

HISTORICAL SECTION

CANADIAN MILITARY HEADQUARTERS

CANADIAN PARTICIPATION IN THE OPERATIONS IN NORTH
WEST EUROPE, 1944. PART IV: FIRST CANADIAN ARMY
IN THE PURSUIT (23 AUG - 30 SEP)

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Canadian Participation in the Operations
in North-West Europe, 1944

Part IV: First Canadian Army in the
Pursuit (23 Aug - 30 Sep)

1. This is a further report in the series covering the detailed narrative of Canadian operations in Normandy in 1944. It follows the sequence of Reports Nos. 147, 162 and 169. It relates the history of First Canadian Army in its rapid pursuit of the enemy from the Falaise débâcle to the River Seine; its crossing of that river during the last week of August; and its continuation of the chase up the Channel Coast to the Dutch - Belgian frontier and the Leopold Canal. The period dealt with extends from 23 Aug to 30 Sep 44. The story of the clearing of the Channel ports and the containing of Dunkirk - operations that were carried out within these dates - forms the subject of a separate Report - Part V in the present series. A similar narration of the operations to clear the Scheldt Estuary and free the port of Antwerp will follow.

THE GENERAL STRATEGIC PLAN

2. On the morning of 22 Aug, fighting had ceased in the area of the now closed Falaise gap (See [Report No. 169](#)). Canadian formations were busy regrouping for the next stage of the campaign - the pursuit to the Seine of the fleeing remnants of the German Army. The phase of operations just concluded by the forces of 12 and 21 Army Groups had cost the enemy the battle of Normandy. With his Seventh Army destroyed as a fighting force and his Fifth Panzer Army badly mauled and in full retreat, there was every indication that he might also have lost the battle of France. Much depended upon his ability within the immediate future to reorganize his shattered resources sufficiently to make a successful stand against the impending Allied advance.

3. For with the imminent collapse of the enemy trapped in the Falaise - Mortain pocket a wider encirclement was envisaged by General Montgomery:

... Our first enveloping movement completed, I was concentrating on ensuring that the wider encirclement along the Seine should be achieved with the maximum possible speed, so as to cut off the survivors from the Falaise - Mortain pocket.

(Field Marshal the Viscount
Montgomery of Alamein, [Normandy](#)
to the Baltic, p. 133)

The C.-in-C. continued:

Speed, then, was now the vital necessity in order to take advantage of the favourable circumstances presented to us: first, we had got to block the withdrawal of the enemy survivors across the Seine, and second, we were to drive quickly across the Pas de Calais to capture ports to facilitate our maintenance requirements, and the flying bomb sites in order to diminish the effect that the 'V' weapons were having on the United Kingdom.

(Ibid, p. 134)

4. On the right of 21 Army Group, First and Third U.S. Armies (later to become 12 Army Group), under command of General Omar Bradley, were already in pursuit. During the operations in the Falaise - Trun - Argentan area the southern thrust by General George S. Patton's Third U.S. Army had proceeded virtually unchecked. By 20 Aug armoured formations had driven as far east as Orleans, Chartres and Dreux, and patrols had reached the Seine at Mantes-Gassicourt and Vernon. The Army's long northern flank reached from Dreux to Argentan; and midway along it a thrust was being developed towards Laigle. (AEF 45/First Cdn Army/C/F, Docket II: First Canadian Army Lectures, Brigadier Mann, The Campaign in North West Europe from the "Break Out" South of Caen, 7/8 August 1944 to 31 December 1944). On General Patton's left, part of the First U.S. Army under Lt-Gen C.H. Hodges, was thrusting eastward from Argentan while other formations held firm the southern side of the Falaise "bottle". With First Cdn Army keeping the Trun - Chambois bottleneck tightly corked, Second Brit Army was closing in from the west and north to complete

the final elimination of the Falaise - Mortain pocket. (G.O.C.-in-C./1-0, Directive, C.-in-C., 21 Army Gp, 20 Aug 44)

5. The Allied planning now foresaw the possibility of entrapping the fleeing enemy within another, and larger bag, before he should be able to make good his escape into North-eastern France. General Bradley's group of armies¹ - First and Third U.S. Armies - was to drive northwards from the general line Mantes - Dreux - Verneuil, with its right flank following the south banks of the Seine, its left directed on Bourgtheroulde. The Army Group capture that city when it was militarily sound to do so. 21 Army Group, comprising Second Brit and First Cdn Armies, was to advance rapidly to the Seine. (Ibid). Even before D Day, in early May, the Canadian Army planners had been given the particular task of studying the operation for crossing the Seine. They produced some material which proved of immense value when the time came. (Maj-Gen Sir Francis Guingand, Operation Victory, p. 370)

