to bomb the dykes, as it would improve the prospects of an amphibious attack by creating a breach through which landing craft might pass. Ramsay insisted that the Royal Navy take over responsibility for any waterborne assault on Walcheren, and he nominated Captain A.F. Pugsley to oversee the arrangements. He also

noted that HMS *Warspite* and the monitors *Erebus* and *Roberts* would be available to support a landing. General de Guingand agreed to “obtain the views of higher authority” on the political dimension of flooding a Dutch island.<sup>2</sup>

Two days later Crerar, Pugsley and a representative from Bomber Command met to consider the plan. They agreed that the commandos of 4th Special Service Brigade would be used in a seaborne landing, allowing Simonds to deploy all of 3rd Division to clearing the Breskens Pocket.<sup>3</sup> Despite a report from Crerar’s Chief Engineer, Brigadier G. Walsh, who doubted the dykes could be breached by bombing and insisted that, even if the whole island was flooded, the channels created would be too shallow for landing craft, Ramsay and Simonds continued to advocate breaching the dykes. On 1 October 1944 General Eisenhower, apparently without consulting the Dutch government, approved the project.<sup>4</sup> The next day Harry Crerar, who had been coping with a severe stomach ailment, entered hospital, handing over command of the Army to Guy Simonds. The senior divisional commander, Charles Foulkes, became Acting Corps Commander, though in practice Simonds continued to exercise command at the operational level.

While these high level discussions were underway, Simonds prepared “preliminary instructions” for Operation SWITCHBACK, the plan to clear the area north of the Leopold Canal. On 30 September the Acting Corps Commander issued a draft outline plan closely based on these instructions. Foulkes sketched a two-phase operation, to establish a bridgehead and then clear “the Knocke-sur-Mer fortress area.” Third Division was to break into the pocket in two places “across the Leopold Canal and across the Savojaards Plaat.” Both attacks were to begin on 6 October less than a week away.<sup>5</sup> This deadline meant that 9th Brigade, selected to carry out the amphibious assault on the northeast corner of the pocket, would have little time for training.

The outline plan did not include paragraphs on “the enemy”, presumably because intelligence officers were still analysing the available information. Little is known about the use of Ultra by First Canadian Army, but Crerar and, after 26 September, Simonds were among the select group of senior officers on the Ultra recipients list.<sup>6</sup> In addition, Brigadier Church Mann, the Chief of Staff, Lieutenant-Colonel Peter Wright, the senior intelligence officer, and five other senior staff officers had access to this special intelligence without a detailed knowledge of its origins.<sup>7</sup> None of the other officers at army or corps were aware that the small group of specialists known as the Signals Liaison Unit, or SLU, were providing the army commander with decrypts of the enemy’s most secret communications<sup>8</sup> including Hitler’s orders to defend Walcheren Island and the Breskens area to the last man.<sup>9</sup>

Ultra provided little assistance when it came to questions of enemy strengths and dispositions at the divisional level, so much depended on photo-reconnaissance and patrol reports. Evidence from these sources confirmed that the enemy held the area in strength with “mortar targets registered to within feet” and defensive belts of machine gun fire “that would sweep the dyke tops at about eight inches height”. It was also evident that the 1037th Grenadier Regiment of 64th Infantry Division, responsible for the defence of the eastern end of the pocket, was a well-trained force of high quality troops.<sup>10</sup>

Allied intelligence reported that 64th Division had been created in the summer of 1944 from cadres of veteran officers and men on leave from the Eastern Front. The rest of the division was filled with whoever was available and it was thought that their quality varied widely. Senior German officers were confident that the division could carry out its orders to provide an obstinate defence of the Breskens Pocket. The army commander described the 64th as the only division in his army “still maintaining its full fighting power both as to strength and equipment.” General Knut Eberding, an experienced infantry officer, and his regimental commanders were regarded as dedicated and effective leaders.<sup>11</sup>

Major-General Dan Spry and his staff had very little time to prepare for Operation SWITCHBACK and 7th Brigade, selected for the assault crossing of the Leopold, did not issue an operational order until 5 October, less than 24 hours before the attack was to begin. Brigadier Jock Spragge held a final co-ordinating conference at 1800 hours that day to confirm timings and arrangements. Simonds’ plan required the Regina Rifles and Canscots to “assault and seize crossing over Leopold Canal in the area Moershoofd to the Aardenburg”. The brigade was then to enlarge the bridgehead and in Phase 3 “mop up in west direction” before advancing to Oostburg and Schoondijke. Divisional engineers were to construct two Kapok footbridges and two road bridges as soon as “the crossing is secured”.<sup>12</sup> The divisional plan called for 8th Brigade to enter the bridgehead after Phase 3 was complete, to clear the area as far west as the Sluis Canal while 9th Brigade advanced from its northeast bridgehead to Hoofdplaat and Breskens.<sup>13</sup>

Did Simonds actually believe that a single infantry brigade without armoured support could cross a canal, overcome large enemy forces in well prepared defences, advance beyond flooded and saturated ground along a single elevated road and then clear and defend a 10 kilometre wide bridgehead? Surely not. The plan provided brigade commanders with an outline of how they were to proceed in the unlikely event of an enemy collapse or staged withdrawal. The crossing itself, never mind the establishment of the shallow Phase 2 bridgehead, presented a major challenge that required elaborate and continuous support.

Considering the limited time available the preparations for SWITCHBACK were an impressive example of the flexibility and professionalism of the Canadian Army. There was, however, one major problem left to deal with. Simonds' original concept of operations called for both the attack across the Leopold and the amphibious assault to begin on 6 October, forcing the enemy to fight on two fronts. The delay in completing operations at Calais and Cap Gris Nez meant that 9th Brigade did not begin training with 5th Assault Regiment until 5 October, and it quickly became evident that the men and equipment for the amphibious assault could not be in position before the evening of 7 October. H-Hour for 9th Brigade was therefore set for 0130 hours on 8 October.<sup>14</sup>

It was now up to Simonds to decide whether to postpone 7th Brigade's attack or allow it to begin as scheduled. In the absence of written records it is not possible to determine their reasons for committing 7th Brigade to an action that would leave the assaulting battalions on their own for at least 48 hours, but there is no doubt that Simonds understood the consequences. The enemy had placed all three of his grenadier regiments along the canal with local reserves positioned to counterattack. The area selected for the crossing, a long, narrow triangle bounded by flooded or saturated polders, was a carefully prepared killing ground with pre-registered mortar and artillery targets and well-camouflaged machine gun posts with interlocking arcs of fire. From the perspective of the senior commanders, the attack, however costly, would focus the enemy's attention on the canal, and greatly improve the prospects for 9th Brigade's risky amphibious landing.

General Knut Eberding conducted the defence of the Breskens Pocket according to German army doctrine ordering regimental and then divisional reserves to counter-attack and force the Canadians to withdraw. The CRA, Brigadier Todd had prepared for this familiar response and he provided the 7th Brigade with a system of "Grouped Stonks and Concs on call" (linear and pinpoint) that included 46 likely targets; roads, hamlets, woods and tree lines, each coded with the name of a river. Forward Observation Officers, one per company, could call down fire on any of these targets with a single word as could company, platoon or section commanders. The pre-determined target could also be used as a reference point for observed fire during enemy counter-attacks. Todd retained control of counter-battery and defensive fire tasks but otherwise the use of the guns rested with the infantry who were "given neutralizing fire when they want it for as long as they want it."<sup>15</sup>

General Eberding was so confident that his division had dealt with the attacks at the Leopold that he reported that the eastern bridgehead had been sealed off and the western one "eliminated."<sup>16</sup> The Reginas were certainly pinned down

and unable to advance, but eliminating them was another matter. Shortly after darkness fell, the enemy formed up to begin a major attack. This was the moment the artillery had been longing for, as the enemy were conveniently grouped around “Skeena,” one of the pre-arranged medium regiment targets. With this kind of support the Reginas were able to report that “everything was under control.”<sup>17</sup>

This was the first of a series of counter-attacks carried out by 1038th Regiment reinforced by Eberdings’ divisional reserve, 1st Para Training Regiment and a battle group from 1037th Regiment. The immediate result of this commitment of the best available reserves was a stalemate with neither side able to gain further advantage.<sup>18</sup> The more serious consequences only became apparent when an armada of Buffaloes emerged from the waters of the Scheldt in the early morning hours of 9 October to open the back door of the Breskens Pocket. This assault, described by the German high command as “a decision-seeking attack on the Breskens bridgehead,” caught Eberding without any reserves other than two companies ferried over from Walcheren.<sup>19</sup> Eberding was to tell interrogators that he had considered the possibility of an attack across the Braakman Inlet but assumed it could only be on a small scale. He believed that the 627th Landeschutzen Battalion, a force of some 300 combat troops, with headquarters at Biervliet, would be able to deal with such attacks. Eberding was unable to imagine the possibility of a large amphibious landing on the north coast of the pocket, as he had no knowledge of the existence of a regiment of amphibious vehicles.<sup>20</sup>

Eberding’s decision to employ his reserves to try and wipe out the Leopold bridgehead allowed 9th Brigade to carry out a complex and dangerous amphibious attack, and to establish a large beachhead before the enemy could react. Combat officers were also surprised by the enemy’s determination to overwhelm 7th Brigade. Major A.L. Gollnich, the 2 i/c of the Reginas, spoke for many when he told an historical officer that:

If the enemy had chosen to adopt a purely defensive role and had withdrawn more slowly all the way to the sea, our casualties would ultimately have been much heavier. Instead he elected to launch many expensive counterattacks, which harsh though our troops found them, eventually weakened him seriously.

Gollnich believed that the enemy had “unquestionably spent his best troops in costly counter-attacks designed to crush the small but stubborn bridgehead” leaving the defence of the rest of the pocket to “men of a very inferior sort, many of them odds and sods of poor physical condition.”<sup>21</sup> By 15 October the outcome of the battle for the Breskens Pocket was no longer in doubt. The

German High Command (OKW) reported that the situation would soon be irreversible unless reinforcements were sent to bolster 64th Division.

While 3rd Division fought to clear the Breskens Pocket, Simonds dealt with the problem of freeing the north coast of the Scheldt Estuary. Despite Montgomery's decision to use I British Corps to support attempts to widen the Nijmegen-Arnhem salient, created during Operation MARKET GARDEN, Simonds was determined to begin the advance north from Antwerp to South Beveland. On 2 October he issued his first directive as Acting Army Commander.<sup>22</sup>

Simonds had anticipated a strong enemy reaction to 2nd Division's advance and on 7 October General Gustav Von Zangen, commanding 15th Army ordered his army reserve "Battle Group Chill" to Woensdrecht to block the Canadian advance. "The defence of the approaches to Antwerp," he declared, "represents a task which is decisive for the further conduct of the war." Lieutenant-General Erich Diestel, who was commanding the mixed bag of divisional fragments defending the area north of Antwerp, described the arrival of the reinforcements when he was interviewed in 1945:

On October 2nd the Canadians attacked north from Merxem and in three days had driven the division's right flank from back to Putte, a distance of some 7 kms... There was no regular line to hold at this time, but rather a series of tactical points... The division had lost over 800 men in the battle for the Turnhout and Albert Canals and was in a very tired state. About 7 October, in almost melodramatic-fashion, aid came in the form of the 15 Army Assault Battalion consisting of about 1000 men from the Army Battle School and the von der Heydte Parachute Regiment of about 2500 fanatical and eager young parachutists.<sup>23</sup>

Fifteenth Army was able to move its reserve to the Antwerp sector because Montgomery decided to postpone the advance to the Rhur until 2nd Army was re-organized. I British Corps, reinforced by 51st Highland Division, took over the defence of the western side of the salient and called off attempts to reach Tilburg and 'S-Hertogenbosch. Montgomery realized that this would leave 2nd Canadian Division on its own with an exposed right flank, but for Montgomery the Scheldt was still not a priority. Aware of the growing criticism of his strategy he told Brooke on 7 October, "Canadian troops were astride the road leading westwards from the mainland to South Beveland." He also claimed to "have examined carefully the whole situation of the opening up of Antwerp with a view to speeding up the matter and it is clear we are using all the troops we can

successfully employ.”<sup>24</sup> Montgomery could not possibly have believed either statement, but he was determined to buy time for one more attempt to reach the Rhine.

Dutch civilians and air reconnaissance had provided fairly detailed information on the arrival of major German reinforcements and both division and corps intelligence accepted an estimate of between 2,000 and 3,000 troops. Brigadier Keebler reacted to this information by ordering 4th and 5th Brigades to go over to the defensive and prepare for a major attack which the army intelligence section, probably on the basis of Ultra decrypts, had predicted for the night of 8 October.<sup>25</sup>

By mid-day on 10 October the German counterattack seemed to be spent. Von der Heydte's Regiment had suffered heavy casualties, estimated at 480 men, in addition to more than 50 prisoners of war.<sup>26</sup> Much is made in the secondary literature of the skill of the German officer corps and the fighting power of German paratroopers, but the battle for Hoogerheide demonstrated major deficiencies in German doctrine and tactics, a situation not uncommon in Northwest Europe. Von der Heydte had launched a frontal attack against forces that had gone over to the defensive. He persisted in pressing forward despite heavy losses. To attack in this manner, when reconnaissance would have shown the weakness of the Canadian right flank, suggests overconfidence and doctrinal rigidity.

On 9 October Field Marshal Montgomery had issued a directive, which again emphasized offensive action by Second British Army in the Nijmegen sector. First Canadian Army was told to use “all available resources on the operations designed to give us free use of the port of Antwerp.” Montgomery did promise reinforcements. The 104th U.S. (Timberwolf) and the 52nd (Lowland) British Division would both be allocated to Simonds, but neither would be available for at least ten days.

When Eisenhower received a copy of Montgomery's directive, he had on his desk a report from Admiral Bertram Ramsay, which criticized the pace of operations to clear the Scheldt and noted that the Canadians were being handicapped by an ammunition shortage. Eisenhower, increasingly unhappy with Montgomery's conduct of operations, used this information in a message to Monty which concluded, “I must emphasize that of all our operations on our entire front from Switzerland to the Channel, I consider Antwerp of first importance and I believe that the operations to clear up the entrance require your personal attention.” Montgomery was furious at this reprimand, accusing Ramsay of “wild statements” and denying there was an ammunition shortage. The Field Marshal

also insisted that Eisenhower had agreed to his policy of making the “main effort” against the Ruhr.<sup>27</sup> The most important immediate effect of this high-level confrontation was to put enormous pressure on the two Canadian infantry divisions. On the night of 9 October, 2nd Division was informed, “the limit to artillery ammunition expenditure (which Monty had denied existed) has been removed.”<sup>28</sup> The battle was to be continued with new intensity, as the infantry battalions would soon discover.

The strategic debate between Montgomery and Eisenhower was temporarily settled on 16 October when Montgomery outlined revised plans for 21 Army Group. “The use of the Port of Antwerp” was to have “complete priority”, with the “whole offensive power of Second British Army” as well as First Canadian Army available. This translated into plans to release I British Corps from its responsibilities in the east, with its full weight “pulled over towards Antwerp.” The Corps was, however, to transfer 7th Armoured Division, 51st Highland Division and 34th Armoured Brigade to Second Army,<sup>29</sup> leaving Crocker with just one infantry and one armoured division until the 104th U.S. Infantry Division was available. Thus, while it is true that once “the new orders took effect the situation north of Antwerp was transformed”<sup>30</sup> eight days were to pass before the enemy was forced to abandon Woensdrecht. It is also important to note that the “whole offensive power of Second British Army” amounted to a very limited advance by 12th British Corps, which did not begin until 22 October.<sup>31</sup>

While his attention was briefly focused on Antwerp, Montgomery lashed out at Ramsay, demanding that he cease dealing directly with Simonds on operational matters. Ramsay, who was not the least bit intimidated by Montgomery, replied that he had been dealing directly with First Canadian Army “in all matters concerning Infatuate in view of your apparent reluctance to concern yourself...” Montgomery promptly backed down and Ramsay continued to deal directly with Simonds.<sup>32</sup>

Montgomery’s 16 October Directive offered Guy Simonds the first opportunity to command a two-corps army since his appointment as acting army commander. He decided to reinforce Crocker with 4th Canadian Armoured Division and start Operation SUITCASE, the advance to Breda, Roosendaal and Bergen-op-Zoom, without waiting for the promised American division. Plans for Operation INFATUATE I and II, the amphibious assaults on Walcheren, were now complete, with 1 November as the target date. To ensure the success of the risky assault landings, Simonds was determined to distract the enemy by launching an attack on the island from the east, and he outlined plans for a new operation code-named VITALITY. VITALITY I involved the advance of 2nd Canadian Division into South Beveland, while VITALITY II was an amphibious attack on the

southeast corner of the Beveland peninsula, designed to outflank the German defences by landing behind the South Beveland canal.<sup>33</sup> Simonds also decided to revive the Army's long standing request for support from First Allied Airborne Army, proposing that "one para bde drop west of Zuid Beveland related in time to seaborne crossing West Schelde and landward thrust west..."<sup>34</sup> The Airborne commanders saw no reason to change their earlier appreciation that "terrain characteristics" ruled out the use of paratroops, a view Simonds did not share.

The five operations planned and executed by First Canadian Army in late October and early November 1944 placed an extraordinary burden on army, corps and divisional staff officers as well as the combat troops. Shortages of ammunition and fuel still plagued the Army, which was dependent on Dieppe and Ostend for supplies. The enemy was "fighting hard...stubbornly contesting one position after another," and was evidently determined "to delay our capture of the Scheldt Estuary at all costs,"<sup>35</sup> so Simonds hoped to destroy their will to resist by a series of carefully timed manoeuvres.

I British Corps' long delayed advance could not begin until 4th Armoured Division was fully concentrated, so Operation SUITCASE was scheduled for 20 October. The corps commander decided that 4th Armoured Division would lead, advancing "two brigades up," to seize a crossing of the Roosendaal Canal and then secure the town of Esschen. The 49th Division was to "conform on the right" and "take over Esschen should 4th Canadian Armoured Division push further north."<sup>36</sup> This action forced the enemy to withdraw from the Hoogerheide-Woensdrecht area, allowing 2nd Division to move west.

The primary purpose of the I Corps advance, "to enable us to operate freely westwards along the Beveland isthmus," had been accomplished by 24 October and Montgomery was again turning his attention to the Ruhr. On 25 October he arrived at Crocker's Corps Headquarters and then visited each division to urge all possible speed in pressing the enemy back to the Maas.<sup>37</sup> With the Polish Armoured Division joining in the advance, Crocker would have four divisions available to pursue the enemy. The plan to trap the Germans south of the river by using "the whole offensive power" of Second British Army "...in a strong thrust westwards" was thus abandoned two days before an attack from the eastern side of the Nijmegen salient forced Dempsey to return units to 8 Corps and limit advances west of S'Hertengobosch.<sup>38</sup> Crocker's divisions were ordered to drive ahead for Moerdijke and the Maas, an advance that continued until 7 November when the last elements of 15th Army crossed the Maas and blew the Moerdijke bridges.<sup>39</sup>

With the route into South Beveland open Operation VITALITY I began on

the morning of 24 October. Attempts to accelerate the advance were prevented by water, mud, mines and several surviving anti-tank guns controlling the railway-road embankment, the only passable route across the narrowest part of the isthmus. To outflank the enemy, the infantry had to wade across flooded polders in a cold, continuous rain. All three battalions of 4th Brigade were committed to the battle and by mid-day on 25 October some progress had been made.

From Simonds' perspective this exhausting battle was going according to plan, for at 0245 hours on 26 October, Operation VITALITY II began with a flotilla of landing craft from Terneuzen reaching the south side of the peninsula behind the canal defences. The task had been assigned to 156th Brigade of 52nd (Lowland) Division and the Scottish soldiers found the steep and slippery dykes a greater obstacle than the enemy. The terrain and the limited number of available Buffaloes slowed the expansion of the bridgehead, but by first light on 27 October the 4/5th Battalion Royal Scots Fusiliers had broken the back of the German resistance, capturing more than 100 prisoners and "severely punishing" the enemy's counter-attacks.<sup>40</sup> The success of VITALITY II was soon measured by the collapse of the enemy resistance at the Beveland Canal. Brigadier J.C. Gauvreau's 6th Brigade was able to cross on the afternoon of 27 October, and the engineers had bridges in place the next morning.

After the Beveland Canal defences were breached, the road network allowed 2nd Division to send two brigades forward. Some veterans of the campaign, as well as the official historian, have maintained that "to encourage rapid advance," the acting division commander promised that the "brigade reaching the area first would hold the near end of the causeway; the other would push across it and form a bridgehead."<sup>41</sup> Versions of this story may have circulated in November, but there was no race to the causeway. The specific tasks and objectives of each brigade are spelled out in the war diaries, message logs and operational orders. As might be expected, the divisional plan called for the advance to be made in a series of bounds, with 4th Brigade leading off into the peninsula and 6th Brigade seizing the bridgehead across the Beveland Canal. Fifth Brigade's war diary for 29 October notes, "Our job has not changed—we are still to go as fast as possible for the causeway. 4th Brigade are pushing out to the west on our left flank and established contact with 157th Brigade during the day."<sup>42</sup>

At 0930 hours on the morning of 31 October, Simonds decided to go ahead with the amphibious attacks on Walcheren Island. Foulkes immediately sent to 2nd Division headquarters a signal that read, "No interference on Walcheren by guns or air. Most desirable we get on with it."<sup>43</sup> The hazardous amphibious attacks on Flushing and Westkapelle were scheduled for dawn the next morning, and it was important to persuade the enemy that the attack would

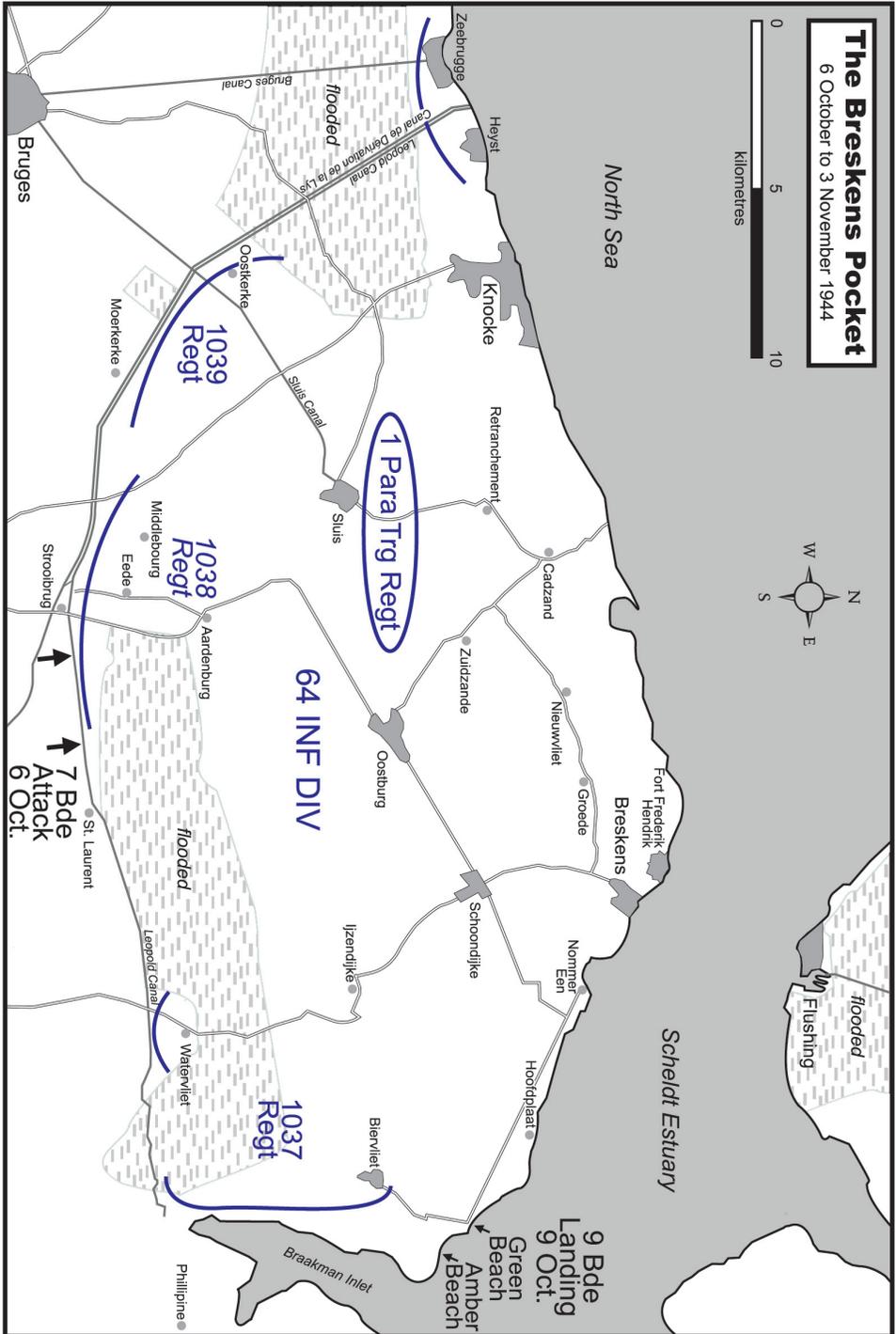
come from the Beveland area. Foulkes ordered 5th Brigade to begin the operation by seizing a bridgehead on Walcheren, which could then be turned over to the Scots.<sup>44</sup>

The causeway diversion was badly needed. The plans for Operation INFATUATE, the clearing of Walcheren Island, made enormous demands upon the assault troops and naval flotillas. The risks taken could only be justified by the urgency of the need to open the port of Antwerp. The attack on Flushing, carried out with limited air support,<sup>45</sup> required 4th Commando, the unit originally raised by Lord Lovat that had fought with distinction at Dieppe, to cross the Scheldt from Breskens in assault landing crafts (LCAs). They were to seize the harbour as a base for 155th Brigade, which was to pass through and clear the partially flooded streets of the town. The assault on Flushing was challenging enough for anyone, but its difficulties paled in comparison to those faced by Force T at Westkapelle. The 182 ships involved in this action left Ostend just after midnight on 31 October. Simonds and Ramsay allowed the force commanders to decide if the operation was feasible when they reached the island.

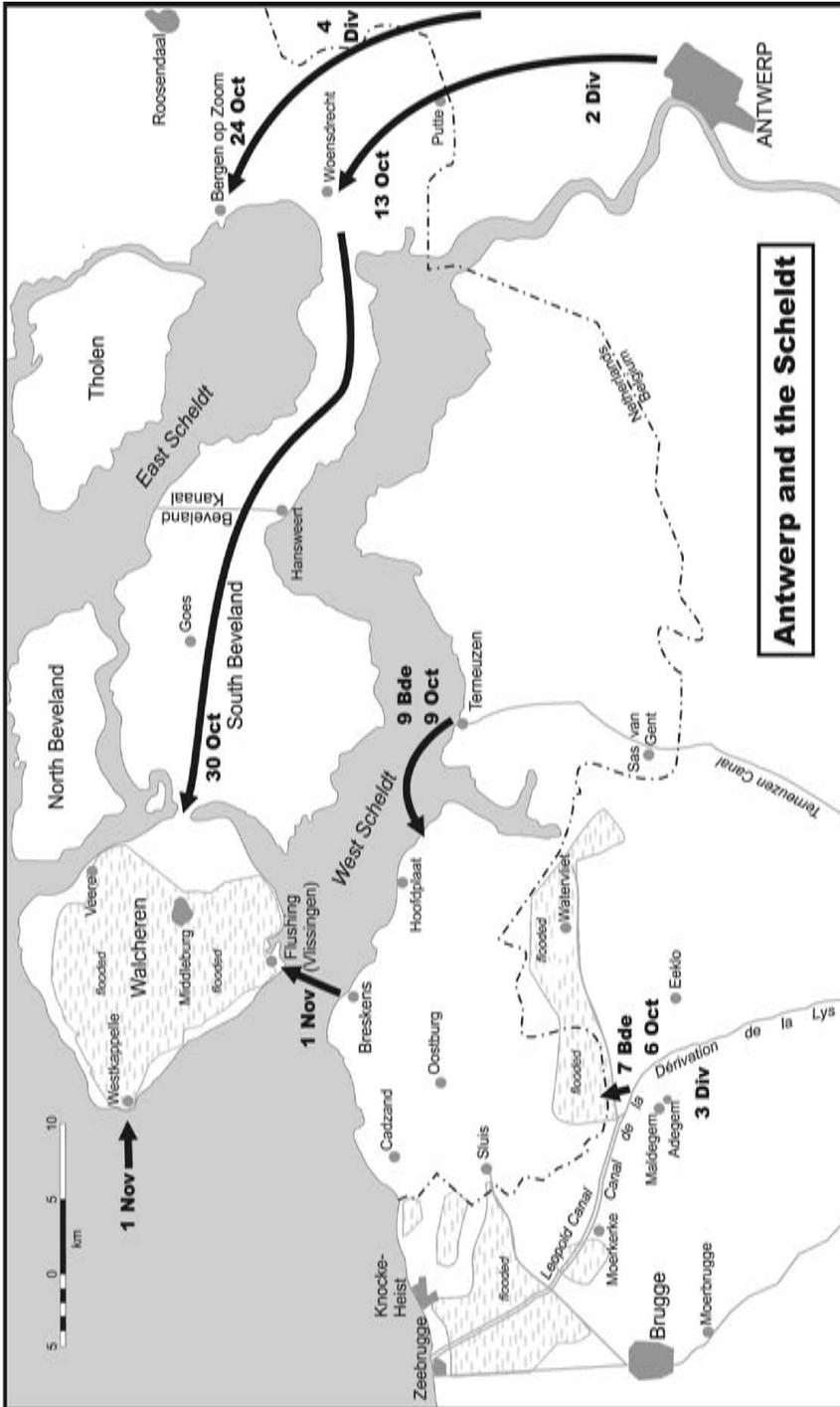
At 0600 hours 1 November Simonds signalled, in clear, that it was “extremely unlikely any air support, air spotting or air smoke owing to airfield conditions and forecast.” Despite this, the naval force commander Rear Admiral A.F. Pugsley decided to go ahead with the operation and at 0820 hours the heavy support squadron, HMS *Warspite* and the monitors HMS *Erebus* and *Roberts* opened fire. The close support squadron, made up of 27 vessels with fire power ranging from rockets to 17-pounder anti-tank guns, drew most of the enemy fire, permitting the assault craft to pass through the breach in the dyke. Nine support ships were lost and eleven badly damaged, but the Commandos were landed and able to begin a three-day battle for the coastal guns.<sup>46</sup>

The post-mortems on Operation INFATUATE began almost immediately. The heavy casualties suffered by the navy prompted Rear Admiral Pugsley to protest the limited commitment of Bomber Command and the failure to silence any of the Walcheren gun batteries. Pugsley, with Admiral Ramsay’s support, also complained that “No proper joint plan was ever produced,” because the RAF remained the sole judges of what air support could be provided. General Simonds wrote a detailed reply to this report (reproduced at the end of this chapter), agreeing with many of Pugsley’s comments on the RAF, but insisting a successful “joint naval and army plan based upon the tasks and outline which had been given to them was produced by the force commanders responsible for the operation.”<sup>47</sup> Simonds concluded his reply with the comment:

It would be my wish that the operations could have succeeded



Map drawn by Mike Bechthold ©2006



Map drawn by Mike Bechthold ©2006

with much lighter naval casualties, but to keep things in perspective I must point out that these were a mere fraction of the casualties suffered by the army formations involved in the operations for clearing the Scheldt Estuary.

The Canadian share of those army casualties, more than 90 percent of the total, included 1,418 men killed in action and 4,949 wounded.<sup>48</sup>

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## ENDNOTES

1. Main HQ First Canadian Army, Operation "Infatuate": An Appreciation, 19 September 1944, LAC RG 24, Vol. 10, 799. Brigadier George Pangman described the planning process in a series of interviews conducted in 1987-88. Transcript LCMSDS Archives.
2. Stacey, *Victory*, p. 371. Ramsay Diary, p. 141. Brigadier C.C. Mann, Operation Infatuate. Notes of Conference 21 September, War Diary, First Canadian Army, 21 September 1944.
3. Crerar made this decision on 22 September 1944, LAC RG 24, Vol. 10,799.
4. Stacey, *Victory*, p. 375.
5. Operation "Switchback". Draft Outline Plan 30 September 1944, LAC RG 24, Vol. 10,809.
6. There is some controversy over when Simonds was first cleared for Ultra. This certainly took place on or shortly after 26 September 1944, when he assumed command of First Canadian Army.
7. The *List of Recipients Ultra* dated March 1945 includes Crerar, Simonds, Brigadier C.C. Mann, (Chief of Staff) Brigadier G.E. Beament, (Brigadier, General Staff) Lieutenant-Colonel Peter Wright, (GSO I Intelligence) as well as four other senior staff officers. Richard Collins Papers, Archives USAMHI. I wish to thank David Keogh, USAMHI archivist for bringing this document to my attention.
8. Hinsley, pp. 378-380.
9. Ralph Bennett, *Ultra in the West*, (London, 1979),p. 148.
10. Cassidy, pp. 159-161.

11. Interrogation Report, General Gustav von Zangen, LAC RG 24, Vol. 10,617,
12. 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade Operational Order No. 3, Operation SWITCHBACK, 5 October 1944; 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade Battlelog October 1944, War Diary, 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade, October 1944.
13. 3rd Canadian Infantry Division, Operation “Switchback ,” War Diary, 3rd Canadian Infantry Division, October 1944.
14. Combined Operations Headquarters, (COHQ) Bulletin Y/43 Amphibians in Operation SWITCHBACK November 1944, LAC RG 24, Vol. 10,651.
15. Brigadier P.A.S. Todd, “Artillery in Operation Switchback” Account given to Historical Officer, 9 December 1944, DHH. Reproduced in Appendix D.
16. O.B. West Intelligence Report, 7 October 1944, AHQ Report No. 69, p. 66.
17. *Ibid.* Skeena was the responsibility of three medium regiments of 9th British AGRA continuously for four minutes. Task Table War Diary, Royal Winnipeg Rifles, 5 October 1944.
18. 2nd Canadian Corps Intelligence Summary, 9 October 1944; 3rd Canadian Infantry Division Intelligence Summary, 11 October 1944. Nilsson, pp.
19. Army Group B Daily Situation Reports 9 October 1944, AHQ Report No. 69, p 64.
20. Interrogation Report Major-General Knut Eberding. War Diary, 3rd Canadian Infantry Division, October 1944.
21. A.L. Gollnich. “The Bridgehead Over the Leopold Canal” 13 November 1944, 4 pages DHH.
22. Stacey, *Victory*, p. 380.
23. Interrogation Report, Lieutenant-General Erich Diestel. The text of the report is reproduced in Copp and Vogel, *Scheldt*, p. 28.
24. M265 Personal for CIGS from CinC, 7 October 1944, BLMP.
25. First Canadian Army Intelligence Summary, 7 October 1944.
26. *Ibid.*, 11 October 1944.
27. The original documents are reproduced in Eisenhower Papers, p. 2215 ff. and in the Montgomery Papers. The issue is discussed in Stacey, *Victory*, pp. 387-388.

28. War Diary, 2nd Canadian Infantry Division, 9 October 1944.
29. M532, 16 October 1944, BLMP. The directive is printed in Stacey, *Victory*, p. 635.
30. Stacey, *Victory*, p. 390.
31. Ellis, pp. 158-159.
32. Montgomery's message M294, 21 October and Ramsay's reply 23 October are in BLMP.
33. The evolution of plans for INFATUATE and VITALITY are outlined in CMHQ Report No. 188. See also War Diary, 2nd Canadian Corps, "Notes on a Meeting at Bde HQ," 4th Special Service Brigade, p. 20.
34. Main First Canadian Army, to First Allied Airborne Army, 21 October 1944.
35. 2nd Canadian Corps Intelligence Summary, No. 21, 21 October 1944.
36. "Operational Order," 4th Canadian Armoured Division, 19 October 1944, War Diary, 4th Canadian Armoured Division, October 1944.
37. War Diary, 4th Canadian Armoured Division, 25 October 1944. L.A. Hoegh, *Timberwolf Tracks*, p. 61.
38. On 28 October Dempsey ordered 15th Scottish Division and 6th Guards Tank Brigade to the east. Two days later 53rd Division was also withdrawn, leaving 12 Corps with just two divisions to compress the pocket of enemy troops who subsequently retired to the north bank of the river. Ellis, p. 193.
39. Despite heavy losses in the infantry battalions, the five German divisions, 85th, 245th, 711th, 719th, and 346th, retired across the Maas with much of their artillery and support cadres intact.
40. Corps Intelligence officers dismissed the 89th Fortress Battalion as made up of "old gentlemen and low medical category personnel," but they would still harass the British troops with machine gun and mortar fire and even mount counter-attacks. 2nd Canadian Corps Intelligence Summary, 27 October 1944. War Diary, 156 Brigade, 27-28 October 1944. War Diary, 415th Royal Scots Fusiliers, 27 October 1944. WO 171/1363.
41. Stacey, *Victory*, p. 402.
42. War Diary, 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade, 29 October 1944.
43. "Message Log" War Diary, 2nd Canadian Infantry Division, 31 October 1944.
44. War Diary, 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade, 31 October 1944.

45. The Acting Army Commander, General Simonds, and Admiral Ramsay sought the support of Bomber Command to neutralize the Flushing defences, as the weather conditions indicated that only heavy bombers using airborne radar (H2S) could be successfully employed. Air Marshal Harris refused recalling the heavy civilian casualties at Le Havre and the British Chiefs of Staff supported Harris. Medium and fighter-bombers did participate. PRO Air 37/1060.
46. *Ibid.*, pp. 192-233. The Close Support Squadron lost 172 men killed and 125 wounded. Their sacrifice, which produced higher casualties than those suffered by all naval landing flotillas on D-Day, 6 June 1944, allowed the assault landing craft to reach the gap with few losses. See AORG Report No. 299 *The Westkapelle Assault on Walcheren October 1945*, LCMSDS Archives.
47. Pugsley's report and Simonds reply (dated 1 January 1945) are in BLMP.
48. Calculated from Stacey, *Victory*, p. 424 and Appendix B.

TOP SECRET  
603/FUTURE/2  
Main HQ First Cdn Army

19 September 1944  
Copy No. 6

## **OPERATION INFATUATE**

*An Appreciation by*

*The Plans Section*

*Headquarters First Canadian Army*

*Reference Maps:- GSGS 2541 1/100,000*

*Sheets 3 and 4*

*GSGS 4336 1/100,000*

*Sheets 2 and 3*

### **Object**

1. To capture the islands of Walcheren and Zuid Beveland, thus enabling the port of Antwerp to be used.

### **Assumption**

2. That First Canadian Army has cleared the mainland up to the south shore of the West Scheldt from Antwerp to the sea.

### **Considerations**

#### Topography

3. The whole question of topography including both the Walcheren group of islands and the West Scheldt has been studied in considerable detail by both GS Intelligence and the Chief Engineer of First Canadian Army. These studies are included in the following documents:-

(a) GS Intelligence – Intelligence Report No. 2 dated 16 September 1944.

(b) Chief Engineer:

(i) Memorandum of the Chief Engineer on Operation Infatuate (CE 1-0-3-1/Main HQ First Cdn Army dated 14 September 1944).

(ii) A map of the general area with an overlay trace showing results of photographic interpretation with reference to beaches, dykes, inland waterways and communications. (Only one copy was prepared and this was handed to the Chief Engineer 2 Canadian Corps on 16 September).

Enemy Defences

4. GS Intelligence First Canadian Army from information received from 21 Army Group and from interpretation of recent photographic cover, have prepared a defence trace of the island of Walcheren which shows defences along the North West coast and comparatively heavier defences on the South West coast and in the vicinity of Flushing 1024. However, since these defences on Walcheren were constructed, a completely different situation faces the Germans in that island today. The forces opposing him, instead of being over the North Sea will be along the south shore of the West Scheldt and on the mainland to the east of Zuid Beveland. He must therefore defend Zuid Beveland unless he is prepared to weaken his defence of Walcheren. So far, there is little indication of defences being prepared on Zuid Beveland, Noord Beveland or Tholen. It is possible that we can expect the perimeter of Zuid Beveland to be defended against a water-borne assault and against penetration from the mainland to the east. He will likely establish lines of defence, one at the isthmus connecting Zuid Beveland to the mainland and another along the obstacle of the Beveland Canal.

Availability of Equipment

5. It is planned that, by 24 September 44 the complete 5 ARE Regiment comprising 5 Squadrons (one squadron from 6 ARE Regiment) with a total of approximately 40 Terrapins, 20 LVT 2 and 80 LVT 4s will be concentrated on the River Scheldt above Antwerp in the vicinity of 5285. These will be available for Operation Infatuate.

6. The Weasel availability is still somewhat obscure. There will likely be available for this operation approximately 60 of the M29 type which float but are NOT self propelled in water. The Weasel M29c, a completely amphibious vehicle, has arrived in the United Kingdom and 100 should be available for shipment to France on 20 September.

7. The Royal Navy through ANCXF have advised that they can make

available to First Canadian Army for this operation 70 LCA and 20 LOT, but it must be pointed out that these cannot be used in the operation unless:-

(a) The LCA are brought by tank transporter from a channel port, such as Ostend, to the West Scheldt.

(b) The LCA and LOT are taken by inland waterways to the West Scheldt. The problem of bringing these craft by canals is being studied, but it is considered by the Chief Engineer that pending further examination, considerable work would have to be done before the canals are made useable by reason of demolished bridges and lock gates. Also it is considered that the Bailey bridging may NOT permit the passage of those craft underneath.

8. The Royal Navy point out that the crews available for these landing craft are NOT trained to carry out a set-piece combined operation.

#### Additional Resources

9. Depending on the priority laid down by the Supreme Allied Commander, airborne forces represented by parachute brigades may be made available to First Canadian Army for this operation. A general study is being made now by HQ First Allied Airborne Army, who subject to the approval of the Supreme Allied Commander, might make available the two parachute regiments (brigades) of the 17 US Airborne Division. This division consists of newly trained troops who as yet have NOT had the experience of tactical dropping under active service conditions. If the airborne operation is NOT required until after 1 October, the parachute brigades of 6 British Airborne Division might be available and HQ First Allied Airborne Army suggest that these brigades would likely be better trained than those of 17 US Airborne Division.

10. The Royal Navy are prepared to assist in this operation by allotting the Monitors HMS Roberts and HMS Erebus, each with 2x15" guns, for bombarding tasks.

11. Belgian river pilots could probably be obtained for piloting landing craft in the West Scheldt. On the other hand, if water-borne operations in the East Scheldt are undertaken, piloting would have to be done by Dutch pilots and it is understood that their integrity may NOT be relied on.

#### **Courses Open to the Enemy**

12. There appears to be NO question that the enemy appreciates the

importance of the Port of Antwerp to the Allied forces, and having appreciated this, that he will attempt, after being forced from the mainland, to continue to dominate the West Scheldt from the islands of Walcheren and Zuid Beveland. The degree of his defences however will depend to some extent on the success of the present operation of Second British Army to secure bridgeheads over the IJssel, Waal, Maas and Neder Rijn in Holland. It is likely that he will be apprehensive of an encirclement of his forces in Holland and in view of the urgent necessity to withdraw as many of his troops as he can to defend Germany, he may decide to withdraw a larger part of his forces from the task of defending these islands and the coast of Holland than he may have originally planned to do.

13. The 21 Army Group estimate is that the enemy may leave as large a garrison as 10,000 troops to defend the islands of Walcheren, Zuid Beveland and Noord Beveland. However, if he is faced with the possibility of these forces being cut off by the thrust of Second British Army, and his defences of these islands are subjected to heavy bombardment by naval and ground artillery together with heavy air attack, he may decide to leave only a small retraining force. Therefore any plan for the capture of these islands by us should embrace plans for the quick exploitation of light enemy resistance.

### **Courses Open to Us**

14. It is reasonable to discard at the outset the possibility of mounting a successful combined operation to capture Walcheren Island by assaulting the only possible suitable beaches, which are on the North West and South West coasts because this could only be done after considerable time spent on combined training and preparation.

15. Possible courses with variations that are worthy of consideration are outlined below. These combine the use of airborne forces and water-borne forces to assist in the ground operation.

16. These courses are all based on the assumption that the island of Walcheren would be too difficult to capture without securing beforehand the island of Zuid Beveland.

17. To permit the capture of Zuid Beveland, it is considered that a necessary preliminary is the securing by First Canadian Army of an area from which operations can be directed from the mainland along Zuid Beveland from the East. It is felt, therefore, that a firm base must be

secured in the area Roosendaal 7231, Antwerp 6895 and Bergen op Zoom 6027.

18. Each of the courses to be considered is based on constant efforts to neutralize the enemy's battery positions and to destroy his defences on the islands of Walcheren and Zuid Beveland by naval and ground artillery fire and by heavy and medium bombing together with attacks by RP and fighter bombers. The ground artillery, apart from the divisional artillery of the force working along Zuid Beveland from the east should be placed as soon as possible in suitable areas along the south side of the West Scheldt so that this artillery can continually carry on neutralization of the enemy's batteries as well as being able to support the advance of the troops from the east.

### *Course A*

19. To establish a firm base on the mainland to the east of Zuid Beveland, covering the landward thrust along the island from the east.

20. When the line of the Beveland Canal has been reached to carry out an airborne operation with one parachute brigade designed to disorganize the enemy and to secure the small harbour at Hoedekenskerke 3420.

21. Using this small harbour and by scrambling over the dykes themselves, to build up through the airborne bridgehead with water-borne troops from either the forces thrusting West along Zuid Beveland or troops held ready for this role on the mainland to the south of West Scheldt.

22. To gain control of the entire island of Zuid Beveland.

23. To carry out a second airborne operation with one parachute brigade designed to secure a bridgehead on the island of Walcheren covering the causeway between that island and Zuid Beveland.

24. To build up through this bridgehead, by using either or both the causeway and ferrying craft, with the forces already on Zuid Beveland.

25. To capture Middelburg 1430.

26. Finally, to clear the island of Walcheren by thrusts directed, on Flushing 1024 from the area of Middelburg, and on the other important defences in the North West end of the island in the vicinity of Domburg 0637.

### Advantages

(a) Prevents the enemy reinforcing the islands except by water-borne means.

(b) The capture of Zuid Beveland first provides a base from which operations against Walcheren can more easily take place.

(c) Disorganize the enemy's defences of Zuid Beveland by the first airborne dropping and prevents him holding the line of the Beveland Canal.

(d) By the use of a subsidiary water-borne force, exploitation of the airborne bridgehead in the vicinity of Hoedkenskerke can quickly take place.

(e) By the use of the second airborne landing a means is provided of obtaining a bridgehead on Walcheren Island permitting the use of the causeway connecting Zuid Beveland and Walcheren.

(f) Once Middelburg has been captured, it enables the defences of Walcheren to be defeated in detail.

#### Disadvantages

(a) If the two parachute brigades are used separately, full value of the concentrated effort of the airborne forces is NOT obtained.

(b) The small harbour of Hoedekenskerke may NOT permit the immediate landing of wheeled and tracked vehicles due to tidal conditions. In any event the harbour is quite small and the discharge of vehicles would be quite slow.

(c) The water-gap between Zuid Beveland and Walcheren south of the causeway is impassable to landing craft, although Weasels M29c might possible get across.

#### ***Course B***

27. Course B is the same as Course A with the exception that the airborne forces would be concentrated and used only for the task of securing a bridgehead on Walcheren Island in the vicinity of the causeway.

#### Advantages

(a) The advantages for this course are much the same as for Course A without that of assisting in the quick capture of Zuid Beveland.

(b) There is the added advantage that, by using the full airborne forces on the island of Walcheren, the development of operations to capture Walcheren, once the causeway has been reached, can progress more quickly.

### Disadvantages

(a) Disadvantages in regard to the harbour at Hoedekenskerke and the water-gap between Zuid Beveland and Walcheren are the same as for Course A.

(b) A further disadvantage is that by NOT using a part of the airborne forces to obtain a bridgehead in the vicinity of the small harbour at Hoedekenskerke, the water-borne operation becomes a water-borne assault.

### *Course C*

28. To establish a firm base on the mainland to the east of Zuid Beveland as in Course A.

29. To thrust west along Zuid Beveland to the Beveland Canal.

30. When the line of the Beveland Canal has been reached to launch a minor water-borne assault from across the West Scheldt to secure the small harbour at Hoedekenskerke with the object of turning the enemy's right flank.

31. To gain control of the entire island of Zuid Beveland.

32. To bring assault craft and amphibians through the Beveland Canal to the East Scheldt and by their use to secure with a small force a bridgehead on Noord Beveland.

33. To gain control of the entire island of Noord Beveland.

34. To use the full airborne forces available to secure a bridgehead on the island of Walcheren covering the causeway between that island and Zuid Beveland as well as any landing places from the causeway up to and including Veere 1735.

35. To develop this bridgehead by a build-up of forces over the causeway and through Veere by using naval, military and civilian craft.

36. To capture Middelburg and develop subsequent operations as suggested in Course A.

### Advantages

(a) Concentrate the airborne forces on the important task of gaining a bridgehead on the island of Walcheren.

(b) Gives us control of the inland waters between Zuid Beveland and Noord Beveland which appear to give a better approach by water to

Walcheren than across the mud flats to the south of the causeway. (This requires further study).

(c) The capture of Noord Beveland prevents the enemy reinforcing or withdrawing from Walcheren.

#### Disadvantages

(a) A water-borne assault across the West Scheldt, even of a minor nature, might prove difficult without the assistance of airborne troops.

(b) The small harbour at Hoedkenskerke may NOT permit the immediate landing of wheeled and tracked vehicles due to tidal conditions and may require preliminary work by engineers. In any event the harbour is quite small and the discharge of vehicles would be quite slow.

37. The problem should also be considered in the light of airborne forces NOT being available to us. Under these circumstances the following courses appear to be open.

#### *Course D*

38. To establish a base on the mainland to the east of Zuid Beveland from which a force to be directed to the west along Zuid Beveland.

39. As required to loosen the enemy's resistance, to conduct water-borne operations directed on the enemy's right flank mounted, as either "left-hook" operations by troops already on the island, or by troops held ready on the mainland to the south of the West Scheldt.

40. To clear completely Zuid Beveland.

41. To secure the causeway between Zuid Beveland and Walcheren by a frontal attack over the causeway assisted by an assault crossing of the water-gap south of the causeway.

42. To enlarge the bridgehead thus gained on Walcheren by the passage of troops over the causeway and by landing craft and amphibians.

43. To capture Middelburg.

44. From Middelburg to direct thrusts on Flushing and on the other important defences near the north west and south west coasts.

#### Advantages

(a) Prevents the enemy reinforcing the islands except by water-

borne means.

(b) The capture of Zuid Beveland provides a firm base from which operations against Walcheren can more easily take place.

(c) By the use of water-borne operations it keeps the enemy from stabilizing his position.

(d) Once Middelburg has been captured, it enables the defences of Walcheren to be defeated in detail.

### Disadvantages

(a) Few suitable harbours exist on the South shore of Zuid Beveland which are necessary to support initially a water-borne operation.

(b) The water-gap between Zuid Beveland and Walcheren south of the causeway is impassable to landing craft, although Weasels M29c might possibly get across.

### *Course E*

45. To capture Zuid Beveland as outlined in Course D.

46. By the use of landing craft and amphibians brought through the Beveland Canal to assault and secure Noord Beveland.

47. Combined with a frontal attack along the causeway between Zuid Beveland and Walcheren, to launch a water-borne attack on Walcheren from Noord Beveland – this is to be directed on the small harbours between the causeway and Veere.

48. Once bridgeheads have been established, to capture Middelburg.

49. Finally to secure Walcheren completely as suggested in Course D.

### Advantages

(a) The same advantages apply as for Course D in respect of the securing of Zuid Beveland.

(b) Gives us control of the island waters between Zuid Beveland, Noord Beveland and Walcheren which appear to give a better approach by water to Walcheren than across the mud flats to the south of the causeway. (This requires further study).

(c) To capture of Noord Beveland prevents the enemy reinforcing or withdrawing from Walcheren.

## Disadvantages

- (a) The same disadvantages apply as for Course D in respect to the securing of Zuid Beveland.
- (b) It would be difficult to provide supporting artillery fire for the assault crossing mounted from Noord Beveland.

## **Conclusions**

50. If airborne forces are available, Course A appears to be the most suitable course to adopt and if airborne forces are NOT available Course D appears to offer the least difficulties.

51. It must be emphasized that whatever course is adopted should provide for the possibility of the enemy defences on Zuid Beveland and Walcheren being easily pierced after air attacks and heavy bombardment, and therefore a subsidiary force, from either the division being directed landwards to the west along Zuid Beveland, or from another formation available on the mainland to the south of the West Scheldt, should be available with the necessary naval, military and civilian craft and amphibians to make an assault landing in the vicinity of suitable ferry sites. In other words the plan should be flexible in order to take advantage quickly of enemy weakness by an assault crossing of the West Scheldt combined possibly with an airborne landing.

52. The necessary naval, military and civilian crafts, with amphibians, should be positioned at least in the Scheldt below Antwerp from where they could be quickly used to take advantage of an opportunity as suggested in paragraph 51.

53. Airborne forces are considered to be a most important adjunct to this operation and a strong representation should be made to have them available.

54. Air attacks by Bomber Command and by resources within 2 TAF on the enemy's batteries and defences should take place as soon as possible and should continue until the ground forces are able to complete the capture of the islands.

55. As soon as the enemy has been cleared from the south shore of the West Scheldt, all available artillery resources for this operation, apart from the artillery of the division to whom is allotted the task of capturing these islands, should be positioned to commence the neutralization of the

enemy's batteries.

56. The use of deception should be considered with the object of misleading the enemy into expecting a sea-borne assault either on the north west or south west coasts of Walcheren.

TOP SECRET

Source: LAC RG 24, Vol. 10,799.

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GOC 8  
Main Headquarters  
2nd Canadian Corps

21 September, 1944

TO: GOC-in-C, First Cdn Army

- 1. I have carefully studied the appreciation drawn up by the Plans Section at HQ First Cdn Army dealing with Operation "INFATUATE". I have the following comments to make and would request that they receive careful consideration in the formulation of plans.*
- 2. As I understand it, the object of the operation is NOT "to capture the islands of 'WALCHEREN and SUID BEVELAND' but "to destroy, neutralize or capture enemy defences which deny to us free passage through the WEST SCHELDT to the port of Antwerp".*
- 3. The Appreciation begins with the assumption that we hold the whole of the SOUTH bank of the SCHELDT. At the present time the enemy is strongly posted along the line of the LEOPOLD CANAL from about HAVEN 1804 to HEYST 8614. With the exception of a few dyked roads, the areas between HAVEN and 0102 and between OSSTKERK 9006 and HEYST are inundated. The gap between these inundations is the only approach to enemy positions NORTH of the LEOPOLD CANAL and most of this gap is covered by the dual courses of the LEOPOLD and LYS CANALS – a most difficult obstacle. It is within the enemy's power to increase the inundations or, indeed, except for the dune area along the NW coast, to "sink" the whole of the area between LEOPOLD CANAL and the SCHELDT. The clearing of this area may be a major operation and barring the fact that it will deny to the enemy the employment of his guns around KNOCKE 9015, it may be so saturated that it would be*

useless to us for gun positions from which the WALCHEREN defences may be commanded.

4. In most military appreciations the ground is the one constant on which firm conclusions can be based. This is not the case in the particular problem under consideration. A German document in our possession makes it clear that the conditions most advantageous to the defence and most disadvantageous to us are those of "ground saturation". This to us the use of the ground for movement to exactly the same extent as if it was completely flooded but allows the enemy the use of his roads, avoids the flooding of buildings, stores and many works which might be of importance to him. Attacking across a "saturated" area, movement is possible only on top of dyked roads. We sacrifice every advantage which we normally possess in the offensive. The defensive fire power can all be concentrated on narrow approaches. Mines and obstacles are most effective. With room to deploy on a "dry belt" behind a saturated area, the enemy can concentrate their fire while keeping their dispositions well concealed and well dispersed. The land approach via SUID BEVELAND appears attractive but it may well turn out to be an approach down a single stretch of road some five miles in length, bordered by impassable ground on either side. It would be equivalent to an assault landing on a "one craft front" on a coast where it was only possible to breach one craft at a single pre-known point on which the whole fire power of the defences could be concentrated. I consider that the project of an assault across water cannot be ruled out if WALCHEREN ISLAND must be taken. It may be the only way of taking it. Though it would be a last resort and a most uninviting task, I consider it would be quite wrong to make no preparations for it, and to be faced at some later time with the necessity of having to improvise at very short notice. I am strongly of the opinion that the necessary military and naval forces should now be earmarked, married up and trained against the contingency that they might be required.

5. The flooding of WALCHEREN ISLAND to the greatest possible extent would not affect the difficulties of operation of airborne troops. Intelligence sources state that thoroughly saturated ground is impassable to infantry and therefore is equivalent to flooding from the point of view of landing airborne infantry upon it.

6. I consider that the technique for the capture of WALCHEREN ISLAND should be as follows:

(a) *Bombing operations should be undertaken to break the dykes and completely flood all parts of the island below high water level.*

(b) *Those parts of the island which remain above water should then be systematically attacked by heavy air bombardment, day and night, to destroy defences and weed out the garrison by attrition. RDF stations should have an early priority as "point" targets.*

(c) *Whenever possible, heavy bombers proceeding to or from targets in Western Germany by day or night should be routed over WALCHEREN so that the garrison can never tell whether the approach of large numbers of aircraft indicates attack or not. This combined with heavy bombing attacks will drive the enemy to cover on approach of large aircraft formations and will help to "cover" an eventual airborne landing.*

(d) *When it is considered that the morale of the garrison has sufficiently deteriorated, water-borne patrols may be sent to determine the situation.*

(e) *If found to be ripe, airborne, followed by water-borne, troops should be landed immediately following a bomber raid (when defenders have been driven to ground) and mop up and take the surrender.*

7. *It is my opinion that the Plans Section appreciation is based upon too many hypothetical considerations which may differ very considerably from actualities – and, in fact, according to latest intelligence, already do in respect to "saturated" areas on SUID BEVELAND. In view of the forthcoming conference on the 23rd September, 1944, I would like to put forward the following for consideration as the basis for future planning.*

(a) *2 Cdn Inf Div to push Northward to cut off SUID BEVELAND and exploit the land approach along SUID BEVELAND as far as practicable.*

(b) *4 Cdn Armd Div to continue its operations to clear the area NORTH of the LEOPOLD CANAL up to the WEST SCHELDT until 3 Cdn Inf Div is available to relieve it. This is a highly unsuitable task for an armoured division but I have nothing else available within the present constitution and tasks of 2nd Cdn Corps.*

(c) *As soon as 3 Cdn Inf Div can be released from BOULOGNE-CALAIS area, this division less one infantry brigade will relieve 4 Cdn Armd Div and complete the clearing of the area NORTH of LEOPOLD CANAL if this has not been completed by that time.*

(d) *One infantry brigade of 3 Cdn Inf Div to be earmarked with necessary Naval counterpart to train at OSTEND for seaborne operations against WALCHEREN.*

(e) *Airborne forces earmarked for this operation, to study and train for landings on those parts of WALCHEREN ISLAND which cannot be "sunk" by flooding.*

(f) *Bombing –*

(i) *To break dykes and flood WALCHEREN ISLAND.*

(ii) *Destroy defences and break morale of defenders of "unsinkable" portions of the island, be instituted forthwith.*

*(G.G. Simonds)  
Lieut-General  
GOC 2nd Canadian Corps*

Source: LAC RG 24, Vol. 10,799.

Headquarters,  
2nd Canadian Corps

1 January, 1945

To: GOC-in-C  
First Cdn Army

*Operation "INFATUATE"*

1. I return herewith the official report of the ANCXF on Operation "INFATUATE".

2. In commenting upon the report, I wish to state at the outset that I consider the decision made by the joint commanders of the assaulting forces at WESTKAPELLE was a courageous and correct one. Based upon the assumption that air support would be possible at "H" hour, my original instructions to the force commanders were that, once the expedition had been ordered to sail, they would assault unless sea conditions made the lowering of craft impracticable. On the evening of "D-1" the forecast indicated that the weather, though satisfactory from the naval standpoint, was unlikely to be suitable for air support at the time fixed for the landing. I therefore, in agreement with ANCXF, sent an instruction to the force commanders informing them that air support might not be possible and leaving the final decision to assault to be made by them in light of conditions on the spot. As soon as the early morning forecast came to my hands, I sent a further message stating that air support at the predetermined "H" hour was most unlikely. Throughout planning and development of the operation I had personally impressed upon all commanders the vital importance of pressing to a conclusion the operations for clearing the SCHELDT, that risks must be accepted to achieve early success, and the all-around advantages which would accrue from simultaneous assaults at the BEVELAND causeway at FLUSHING, and at WESTKAPELLE. I consider that their decision was right and that the losses involved were justifiable because of the importance of the operations. If the losses be considered unduly heavy, the responsibility is mine in view of the orders which I issued to the joint commanders, but I consider the credit for what I believe was a courageous and right decision, and for the determination with which the assault was carried through to a most successful conclusion, belongs to them.

3. It is on paragraphs 3 and 4 that I particularly wish to comment.

4. Paragraph 3 of ANCXF Report:

*The complications in planning arose from the fact that "INFATUATE" was a subsidiary part of a much larger Army operation with which it had to be timed and co-ordinated. The number of army commanders with whom Commander Force "T" had to deal arose directly from the fact that in operational matters he worked back through naval channels of command which were not represented by an officer empowered to make decisions at the corresponding army headquarters. In my opinion, in such circumstances, the naval force required should have been placed directly under the command of the army with the right of access to higher naval authorities in technical naval matters. When, as in the case of "INFATUATE", a combined operation is to be undertaken as a subsidiary part of other large scale operations on land, when its mounting and launching will be dependent upon, and must be synchronized with, the development of those operations, then once the operation has been decided upon at the higher level, the combined forces detailed for its execution should come under command of the military commander responsible for the operations as a whole. The following points must be decided at the highest level:-*

- (a) That the operation is desirable, taking all factors into consideration.*
- (b) That it is practicable.*
- (c) That adequate naval forces are available.*
- (d) Naval limitations regarding its mounting and launching.*
- (e) Nomination of the naval forces and their commander and agreement in outline for combined training and planning.*

*Once the above points have been settled, the naval commander working with the military force commander should take his directions solely from the army commander responsible for the whole operation.*

*It is true that training the naval force in England increased the difficulties of detailed planning at the lower levels since army and naval commanders were not able to work together from the outset. This was a condition imposed by naval considerations*

*affecting the use of OSTENDE as a training port and one only accepted by the army on naval representation that training from a continental base was impracticable.*

5. Paragraph 4 of ANCXF Report:

*Though no joint plan was submitted in writing to the Supreme Allied Command, I do not accept the statement that “No proper joint plan was ever produced”. A joint naval and army plan, based upon the tasks and outline which had been given to them, was produced by the force commanders responsible for the execution of the operation. In my opinion this is a correct procedure.*

*From the outset it, it was made clear to the two force commanders that the plan must be flexible. Its final form depended upon the success of the attempt to breach the dykes, the extent of flooding and enemy reactions to the attacks in the Breskens bridgehead and South Beveland. It is my opinion that a tendency has grown up to make combined planning too rigid and inflexible. As a result of early failures because of no proper combined plan we now veer to the other extreme and attempt to legislate in detail for events which will depend upon the sway of battle. Three other amphibious assaults were mounted during the Scheldt operation (crossing the Savojaards Plaat, the assault on South Beveland and the assault on Flushing). All three were mounted at short notice and all three were most successful because they were timed with the “run of the battle.” Had the “full dress” procedure been adopted they could never have been mounted in time to take advantage of favourable situations.*

*In regard to the question of air support, though the army acted as the co-ordinators for the pre-“D” Day programme, this programme was merely a collated list of targets required to be engaged by the navy, the army and the RAF. The programme was compiled as a result of submissions of all three Services at joint conferences. It was modified as a result of the success of the dyke cutting and flooding operations (this principally affected the flak targets which the RAF had submitted for engagement). The Commander, Naval Force “T”, was kept fully informed of the programme and any amendments made to it and of the engagement of targets by Bomber Command. There was a RAF*

*representative at the joint force headquarters available to represent any specific requirements of Force "T" in respect to target engagements. I would point out that in principle, this procedure was exactly the same as that followed in the case of the air support for the landing of 1st Cdn Inf Div in Sicily. Admiral Vian and myself, through the attached air adviser, submitted our requirements, but the allocation of air effort was determined at the highest level, and what we wished had to be balanced against the air forces available and what were considered to be the most vital targets.*

*6. The difficulties of the assaulting forces at WESTKAPELLE arose from the fact that the pre-"D" Day air effort against certain targets failed to produce the desired effect, and the assault went in without air support or spotting aircraft to control the fire of bombarding ships. The disappointing results of the pre-"D" Day bombing attacks were NOT the result of faulty joint planning. Before the operation there was never any suggestion that the pre-"D" Day target programme as co-ordinated at HQ First Cdn Army would not meet naval requirements. It is only the effect which seems to be in question. The RAF representatives have insisted throughout all discussions on questions of air support that they alone are the judges of the number and type of aircraft and the weight and type of bomb required to produce a given effect on a specified target. I have not agreed and do not now agree that the RAF should be the sole judges in this matter. Very often the troops who subsequently assault an objective are in a far better position to judge the effect of a prior air bombardment than are the RAF who deliver the bombs. Though accurate assessment of physical damage can usually be made from air photography, by far the most important effect, i.e., weakening of the morale of the enemy, is better assessed by the troops who have to deal with them.*

*7. It is not possible at an Army level to judge what were the conflicting demands for the available strategic bombing effort at the time of the WALCHEREN operations, nor the over-all priorities. I assume that the general air situation was such that the effort against the WALCHEREN batteries represented a maximum, taking all vital commitments into consideration. When I agreed to a short intensive "softening" instead of a prolonged systematic bombardment of the batteries, I was assured by the C of S, 21 Army Group, that the tasks would be first priority targets for Bomber Command.*

8. *It is obvious that the bombing effort placed on the various batteries covering the approaches of WESTKAPELLE failed to achieve the expected and desired result. I question the argument that at best the air can only neutralize and cannot destroy and therefore no better result would have been obtained by a greater force prior to "D" Day. The principle batteries concerned were in open casemates and a study of the bombing pattern and accuracy of the MPI on targets where the dykes were cut clearly indicate that had a similar effort been placed on each battery, extensive if not complete destruction would have resulted. The damage done has a direct effect on enemy morale as detachments will be less inclined to leave their bunkers and man equipments in a position that has suffered heavy damage.*

9. *It was unfortunate that the weather on the morning of 1 November, 1944, did not permit the employment of spotting or tactical support aircraft at the time of the assault. The forecast indicated this would be the condition and the risks were quite clear to me when, in agreement with Admiral Ramsey, we ordered the operation to proceed. The fact is that when, during planning, weather probabilities were examined, there were some six days in the year on which the weather conditions would meet the requirements of all three services as originally stated, and these might occur in May and June. The operations to clear the SCHELDT had to be carried out in the season of October – November and it was clear to me from the outset that I would have to be prepared to accept conditions very much less than the ideal. Had I not proceeded with the operation because of the adverse conditions from the point of view of the air, in the following days the conditions would have been impossible from the naval point of view. In fact, I consider that Providence was more than good to us in the weather which we were given on "D" Day, in that it was good from the naval stand point and, at the most critical stage, it cleared sufficiently to fly tactical support aircraft.*

10. *It would be my wish that the operations could have succeeded with much lighter naval casualties, but to keep things in their right perspective, I must point out that these were a mere fraction of the casualties suffered by the army formations involved in the operations for clearing the SCHELDT Estuary and that the 2nd Cdn Inf Div suffered heavier casualties in their initial assault across the BEVELAND causeway than either of the assaulting forces at FLUSHING and WESTKAPELLE.*

11. *It was impressed upon me by the C-in-C, 21 Army Group, that the early clearance of the SCHELDT Estuary and opening of the Port of*

*ANTWERP was of such vital importance that risks must be accepted to effect quick results. It is true that the casualties to the WESTKAPELLE assaulting force might have been less had the bomber effort on the coast defence batteries on WALCHEREN been greater, but this must be balanced against the over-all priorities and employment of the strategic air forces at that time. The allied war effort as a whole may have been better served by the employment elsewhere of the additional heavy bomber effort which would have made the difference. As I have already explained, I was not then, and I am not now, in a position to make such an assessment. That the bombing attacks failed to produce the desired effect against the batteries at WALCHEREN must be evident to the RAF and to Bomber Command. In the interests of inter-Service relations, I do not think any useful purpose would be served by the army making critical representations at this time. We can learn our lesson without that, and I think that in the future the RAF must be more ready to accept the army's views as to the weight of effort required on various targets. We now have a much accumulated experience on which to base assessment of probable results.*

*(G.G. Simonds),  
Lieut-General,  
GOC 2nd Canadian Corps.*

Source: Montgomery Papers, Imperial War Museum.



## CHAPTER 5

# Battle Exhaustion and Morale

By the summer of 1944 the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps had developed a systematic approach to the problem of battle exhaustion, the term used in the British and Canadian armies for stress-related psychiatric casualties. The Canadian psychiatrists initially tried to work within the standing orders issued by 21 Army Group, which emphasized the role of the Regimental Medical Officer, but experience in Italy led to the appointment of a divisional psychiatrist for 3rd Division, an innovation accepted by the staff of I British Corps. No such appointment was made for either 2nd or 4th Canadian divisions, as Corps headquarters insisted on a standard British model with psychiatrists located at a Corps Exhaustion Unit. No “psychiatry” was permitted during the training phase. It is not possible to determine whether Simonds played any role in determining this policy, which was implemented by the senior medical officer at Corps Headquarters.

Dr. Robert Gregory<sup>1</sup> took up his position with 3rd Division in March 1944 and immediately began a program of talks to regimental medical officers (RMOs), outlining a procedure wherein all but the “mildest” exhaustion cases would be sent to a specially designated Field Ambulance. Only the divisional psychiatrist would be authorized to evacuate men beyond that level. Gregory wanted medical officers in each Field Ambulance to be “trained in the ordinary mechanical end of treatment” and urged that “courses for two officers from each Field Ambulance be arranged with the American Army hospital of Psychiatry at the earliest possible time.”<sup>2</sup> The Division’s senior medical officer, ADMS Colonel M.C. Watson, endorsed Gregory’s work, and in April space was found for the Canadian doctors at the American school. Gregory attended the sessions and reported: “The course includes... the outline of treatment of combat exhaustion in its different forms and actual demonstrations of how the cases should be handled. It was suggested that, insofar as possible, the exhaustion cases should be kept separate from the

wounded principally for reasons of morale. The three MOs, one from each Field Ambulance in the division, were extremely pleased and interested. They will be expected to act as aids to the Divisional Psychiatrist should conditions be such that treatment may be established at the Field Ambulance level. If treatment of the cases is further back they will be expected to check all exhaustion cases for proper sedation... so that in evacuation they will be quiet and not upset the morale of the others.”<sup>3</sup>

Gregory also noted that copies of the American guidelines on exhaustion had been obtained and would be used in the talks that the RMOs were to give to the officers and NCOs of their units. “These are men who will be in direct contact with the soldiers in the fighting and will be the ones who have the best chance of observing early symptoms. If the prodromal symptoms can be recognized by these it may be possible to get the exhaustion cases early enough to treat them within unit lines and avoid having them ‘crack’.”<sup>4</sup>

Preparations for forward treatment of battle exhaustion occurred in conjunction with a screening of the division. Gregory had read psychiatric reports from the Mediterranean and was quite willing to assist units in getting rid of neurotics and “inadequates” who were “apt to give trouble in action,”<sup>5</sup> but during a three-month period in which all units were carefully “weeded” only 127 men were removed on psychiatric grounds. Gregory was more concerned about the reinforcement units that would supply the division where “there is much to be desired in the training of replacements and the keeping up of their morale.”<sup>6</sup> The 3rd Division as a whole, Gregory reported, was in fine shape. “The general morale throughout the division is excellent. The troops are relaxed and in the highest spirits. Some of the officers and practically all other ranks feel that our troops will go twenty-five miles in one day, that they have the fire power, the naval support and air superiority. There seems to be no talk of hazard.”<sup>7</sup>

Experience in other campaigns had suggested that battle exhaustion would be quite low in the initial days of fighting.<sup>8</sup> Psychiatrists had been forced to note this fact, but they had great difficulty in explaining it. The most common assumption about battle exhaustion – predisposition – provided little insight into this situation. Some psychiatrists suggested that soldiers with a poor history were able to keep their anxiety under control for a short time through an effort of will. A rise in exhaustion casualties, they assumed, would begin after such individuals had been exposed to a longer period of stress.<sup>9</sup>

The initial bridgehead battles were over by 11 June. The British-Canadian forces spend the next two weeks holding the perimeter under continuous shelling and mortaring. Offensive operations were confined to relatively minor probing

attacks designed to hold the Germans on the eastern flank. Battle exhaustion casualties remained well below the percentages reported in Italy. On the American front, where the priority was assigned to the capture of Cherbourg, requiring continuous attacks, exhaustion ratios were similarly about half the number indicated by the experience of heavy fighting in Italy.<sup>10</sup> Differences in diagnosis and reporting made all these psychiatric numbers doubtful, but everyone in the bridgehead agreed with Major D.J. Watterson, the 2nd British Army's psychiatrist, when on 24 June he described the "ratio of exhaustion as lower than expected, probably 10 percent or a little more."<sup>11</sup> (In Northwest Europe the terms NP ratio or exhaustion ratio expressed the relationship between psychiatric casualties and all *non-fatal* casualties, including psychiatric ones). Watterson reported that the initial psychiatric casualties included large numbers of men who were "unfit for front line duty" and who had been weeded out by "a process of natural selection." This fact, as well as the high rate of breakdown among "unit residues"<sup>12</sup> (those brought over from other units as immediate reinforcements), would, he believed, begin to diminish in importance leaving only the true battle exhaustion cases for psychiatrists to deal with.

True battle exhaustion cases, according to Watterson, were those men of normal personality who broke down when their personal morale failed. This, he maintained, was usually the result of a collapse in unit morale. He noted that the importance of good leadership in limiting psychiatric casualties "had been brought out clearly again and again" during the June battles. The cause of a rise in the NP rate, he wrote, could only be understood in the context of the battalion: "Is the unit well led? Are its welfare needs attended to? Is the post coming up to scratch? Do the men know the latest German weapons? Does the unit need resting?"<sup>13</sup> These and other similar questions had to be answered if battle exhaustion was to be understood.

Canadian medical officers agreed with Watterson. Gregory was confident that everything was under control. He reported that the low incidence of exhaustion in the 3rd Canadian Division was evidence of the successful "weeding" of the division, while the 200-odd breakdowns were proof "that a division cannot be completely weeded." He added that "the numbers and percentage of NP casualties bears no relation to the daily total casualties but bears the usual relation to the conditions of the troops (fatigue etc.), the tactical situation and the stiffness of resistance, e.g. the greatest number of NP casualties occurred when the troops were very tired, very static, dug-in and under heavy counterattack. Fully 80 per cent of the NP casualties complained bitterly of mortar fire and 88 mm artillery."<sup>14</sup>

On 24 June General Montgomery launched the first of a series of major

offensive operations designed to capture the City of Caen and break out into the open country to the south. By mid-July the small infantry component of 21 Army Group, less than 15 per cent of the total manpower in the bridgehead, had suffered enormous casualties. On average one in every four of these casualties was due to battle exhaustion.<sup>15</sup> On the western flank, the United States Army, pressing towards St. Lô, in the difficult *bocage* country, was experiencing even heavier total casualties with a similar NP rate.<sup>16</sup> In retrospect it is possible to argue that the battles of late June and July wore down the German defenders and precipitated a major collapse of enemy morale, but this was not apparent to anyone at the time. During July the Allied armies were too concerned about their own crisis to wonder about the enemy's problems.

The Canadians were especially concerned with the immediate impact of battle exhaustion on 2nd Division. The division had entered the "line" on 11 July. Under continuous mortaring it had immediately begun to suffer relatively large numbers of exhaustion cases, which in the absence of any divisional centre were evacuated to the Corps Exhaustion Unit. The CEU War Diary for the period includes the following entries:

**13 July 1944:** The first twelve patients arrived at 1200 hours. The majority of these were from RRC (Royal Regiment of Canada) which had been in action two days... Histories were taken, each man was given three grains of Sodium Amytal and put to bed.

**14 July 1944:** Forty-one patients were admitted today. About 15 of these are cases which have been out of the line for about a week... cases seen yesterday and today have shown chiefly anxiety symptoms... the precipitation factor in most cases is said to be blast – mortar more frequently than shell.

**15 July 1944:** Twenty-six patients were admitted today and with a top accommodation of 110 beds, it is apparent that our plan of two days sedation and three days rehabilitation will not be practicable... As we are now discharging patients, psychotherapeutic talks to groups about to be discharged have now been instituted. These consist of simple explanations of psychogenic symptoms "exhaustion versus shell shock" etc... Many of the men understand the mechanism of their trouble alright, and most are ready to admit that the origin is emotional rather than physical but many are without any incentive to carry on further.

**16 July 1944:** Twenty-three patients have been admitted today and our bed strength is now eighty-four.

**17 July 1944:** Hope of adequate and rehabilitation will have to be abandoned... The treatment cases are without pyjamas and the convalescents have to wear their dirty and tattered clothes.

**18 July 1944:** We were awakened this morning by a terrific roar of gunfire... rumour is that "This is it" and that the show should soon be over. So far our admissions have not exceeded the usual level: about twenty-two today... We face a serious shortage of sedative.<sup>17</sup>

One hundred and sixty patients, the large majority from the 2nd Division, had been evacuated to the Canadian Exhaustion Unit (CEU) in a six-day period preceding the division's first major battle. These numbers seriously taxed its resources. This was not a very good beginning and did not fit with preconceptions about how and when exhaustion cases would occur.

There is no record of Simonds' involvement in debates about battle exhaustion in Italy, which did not begin to become a problem until after his departure. Crerar, who had overall responsibility for the medical services and contact with the Advisor-in-Psychiatry, Colonel F.H. Van Nostrand, provided Simonds with some policy guidance in a letter dated 15 July 1944 and on 30 July Simonds issued a directive "To All Formation Commanders, 2nd Canadian Corps" which spelled out his ideas on command responsibility when opportunities occurred to withdraw units for short periods of rest. (Both documents are reproduced below).

Simonds did not address the specific problem of battle exhaustion, a medical diagnosis, until 29 August when he was deeply concerned by "the deficiencies in unit establishment" which were not the result of battle casualties. (The document is reproduced below.) After August 1944 both Crerar and Simonds left the problem of psychiatric casualties to the responsible medical officers. They seemed to have accepted the inevitability of a significant number of such casualties and were now confident that Canadian army psychiatrists were dealing with the problem effectively. Simonds focused his attention on the problems encountered in integrating reinforcements into combat units and issued detailed instructions on this matter in late October 1944. (This document is reproduced at the end of this chapter.)

## ENDNOTES

1. Dr. Robert Gregory, a native of Saint John, New Brunswick, received his MD at McGill in 1931. He worked for the New Brunswick Provincial Hospital prior to enlistment in 1939. He joined the neuropsychiatric branch in the expansion of 1941. He is remembered as a colourful character who wore a leather aviator's jacket and was frequently seen with a rifle over his shoulder. Obituary, CMAJ (Dec. 1976), and Richardson, McNeel, Burch, interviews. Terry Copp and Bill McAndrew, *Battle Exhaustion*.
2. "Psychiatrist Report," HQ 3 Cdn. Inf. Div., 18 March 1944, War Diary appendices ADMS 3 Canadian Infantry Division, LAC, RG 24, Vol. 15,611.
3. *Ibid.*, 17 May 1944.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, 8 April 1944.
6. *Ibid.*, 17 May 1944.
7. *Ibid.*
8. A.J. Glass, (ed.), *Overseas Theatres*, vol. 2, Neuropsychiatry in World War II (Washington: Office of the Surgeon General, 1973), p. 279. First United States Army reported no psychiatric casualties on D-Day; 4 on D-Day + 1; 47 on D-Day +4; *Ibid.*, p. 280. British and Canadian figures were similar.
9. See R.R. Grinker and J.P. Spiegel, *War Neuroses in North Africa: The Tunisian Campaign (Jan. – May 1943)* (New York: Josiah Macey Jr. Foundation, 1943), p. 29ff for an elaboration of this view.
10. "Weekly Report by Psychiatrist Second Army for week ending June 24th," War Diary, DDMS Second (BR.) Army, PRO WO 177/321. U.S. casualties were higher than the British-Canadian figures as a result of offensive operations to capture Cherbourg, but the battle exhaustion casualties were similar, about 11 per cent of all non-fatal casualties. Glass, *Overseas Theatres*, p. 293.
11. "Weekly Report by Psychiatrist attached to Second Army for week ending Sat. 24 June, 1944," PRO WO 177/321.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*
14. Gregory, "Report, 27 June 1944."

15. Monthly Report, "Psychiatrist attached to Second Army July 1944," PRO WO 177/321.
16. Glass, *Overseas Theatres*, p. 292.
17. War Diary, 1 Canadian Exhaustion Unit, LAC, RG 24, Vol. 15,569.

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*PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL*  
*GOC-in-C 6-10-1*  
*Tac HQ First Cdn Army*

*15 Jul 44*

*Dear Guy:*

*While I have talked with you on the subject of "exhaustion neurosis" both real and artificial, it might be desirable if you had, for your reference, a copy of the remarks I made to Burns last March, when I handed over to him command of 1 Cdn Corps. Here is the extract from my letter to him:*

*"The next matter, which we have discussed on previous occasions, has several angles to it, but each is part of the one general problem. That general problem concerns the natural but, in the circumstances of war, reprehensible objection of a small proportion of other ranks of 1 Cdn Corps to risk death, or serious injury, for their country. The "angles" include such things as desertion, self-inflicted wounds, attempts to be diagnosed as "exhaustion cases", VD re-infection and so on.*

*To my mind, this problem requires to be tackled in three ways. First of all, the processes of disciplinary action should be tightened up and speeded up. Secondly, punishment should be as severe as the circumstances permit. Thirdly, by "education," all ranks should be brought increasingly to the view that "escapism" is a shameful thing.*

*My observation indicates that there is a general tendency amongst forward units and formations to take the easy way out of this difficult problem. If a man shows himself to be unreliable under fire, he is left behind in the case of a fighting patrol and left out of battle in the case of a unit action. While this tendency may ease the problem of the moment, it*

*offers no solution to it, indeed, it tends to add to it as every week goes by. It follows that sub-unit and unit Commanders must, somehow, all be persuaded to abandon this "can't depend on the man so leave him behind" attitude.*

*The "exhaustion neurosis" problem also requires your attention. Undoubtedly, a pretty high proportion of the cases which get back to the General Hospital are real nervous breakdowns on the part of the unstable mental characters. On the other hand, as it is not considered any disgrace to be an "exhaustion case" it is becoming increasingly tempting to "lead-swingers" and others, whose hearts are not in the war, to seek this way out. While, therefore, the real "shell-shock" must be regarded and treated as a casualty, I consider it very important that the mesh of the administrative sieve should be so close that the fake exhaustion case should be detected and held within your jurisdiction, should be suitably punished and not allowed to get away with it."*

*Yours ever,*

*(Sgd) H.D.G. Crerar*

Source: LAC RG 24, Vol. 10,799.

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*58-1/SD  
Main Headquarters  
2nd Canadian Corps*

*30 July, 1944*

*To All Formation Commanders 2nd Canadian Corps*

*1. Occasionally it may be possible to withdraw formations or units from contact for short periods of rest. In the present stage of the war in general and the campaign in Normandy in particular, I cannot guarantee how long or how frequent such periods of rest may be. When opportunities occur, it is of great importance that troops should derive the utmost benefit from periods out of contact and the following notes are intended for guidance of commanders and commanding officers.*

*2. During the rest periods there are three objectives which must be*

attained:-

(a) Enhance Morale – During periods of close contact the standards of personal cleanliness, feeding and physical well-being tend to deteriorate. Troops also tend to contract a mental inertia. The combination of danger, monotony and poor living conditions during less active periods in close contact can have a deleterious effect on fighting spirit. The primary object of all measures must be to restore to the highest possible level, physical and mental well being and alertness.

(b) Re-Organization, Proper Absorption of Reinforcement Personnel – When strengths of units include a high proportion of reinforcements, sub-units lack esprit-de-corps and there is a loss of the cohesion characteristic of a well-drilled battle team. The re-posting of officers, new NCOs and specialists and re-organization of battle teams can best be done when troops are free to re-train.

(c) Training – The re-training and welding of sub-units into battle teams. Through analysis, study and absorption of the lessons learned from operations and the exchange of ideas between officers and NCOs. Study of problems in connection with probable future operations.

### **Enhancing Morale**

3. “Rest” will not be interpreted as leaving the soldier to himself to do nothing or as a time for relaxing of discipline and indulgence in licence. Actually it is the strain of being under fire in forward areas and the drain on physical strength without having enough to fully occupy the soldier’s mind, from which the troops suffer the most during long but comparatively inactive periods of contact. The following measures will be included during rest periods:-

(a) The first twenty-four hours out of the line, the soldier should be left to himself to write his letters, sort out his kit, get himself clean and have a really good sleep.

(b) After the first twenty-four hours a proper daily routine must be instituted which will fill the soldier’s day. Firstly, meticulous attention will be given to the details of discipline – correctness and cleanliness of turn-out, saluting, general smartening up and physical training. Remember the golden rule for the

*disciplinarian “Look after the little things and the big things will look after themselves”.*

*(c) Officers and Sgts Messes should be re-formed on a regimental basis; when reinforcement officers and new NCOs have been absorbed, tremendous value is obtained from contacts in regimental messes.*

*(d) Each day commanding officers should have all their officers together for an hour and advantage should be taken of this time to pass down through the unit the regimental outlook and spirit which the commanding officer wishes to be carried throughout the battle. Tactical discussions and TEWTs should also be included in this period.*

*(e) For at least one hour every day platoon and equivalent commanders should be able to have all their men together for an instruction on such matters as discipline, care of weapons, regimental customs, traditions; the progress of the war; the war in the air and how the RAF has assisted operations on the ground; the part the division has played in its operations; where and how the sub-unit plays its part in the war effort as a whole; the relation of the soldier to the civilian population of occupied countries and the importance of proper conduct in relation to the local inhabitants. All of these subjects should be taught at the platoon level and instruction of this type is one of the best opportunities offered to the platoon commander to “sell himself” to his men.*

*(f) Organized games and sports are of tremendous value and all should be able to participate in these.*

*(g) Properly organized sight-seeing parties in charge of an officer may be taken on conducted tours of places of interest, but individual officers or soldiers will NOT be permitted “on pass” in local towns. Much value can be derived by “exchange visits” between units to places where actions have taken place, an officer who took part describing the battle and conducting the tour. Entertainment will be arranged within units – concerts should be organized, bands will be available and the facilities of the Auxiliary Services. Properly organized unit canteens may be instituted when this is practicable. Drinking by soldiers in their bivouac lines will not be countenanced. This requires careful checking when stocks of*

*local wines are easily obtainable.*

*(h) As far as operational requirements permit, individuals or small groups should arrange exchange visits between Allied Regiments of the British Army or Visits to the Royal Navy or Royal Air Force.*

### **Training**

*4. Training should be concentrated on the section, platoon and company level. These are the sub-units which suffer most by dilution as a result of wastage. Battle teams must be re-organized, trained and re-built on the nucleus of experienced personnel. Particular attention must be given to the care and handling of weapons.*

*Training with the troops should not be attempted above the unit level, and only above the company even when time permits, but each Headquarters should set its house in order as a result of its battle experiences. Formations should organize officers' discussions on the lessons learned during operations and pool their knowledge and experience for the benefit of all.*

*5. When troops can be collected together, I wish to visit them myself and have an opportunity personally to congratulate them and show them how their achievements have played their part in the bigger strategical conceptions of the present campaign.*

*(Sgd.) G.G. Simonds, Lieut-General  
GOC 2nd Canadian Corps*

Source: LAC RG 24, Vol. 10,799.

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

*Main Headquarters  
2nd Canadian Corps*

*29 August, 1944*

*Maj-Gen. C. Foulkes, CBE, GOC, 2 Cdn Inf Div*

*Maj-Gen D.C. Spry, DSO, GOC 3 Cdn Inf Div*

*Maj-Gen H.W. Foster, GOC 4 Cd Armd Div*

FIGHTING STRENGTHS

- 1. I have checked the figures of our deficiencies in unit establishments with the figures for battle casualties and there is a marked discrepancy between the two.*
- 2. Records show that this discrepancy is not attributable to sickness, which is low throughout the Corps. It may be attributable to the following causes, and I consider that this matter must receive the personal attention of all commanders and commanding officers:*

*(a) Battle Exhaustion*

*Medical officers may be inclined to take a lenient view of so termed "battle exhaustion" cases. It requires the close attention of commanders to see that malingering is not only discouraged, but made a disgraceful offence and disciplinary action taken to counter it. Battle exhaustion may be an acute problem under the most adverse fighting conditions – winter, bad living conditions and bad feeding resulting from small parties of troops having to fend for themselves – the drabness of static warfare with its inevitable drain on morale. It is quite inexcusable under the conditions in which we have been fighting in the last few weeks.*

*(b) Straggling and Absenteeism*

*I am certain there is some straggling and absenteeism in units for I have seen soldiers in villages far from the area in which their unit is fighting. Though in some cases these may be Rear Echelon personnel, I am satisfied that some are not. Firm disciplinary action is necessary on the part of commanding officers to deal with absenteeism or straggling. This is particularly important now that we are moving through a country where the civil population is present in the towns and villages and through the countryside. It is*

*a great temptation to the soldier who is weary, especially if plied with wine by the ill considered friendliness of local civilians, to take 24 to 48 hours away from duty.*

*3. I appreciate the problem which faces unit commanders who have a high proportion of reinforcement officers, short of regimental experience and with little opportunity to get to know their men before they are actively engaged with the enemy. Whilst I understand the difficulties, I will not condone malingering or straggling and I request that you will give your personal attention to this matter and take active steps to see that disciplinary action is taken and examples made wherever offences occur. The reinforcement situation being what it is, every serving soldier must be made to pull his weight whether or not he may feel temporarily disciplined to do so.*

*(Sgd.) G.G. Simonds, Lieut-General  
GOC 2nd Canadian Corps*

Source: LAC RG 24, Vol. 10,799.

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*GOC-in-C 6-2  
Main HQ First Cdn Army*

*28 Oct 44*

*All Commanders, Canadian Formations*

*ABSORBTION OF REINFORCEMENT PERSONNEL*

*1. Occasionally I have had instances reported to me purporting to prove that the training of reinforcement officers and soldiers on joining their units in the field, has been wrong, or inadequate. I am satisfied that most of the officers now responsible for training and testing remustered personnel, or drafts arriving from Canada, are officers who have had considerable infantry fighting experience in this war; know what is required and all are conscientious in their duty. I have discussed this problem with some Commanding Officers and senior Formation Commanders and I believe that the way in which reinforcements are posted within units has much to do with their unsatisfactory performance in cases where they have fallen short of expectations. I do not believe that Commanding Officers have given enough consideration to the human*

*aspects of the problems.*

*2. Commanders and Commanding Officers must realize that when the reinforcement officer or soldier joins the unit with which he is going to fight, it is one of the great moments in his life – comparable with birth, marriage or death. The position of a new reinforcement joining a unit is quite different from that of a soldier who has served with a unit for a considerable time and goes into battle beside officers and NCOs who have trained him and with men whom he knows. The reinforcement (unless he is a recovered casualty returned to his own unit) comes as a stranger. Regardless of how thorough his preliminary training may be, in the stress of his first battle, he may react in a way contrary to his training unless steps have been taken to win his confidence. It is well known, and only human, that the experienced fighting soldier is inclined to “lay it on a bit thick” in describing his battle experience to the new arrival. This adds to the tension under which the inexperienced soldier goes into his first engagement. He may do things in the stress of the moment which afterwards he may well realize were contrary to what he had been taught.*

*3. Unless proper steps are taken within a unit, the reinforcement officer, or soldier, goes into action as an individual rather than as a member of a unit team.*

*4. Commanding Officers will take steps to ensure that their unit arrangements for the reception and absorption of reinforcement officers and soldiers are properly organized. Reinforcement personnel arriving at a unit must:-*

*(a) Be made to feel that they are part of the unit and no longer just individuals. A responsible officer who has served with the unit for some time must interview them and explain the practical side of soldiering in the field and make the new arrival feel that he belongs there. If this matter is properly handled, confidence is won from the outset and each man feels that he has become part of a unit which takes an interest in him.*

*(b) Have a final check over of their individual weapon training and be given a few talks from experienced officers and NCOs, on practical pointers.*

*(c) Be given time to adjust themselves to their new surroundings before they are faced with action itself.*

*5. I have previously issued instructions that every infantry battalion and*

*armoured regiment shall have a strong “left out of battle” party, including 2ICs and selected officers, NCOs and men. From this “left out of battle” party can be formed the “unit reception school” to deal with arriving reinforcements. If properly organized within the unit, this party should be able to provide just the type of officer and NCO needed to test and initiate the new soldier. I am satisfied that the means to handle this problem are there, if there is proper organization within the unit.*

*6. Except in extreme emergency, i.e. when it is a question of winning or losing, a battle, reinforcements will NOT be posted into fighting echelons in infantry battalions, or armoured regiments until they have spent a minimum of forty-eight hours in the LOB [left out of battle] “school”. I stress forty-eight hours as the minimum. Four or five days is preferable, whenever operation circumstances allow.*

*7. Whilst during prolonged active periods, the urge may be very strong to bring up to strength depleted fighting echelons as soon as a draft of reinforcements arrives, I am convinced that if the steps are taken, which I have outlined above, a far greater fighting value will accrue to the unit and casualties will be fewer.*

*8. I fully appreciate that during the period of intensive activities through which we have been going that Commanding Officers have had little time to think about things other than the battle in which they are engaged. But, once proper arrangements have been made for reinforcement absorption, and a “unit reception school” formed, the senior LOB officer can command it.*

*(Sgd.) G.G. Simonds, Lt-Gen  
A/GOC-in-C, First Cdn Army*

Source: LAC RG 24, Vol. 10,799.



## CHAPTER 6

# The Rhineland Battles and the Liberation of the Netherlands

The operations carried out by 2nd Canadian Corps in the fall of 1944 had placed enormous pressure on frontline soldiers. From 20 September to 7 November, 6,784 men were wounded and 3,244 reported killed or missing in action. An additional 949 men were treated for battle exhaustion and 5,008 were evacuated to hospital as sick. These losses, 14 percent of the total strength of the Canadian component of 21 Army Group, were heavily concentrated in the 21 infantry battalions. Using the conservative figure of 70 percent as the proportion of losses in infantry units produces the conclusion that more than 60 percent of the men serving in infantry battalions in mid-September became casualties in the next seven weeks.<sup>1</sup> Despite these losses the flow of replacements resulted in a gradual increase in the strength of the infantry battalions as men retrained from other arms were added to the reinforcement pool. By February 1945 2nd Canadian Corps was at full strength with an adequate replacement reserve including the 12,908 conscripts who had been sent overseas.<sup>2</sup>

The manpower problem was not the only issue that needed to be resolved in the aftermath of the Scheldt battles. The morale of many combat soldiers had declined dramatically in October 1944 as attrition warfare in the most miserable conditions yet encountered took its toll. On 28 October Simonds issued his directive on the “Absorption of Reinforcement Personnel” (see previous chapter) and welcomed the appointment of an Advisor in Psychiatry at corps headquarters. Major Burdett McNeel was asked to organize a series of talks to be given to battalion officers and NCOs as well as Padres and medical officers. McNeel took a common sense, jargon-free approach. He discovered a supportive atmosphere at corps headquarters and receptive audiences in the infantry battalions.<sup>3</sup>

The task allocated to the corps in the winter of 1944-45, defence of the Maas River line and the Nijmegen salient, allowed for 48-hour leaves and periods of rest as a break from winter patrols and training. This pattern, together with the announcement of the war services gratuity component of the Veteran's Charter,<sup>4</sup> produced the necessary improvement in morale, and Simonds was confident that the corps was again ready for large-scale operations.

Simonds did not attempt to imitate Montgomery's leadership style by addressing large groups of soldiers directly, but he continued to speak to the officers of his corps at conferences called to outline events and describe the challenges confronting the corps. A summary of one such talk to senior staff officers and brigade commanders is reproduced below, but Simonds also held a conference at the Wintergarden Cinema in Nijmegen for all officers serving on the staff of corps headquarters "to express his appreciation for the manner in which administrative details had been carried throughout the Corps... He expressed his heartiest felicitations for the coming Christmas season and wished that shortly after the turn of the year we would see peace."<sup>5</sup>

Canadian generals were not involved in the increasingly bitter Anglo-American strategic debate, but First Canadian Army was to play a major role in the destruction of enemy forces on the west bank of the Rhine. Montgomery's 21 Army Group, with Ninth U.S. Army (Lieutenant-General Bill Simpson) under command, was to launch converging attacks under the code names VERITABLE and GRENADE. VERITABLE, directed by First Canadian Army, was to begin on 8 February 1945 with GRENADE scheduled to start two days later.

The timing was ambitious. GRENADE could not begin until British troops had cleared part of the start line, a strongly defended triangle between the rivers Maas and Roer. Operation BLACKCOCK began on 16 January and the 10 day struggle in boggy countryside produced some of the fiercest fighting of the war, a fitting introduction to the Rhineland battles.<sup>6</sup> Eisenhower also wanted First U.S. Army to seize the Roer dams to prevent the enemy from flooding the river at an opportune moment. This attack, which began on 30 January, turned into another slow slogging match. As American troops approached the dams the Germans opened the discharge valves, flooding the Roer and increasing the speed of the current so that the river was impassable until the reservoirs were empty.<sup>7</sup> As a result, GRENADE was to be postponed for almost two weeks.

General Harry Crerar and the staff of First Canadian Army had been preparing for VERITABLE since November. The original plan, to launch the offensive with Lieutenant-General Brian Horrocks' 30th Corps and use 2nd Canadian Corps in a defensive role, had been modified under pressure from

Lieutenant-General Guy Simonds who argued, “to leave the Canadians out of so important and so decisive a battle would be a bitter disappointment to the troops.”<sup>8</sup> The troops were not asked if they agreed with Simonds’ views, but he won his case, and both Canadian infantry divisions were assigned to 30th Corps for the opening phase of the battle.

When VERITABLE had first been planned, German fortifications at the northern end of the Siegfried line had none of the formidable character of the main sections further south. By February a great deal of work had been done in strengthening the positions. Three defensive belts confronted the Allies, each from 500 to 1,000 metres wide. The first, on the edge of the Reichswald forest, covered the 10-kilometre gap between the Maas and the town of Wyler. North of Wyler the flood plain of the Rhine, covered in several feet of water from the blown dykes, provided another kind of obstacle. Through the heart of the Reichswald and south along the Maas, the Siegfried line itself presented a position that could cause trouble if not quickly breached. A third belt stretched from the Rhine near Rees to Geldern.<sup>9</sup> The extensive “squares” of forest, which made up the Reichswald, were an obstacle in their own right, but perhaps the greatest asset the Germans possessed was the weather. When Montgomery had first outlined VERITABLE, he had expressed the hope that “dry or hard ground” would be available. “If these conditions exist,” he told his commanders, “then the basis of the operations will be speed and violence. The aim will be to pass armoured columns through to disrupt and disorganize enemy resistance in the rear.” But he cautioned, “If the ground is wet and muddy, then a slower and more methodical progress may be forced upon us.”<sup>10</sup> By February the ground was very wet and very muddy. Rain and grey skies covered the battlefield keeping air operations to a minimum and giving promise that progress would be slow.

As VERITABLE began, the German High Command (OKW) retained responsibility for the direction of the defence of the Rhineland limiting the options available to General Schlemm’s 1st Parachute Army. Initially OKW was convinced that this was not the main Allied offensive, and all that Schlemm could do was dispatch the balance of 7th Parachute Division to the Reichswald. He also ordered the creation of a new defensive line, Cleve-Kessel-Gennep, but did not attempt to protest Hitler’s predictable demand that no fortified position was to be given up without his personal permission.<sup>11</sup>

On 10 February OKW agreed that VERITABLE was the main operation, sending 47th Panzer Corps, with 116th Panzer and 15th Panzer Grenadier Divisions under command, to an assembly area near Uedem to prepare a corps-level counter-attack designed to regain the high ground west of Cleve. According to a senior staff officer of the panzer corps, “the dark night... and strong harassing

fire on crossroads and important terrain points by the enemy artillery” made it impossible to assemble the divisions in time, and the attack did not get underway until 0930 hours, 13 February. The British “recognized the German attack, met it energetically and soon were able to commence their own attack.” After a daylong battle the British broke through at the seam between the panzer divisions, forcing a withdrawal. That night both sides, exhausted by the struggle, ceased to mount new attacks, accepting the reality that a temporary stalemate had developed.<sup>12</sup>

The original plan for VERITABLE had been based on two premises: the ground would be sufficiently hard (frozen) to permit tank brigades to manoeuvre freely, and the American attack, Operation GRENADE, would be launched shortly after the assault, preventing the Germans from committing enough additional troops to stabilize their northern front. Within 48 hours of launching the attack it was clear that the ground was so soggy from the thaw and deliberate flooding that there would be no breakout by the armoured units. And, by the afternoon of 12 February Horrocks was informed that the American attack would have to be delayed for at least another week because the Roer River was impassable.

VERITABLE had not been designed as another sloggish match for 21 Army Group’s infantry divisions. Churchill’s decision of December 1944 to add an additional 250,000 men to the strength of the British Army gave promise of solving some of the British reinforcement problem, but the worst shortages were in junior officers, shortages that could not be overcome with men hastily transferred from other arms.

The British army had solved its earlier shortage of junior officers by borrowing more than 600 young Canadians under the terms of the CANLOAN agreement.<sup>13</sup> By February 1945 all available Canadians were serving with British units and the War Office was forced to authorize Immediate Emergency Combatant Commissions for the infantry and armoured corps. Outstanding NCOs could be commissioned without attending officer training schools if the operational situation demanded it. By the end of the first week of VERITABLE, 30th Corps had suffered 2,400 casualties, including 126 officers,<sup>14</sup> a situation that required both emergency commissions and a new operational plan.

Guy Simonds, who was able to observe the battle while waiting for 30th Corps to release his Canadian infantry divisions, understood the need for a new approach and tried to persuade Crerar and Montgomery to reconsider VERITABLE. He proposed an expansion of Operation WALLSTREET, the code name for an idea developed by Major-General G.H.A. Macmillan and the staff of 49th British Division. Macmillan’s battalions had been patrolling the “island,” the partially flooded area between Nijmegen and Arnhem since late December. On

18 January, 56th Brigade, working with a squadron of Sherbrooke Regiment tanks, occupied the town of Zetten after a bitter battle with elements of a German parachute regiment. Zetten was just a few kilometres from the Rhine over relatively dry ground, and Macmillan began to think seriously about crossing the river and taking Arnhem.<sup>15</sup>

When Simonds heard about WALLSTREET he met with Macmillan and went away to prepare “an appreciation and plan for a corps-level operation in which both 2nd and 3rd Canadian Infantry Divisions would follow 49th across the Rhine to expand the bridgehead beyond Arnhem.”<sup>16</sup> Corps engineers would build bridges capable of sustaining the advance. Simonds was certain that WALLSTREET would force the enemy to respond, weakening the resistance in front of 30th Corps and thus altering the course of the Rhineland battle and perhaps the war.

Simonds presented an outline to Crerar on 14 February<sup>17</sup> but it was quickly rejected. Montgomery had visited the VERITABLE front on 11 February “to see the conditions for myself.” His nightly message to Brooke suggested that enemy resistance was weakening and “the whole problem was one of opening up road centres and developing communications.” He reported that he had instructed to “regroup and come up on a two corps frontage... the postponement of GRENADE may be for longer than we think and this makes it very necessary for VERITABLE to be given all the strength that can be collected.” The next day his message acknowledged that resistance to VERITABLE was increasing with most of the available German reserves drawn into the battle, but he remained determined “to put all the strength into Veritable and go on driving hard to the southeast.”<sup>18</sup> Crerar did ask Simonds to keep WALLSTREET “under consideration so that it might be undertaken without delay once the objectives of Veritable have been secured,”<sup>19</sup> but this was small consolation. Simonds knew that both 6th and 7th Parachute divisions were firmly committed to the Rhineland battle and there were few German divisions left holding the river west of Arnhem.<sup>20</sup>

While it is of course impossible to say what might have happened if WALLSTREET had been carried out, it was surely worth trying given the exhausting character of the Rhineland battle. A plan to seize and defend a bridgehead at Arnhem in February 1945, with full artillery and air support and a secure line of communications, had a much better likelihood of success than the ill-fated airborne venture of the previous September, and would almost certainly have been less costly than frontal assaults against prepared defences in the Rhineland.

The rejection of WALLSTREET meant that the Canadians were required

to take over a front of some 2000 metres on the Rhine flank of the advance. The area was currently occupied by a brigade of 15th Scottish Division, which had been locked in combat with elements of 116th Panzer Division for three days. The Scottish troops were in no condition to continue offensive action after a struggle described as their “worst experience since landing in Normandy,”<sup>21</sup> but the corps plan required them to advance towards Kalkar, securing Moyland Wood before handing over to the Canadians. This task proved well beyond their capacity and when 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade arrived almost half of the woods and the village were still in German hands. The next morning, 16 February, 7th Brigade, supported by squadrons of the Scots Guards, took over the task.

The battle for Moyland Woods turned into a prolonged, costly action. Total casualties to 7th Brigade including battle exhaustion exceeded 500 men and the brigade had to be pulled out of action. Simonds, who was focused on the advance towards Hochwald, was harshly critical of 7th Brigade and ordered Major-General Dan Spry to relieve the brigade commander. Simonds was also determined to replace Spry and did so when the Rhineland battle ended.

The battles for Moyland Wood, the Goch-Kalkar road, and the bitter struggle for the town of Goch cost British and Canadian divisions more than 3,000 casualties, including 919 killed, wounded or missing on 20 February alone. Canadian losses comprised just over 900 men, including 51 killed, 99 wounded and 54 taken prisoner from the Essex Scottish.<sup>22</sup> When combined with “wastage” due to sickness and battle exhaustion, the casualty rate in VERITABLE was hollowing out the combat power of many battalions. The Canadians could draw upon a replacement pool greatly expanded by the arrival on the continent of reinforcement drafts that included conscripts, but the British were desperately short of trained men.

General Bill Simpson’s 9th U.S. Army had waited impatiently while the battle of the Rhineland was waged by British and Canadian troops. With ten divisions, three of them armoured, 9th Army had over 300,000 men under command plus its own tactical air force. Intelligence reports indicated that after Panzer Lehr was committed to stemming VERITABLE there were fewer than 30,000 German troops of varying quality between the Americans and the Rhine. Simpson and his corps commanders were understandably anxious to set such a promising operation underway.<sup>23</sup> When U.S. Army engineers calculated that the reservoirs behind the blown dams would be empty by 24 February, Simpson decided to start his attack early on 23 February while the river was still in flood, in the hope of catching the defenders off guard.

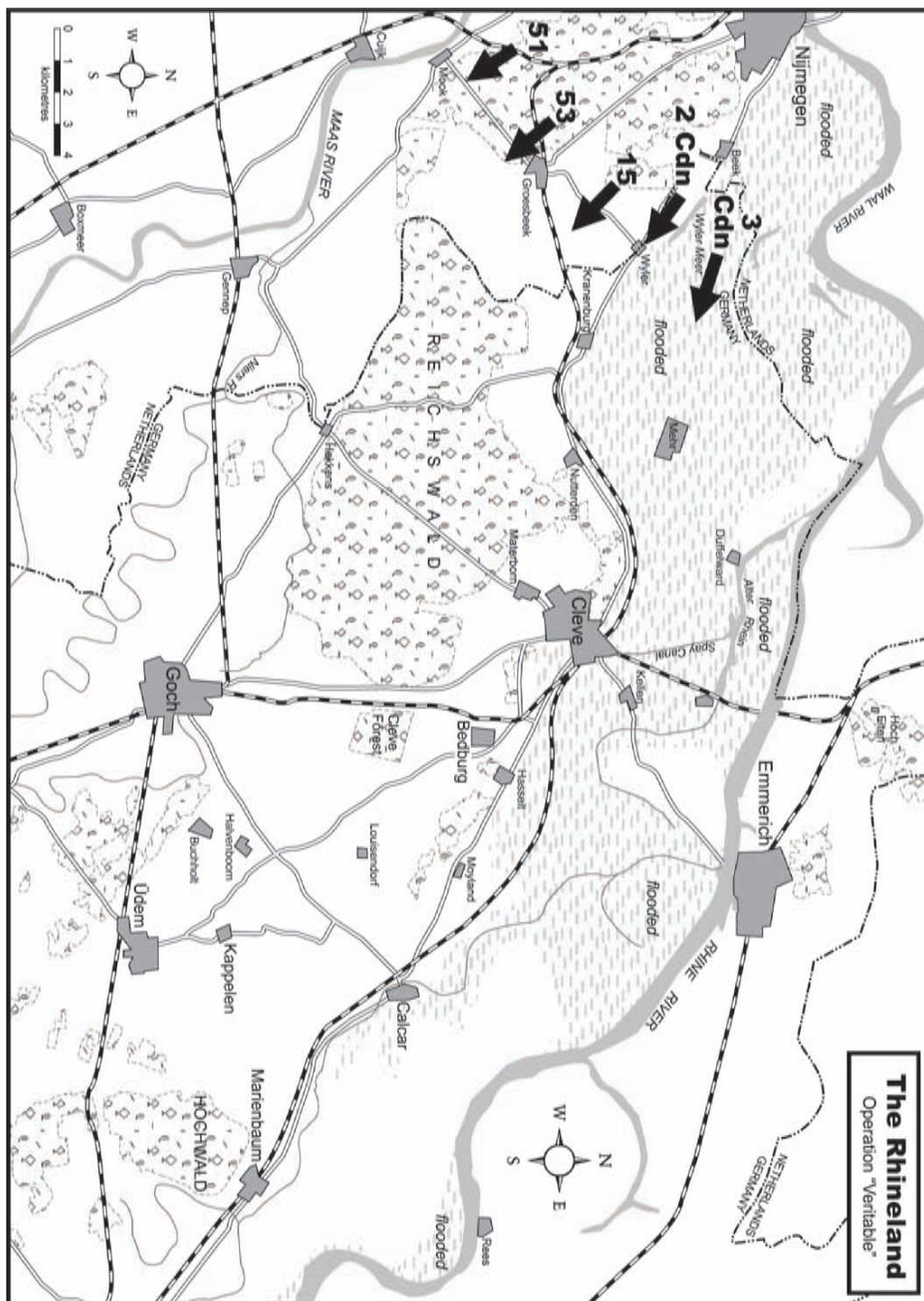
Before launching GRENADE, General Simpson gave his Corps

commanders an instruction that was reminiscent of orders issued by General Patton. Simpson wrote: “If the violence of our attack should cause disruption of the enemy resistance, each corps will be prepared to conduct relentless pursuit in zone, and phases will be abandoned in favour of taking advantage of our opportunity.” By the evening of the second day tank and tank destroyer battalions were across, and Simpson began to sense that “things were breaking up.” There was “not much in front of Ninth Army,” and it was time to go for the Rhine. The German commander, von Zangen, had received reinforcements—the 9th and 11th Panzer Divisions, plus the 338th Infantry Division—but as usual they had to be hastily fed into the defensive perimeter in the hope of maintaining a cohesive line. Counter-thrusts then bled their hitting power and the best the Germans could do was to slow down the American advance.<sup>24</sup> The hammer was well and truly aimed for the anvil of the British-Canadian forces to the north. But the anvil, as we shall see, was not allowed to remain in place until the American hammer had delivered the crushing blow. Instead, frontal attacks on the main German defensive position were ordered, and 2nd Canadian Corps found itself fighting one of its most costly operations of the war.

The decision to pause and mount a new offensive operation to the “Hochwald Forest and Xanten” was made by Montgomery on 20 February, three days before GRENADE began. The eleven German divisions committed to containing the Anglo-Canadian advance were “sowing the seeds for a successful Grenade” and Montgomery was determined to maintain pressure and reach the objectives set out in his original orders. Simonds’ 2nd Canadian Corps, which Montgomery claimed had lost just 400 of the 3,800 casualties suffered in VERITABLE, was to have primary responsibility for the new offensive on the “main enemy positions while 30th Corps operates from Goch towards Weeze and thence southward.” His nightly message to London noted that he was “going forward tomorrow to spend two days at TAC HQ Canadian Army to examine the battle in detail.”<sup>25</sup>

General Crerar outlined Montgomery’s plan to his corps commanders on 21 February. Crerar told 30th Corps to renew its advance the next day capturing the town of Weeze and, if the opportunity arose, exploiting towards Kevelaer. Four British divisions plus 1st Commando Brigade were to take part in the advance. Second Canadian Corps, with two British divisions under command, was to begin a new offensive on 26 February breaking through the Hochwald defences and exploiting to Xanten.<sup>26</sup> The next day, Simonds outlined his corps plan, using the name BLOCKBUSTER for the Canadian attack. (The appreciation and outline plan is reproduced below.)

The next day, when news of the success of the American attack had



reached Crerar's headquarters, the Army Commander began to reconsider BLOCKBUSTER. As the Army intelligence summary put it, "There is no doubt that the 9th U.S. Army's operations will have an effect on the First Canadian Army front. What form it will take remains to be seen." Twenty-four hours later, further news of a rapid American advance, strong resistance to the 30th Corps's attack on Weeze and evidence of an "increase in activity and gun strength in the Hochwald"<sup>27</sup> prompted Crerar to issue new orders:

In view of the determined enemy resistance 24/25 Feb, north of Weeze and the consequent inability of 53 (Welsh) Division to firmly secure that town before Operation Blockbuster commences it will be necessary to reconsider the basic draft plan. If by D + 1 it is obvious that to complete Blockbuster a considerable regrouping is required, then a partial Blockbuster will terminate the operation.

Crerar noted that he was prepared to be satisfied with "securing this high-ground east of the Kalkar-Üedem road."<sup>28</sup>

The first day of BLOCKBUSTER was extraordinarily successful. The 2nd Division captured the northern half of the Kalkar Ridge and dealt effectively with German counterattacks. The 3rd Division penetrated the enemy's outer defences securing both Keppeln and Üedem while 4th Armoured Division reached its first phase objectives in preparation for an advance through the Hochwald Gap. Simonds was "very happy and pleased with the performance of the divs in the corps today – everything fine considering the rotten tank-going caused by the rain last night."<sup>29</sup>

Montgomery and Crerar were also impressed with the corps' achievements. Montgomery's nightly message was especially optimistic, reporting that he "was very well satisfied" and hoped to "write off or capture the bulk of the Germans west of the Rhine." He noted, "this converging operation with two large armies is a tricky business and I have to keep a pretty tight grip on the battle to ensure it goes the way required." Montgomery hoped that the better weather promised for the next few days would allow the air forces to destroy the Wesel bridges and prevent the withdrawal of the enemy's heavy equipment. The prospect of "maximum activity of air forces on the Rhine by day and night" added to his confidence that BLOCKBUSTER and GRENADE would quickly end German resistance.<sup>30</sup>

On the night of 26/27 February, Simonds issued orders for the next stage of BLOCKBUSTER. Despite the difficulties reported by 11th Armoured Division south of Üedem, where boggy ground and numerous enemy anti-tank guns had

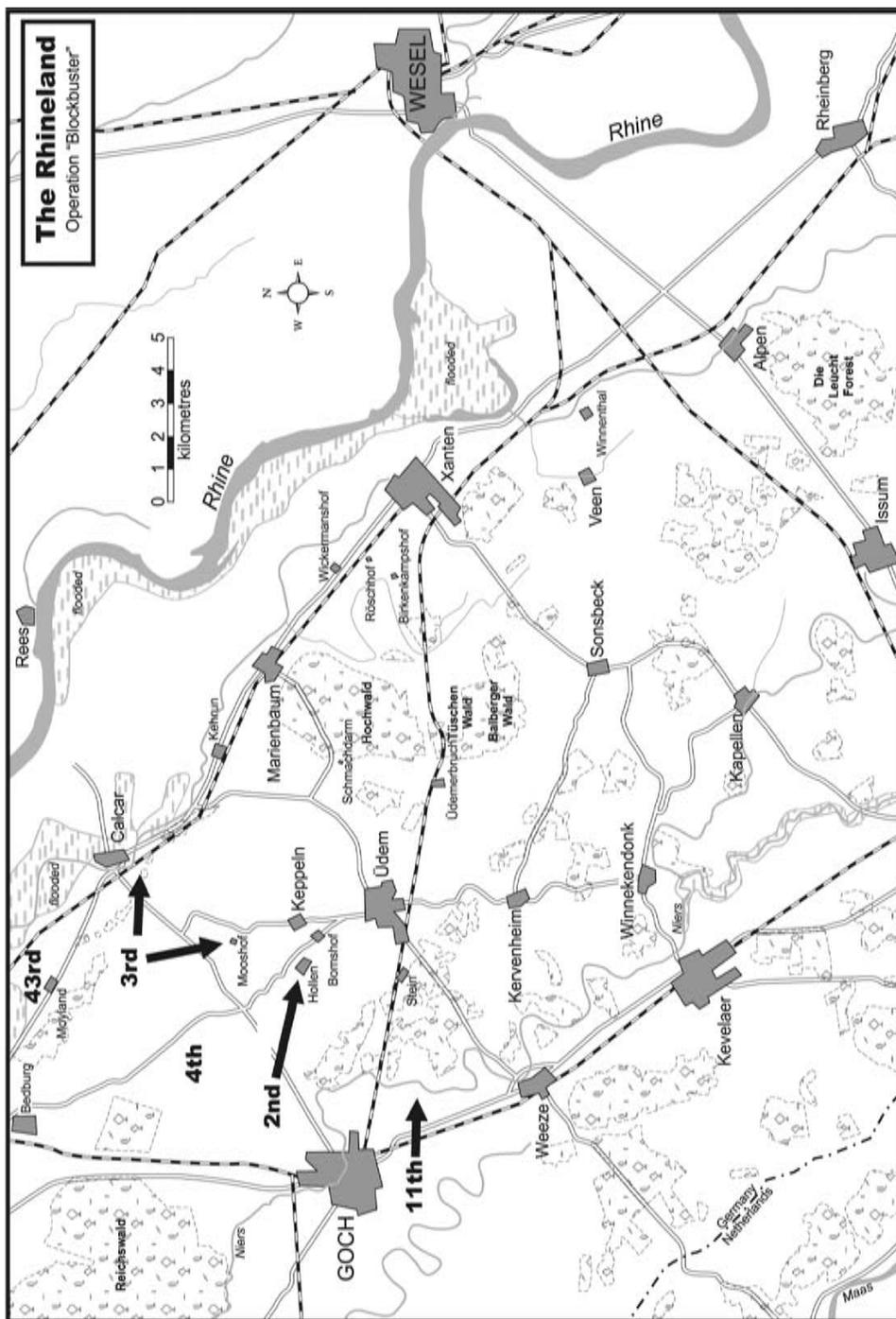
produced a slow, miserable, costly operation, the advance to Sonsbeck was to continue with the division's infantry brigade in the lead.<sup>31</sup> Simonds issued similar orders to 4th Canadian Armoured Division who were to send Lion Group, composed of the Algonquin Regiment and the tanks of the South Albertas, forward to the at the western end of the Hochwald Gap. They were to proceed "under cover of darkness because there was no protection from the high ground and so that the crest of the hill could be reached before daylight."<sup>32</sup>

At 1600 hours, 27 February, Simonds joined Crerar, Horrocks and Air Vice-Marshal Hudleston, for the Army Commander's daily conference. While it is unlikely that they knew the details of 9th Army's appreciation, that German resistance on the Roer front was on the verge of collapse, they were aware that the American bridgehead was secure, with elements of two armoured divisions across the river. Again we have no record of their discussions, just of their decision to mount what proved to be a costly and unsuccessful attempt to break through the enemy defences.

The situation was very different on 9th Army's front, where, on the afternoon of 1 March, the Americans were less than five kilometres from the Rhine opposite Düsseldorf and within striking distance of the boundary between the two Allied armies. The weakness of the enemy and the elaborate road network of the Cologne plain invited the bold use of armour, and General Simpson decided to send "strong armoured punches" towards the Rhine bridges.<sup>33</sup>

Montgomery visited General Simpson on 28 February seeing "the corps commanders and many of the divisional generals." Ninth Army, he reported, "has gained a great victory with very few casualties and this has raised morale to a high level." The next day, Montgomery commented on the "sensational results" in the south and "the very hard and bitter fighting"<sup>34</sup> in the north, but proposed no changes in existing plans to require most of Simpson's 9th Army to cease operations once they reached the Rhine. Eisenhower encouraged Simpson to try and secure an intact bridge across the Rhine, but when Simpson met with Montgomery to request permission to operate as far north as the bridges at Wesel, well within the Canadian zone, Montgomery, who must have remembered a similar debate over boundaries at Falaise in Normandy, agreed to extend 9th Army's sphere of action to Rhineberg, 10 kilometres south of Wesel, but he reserved the task of reducing the Wesel bridgehead to First Canadian Army.<sup>35</sup>

This decision left Crerar with few choices. The enemy was known to be busy building a new defensive line around Wesel, but there was no sign of an immediate withdrawal in the Hochwald. Crerar proposed to shift the weight of 30th Corps' attack farther to the south before turning it east to the Rhine leaving



Map drawn by Mike Bechthold ©2006

the Sonsbeck-Veen road to the Canadians. Before dawn on 2 March, elements of all three Canadian divisions were plunged into a series of fierce and bloody battles that taxed the capacity of everyone involved.

We have no record of Simonds' views or new orders which required 2nd and 30th corps to press attacks on a well-defended bridgehead, but on 7 March he did agree to a request from Major-General Bruce Matthews for a 24 hour pause to organize a set-piece attack on Xanten. Simonds told 43rd British Division, which had been conforming to 2nd Division's advance on the Rhine flank to commit a brigade to this action which was carried out with full artillery support, a smoke screen and elaborate counter-battery and counter-mortar arrangements. By late afternoon on 8 March British and Canadian troops had made contact in the centre of Xanten. No such careful preparation marked the advance of 4th Division towards Veen.

Montgomery's reluctance to employ the full weight of 9th Army against the Wesel Pocket imposed an enormous burden on the British and Canadian troops, who suffered 1503 casualties in the last six days of the Rhineland battle, including over 500 killed and missing.

The Canadians were pinched out of the last days of the Rhineland battle, which Crerar co-ordinated with 30th British and 16th U.S. Corps. The defeat suffered by the German Army in the Rhineland, coupled with the enormous losses on the Eastern Front, made the continued defence of Germany impractical. In the west, the Allies had taken their millionth prisoner, and victory was now a matter of time and endurance. General Crerar summed up the experiences of the Canadian Army in his quarterly dispatch to Ottawa:

During the concluding stages our own infantry suffered heavy casualties from shelling, mortaring and rockets. This was consistent with the enemy's tactics throughout the whole of the operation. His firepower, particularly from machine-guns, mortars and cannon had been more heavily and effectively applied than at any other time in the Army's fighting during the present campaign. Not including self-propelled guns, I estimate that at the beginning of March over 700 mortars and more than 1,000 guns of various calibers were available to the First Parachute Army. Only rarely did there appear to be any shortage of ammunition, and on a narrow front, the enemy gunners were able to concentrate their fire on our points of penetration in the natural defiles along the line of advance. The combined effects of guns and tough going made themselves felt in the loss to us of

some 300 tanks.

Our material superiority was not without its effect, but the state of the ground and the prevailing wet and overcast weather prevented the full deployment and exploitation of our strength.<sup>36</sup>

Simonds was more concerned with what he saw as a decline in the standard of infantry tactics during the Rhineland battles and other problems that he believed had to be corrected for future operations. Major Sesia, the corps historical officer, took notes at the Corps Commander Conference held on 17 March 1945. (This document is reproduced below.)

The 2nd Canadian Corps was not involved in the planning of the Rhine crossing, and its future role could only be described in general terms. Once the British and American armies were across the Rhine and racing into the heart of Germany, 2nd Canadian Corps was “to open a supply route to the north through Arnhem” and clear “Northeast Holland and the coastal belt eastwards towards the Elbe.” The 1st Canadian Corps, recently arrived from Italy, was to liberate the old provinces of Holland to the west. The 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade was attached to 51st Highland Division for the crossing and all of 3rd Canadian Division was committed to the battle for Emmerich, which lasted until 30 March.

Once the 2nd and 4th divisions joined 3rd Division on the east bank of the Rhine, 2nd Canadian Corps began to advance on three distinct centre lines. The 4th Armoured Division was required to protect the left flank of the British advance while 3rd Division cleared the east side of the Ijssel River, including the cities of Zutphen and Deventer. The 2nd Division moved north to Groningen, where it fought an intense battle for the city. There was little a corps commander could contribute to these operations and Simonds was frustrated by the fragmented role assigned to the corps.

The battle for Groningen was in its third day when Montgomery arrived at Crerar’s headquarters with new instructions. Eisenhower’s directive of 15 April required 2nd British Army to seize crossings over the Elbe, secure Hamburg and advance to Lübeck and the Baltic in preparation for the liberation of Denmark. Operations to clear northeast Holland and the coastal belt into Germany were also ordered, and Eisenhower assumed this meant the capture of Bremen, scheduled to be the American port of entry into occupied Germany.<sup>37</sup> Bremen was strongly defended, and General Horrocks wanted additional troops, an attack by Bomber Command and time to build up stocks of ammunition.<sup>38</sup> Montgomery sought a Canadian infantry division to join 4th Canadian Armoured Division on the British flank. Crerar agreed, and both men flew to Simonds’ headquarters to work out the details. Crerar also announced that he was needed in London and would authorize

Simonds to act for him as army commander while he was away.<sup>39</sup>

Simonds met with his divisional commanders to outline their new tasks on 20 April. The 4th Division had become embroiled in a costly battle at the Küsten Canal, held by the enemy as a defensive line blocking access to Wilhelmshaven. Simonds told Vokes to build-up the bridgehead before striking east to Oldenburg. If the city was “too strong for an armoured division to capture,” the division was to seal off the northern exits and advance to the Weser River. The Polish Armoured was to advance towards Varel and Wilhelmshaven.<sup>40</sup> Simonds did not yet know what role 2nd Division might play, and Matthews was simply told to deploy his division on the left flank of 30th Corps. The most important new task was assigned to 3rd Division, which was to “prepare for an infantry brigade assault across the River Leda into Leer and advance via Aurich into Emden.” Hoffmeister’s 5th Armoured Division was to relieve 3rd Division in northeast Holland and be prepared to seize the Dutch port of Delfzijl after Emden was captured.<sup>41</sup>

Before examining the battles for Delfzijl and Emden, we need to understand the broad strategic picture in mid-April 1945. The United States 9th Army reached the Elbe on 11 April and secured a bridgehead across the river the next day. General Simpson was confident his troops could reach Berlin quickly, just 70 miles away, but Eisenhower was adamant, no lives were to be lost in pursuit of an objective that would have to be handed over to the Soviets.<sup>42</sup> A rapid advance to Berlin in April 1945 was well within the capacity of the Allied armies and, as Winston Churchill argued, “As long as Berlin holds out German resistance will be stimulated.”<sup>43</sup> Churchill was surely right when he argued that if the Allies had concentrated their forces Berlin could have been reached quickly and the Germans forced to surrender. He believed the war was prolonged for two or three costly weeks because of this decision, but no American was any longer responsive to Churchill’s views.

That night President Franklin D. Roosevelt died, plunging America and the western world into heartfelt mourning. Newspapers and radio stations focused on stories about Roosevelt, his successor Harry Truman, the shocking evidence of Nazi death camps—especially Bergen-Belsen—and speculation about an immediate collapse of German resistance. The war, it appeared, was all but over. On 16 April the Royal Air Force and the United States Army Air Force suspended the strategic air offensive and prepared to use their heavy bombers to bring relief supplies to Holland. In Berlin, Hitler, confined to his underground bunker, celebrated his last birthday on 20 April and two days later announced his determination to stay despite the advance of Soviet troops who had all but surrounded the city.

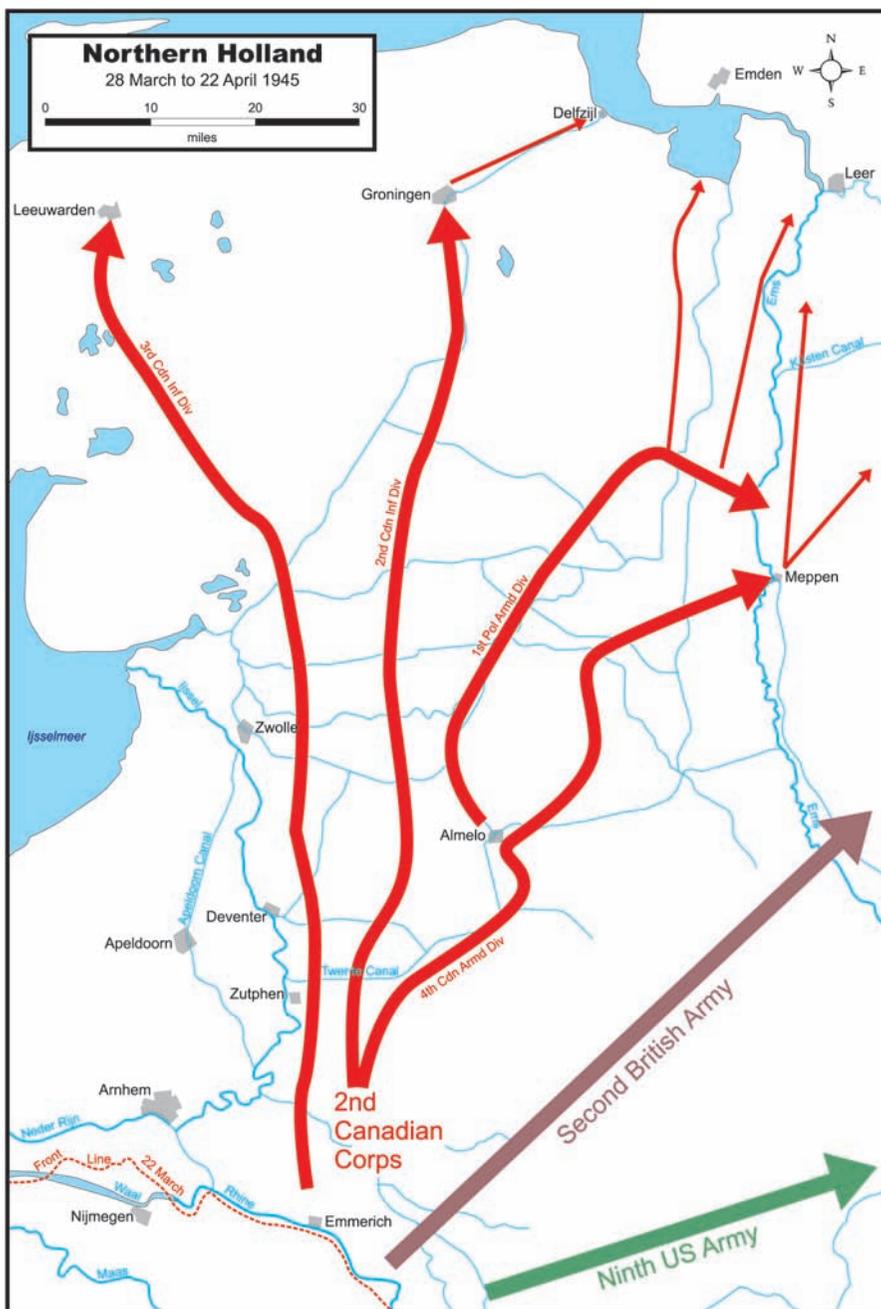
The last major battles fought by the Canadians in Northwest Europe were carried out in accordance with the strategy of maintaining pressure and securing the North Sea ports. The heaviest burden fell as always on the infantry, required to close with the enemy through to the last day of the war. Simonds was reluctant to issue the final orders for operations that would cost more Canadian lives. His hesitation was based on two important considerations: the overall military situation now pointing to an imminent German surrender, and the limited resources available for what looked like major battles. There was a birthday dinner for Simonds on 23 April, but the mood was sombre. Bomber Command, which played a major role in the attack on Bremen, was not available for Leer or Emden. Simonds and his staff were even more upset with the un-cooperative attitude of Air Marshal Coningham, who insisted that the flak defences of the Emden fortress area prohibited the use of medium bombers, and limited the employment of Typhoons to direct support of the river crossing.<sup>44</sup> They were also surprised to learn that the Buffalo LVTs were needed at the Elbe and the Canadians would have to rely on storm boats.<sup>45</sup>

On the morning of 27 April Montgomery reiterated his orders and added the capture of the Frisian Islands to Simonds' list of responsibilities. When a request for commando brigades to assist in these projected assault landings was refused, the low priority attached to Canadian operations was evident to all.<sup>46</sup> The Corps Commander's War Diary entry for 27 April reflects the attitudes expressed at corps and army headquarters:

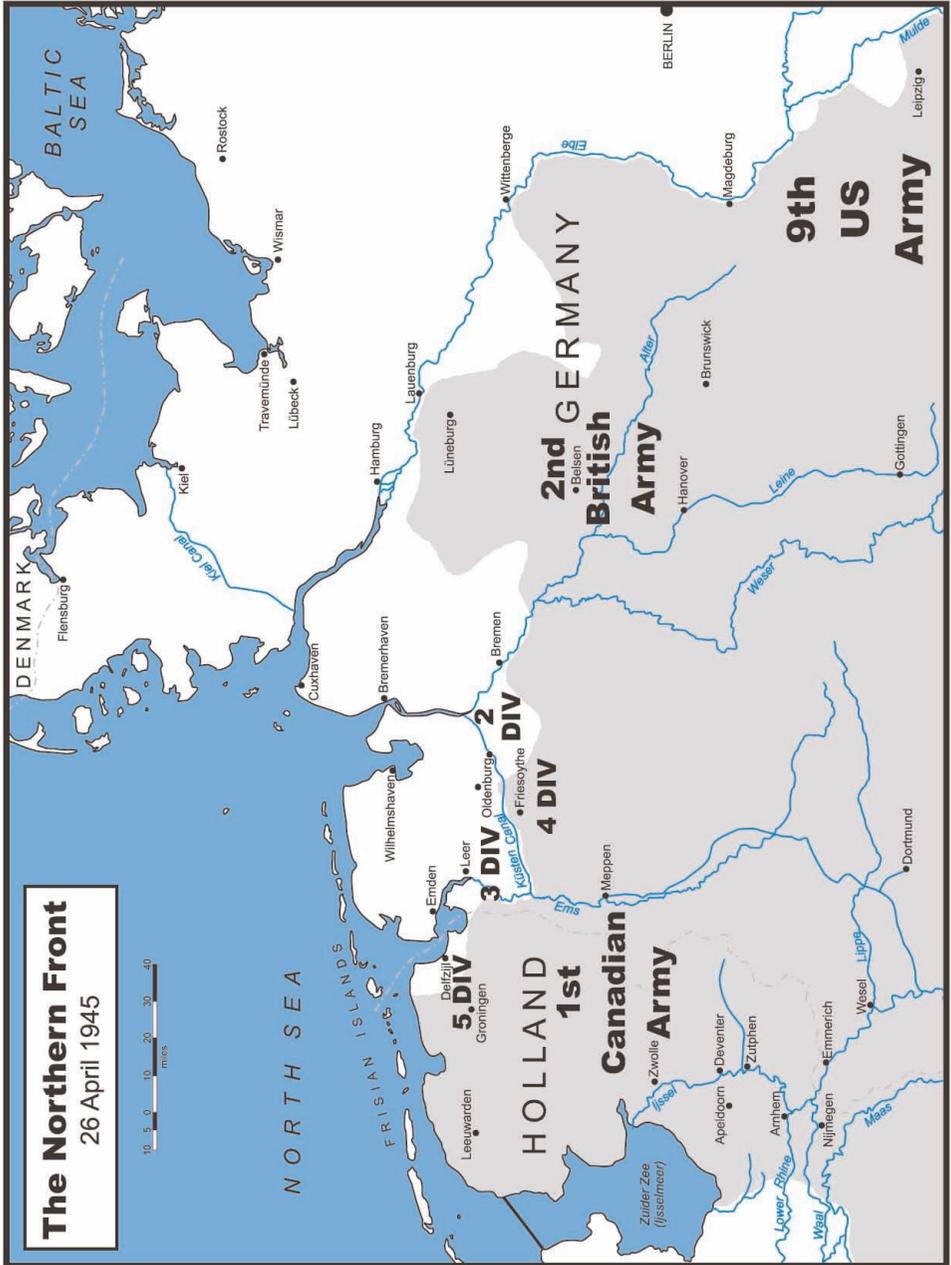
27 April. Comd had a conference at 1115 hrs with Comds 3 Canadian, 5 Cdn Armoured and 1 Pol Armoured Divs to confirm arrangements for the assault into Leer. It was to carry on irrespective of air sp which by reason of weather and other factors not apparent to this HQ is not likely to extend beyond fighter-bomber attacks.<sup>47</sup>

Major-General R.H. Keebler, who now commanded 3rd Division, selected 9th Brigade to carry out Operation DUCK, the assault river crossing into Leer. Brigadier John Rockingham was given enough storm boats to lift six companies and he planned simultaneous attacks on the city from three directions. Leer was seized and the other brigades crossed the river to join in the advance to Emden.

While 3rd Division fought the battle for Leer, Major-General Bert Hoffmeister and his infantry brigade commander Ian Johnston decided to re-interpret the orders given to 5th Armoured Division. Rather than wait until the capture of Emden before securing the Dutch port of Delfzijl, Brigadier Johnston's battalions began to compress the Delfzijl perimeter in preparation for the capture



**Northern Holland**  
23 March to 22 April 1945



Map drawn by Mike Bechthold ©2006

of a series of fortified gun positions along the Ems Estuary. On 28 April Hoffmeister told Simonds that he proposed to go ahead with an attack on Delfzijl, code named Operation CANADA, because “three or four days mucking about will cost us more in the end.”<sup>48</sup> Simonds allowed Hoffmeister to use his own judgement.

Hoffmeister’s three infantry battalions were positioned to advance from two directions: the Perth and Cape Breton Highlanders from the north, and the Irish Regiment from the southeast. The motor battalion, the Westminsters, were dismounted and sent forward to capture the gun batteries south of the town. In this “flat country with little cover and a complicated system of ditches and canals” cross-country movement was almost impossible, at least in daylight, so Johnston ordered his men to move only at night in carefully controlled bounds. Everyone was to be dug in and under cover at first light.<sup>49</sup> This agonizing process continued through to 2 May when the last defenders of Delfzijl and its gun batteries surrendered. Casualties, including 75 men killed-in-action,<sup>50</sup> were far higher than expected, but 11th Brigade’s success was welcome news to the men of 3rd Division, who were attempting to capture Aurich and Emden. Farther to the east, the soldiers of the Polish Armoured Division, 4th Canadian Armoured Division, 2nd Canadian Infantry Division and 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade were engaged in a series of limited actions to clear the Wilhelmshaven peninsula.

The final days of the war were a tense period for everyone, from Simonds and his staff officers, who were denied the support they believed the troops needed, to the men at the sharp end asked to maintain pressure without taking too many chances. Total casualties in the last two weeks of the war included 490 men killed-in-action, losses that seemed especially tragic in the circumstances. The ruined cities, ravaged countryside and forlorn refugees added to the misery, and when the news of the ceasefire reached the forward troops on 5 May, there were few celebrations, just an overwhelming sense of relief that the war was finally over.

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## ENDNOTES

1. Copp, *Cinderella Army*, Appendix A.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Copp and McAndrew, p.

4. J.L. Granatstein and Peter Neary (eds), *The Veterans Charter*, (Toronto)
5. War Diary, 2nd Canadian Corps, December 1944.
6. Ellis, pp. 241-244.
7. Charles B. MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, (Washington, 1973), p. 143.
8. Personal Diary Brigadier N.E. Rodger, LAC RG 24 Vol. 10,797.
9. Canadian Military Headquarters Report No. 185, *Operation Veritable: The Winter Offensive between the Maas and the Rhine 8-25 February 1945*, pp. 19-20.
10. Directive M548, 21 January 1945, BLMP.
11. CMHQ, Report No. 185, p. 23.
12. D.C. Bernsdorf, OCMH MS B-601.
13. W.I. Smith, *Code Word Canloan*, pp. 1-9.
14. The War Office Directive is in War Diary, DA 8 QMG, 2nd Canadian Corps, January 1945. Emergency Commissions could be offered to British personnel in First Canadian Army. There was no shortage of junior officers in Canadian units. Casualty figures are from CMHQ Report No. 85, Appendix F.
15. Lieutenant-Colonel Trevor Hart Dyke who commanded the Hallamshire battalion in 49th Division recalled discussions of Wallstreet and expressed the view that it was doable as a corps operation. Interview Terry Copp with Brigadier Hart Dyke, Sheffield 1986. For Hart Dyke's account of fighting on the "island" and the battle for Zetten see Delaforce, pp.191-194.
16. War Diary, 2nd Canadian Corps, February 1945, GOC's Activities, LAC RG 24, Vol. 13, 245.
17. War Diary 49 Division, Division Commander's Second Outline Plan, 15 February 1945, LAC RG 24, Vol. 10,893.
18. M473 and M474, 10-11 February 1945, BLMP.
19. Crerar to Simonds, 14 February 1945, Crerar Papers.
20. Army Group H responsible for defending the Maas-Waal line consisted of 25th and 1st parachute Army. By February 1945 both the 711th and 712th German infantry divisions had been transferred from 256th Army to the eastern front leaving 346th Division and some regimental battle groups to hold the western sector along the Maas. 1st Parachute Army responsible for the sector Arnhem-Venlo began committing regiments of 2nd, 6th and 7th Parachute Divisions to the Rhineland in February, and while Allied

intelligence officers were uncertain about the location of all elements of these divisions, they knew that the Army Group's mobile reserve, 47th Panzer Corps, had entered the battle in the Rhineland. See First Canadian Army Intelligence Summary, 3 February 1945. See also Special Interrogation Report, General Alfred Schlemm, 23 December 1945, DHH and Special Interrogation Report General Gunther Blumentritt 22 May 1946, DHH.

21. H.G. Martin, *History 15th Scottish Division*, (Edinburgh, 1948), p. 256. See Also Robert Woollcombe, *Lion Rampant*, pp. 210-219.
22. CHMQ Report No. 185, Appendix F. Stacey, *Victory*, p. 484.
23. Macdonald, p. 139.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 154. See also Peter Allan, *One More River: The Rhine Crossing of 1945*, (New York, 1978), p.141.
25. Personal for CIGS from Commander in Chief, 20, 21 February 1945, BLMP 112, M493, M498. The British military historian Major-General H. Essame, who commanded a brigade of 43rd Wessex Division during the Rhineland battle, has suggested that Montgomery did not approve of BLOCKBUSTER, but declined to interfere with Crerar's plans. Essame wrote without access to Montgomery's papers.
26. Stacey, *Victory*, p. 491.
27. First Canadian Army Intelligence Summary No. 238, 239, 23-24 February 1945.
28. Crerar Papers, Vol. 2, Directives to Commanders, 25 February 1945.
29. GOC's Activities War Diary, 2nd Canadian Corps, 26 February 1945, LAC, RG 24, Vol. 10,798.
30. M1005, 26 February 1945, BLMP.
31. Great Britain Army, *A History of 11th Armoured Division*, (London, 1945), pp. 80-84.
32. GS Account on Operation "Blockbuster," LAC RG 24, Vol. 10,935. This nine-page document includes the most important decisions recorded in the corps message log.
33. These directions are outlined in Macdonald, pp. 173-174.
34. M1009, 1 March 1945, BLMP.
35. Macdonald, p. 175.
36. War Diary, HQ First Canadian Army, May 1945.
37. Eisenhower Papers, p. 2611.

38. Horrocks, p. 177.
39. War Diary, 2nd Canadian Corps, 16-17 April 1945.
40. War Diary, 2nd Canadian Corps, War Diary Notes, 20 April 1945.
41. *Ibid.* See Historical Officer 3rd Canadian Infantry Division “Battle Narrative 18 April to 5 May 1945” LAC RG 24 Vol. 10986.
42. Forest C. Pogue, “The Decision to Halt at the Elbe (1945)” in K.R. Greenfield, *Command Decisions*, (Washington, 1962), pp. 374-387.
43. Gilbert, p. 1273.
44. War Diary, 2nd Canadian Corps, 27 April 1945.
45. Brigadier J.M. Rockingham, *Operation Duck*, 4 May 1945, DHH.
46. Stacey, *Victory*, p. 590.
47. War Diary, 2nd Canadian Corps, 27 April 1945.
48. War Diary, 2nd Canadian Corps, April 1945, Notes Chief of Staff, 1 May 1945.
49. Brigadier Ian Johnston, *Report on Operations: 11th Canadian Infantry Brigade*, LAC RG 24, Vol. 15,201. See also 5th Canadian Armoured Division, History of Operations, LAC RG 24 Vol. 10,941. The author of this 5-page summary notes that while “a constant maintaining of pressure might have proved sufficient... the constant enemy shelling was taking its toll. So it was decided to reduce the pocket immediately.” Daniel T. Byers “Operation ‘Canada’: 5th Canadian Armoured Division’s Attack on Delfzijl, 23 April to 2 May 1945,” *Canadian Military History*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (1998): 35-45. See also Alex Morrison and Ted Slaney, *The Breed of Manly Men The History of the Cape Breton Highlanders*, (Toronto, 1994). pp. 319-331.
50. M.J. Huizanga and H. Dooubnbos, *The Battle for the Liberation Along the Ems and Dollard* (translated for the author by William Jeronimus) lists fatal casualties by name and regiment. Brigadier Ian Johnston’s Report on Operations gives the same total for killed-in-action/missing and lists 180 wounded. It should be noted that 3rd Division suffered 43 fatal casualties in actions in the coastal region of Groningen Province before handing over to 5th Division.

**CONFERENCE HELD BY LT.-GENERAL G.G. SIMONDS CB,  
CBE, DSO, GOC 2 CDN CORPS, AT MAIN HQ 2 CDN  
CORPS, WIJCHEN, HOLLAND, 20 DEC 44.**

(N.B. – This conference was attended by the Commanders and GSOs 1, Divs, all Brigade Commanders, the Commander 2nd Cdn Armd Bde, CCRA, Chief of Staff, CE, CSO, DA & QMG, AA & QMG, GSO 2 Ops, GSO 2 Int, 2 Cdn Corps, OC, 2 Cdn Fd Hist Sec, LO from Army and a senior representative from 30 Corps) – Hist Offr.

1. The GOC opened his remarks by stating that the purpose of the meeting was to make a general review of the situation in North-Western Europe, by going back over recent events and by discussing what is now actually happening on the various Army fronts in this theatre. He would also attempt to say something about the probabilities of the future operation that has been planned which concerns this Corps directly and which in the light of recent events may be postponed indefinitely.

2. Going back to earlier operations General Simonds stated that SHAEF had considered that the main stay of our winter campaign would be the capture of Antwerp and securing of the Scheldt Estuary to guarantee the passage of our supply vessels without molestation from the enemy. In considering whether or not a winter campaign would take place SHAEF had to make two decisions. First, if there was to be a winter campaign, Antwerp had to be cleared. Secondly, it had to be determined whether or not the Germans would accept fighting the decisive battle of Germany on this side of the Rhine. The answer to the first decision depended upon the clearing of the enemy from the Scheldt and this task had been given to the First Cdn Army and particularly to 2 Cdn Corps and we succeeded in clearing the Scheldt as planned so that now at the present time the port facilities of Antwerp are in use. The second decision was made by the Germans themselves when the Americans broke through at Aachen and penetrated as far as the Siegfried line to be stopped by determined resistance on the part of the enemy.

3. On Saturday, 16 Dec 44, the enemy put in a strong counter-attack against American forces between Durem and Trier and succeeded in breaking through at a considerable rate. The attack was made along two axis and the enemy apparently employed six Panzer divisions to achieve this. The GOC then went into detail describing the enemy attack based on

the information to hand and showed how the enemy had concentrated considerable striking force making full use of his best trained SS divisions. Apparently the enemy's objective was to strike through to get to the river Meuse and then perhaps go Northwards towards Liege or Southwards towards Namur. The GOC felt that by this evening they would reach the line of the River Meuse by which time a strong American counter-force on the Western bank of the Meuse would be there to seal off any further progress on the part of the enemy. The GOC also stated that the Southern part of the corridor effected by the enemy was sealed off and that the sealing off of the Northern portion was virtually complete. Furthermore, General Patton's Third US Army would strike from the South to near the entrance to the corridor and thus cut off those of the enemy who had broken through. General Simonds said that in effecting this breakthrough three US divisions were very badly mauled and at the present time ceased to function as divisions.

4. Commenting on this breakthrough, the GOC felt that never at any time since the invasion is the situation more favourable for the Allies. The enemy has shown his force and has declared himself as ready to take all in this breakthrough. So far he has not succeeded in doing any real strategic harm to the Allies there being no airfields in the areas which he has seized, and judging from captured orders it would seem that they will depend mainly upon captured American fuel and equipment to maintain the force of their attack. The GOC pointed out that this was a rather precarious method of mounting an attack of such major proportions.

Source: LAC RG 24, Vol. 17,506.

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**CONFERENCE OF COMMANDER, 2 CDN CORPS, ON  
OPERATION "BLOCKBUSTER," HELD AT MAIN HQ  
2 CDN CORPS, 22 FEB 45.**

1. The Corps Commander's opening remarks were concerned with giving the up-to-date enemy picture on the immediate Corps and flanking fronts. He stated that the enemy had brought in what reserves he could during the opening phases of Operation Veritable and two days ago (20 Feb) he reached the stage of having to utilize divisional organizations with remnants

of units tagged on to them. In other words, the enemy is putting in to battle every reserve he can immediately lay his hands upon. On 23 Feb Operation Grenade will commence, which is the IXth US Army's operation for crossing the River Rhur.

2. The Corps Commander then stated that on 25 or 26 Feb 2 Cdn Corps will undertake an operation to be known as Blockbuster with the object of capturing the high ground south of Calcar and Udem and then to exploit to the enemy positions towards Xanten and Wesel. For this operation 2 Cdn Corps will have two fresh armoured divisions available, viz., 4 Cdn Armd Div and 11 Brit Armd Div. General Simonds pointed out that seldom, if ever, will such an opportunity present itself again wherein the Corps would have available to it two fresh divisions. He said that rather than to dribble in his fresh reserves he considered that now was the time to strike hard at the enemy in an all-out effort. He pointed out that the enemy has managed to achieve some semblance of organization in his defences due mainly to the favourable lay-out of the high ground upon which he was falling and also to the fact that as his "bridgehead" was being gradually curtailed the ratio of his fire power for a given area increased tremendously.

In support of the operation, the Corps Commander said that all of 2 Cdn Corps and 30 Brit Corps artillery, including 2 Cdn AGRA, will be available, in addition to all available air support providing that the weather is favourable. The Corps Commander pointed out that the nature of the ground was important to the enemy's ability to maintain his positions. He said that Calcar will be fought for because it is a centre of a good roads system and also that the high ground between Calcar and Udem holds the main weight of enemy infantry defences. The principal anti-tank defences consist of an anti-tank ditch running behind the infantry defences in a lay-back position to the Hochwald Forest.

## **Plan**

### Phase I

(a) An attack by 2 Cdn Inf Div at H-Hour with two armoured regiments (2 Cdn Armd Bde) moving at tank pace to secure the high ground and escarpment south of Calcar. Main weight of attack by 6 Cdn Inf Bde, with a support attack by a battalion of 5 Cdn Inf Bde to broaden the base. At the conclusion of this phase 4 Cdn Inf Bde will have been pinched out.

(b) A subsidiary attack on the right by one battalion, 8 Cdn Inf

Bde with one armd sqd moving at infantry pace, at H-Hour, to get astride road Calcar-Udem area 9845.

### Phase II

(a) An attack on the right by two battalions of 8 Cdn Inf Bde (3 Cdn Inf Div) to capture line of road 970433 to incl Keppeln 9844.

(b) An attack (co-ordinated) by Corps with (a) by a battle group (two inf bns, two armd regts) of 4 Cdn Armd Div to establish them on a line excl Keppeln to road at 020450.

### Phase III

(a) 3 Cdn Inf Div passes 9 Cdn Inf Bde through to the assault of Udem.

(b) 4 Cdn Armd Div passes a battle group through to establish itself on the high ground 1942 – 0043 – 0143.

(c) 2 Cdn Inf Div passes 4 Cdn Inf Bde through to relieve battle group of 4 Cdn Armd Div on the position referred to in Phase II para (b).

(d) 11 Armd Div conforms to advance of 9 Cdn Inf Bde.

### Phase IV

(a) While 3 Cdn Inf Div is fighting for Udem, 11 Armd Div will by-pass Udem to the SW and advance on axis Udem-Sonsbeck 0535 and high ground immediately NE of Sonsbeck leaving a firm base on escarpment 0400 – 0039.

(b) 3 Cdn Inf Div will follow the advance of 11 Armd Div by stepping up battalions by brigades along the line of the R Grosseley with the object of eventually relieving 11 Armd Div of Sonsbeck.

(c) 4 Cdn Armd Div will advance (as ordered by Div Comd) to establish a battle group astride the railway line 0340 – 0440.

(d) 2 Cdn Inf Div while retaining one brigade on the high ground immediately south of Calcar, and one as referred in Phase III para (c), to pass the third brigade through to relieve battle group of 4 Cdn Armd Div on objective referred to in Phase II para (b).

## **Exploitation**

No forecast possible but alternative as follows:

(a) To direct 4 Cdn Armd Div on Xanten and 11 Armd Div on Menzelen 1636 and the Wesel crossings, or

(b) To direct both armd divs on Xanten, then 11 Armd Div to turn SE towards Menzelen, or

(c) If 4 Cdn Armd Div is held up after Phase IV, to direct 11 Armd Div on Xanten with 4 Cdn Armd Div cutting across its rear directed on Menzelen at a later opportunity.

Source: LAC RG 24, Vol. 13,245.

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90-4-1/L  
Main First Cdn Army  
17 Mar 45

## **NOTES ON CONFERENCE HELD BY COMD 2 CDN CORPS**

Lt. Gen G.G. Simonds, CB, CBE, DSO held a conference of comds down to bn comds and SOs down to grade two appointments at the Winter Garden Theatre Nijmegen 171030A at which he stressed the following pts.

1. Inf: That the standard of inf tactics had deteriorated due (a) to hy wastage since beginning of op Overlord, (b) due to the unusual type of fortress warfare which the Corps had undertaken during the autumn and (c) to the static period during the winter of 1944-45. The result was that there was too little imagination used in the emp of ap arms, too great a dependence on sp weapons, and too little appreciation of the time factor in battle. With the improved enemy method of handling his arty, fewer med guns would be available for direct inf sp and the inf would have to rely on fd arty. Too great a dependence upon sp weapons, e.g. Crocodiles, means that the enemy by cratering rds and mining tk approaches can gain sufficient time after having been forced off a tactical feature to reorg at leisure upon a new one (he cited the op to clear the Hamerbruch feature and the capture of Veen as examples of this). Junior leaders were not sufficiently aware of the tactical advantage and the consequent chance of saving lives involved in a quick follow up of a retreating enemy. Inf were becoming too dependent on TCVs and he laid it down as a principle that inf

should NOT be lifted for an adv of under 15 miles unless very tired, as the time wasted in ordering fwd the vehs, onbussing and debussing, gave the enemy a chance to org his def. He stressed the importance of keeping the inf sec in battle down to 6 or 7 men with good trained men LOB; that the inf sec in our army, unlike the American or Russian armies, is NOT a tactical unit, and he discouraged the fmn of rifle and bren gps within the sec as tending to destroy the efficiency of the real tactical unit, the pl; by keeping an efficient number of mne LOB, it prevented the bn from suffering crippling cas in a set piece attack and enabled it to reinforce itself without having to pause. He stressed that future ops would contain a great deal of wood fighting and street fighting whose whole success depends upon the standard of trg of the pl and sec comd.

2. Arty: Owing to the increased efficiency with which the enemy is now org his arty and mortar DF, more med guns will have to be allotted for CB and will NOT normally be available in sp of inf except for engaging SP guns, tks or fortress posns. Our arty preparation and methods are becoming too standardized and well known to the enemy. He asked for study of the question of using a block barrage instead of a creeping barrage. By neutralizing an area in depth, and lifting, say 500 yds every 15 mins, it (a) enabled the inf to mop up and thoroughly clear an area without loosing the barrage and (b) gave the enemy less chance of discovering exactly where our own inf were and then putting down mortar cones behind the barrage. FOOs must be prepared to accompany the inf on foot either manhandling their wrls set or using aslt line.

3. Comns: Units were to apt to rely on wrls and NOT to make use of the lines and runners.

4. Comd: A confusion existed between a unit or fmn in res and one at rest. At the beginning of an attack, the freshest and most battle worthy unit should be in res, since the units which make the initial penetration are working to a fixed plan, whereas when the res unit passes through, it has NO exact infm about the enemy and will have to improvise.

Source: LAC RG 24, Vol. 10,935.



## ANNEX A

# “An Army that can Attack – A Division that can Defend”

*By Captain G.G. Simonds*

*Royal Canadian Artillery*

*Canadian Defence Quarterly, Vol. XV, No. 4, July 1938*

### **Introductory**

In an article in the April 1938 issue of *Canadian Defence Quarterly*, Lt.-Col. E.L.M. Burns, O.B.E., M.C., suggests a reorganization of the infantry division to produce “A Division That Can Attack”. Many of the detailed conclusions reached by Col. Burns are open to dispute but it is not intended to enter into a discussion of them here – the present writer proposes to join issue on broader lines. Before we proceed to the “design stage” whether we are building a house, a ship or a fighting formation it is good and established practice to lay down a “specification for performance” based upon the functions which it is desired that the finished article shall fulfill. Col. Burns ignores the “specification stage” and plunges into the “design stage”, the reorganization of the “line of battle” division, on the *assumption* that we require a division capable of taking the offensive “under its own steam”. Because he has ignored what is probably the most vital stage in the production of any article, in the opinion of the present writer, he has laboured and brought forth the unwanted brain-child – “A division that can attack”.

Col. Burns makes it clear that the division which he considers suitable for the British Army, and as a prototype for the Empire, is designed primarily for a “national war” – a war of the first magnitude against a first class power or

combination of powers. Without entering into a discussion on the views on foreign policy of Great Britain and the Dominions, it is sufficient to point out that if Canada is called upon to defend herself, either directly or indirectly, it will be against aggression by a first class power. War organization for such a contingency is that in which Canada is most interested and the present writer offers no apology for further discussion of the subject. The subject is discussed in relation to Great Britain because, firstly it is to the British Army that Col. Burns offers his division and secondly because the military problems of Great Britain are more concrete than our own.

It is proposed to study the functions of the “line of battle” division (or what we have been used to call the “infantry” division) under the following headings:-

- (a) The British Army in a national war.
- (b) The Offensive Battle.
- (c) The Defensive Battle.

The writer believes that having studied the problem under the above headings we will reach the conclusion that what is required is “An Army that can Attack – A Division that can Defend.”

### The British Army in a National War

If Great Britain is involved in a European war there will be no question of a “limited liability” – she will be fighting for her existence. If Great Britain and her allies are to gain a decision against a continental combine, that decision must be gained on land – the hostile armies must be rendered incapable of further action. Naval and air forces may make an even greater contribution towards victory than they have done in the past, but the *coup-de-grace* will have to be delivered by land forces – by an army. To what extent Great Britain will contribute to an army on the continent will depend upon events. But apart from any continental contribution, she will have many purely defensive commitments to ensure the safety of her sea and air communications.

Some military experts argue the superiority of a “small, highly trained hard-hitting” force over the “unwieldy, cumbrous masses” of continental armies – the superiority of the nimble David over the sluggish Goliath. The theory is attractive if Goliath will play his part true to form. But the “unwieldy, cumbrous masses” may turn out to be “*a large, highly trained, hard-hitting force*” and the good featherweight usually makes poor sport when matched against the equally

good heavyweight. If the armies of Great Britain's continental allies are faced with defeat, if they are incapable of gaining a victory by themselves, then much as the British people may dislike continental warfare, they must either fight on the continent or accept defeat or stalemate. A study of the records of discussions between British and French soldiers and statesmen in 1917 and 1918, on the subject of "manpower", should be sufficient to convince anyone, that in a partnership "we make war as we must and not as we should like to".

The size of the army which Great Britain will place on the continent of Europe cannot be set at an arbitrary figure. It will be determined by the force required in conjunction with allied forces, to ensure victory. It is conceivable, having regard to the size of the British Regular Army and possible commitments elsewhere, that the initial contribution on the continent may be nothing more than a "token force". If all goes well with the armies of her allies it may remain so for the duration of the war – Britain's share in an allied victory taking the form of action on the sea and in the air. On the contrary, it may become necessary at once to reinforce the "first flight" to stop the first onrush and slave off defeat – the primary role of such reinforcing elements being *defence*. It is well within the bounds of possibility that ultimately to ensure victory, the British Army on the continent may represent the maximum effort of Great Britain (and those Dominions which may decide to assist her) bearing in mind the needs of the navy, the air force, overseas commitments and the home industries required to maintain the "nation in arms".

Certain exponents of mechanized warfare seem to be of the opinion that when it comes to producing armoured fighting vehicles the capacity of British industry is unlimited. Judging by the fact that Great Britain is purchasing abroad, the demands of the present rearmament programme have already stretched British industry beyond its capacity. Realizing that in the present case it has had to start from scratch, this industry must support in war, the navy, the air force, the army and an export trade to maintain foreign credits for purchase of raw materials. It is unfortunately a fact that the offensive weapons are the most difficult to produce and most expensive to maintain. Weapons of offence for a British Army will not be available in unlimited quantities.

If the foregoing arguments are accepted the following conclusions may be drawn:-

- (a) In a national war, the British Army will have many purely defensive commitments.
- (b) Once again the British Army may have to expand to provide a great army on the continent of Europe.

(c) The offensive material which British industry can supply to and maintain for the Army will be limited. There will not be enough to squander it on troops required for a purely defensive role, and as a corollary to the above:-

(d) Under these circumstances it is not logical to design the basic formation of the British Army as a whole for offensive action.

It remains to be seen whether the basic formation of that part of the British Army which fights on the continent of Europe should be “a division that can attack”.

### The Offensive Battle

From Col. Burn’s article one might deduce that, if every division must be capable of attack, the future British Commander-in-chief is going to revert to that unhappy policy of 1916-17 – being offensive everywhere and all the time. Let us hope there is no repetition of a policy so wasteful of effort and barren of results. Assuming that the initiative rests with the British, ground alone will limit the areas in which a sustained offensive will be practicable.<sup>1</sup> There will be areas unsuitable for a British offensive but perhaps well adapted to the mounting of a hostile offensive directed against them. There will be areas in which the ground is such that large scale offensives will be impractical for both sides. Such areas must be held in varying degrees of strength – but must they be held by “divisions that can attack”? The offensive weapons – the “hitting-power” – of a British Army will be limited. The bulk of this hitting power should be at the disposal of the highest commander who can control the battle – not arbitrarily divided between divisions in “penny packets”. Once the requirements of security have been met, for the Commander-in-Chief’s main offensive, intended to be the decisive *coup-de-grace*, every ounce of hitting power should be concentrated. A Meggido, a Riga or a Caporetto can only be planned for an army in which the Commander-in-Chief controls the “punch”. When G.H.Q. exercises only general direction and the control of the battle is in the hands of forward formation commanders then the hitting power must be decentralized to enable leading formations to fight their own way forward. Thus for the approach march or broken battle leading divisions, or even brigades, must be strengthened by the offensive elements necessary to make them divisions (or brigades) that can attack. But the organization within the army must be such, that for the main offensive battle a highly centralized control may be exercised over those elements upon which the success of the operation depends.

If the foregoing arguments are accepted the following conclusions may be

drawn:-

- (a) Even for the side which holds the initiative there will be many “holding tasks” during offensive operations. The minimum strength for a basic formation must be a “division that can hold.”
- (b) The offensive power of an army should be at the disposal of the highest commander who can actually influence the battle. This will vary with every phase of operations. The bulk of the offensive elements of an army should be so organized that either a centralized or decentralized control may be exercised.
- (c) For the main offensive, the bulk of available hitting power should be at the disposal of the Commander-in-Chief to allot in accordance with his plan and in proportion to the importance he attaches to the various phases of his attack or attacks.
- (d) A basic “division that can hold” is a suitable element for an offensive army providing that there is a G.H.Q. or higher formation “pool” from which the offensive elements may be attached to it when it is required to attack.
- (e) Owing to the difficulties of terrain alone, offensive operations will only be possible on part of a battle front. Only a proportion of divisions will need the additional strength to make them divisions that can attack.
- (f) A division organized to hold should not be asked nor expected to attack without the addition of offensive elements.

### The Defensive Battle

For an army fighting a defensive battle, the sectors of the front which it holds will vary in importance. There will be sectors where a successful hostile offensive may strike at an objective or objectives vital to the defence. The Flanders sector, covering the Channel Ports, held by the British Armies in the Spring of 1918 affords an example. Such a sector must be fully insured and formations holding it must be capable of large scale counter-attacks. There may be sectors where the defence can give ground – forcing the enemy to pay a price for every advance, but slipping out of reach of the “set piece” hammer before it

falls. The sector held by the Fifth Army in March 1918 and the action which G.H.Q. visualized on the part of the Fifth Army<sup>2</sup> represented this type of defence. When opportunities exist for tactics of this nature counter-attacks should be limited to small scale operations organized by units in contact with the enemy, if the latter are caught off balance – they will not demand a high degree of offensive power from the formations operating. There will be sectors in which a sustained offensive by the enemy will be impractical but through which the enemy might infiltrate if they were not held. Formations defending sectors of this type require “holding power” only. There may be sectors where it is intended to give ground to lead the enemy into a trap for the main counter-offensive.

The task of the division in defence may vary from preventing infiltration through a quiet sector, to holding a sector where the loss of its position may seriously embarrass the defence. It may have a counter-attack role on a vital part of the front or may form part of the general reserve, held to deliver the main counter-offensive. *It must be able to hold. The extent to which it will be required to attack will vary with the task allotted to it.* It is only the Commander-in-Chief who, viewing the battlefield as a whole, knows the importance attached to each sector, to the holding of certain ground and to the success of his counter-offensive. The bulk of the offensive power should be under his control to allot to his formations in accordance with the importance which he attaches to their tasks.

From the above arguments the following conclusions may be drawn:-

- (a) The basic formation for defence should be “a division that can hold”.
- (b) The bulk of offensive elements should be at the disposal of the Commander-in-Chief to sub-allot in accordance with his plan.
- (c) Divisions required to counter-attack on any but a very small scale must be strengthened by the attachment of additional offensive resources.

### General Conclusions

In the opinion of the present writer the British Division is not a division that can attack. It is also his opinion that this is not because of obtuseness nor stupidity on the part of its designers. It is because both in attack and defence there will be many holding tasks, because in spite of reckless estimates, the main offensive weapons will be limited and because the offensive weapons must be kept flexible and capable of the most advantageous distribution to meet the varying

conditions of battle. Some additional offensive strength may be permanently allotted to corps. But a “Division that can attack” is not wanted and can only be created by violating the principle of economy of force.

An army, no matter what its size must be an army that can attack. Its basic formation can be a “Division that can defend” providing that within the army as a whole there exists offensive power proportionate to the administrative strain which the maintenance of that army in the field entails. It is mainly by the skilful handling and distribution of his offensive elements that the Commander-in-Chief justifies his existence.

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## ENDNOTES

1. The German appreciations for the Spring offensive of 1918 are excellent in regard to their arguments as to what does and what does not constitute an “offensive front”.
2. That the tactics of the Fifth Army differed from the action visualized by G.H.Q. does not affect this argument.



## ANNEX B

# What Price Assault Without Support?

*By Captain G.G. Simonds*

*Royal Canadian Artillery*

*Canadian Defence Quarterly Vol. XVI, No. 2, January 1939*

In his article “Where do Tanks Belong”<sup>1</sup> Col. Burns criticizes ideas advanced by myself in an article<sup>2</sup> in the July number of the *Canadian Defence Quarterly* and further supports the plea for re-organization of the division as advocated in “A Division That Can Attack”.<sup>3</sup> Though moderately expressed, there are certain weaknesses and inconsistencies in argument that cannot be allowed to pass unchallenged.

It now appears that the re-organization suggested was meant to apply only to the British Regular Army—not to “second-line” divisions. Yet, to quote from “A Division That Can Attack”, the following was the reason given for telling the British Army how to reorganize itself: “...the British regular division is the prototype of all the divisions of all the forces of the Empire, it having been agreed long ago in Imperial Conference that organization and training should be uniform. Hence, a Dominion officer who feels it is his duty to suggest improvements in military organization must argue the case for all (Col. Burn’s italics) the Empire’s forces, and first of all in the British regular army, taking cognizance of the whole range of that army’s duties...” The passage quoted is a sound reason for volunteering suggestions in regard to changes in British organization, *only so long as that organization and the suggested changes react upon our own*. Beyond that point, our attitude as Canadians towards the problems of defence, leaves little justification for offering advice to other parts of the Empire. Let us concentrate upon setting our own house in order. We may then be in a position to offer advice

to others.

In the sphere of military defence, Great Britain by virtue of her geographic position and economic structure must have a first class navy and a first class air force. With a navy and air force kept at a strength equal or superior to any likely rival power, or combination of powers, she is safe against “the knock-out blow”. The burden which the maintenance of these two services (and the ground organization for air defence) puts upon the British taxpayer, places a first class field army beyond the range of sound finance. It has been the oft expressed opinion of British statesmen that an attempt to support in times of peace an army on a continental scale would result in financial and economic collapse—followed by disintegration of the Empire. It would be the negation of “defence”, using that word in its widest sense. The British Regular Army is maintained for home defence, to garrison vital points on Empire lines of communication and to provide a small strategic reserve to meet Imperial commitments or *perhaps* reinforce an ally on the continent of Europe. The policy of the British Government in regard to the employment of the Regular Army was carefully defined in the speech of the Secretary of State for War when introducing the Army Estimates on 11th March, 1938.<sup>4</sup> Col. Burns cannot have studied this statement of policy. In it, the organization of an expeditionary force for employment on the continent of Europe is last in order of priority of the tasks of the Regular Army.

Behind the Regular Army is the *potential* in manpower and industry to raise a great national army should it prove unnecessary in a continental war. The field formations of the Territorial Force form the peacetime framework upon which a national army may be built.

If the armies of Britain’s allies are strong enough to defeat their enemies without British aid, then it would be sound allied strategy to try for an immediate and simultaneous decision by land, sea and air. But if this is not the case, then common sense demands that the allies should postpone a decision on land until British war potential has had time to develop. In the first instance their land strategy should be defensive. True, this does not exclude the tactical offensive. No doubt the British contribution of a powerful striking force, to act as the spearhead of all offensive action (as inevitably it would) would be gratefully accepted on the continent. The wisdom of employing in this manner the only fully trained troops at the disposal of the British Government is a different matter.

In 1914 nearly the whole of the Regular Army was despatched to the continent within a few weeks of the outbreak of war. This marked the beginning of four years of abortive offensives aimed at gaining a decision in the west. The training of the “national army” was improvised as best it could be, without trained

staffs and instructors and without equipment. It was reinforced by formations of the “New Armies”, hustled into battle without proper equipment, support or training. From then onwards British manpower and material were dribbled into action “to maintain pressure on the enemy.” Heavy casualties resulted and the ranks of fighting units were always filled with a high percentage of half-trained drafts. “Pressure” was maintained but there was never a pause long enough to conserve the energy for a “punch”. In the spring of 1918, when conscription had failed to provide the drafts required to keep units up to strength, the Germans played into the hands of the Allies with a gambler’s throw for victory. Was this method of conducting war so successful that the “opening move” should be repeated? Circumstances may force Great Britain to send troops to the continent before she is prepared. No set of circumstances can justify offensive action which has not a reasonable prospect of success.

The writer is accused of harbouring “...the insidious notion that the British Army’s task will be predominately defensive.”<sup>55</sup> It is difficult to understand how this deduction can have followed from the statement: “An army, no matter what its size, must be an army that can attack.”<sup>56</sup> The value of and necessity for offensive action are fully understood. On the contrary, the offensive merely for its own sake – to maintain a principle – has proved too costly a policy in the past to warrant repetition. Defensive action cannot gain a decision. No more can the offensive unless backed by the power required to drive it home.

In the sphere of design, Col. Burns’ comparison between the work of the War Office and that of works officers of the Corps of Royal Canadian Engineers is a fair analogy. Both have the same *nature* of problems to face though in vastly different fields. Design, to be good, must be restricted by the medium available and within the means available for building. It is useless to design a bridge in reinforced concrete when only wood can be obtained for construction. The District Engineer Officer who, told to make one room into two, tore down the building and produced a perfect but costly design for its replacement (with the necessary two rooms instead of one), might get a gold medal from the Institute of Architects but would probably get a court martial from his D.O.C. when roof and walls must be left intact to give protection against stormy weather, the scope of the designer, no matter what his vision, is limited to putting or removing the partitions.

Within the British Empire the British Regular Army is the only strategic reserve of land forces immediately available. With the League at its zenith and public opinion concentrated upon the realization of disarmament, the money needed for Army reform was not forthcoming from the British taxpayer “...we are always being asked for some reason or other to cut down the Army Estimates.

Every year we are asked to cut things out and we have got to do everything out of savings. No big company ever did such a thing; they issue further shares and work on capital. They do not modernize their business out of savings...” So spoke the C.I.G.S. in 1929. By the time the danger had become apparent to the public it had reached a point where heavy demands were being made on the Regular Army. “Scrap and Rebuild” was no longer a practical policy. The “roof and walls” had to be kept intact to give protection against storms which were, with a change of season, no longer just visible on the horizon but starting to break. A rebuke to Great Britain for failure to rearm with greater energy would come ill from a Canadian.

No one claims that the British Division as at present organized is perfect, but some realize that army re-organization has had to be carried through in face of practical difficulties. What the writer claims is that it is unsound to base re-organization on the theory that the line of battle division must be a division that can attack.

Col. Burns’ historical evolution of the division follows closely a similar study by Captain Liddell Hart. It is of none but academic interest to the military historian. It is strange to find one who has so often expressed contempt for outworn tradition, himself indulging in traditional argument. In an age of “totalitarian war”, the “Army” has replaced the “division” in the Napoleonic conception of an independent strategic formation. Why? Because in continental warfare with the extension of the idea of the “Nation in Arms”, with battlefields stretching over half a continent, operations on a divisional scale are mere “pinpricks” with no strategic significance. “What’s in a name?” The term division has survived to describe a mixed formation of about 15,000 men. True, we might give this another name and reserve the term “Division” for a force capable of attaining strategic results independently. If the psychological effect of this change of nomenclature will help win the next war, by all means let us make the change! The fact remains that a force the size of the division, as that term is now generally understood in all the world’s armies, is no longer capable of attaining independent strategic results in continental warfare. The area within which it can exert pressure (Col. Burns’ “super” division can attack, according to his claims, on a front of 4000 yards) is too small to produce anything but purely local effects.

In regard to Col. Burns’ estimate of the capacity of British industry, it is only necessary to make two observations. Tanks do not consist of a chassis alone. Armour and armament are also required – both products of a highly specialized industry which cannot be expected to have flourished in a period when the public cry was “kill the armaments maker”. It is interesting to note that in the example quoted by Col. Burns for supply of Allies’ tanks in 1919, Great Britain was to

supply the armour and armament, though at that time the United States was the greatest steel and motor manufacturing country in the world. "... America decided to build another 1500 tanks at home as well as many thousands of Renault Tanks. She found, however, greater difficulty than she had expected in making armour plate and guns, so it was arranged that the second 1500 should also be assembled at our French factory on the same terms as the first, England supplying the armour plate and guns, America the engines."<sup>8</sup>

Secondly, if industry can provide 2560 tanks, it would be unsound to equip active units with more than 1000. The balance would be required to replace casualties and in the form of spare parts for repair. At Cambrai, the first great tank battle of the war, 216 tanks went into action at zero – 165 or over 75% of the numbers engaged were held in reserve as spare machines to replace casualties. Yet, on the second day of the battle only 145 tanks were able to continue the fight. In the Battle of Amiens, considered one of the most successful attacks of the last war, 480 tanks went into action of which 39 were hit. On the third day only 67 tanks were available of which 30 were hit during the day's fighting. By 11th August the Royal Tank Corps could no longer operate. Admittedly, improvements in mechanical efficiency and reliability of machine will result in fewer casualties from mechanical failure, but this will be balanced by a vast increase in the efficacy of modern anti-tank defence. A tank force which is backed by less than 150 percent spares "ex-factory" will be a "flash in the pan" incapable of any sustained effort in war.

Col. Burns' main argument for including a tank brigade within the division is that unless tanks form an integral part of the formation, co-operation between all arms will suffer. He further claims that unless tank training is their direct responsibility, divisional commanders will not learn how to employ them or how to attack. It is convenient to examine the latter contention first.

Will the addition of assaulting power without the addition of the means of supporting assault, improve the attack technique of divisional commanders? In training for the attack, the launching of infantry to the assault without the fire support required to put them on their objective has been the main subject of adverse comment by military critics. To substitute *unsupported tanks for unsupported infantry* is not going to result in greater realism. To quote from "A Division That Can Attack": "With four tank battalions in the division, probably not more than two would attack in line simultaneously, allowing for reserves to penetrate in depth. Each could attack on a 2000 yard front – 4000 yards in all. The probability is that such a division would normally attack on a shorter front. Assuming the 4000 yards, however, and that the frontage a gun can effectually cover in a barrage is twenty yards, 200 guns would be required to cover the front

... Obviously it would be impracticable to have so many guns permanently with the division. Let us assume that only about one third will be on the division establishment, the remainder being provided for offensives from corps or higher artillery reserves.” Col. Burns admits that it is impractical to include the necessary fire support within the division. Without it, his unbalanced division will still be unable to attack. For many of the tasks allotted to the division the assault power of a tank brigade will not be needed, yet these tanks may be employed to a greater advantage, or urgently required, in another battle area. It is a psychological fact that most human divisional commanders are very reluctant to give away anything which authority has admitted to be an essential part of their formation. This tendency would be accentuated in a division such as Col. Burns suggests. With only two infantry brigades, tanks would generally constitute the divisional reserve.

Co-operation between all arms is of vital importance, but the writer believes that this can be achieved without including tanks in the divisional organization. An Army Tank and Army Artillery “Circus” should be available for attachment to divisions for attack exercises during their training. By varying the number of tank battalions and artillery regiments made available to divisions a further important lesson relevant to the offensive may be stressed – namely to limit the scope of an attack to the resources available. There is no difficulty in arranging the peace stations of army tank battalions so that they will be able to work with other arms during unit training. Tanks were not included in divisional organization during the war, yet, with the exception of the 51 Division, there was no difficulty in training tanks and infantry to work together before the Battle of Cambrai. It is the duty of the Directorate of Military Training (and those who appoint divisional commanders) to see that instances such as that which arose with the 51 Division do not recur.

In the war 1914-18 *massed artillery and surprise* was the formula for successful attack. Given those two conditions and the “break-in” succeeded whether tanks or infantry were the main assaulting arm. Neither the Allies nor the Germans ever achieved a “break-through” on the Western Front. In the future given sufficient support, the range and endurance of tanks may enable them to convert a “break-in” into a “break-through”. But the increase in anti-tank weapons will make the unsupported tank assault of the future as costly as the unsupported infantry assault of the past. Air bombing may develop to the stage where massed air craft, converging from distant aerodromes, can provide a sustained bombardment of the necessary accuracy and intensity to give covering fire to troops. This would obviate the difficulty of a secret concentration of masses of artillery close to the front of the attack. The number of aircraft required for such tactics are no more suitable for embodiment in the divisional organization

than are the 200 guns mentioned above.

Col. Burns has tried to create a division that can attack by adding assaulting power without the means of supporting it, and if history gives us any guidance, what price assault without support?

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## ENDNOTES

1. *Canadian Defence Quarterly*, October 1938.
2. “An Army that can Attack – a division that can defend.”
3. *Canadian Defence Quarterly*, April 1938.
4. Extracts from “*Parliamentary Debates*”, Vol. 332, No. 72, Friday, 11th March 1938.
5. “Where Do The Tanks Belong?”
6. “An Army that Can Attack – A Division that Can Defend.”
7. From an address by Field Marshal Lord Milne when C.I.G.S.
8. “Tanks 1914-16”, by Sir Albert G. Stern, K.C.B., C.M.G.



## ANNEX C

# The Attack

*By Captain G.G. Simonds  
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*Canadian Defence Quarterly Vol. XVI, No. 4, July 1939*

### I – Introductory

Ever since the close of the war in 1918, British tactical doctrine, as exemplified in training exercises both with and without troops, has been under fire from military critics. Censure of defence doctrine is a comparatively recent development but prolonged and violent criticisms have been directed against our training for the attack. In spite of artful ripostes by the vested interests – the older fighting arms with a long and honourable tradition of supremacy on the battlefield – much of this criticism is justified. But the writer believes that the fault rests, not with our doctrine, but with the manner of its interpretation.

Our Field Service Regulations, and training manuals generally, are most frequently condemned because they are said to be too indefinite. It is claimed that they are too inconclusive and replete with remarks of the type: “Under certain conditions this may be the right thing to do, but then, on the other hand, it may be quite wrong” and that in fact a quotation can be found in F.S.R. to justify any tactical act or course of action. *No book of doctrine can be a substitute for common sense and good judgement.* Before opening the cover of any training manual the reader must ask himself the question: “For what conditions has this manual been written?” The answer so far as British manuals are concerned is: “They visualize operations against every type of enemy, over every type of terrain, almost anywhere in the world.”

So long as Great Britain remains a world power her Army must be trained

to meet the commitments and obligations which are inseparable from a world wide political responsibility. A study of the varied operations in which British troops were engaged during the War 1914-18 in France, Northern Italy, Macedonia, Gallipoli, Egypt and Palestine, Mesopotamia and East Africa, affords convincing evidence that British tactical doctrine cannot be dogmatic in its interpretation of modern war. Cavalry charges that rode over the Turks in Palestine would have withered away before German barbed wire and machine guns in France. A German attack, planned and executed like the offensives in France in March and April, 1918, would have sent British troops from their precarious hold on the beaches of Gallipoli, hurtling into the sea.

The writer has had occasion to study certain continental tactical doctrine. In comparison with the substance of our own training manuals it is more definite and at first sight appears much more realistic in its appreciation of the characteristics of modern war. This first impression must be modified when one bears in mind that one particular set of conditions for which such doctrine legislates – a struggle between the armies of first class continental powers on the battlefields of Western Europe. Deeper analysis shows it to be far too restricted in vision to form the basis for the training of British troops. The possibility that the British Army may have to fight in Western Europe becomes daily more of a probability but it becomes equally probable that the Continent is not the only theatre in which British troops may have to meet potential enemies. Official training manuals must continue to take a broad view of the training, morale and equipment of the enemy, of the type of ground over which it may be necessary to operate and of strategical conditions which will vary with the theatre of war. But the wisdom of concentrating in one manual a teaching which covers so wide a field, without providing some additional guidance for special conditions, is open to question. The writer believes it has led to much confusion of thought – that action which a manual intends to justify against an enemy Category C.3. is often interpreted as justifiable against an enemy Category A.1. There is much to be said for the production of a supplementary manual dealing with one special set of conditions – war against a first class enemy in a closely settled and civilized country.

*“The enemy” is by far the most important, and because that term embraces individual and collective human beings, by far the most unpredictable factor in any military situation. Ground and Time and Space are important but their values are set by the character of the enemy. “The enemy” is the crux of the problem in war. If our peace-time training exercises are to have any real value, the imaginary enemy must be made to live. The writer has attended many instructional exercises wherein the enemy, having been described in the “Opening Narrative” as Category A.1. in the subsequent development of the situation have*

been successfully dealt with and made to act as if they were Category C.3. *No tactical exercise, with or without troops, should be allowed to be used for training until the action of the enemy has been worked out in terms of definite units and a definite doctrine.* To bring out certain lessons it is perfectly justifiable to place the enemy at a disadvantage – state that they have suffered a series of heavy defeats; that a strategical surprise has caught them off balance. It is not justifiable to make them act as if they had not the slightest knowledge of the most elementary tactical principles unless the “Opening Narrative” or “General Idea” has described them as an untrained rabble.

It adds to realism if the organization and equipment of “the enemy” is made different from our own – either based upon that of some foreign army or, to avoid national susceptibilities, upon a reasonable combination of several. It is equally an advantage to make the enemy operate in accordance with some foreign doctrine in cases where the latter is at variance with ours. No very deep research is necessary for this purpose – there is ample information in the various service journals. One further observation is necessary. There is a school of thought which rates the continental conscript army at a lower military value, man for man, than the professional army raised by voluntary enlistment. This is a smug and dangerous theory. It is true if conscript armies are raised as they were in the British Empire during the war 1914-18 – after having skimmed all the cream off the surface by appeals on moral grounds the residual manpower was then forced into military service as a body. It is not true of most continental countries, democratic or otherwise, whose sons are taught from the day of their birth that equal rights must be shared with equal responsibilities. The conscripted units of a continental army represent a true cross-section of the nation. Though there must be a representation of the weaker element in each unit, they are carried along by the more virile group. The conscript soldier trains on a practically full strength unit, for the number of active units in the national army is fixed by the predicted strength of annual contingents called to the colours. Almost the whole of his training with the colours is *training for war*. The volunteer soldier, particularly during periods when recruiting is slack, often has to train in a unit that is little more than a skeleton and a great proportion of his time is spent on fatigues, or the hundred and one side-lines connected with interior economy, instead of on field training. The officer in the conscript army is used to working with a full strength unit and higher commanders and staffs get practice during peace time in handling large formations. The officer in a voluntary army is called upon to train in what are often the most disheartening conditions of “make believe.” The writer believes that *in the long run* the better moral quality of the voluntary army will tell in its favour. But during the early stages of a war, the general standard of training and technique of both staffs and units of a conscript army will probably be better

than those of an army which in peace time depends solely upon volunteers. An unbiased study of the conditions of training under the two military systems cannot lead to any other logical conclusion. The sooner we face this fact the less likely are we to make disastrous mistakes in war.

The foregoing may appear irrelevant but the writer believes that the ideas expressed are *fundamental to all realistic training for war*. Further, having expressed the belief that tactics must depend to a great extent upon the character of the opposing forces, the writer was under an obligation to explain that the arguments which follow are meant to apply to the attack against a *First Class Enemy* and what that term was intended to imply.

## II – Phases of the Attack

The attack may be considered as comprising three inter-dependent operations:-

- (a) *The Assault*, which neutralizes or paralyzes the defenders by imminent threat of destruction.
- (b) *Mopping Up*, the process of disabling or capturing the enemy before they recover from the temporary paralysis engendered by the assault.
- (c) *Consolidation*, the process of securing against a hostile counter-stroke, the position already won so that it may serve as a firm base from which to launch a further phase.

*Exploitation* is hardly a part of the attack proper, but rather the advantageous use of a favourable opportunity created by the attack.

If hostile troops are caught in movement in the open, assault and mopping up may merge and become one operation. But if the attack is directed against an enemy in position, mopping up will generally entail disabling or forcing the surrender of enemy detachments sheltering in weapon pits, trenches, dugouts, buildings or woods. Consolidation is the hasty organization of defence and is a holding task. Infantry are the only arm capable of mopping up an enemy in position and except under unusually favourable conditions, the only arm capable of consolidating a position won.

The assault is the phase of the attack about which most of the controversy has centred. An “Advanced Tank School” claims that infantry are incapable of pressing home an assault in face of a modern machine gun defence; that tanks must rely on speed for their protection and that if “encumbered” by cooperating

infantry they will only be handicapped in an operation which they are quite capable of performing unassisted. A “Reactionary Infantry School” claims that the tank has been rendered valueless by modern anti-tank defence and that even if tanks can penetrate the defence, “what can they do when they get there?” Therefore the first step in a study of the attack must be the analysis of conditions on the modern battlefield to decide what should be the main assaulting arm. Such an analysis must be carefully fixed in relation to time for science is continually evolving new ideas and the introduction of a new weapon may revolutionize tactics. But most armies are now committed to their rearmament programmes and if war should come in the next five years there seems to be little doubt as to the general type of weapons which would be employed – at least in the early stages.

### III – The Main Assaulting Arm

*The Conception of the Infantry Tank.* The Infantry Tank is a heavily armoured tank designed to give protection against the projectiles of small calibre weapons. Road-widths, turning lock, bridging and conveyance by sea and railway are all factors which limit the overall weight and size of tanks. With the power/space ratio fixed, to mount a satisfactory armament and carry armour to give the degree of protection required the Infantry Tank must sacrifice speed. In comparison with the more lightly armoured “medium” tank, it is very slow. Those who criticize the basic idea of the infantry tank claim that the gun will always beat armour, and therefore it is unsound to increase armour at the expense of speed which must remain the tank’s best protection. This argument requires careful examination. Against enemy troops caught in the open – as a weapon of opportunity for surprise shock action – the fast tank with moderate protection is by far the best weapon. But against an enemy in position, in well concealed defences the locations of which will not be discovered except at close range, it will not be possible for tanks to operate at high speeds and still neutralize the defence. The tank depends mainly upon the firepower of its weapons to neutralize or destroy the enemy. Except on very level ground, high speeds result in jolting motion, an unsteady gun platform and inaccurate shooting. A tank with hatches battened down for battle has a very limited field of view. Its crew will not be able to locate enemy posts when the tank is travelling at high speed. *The logical conclusion seems to be, that no matter what the maximum speed of which a given tank may be capable, the pace at which it can advance through and neutralize an organized defence will be slow.* In regard to the argument that the gun will always beat armour, modern improvements in armour plate necessitate the employment of a fairly big gun to penetrate the armour which a tank can carry. Putting heavy armour on a tank, in the present stage of development of firearms forces the enemy

to employ a big anti-tank gun. The larger the anti-tank gun the more difficult it is to conceal. The larger the gun the more complicated is the problem of ammunition supply, both in regard to provision and transport, and this in turn legislates against the employment of a fully automatic weapon. *On balance the principle of the Infantry Tank, at the present stage of development of firearms is tactically sound.*

*Characteristics of the Anti-Infantry and Anti-Tank Weapon.* The defensive power of the machine gun is probably the most emphatic lesson of the War 1914-18. Sustained fire confers on the machine gun its great stopping power and inconspicuousness makes it extraordinarily light in weight and mechanization of first line transport will enable large quantities to be placed at gun positions. Even when blinded by darkness, dust or smoke the ability to fire on a fixed line makes the machine gun a formidable anti-infantry weapon. The number of machine guns now included in the organization of every first class army will enable all important "fixed lines" to be tripled or quadrupled by guns firing from widely dispersed positions. The number of machine guns available will make it possible to allot individual guns small arcs of fire and this further assists concealment.

If we include the divisional field artillery, the proportion of anti-tank guns to anti-infantry guns in most modern armies is about one to six. As the divisional field artillery is primarily intended for other purposes than anti-tank defence this basis of comparison really favours the anti-tank weapon. If comparison is made on the basis of projectiles delivered per minute, the numerical strength of anti-infantry defence is overwhelmingly greater than anti-tank defence. Because of the comparative scarcity of primary anti-tank weapons, individual guns must be allotted wide arcs of fire. The size of the gun and the present necessity for a wide arc of fire make concealment a much more difficult problem than is the case with the machine gun. The big anti-tank gun cannot fire on a fixed line – it must fire an aimed shot and must be able to see its target. Therefore conditions of bad visibility are a much greater handicap to the anti-tank gun than they are to the machine gun.

*The machine gun possesses advantages over its target – the infantry, which the anti-tank gun does not possess over its target – the tanks.*

*The Influence of Smoke.* The writer is of the opinion that the advantages of the use of smoke in the attack have been grossly exaggerated. In the form of direct covering fire, within the area where the assault is taking place, it may assist infiltration through gaps in the defence but gaps will not exist unless they have been created by lethal covering fire. Assuming the defenders to be of good morale, the man lying in wait in his weapon pit until a target looms through the

smoke actually has an advantage over the man groping his way blindly through obscurity, his sense of direction lost and knowing where to look for his enemy. Smoke will not stop the machine gun firing on fixed lines. It will neutralize the anti-tank gun but will also neutralize the tank which will be unable to see to use its weapons.

Smoke can assist the attack if employed beyond the immediate objective, to shut out observation and neutralize anti-tank guns sited in depth to fire into the area being attacked. Used in this manner smoke can completely neutralize a proportion of the anti-tank guns which depend upon aimed fire to stop their opponent. It will not stop the machine gun firing on a fixed line.

*Bearing in mind the above limitations, smoke affords a greater degree of protection to attacking tanks than to attacking infantry.*

*The Influence of Gas.* Neither tanks nor infantry are likely to be seriously handicapped by choking gas. An area contaminated with blister gas will not stop attacking infantry because its effect is delayed but it may cause heavy casualties. Tanks can pass through a contaminated area with impunity. In attacking an enemy who employs gas, tanks are less likely to suffer casualties than infantry.

*Counter Attack.* Infantry are very vulnerable if exposed to an immediate counter-attack by tanks before they have had time to organize consolidation. Tractor drawn anti-tank guns (whether manned by gunners or infantry-men) are not suitable for employment on the move in the forefront of the battle. Therefore, for protection against hostile tanks, infantry must depend upon accompanying friendly tanks which mount an anti-tank gun. A difficult problem (which is discussed below) arises when attacking across an anti-tank obstacle.

*Tanks have the weapons to stop a hostile immediate counter-attack by tanks and/or infantry. Infantry can stop a hostile immediate counter-attack by infantry but their ability to stop tanks in the first few moments of reaching an objective is, at best, very doubtful.*

*Economic Considerations.* It is sometimes argued that infantry are much less expensive than tanks and for a long time we have been in danger of developing a mentality that considers tanks so valuable that they must not be risked in battle unless conditions are exceptionally favourable. "Fire is the predominant factor in modern war."<sup>1</sup> Therefore it is fair to take fire power as the basis of comparison between infantry and tanks. A platoon of say twenty-five men develops slightly less fire power than a five man tank mounting three machine guns, smoke projectors and an anti-tank gun. The average man in this country by the time he has attained the age of 18 has cost \$5,700.<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that in

general this is the age at which a youth ceases to be a “liability” and goes to work and becomes an “asset” to the national economy. A platoon of twenty-five average men is worth at least \$142,500 *without taking into consideration the value of their arms and equipment*. The crew of a five man tank will be worth \$28,500. This leaves a credit balance of \$114,000 with which to purchase their equipment. It is very difficult to state the value of a tank. It depends upon the number ordered. The mass production car that markets for \$800-\$900 would cost \$10,000 to \$12,000 custom built. But it is certain that for \$114,000 any government could buy a mass production tank of the type required and still have a balance in hand to contribute towards its running expenses.

A counter argument has been developed on the lines that with the tank, all the eggs are in one basket whilst with the platoon they are well distributed over the ground. But the dispersal of the eggs must be considered in relation to the proportion of projectiles capable of destroying them and it has been pointed out above that in this respect the chances of survival of the tank are considerably better than those of the infantry-man. Further, a disabled tank has salvage value and even if completely destroyed, apart from its crew, the loss entailed does not exceed its original cost. Dead men have no salvage value. Dependents of killed and disable soldiers must be pensioned and become charges against the State. Infantry is not “cheap.” Its man power is a nation’s greatest asset. It takes about eighteen years to make a man. Once mass production has been organized, tanks can be run off the assembly lines at the rate of hundreds per month.

*From the point of view of national economy, the tank is a cheaper assaulting arm than infantry.*

*The Influence of Obstacles.* It is its ability to surmount almost any type of obstacle (providing the obstacle is not covered by sustained fire) which confers on infantry a characteristic possessed by no other arm. The statement often made that infantry cannot assault in face of the modern machine gun defence is not supported by facts. *Given sufficient fire support* infantry made successful assaults on the most highly organized defences during the War 1914-18. It is probable that in a future war, an enemy acting on the defensive will make full use of anti-tank obstacles as the Germans did during their retreat in 1918. On occasions it will be possible to pass assaulting tanks across an obstacle by some mechanical means and this opens an interesting and profitable field for attaining tactical surprises in the future. But there will be many cases where an obstacle is of a type that cannot be overcome by a mechanical device and those who believe that infantry can no longer assault, when faced with such a situation, will have no alternative but to follow their counsels of despair and admit that they are beaten. Until infantry have secured a bridgehead it will not be possible to build a bridge and pass tanks across

and this presents a difficult and important problem that has received too little attention. The anti-tank gun is not a weapon which fits conveniently into a boat. Without the support of tanks or anti-tank guns the infantry will have great difficulty in maintaining a bridgehead in face of counter-attacks by hostile tanks. The amphibious tank has been suggested as a possible solution, but in the writer's opinion the amphibious tank is a poor weapon. To be buoyant, armour protection must be pared down until the vehicle in fact ceases to be a tank and becomes an unarmoured gun platform too big to take advantage of cover that would conceal an anti-tank gun of conventional design. A type of inflatable flotation gear is required for the anti-tank gun and should form part of its regular war equipment. Once across an obstacle, the gun can be man-handled by its detachment until its tractor can be moved across but the carriage of ammunition will require special fatigue parties.

In a comparison of artificial obstacles, the barbed wire entanglement is cheaper, lighter and more compact in transit and quicker and easier to construct than any obstruction capable of stopping a tank.

*Excepting the barbed wire entanglement, obstacles place a much greater restriction upon the movements of tanks than they do upon the movements of infantry.*

*Covering Fire.* Covering fire may take the form of stationary concentrations on selected areas or of a moving barrage. Doctrine states: "A barrage is the simplest and most effective method of giving support when it is not possible to locate enemy positions with *accuracy*" and further "When the enemy dispositions are known *in considerable detail*, it may be effective and also economical of resources to employ concentrations of fire on selected areas ..."<sup>3</sup> (My Italics). It is not likely that enemy dispositions will be known "with accuracy" and "in considerable detail" except under conditions of static warfare and then the extent of information will amount to the knowledge that certain positions are occupied by the enemy – the complete enemy layout will never be known when an attack is launched. Our defence doctrine severely deprecates the siting of even hasty defences in exposed and obvious positions. It emphasises that when there is not time to construct field defences, concealment is of primary importance. So does the doctrine of every first class army and many foreign armies do more than pay lip service to the use of camouflage. Yet our most common form of attack training exercise proceeds something along these lines: - After reconnaissance troops have been held up for a short time by machine guns firing over open fields of fire, infantry are launched to the assault supported by concentrations on selected areas. The positions of hostile centres of resistance are presumably located "with accuracy" by some divinely inspired sixth sense

possessed by the commander of the reconnaissance troops. If this is tried in war against a first class enemy the answer will be a large number of infantry casualties at \$5,700 per head. If there are gaps in the defence the reconnaissance troops will discover them. If there are no gaps – if it is a continuous position with interlocking fire from mutually supporting localities – even if the position lacks depth the “crust” will not be broken by infantry unless supported by a barrage.

Tanks are immune to machine gun fire or shell splinters. They can operate within a machine gun barrage and in the rear edge – the splinter zone – of a H.E. artillery barrage. The occasional short shell is unlikely to do tanks serious harm. *For these reasons they can take better advantage of covering fire than can infantry.*

*The Main Assaulting Arm.* A consideration of the foregoing factors shows that in a comparison between the assaulting power of tanks and infantry with the one exception of ability to cross certain types of obstacles, every advantage is in favour of tanks. *It follows that on every occasion when the ground permits of their employment, tanks should fill the role of the main assaulting arm.* This is not to say that infantry cannot assault if they are given *adequate artillery support* and providing the enemy have not erected wire. But they will do so at a greater cost and the depth to which they will be able to penetrate will be much more limited than if tanks are employed.

Assisted by the neutralizing effect of artillery and machine gun support, tanks can close the enemy defences until they can see the hostile posts and engage them at decisive short range. Armoured protection puts the tank crew on an equal footing with the defenders behind earthworks or even concrete. At short range they can destroy or neutralize the *perimeter defences* of hostile localities. But they cannot destroy the enemy who, on the approach of tanks may take cover in wood, buildings, weapon pits or dugouts, only to man their weapons again as soon as the tanks move away. *Therefore to destroy or capture the enemy the co-operation of infantry is essential.* Under the cover provided by the tanks infantry can enter hostile localities and deliver the *coup de grace*.

The bickering between the “Advanced Tank School” and the “Reactionary Infantry School” should cease, for successful attack in the future depends upon *cooperation* between these arms. Infantry, instead of practicing unrealistic attacks supported by a battery firing a concentration and “fighting their way forward with their own weapons” over open fields of fire, should study seriously the problem of working with tanks. To the riposte frequently heard: “What are you going to do when you haven’t got tanks?” there is only one reply. “What are you going to do in modern war without machine guns, artillery, ammunition, gas masks or

aeroplanes?”

#### IV – Framing of Attack Situations

It is unfortunate that most of our training for the attack has been framed in the setting of the Encounter Battle. For the Encounter Battle – the head-on collision between two forces going in opposite directions – presupposes a faulty appreciation by one side or the other. *Both sides cannot hold the initiative*. It is interesting to note that the encounter battle has formed the “build-up” for tactical training mainly since the Franco-Prussian war when the French made a deplorably faulty appreciation. It has continued since the war 1914-18, when again, the initial French Plan XVII was based upon entirely faulty premises. In act, taking history as a basis, *the encounter is generally fought out by the mobile troops*. By that time, the situation has become clarified and there is little doubt as to which side possessed the initiative. Information from the air and from his cavalry decided Sir John French to halt and defend the line of the Mons-Conde Canal although original plans required the B.E.F. to *advance* on the left wing of the French Armies – there was no head-on collision between advanced guards of main columns. After the Marne the initiative passed to the French and British and the B.E.F. followed the retiring Germans who covered their withdrawal by mobile troops. The encounter battle as envisaged in many training exercises can only take place if one side has made a thoroughly bad appreciation, including a miscalculation of the time and space factor.

Let us examine the probable action of a well trained enemy assuming that our side holds the initiative. The mobile troops of most modern armies consist of a mixture of light armoured fighting vehicles and troops carried in mechanical transport intended primarily to be employed in dismounted action. The first contact will be with patrols from enemy mobile troops sent forward to *gain information* – to confirm air reports as to the direction and frontage of our advance. Out-manoeuving and driving in these patrols will be the task of our own mobile troops. Such hostile patrols may test our strength and gain a little time by blocking and holding the crossings over obstacles. If hostile patrols are only strong enough to hold actual crossings, the dismounted element of our own mobile troops may cross at intervening points and drive off detachments covering bridges. But at times it may happen that our own mobile troops are extended on such a wide front, that though they can find the gap, they have not the strength to exploit it. It will then be necessary to deploy some of the leading infantry. On these occasions the situation will not be such that infantry are called upon to attack frontally a position which the mobile troops have been unable to penetrate. The situation will require the crossing of an obstacle at a place unguarded by the

enemy, an advance on the far side with all round protection and manoeuvre to reach a position in rear of an enemy standing patrol from which fire can be brought to bear upon it at close range. In country that is closely wooded, or intersected by many streams or canals, a few standing patrols might hold up mechanized mobile troops for long periods and under these conditions it may be necessary to call on the assistance of infantry at frequent intervals. Infantry could be “unleashed” across or through obstacles to clear the way. *The action required of the infantry will necessitate tactics of manoeuvre and infiltration through close country, not an attack with a set piece fire plan.*

The next stage arises when our mobile troops come in contact with a hostile covering force sent forward to *gain time*. The tactical handling of a covering force is exactly the same as that of a rearguard, the ruling principle of which is *the maintenance of an intact front* at the sacrifice of depth. Whenever our mobile troops make contact with the enemy, if trained according to principles laid down by doctrine, they will “fan out” to the flanks and explore the extent of the hostile position. *The first intimation our mobile troops will get that they are no longer opposed by patrols, but by a covering force, will be the discovery that they are up against an intact front. If through a tactical error on the part of the enemy there is a gap in the hostile front, trained mobile troops will discover it.* If the gap exists on the group over which tanks can operate, the armoured vehicles of the mobile troops will be better fitted to exploit it than infantry, for the situation will require a rapid advance through the gap and subsequent operations against the flanks and rear of the enemy on one or both sides. If our artillery is properly handled, any support available to infantry within two hours will be available to the mobile troops. If the gap is blocked by an anti-tank obstacle, then it will be necessary to call upon the forward infantry, but once again the tactics required of infantry will be exactly the same as those against patrols outlined above. But we cannot work on the assumption that the enemy are going to make mistakes or that they do not know their business well enough to provide a covering force adequate to the frontage to be covered. *And one up against an intact front, with interlocking fire, it is a useless waste of life to launch infantry to the assault without adequate fire support and adequate fire support means a barrage.* If it is essential to the commander’s plan that the hostile covering forces be driven-in quickly, then leading formations must be reinforced with infantry tanks and senior commanders must be well forward so that they are able to make an early decision as to where the enemy position is to be broken and concentrate their artillery and tanks to break it. Several independent company and battalion battles launched on a divisional front will meet with the repulses that lack of coordination and concentration always deserve.

Let us hold to realism. The object of training is not to prove that “Infantry

is the Queen of Battles” but to teach cooperation between the many varied fighting troops which are the *essential components* of a modern army.

## V – Summary of Conclusions

It is not the intention of this article to be one of destructive criticism, but it is felt very strongly that the lines upon which our training for the attack have been based during the last few years are unrealistic in the extreme. Official and unofficial histories and records of the War 1914-18 will be searched in vain for examples of successful attacks staged on the lines of the majority of training exercises. The writer has been able to discover three examples of successful attacks of this type but they took place during the Third Afghan War.

In conclusion of the preceding arguments the following is a summary of the suggestions in regard to training for the attack:-

(a) Attacks by infantry and tanks in cooperation should be considered the normal, not the abnormal, method of attack. *By far the most important subject for study and training is the cooperation between infantry and infantry tanks.* Since the close of the War in 1918 this has become almost an unexplored field. There has been tremendous progress in tank design and cooperation cannot be achieved without training as was proved in the last Great War. *This is not just a problem for higher commanders. It is equally a problem for infantry platoon and tank section commanders, for infantry section leaders and tank crews.*

(b) Barring cooperation with tanks, infantry training in the attack should be directed to the following studies:-

- (i) Forcing the crossing of tank obstacles.
- (ii) Exploitation of a gap, requiring an advance with exposed flanks and infiltration tactics.
- (iii) Fighting in close country, woods and villages.
- (iv) Night attacks.

This is not a criticism of doctrine – the reader is challenged to find a statement that conflicts with our doctrine as applied to modern organization. It is a criticism of misinterpretation of doctrine. Before the outbreak of the War in

1914 a Senior German officer is reported to have made the remark: “The British Army has the finest training manuals of any army in the world and makes the worst use of them.” Let us make sure that such a statement cannot be justified today.

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## ENDNOTES

1. *Infantry Training 1937*. H.M. Stationary Office.
2. Dominion Bureau of Statistics as quoted by *Ottawa Journal*.
3. *Infantry Training 1937*. H.M. Stationary Office.

# Afterword

The stated purpose of this book is to document the ideas on leadership and command expressed by Lieutenant-General Guy Simonds while serving as General Officer Commanding 2nd Canadian Corps. The narrative sections are designed to place these ideas in context so that the specific challenges confronting the corps are understood. These descriptive paragraphs are largely drawn from my book-length studies *Fields of Fire: The Canadians in Normandy* and *Cinderella Army: The Canadians in Northwest Europe 1944-1945*, and readers who wish to examine the topic further should consult these works. My reading of the campaign in Normandy and Northwest Europe suggests that at the corps and army level where the allocation of scarce resources, the formulation of workable, innovative operational plans and the optimum use of ancillary units such as the specialized armour of the 79th Armoured Division were critical to success, command skills were vastly more important than personality characteristics. By this measure Simonds was the most effective corps commander in 21 Army Group.

Readers who seek other views on Simonds should consult the biographical sketches by Graham and Granatstein, as well as the essays in Stephen J. Harris and Bernd Horn (eds) *Generalship and the Art of the Admiral: Perspectives on Senior Canadian Military Leadership*, especially the essay on Simonds by Roman Jaramowycz. Bill McAndrew, one of Simonds' best-informed critics, comments on the general's approach to battle in "Fire or Movement?" Canadian Tactical Doctrine, Sicily 1943" in *Military Affairs* July 1987. For a more favourable assessment from an especially astute observer see John A. English, *The Canadian Army in the Normandy Campaign: A Study of Failure in High Command*. Douglas Delaney discusses Simonds, as well as other Canadian generals in "Looking Back on Canadian Generalship in the Second World War" in *Canadian Army Journal* volume 7.1, Spring 2004. Delaney is preparing an

important comparative study of the three corps commanders who served under First Canadian Army: John Crocker, Brian Horrocks and Guy Simonds. Readers will enjoy C.P. Stacey's "Canadian Leaders of the Second World War" in *Canadian Historical Review*, volume 66 March 1985 and his memoir, *A Date With History*. For a detailed analysis of Simonds' most famous battle, Operation TOTALIZE, see the model study by Brian Reid, *No Holding Back*.

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