6. The boundary set between 12 U.S. Army Group and Second Brit Army was Argentan - Nonant - Laigle - Dreux - Mantes - Beauvais - Amiens. That between Second Brit and First Cdn Armies ran through Falaise - Vimoutiers - Orbec - Bernay - Le Neubourg - Louviers - Neufchatel - Le Tréport (AEF/First Cdn Army/C/1, Docket III(d): First Cdn Army Op Instr No. 18, 22 Aug 44). General Montgomery directed Second Army, when the enemy remaining in Normandy

¹ General Bradley's command did not officially become known as "12 Army Group" until 1 Sep 44 (Report by The Supreme Commander to the Combined Chiefs of Staff on the Operation in Europe of the allied Expeditionary Force, 6 June 1944 to 8 May 1945, p. 76). Field Marshal Montgomery, however, used the designation in his directives from 21 Jul on. (G.O.C.-in-C., 1/0, 21 Army Gp Directive, M.512, 21 Jul 44)

had been destroyed, to advance with all speed to the Seine, and cross the river, pushing on beyond the Somme into the Pas de Calais. First Cdn Army, while completing its task in the Trun - Chambois area, was simultaneously to advance its left wing (1 Brit Corps) towards Lisieux and Rouen. When its work at Trun was finished the Army would advance to the Seine, and, crossing between Louviers and the sea, operate to clear the whole Le Havre peninsula to the west of the Army boundary. The need for securing the port facilities of Le Havre was pressing. The main tonnage of supplies for 21 Army Group was still coming in across the beaches of D Day, and the rapidly lengthening lines of communications as the armies moved eastward were producing complex problems of administration whose solution would be materially aided by the early acquisition of suitable ports. Up the Channel Coast from Le Havre was the small port of St. Valery-en-Caux, where 51 (H.) Inf Div had made so gallant a stand in 1940, and further east was Dieppe. Their capture by First Cdn Army would be welcomed for other than purely strategic reasons.

All Scotland will be grateful, if Comd Cdn Army can arrange that the Highland Division should capture ST VALERY. I have no doubt that 2 Cdn Div will deal very suitably with DIEPPE.

(G.O.C.-in-C./1-0, C.-in-C.

Directive, M519, 20 Aug 44)

7. To the Allied Air Forces was given the task of destroying and keeping out of action all bridges across the Seine and the Loire. It was also planned that airborne troops would be used to break enemy resistance ahead of our

advancing ground forces. (The implementation of such plans was, however, not necessary, as armour and infantry moved forward with greater rapidity than had been anticipated). This cutting of the enemy's lines of withdrawal carried out in conjunction with the American right flanking move down the Seine would, it was hoped, place him once more in a predicament where the destruction of his forces might be contemplated. (Ibid)

8. The axis of advance assigned to 2 Cdn Corps was along the general line Trun - Vimoutiers - Orbec - Bernay - Elbeuf (Louviers was a possible alternative to Elbeuf) (W.D., G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army, August 1944: Appx 9, G.O.C.-in-C. Directive, 19 Aug 44). The Corps advance would only commence on orders received from the G.O.C.-in-C. First Cdn Army, but in anticipation of the early elimination of the Falaise pocket, Lt-Gen Crerar directed the Corps Commander on 19 Aug to carry out active reconnaissance to the north-east in the direction of Vimoutiers. 1 Brit Corps would continue to direct its advance along the axis Lisieux - Pont Audemer. (Ibid). In his directive to the commanders of 1 Brit and 2 Cdn Corps, General Crerar defined the Army's task.

The basic tactical policy of the First Cdn Army ... will be to advance to the R. SEINE with "right leading" even though it may well be that 2 Cdn Corps will be temporarily prevented from commencing its part in this intended manoeuvre by its present commitments ... in the meantime 1 Brit Corps will not hold back on that account, but will proceed as intended ... enemy garrisons in the coastal belt will be masked and contained by adequate forces. Their continued existence, however, will not be

allowed to distract the main forces of 1 Brit Corps from their thrusts along the axis given.

(Ibid)

9. In preparation for Second Army's advance to the Seine, 12 Brit Corps was moved behind 2 Cdn Corps, to release the latter from its holding role about the Falaise pocket, and to be in position itself so that it might swing in between the Canadian Corps on the left and 30 Brit Corps on the right, paralleling the advance of each. 8 Brit Corps was now squeezed out, going into Army Group reserve on 18 Aug, and did not again participate in operations until after the Seine had been crossed. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, August 1944: Appx 1, Sitrep, 18 Aug 44)

THE 2 CDN CORPS PLAN OF PURSUIT TO THE SEINE

10. 2 Cdn Corps had under command for the impending pursuit 2 and 3 Cdn Inf Divs, 4 Cdn Armd Div, 2 Cdn Armd Bde and 1 Pol Armd Div. The Polish Division, commanded by Maj-Gen S. Maczek, was brought into reserve on 23 Aug 44 for a well-deserved rest and an opportunity for reorganization after its brilliant but costly feat of closing the gap at Chambois and linking up with the United States formations in that area. The division remained in reserve until the crossing of the Seine had been accomplished. (AEF/First Cdn Army/C/E, Docket II: 2 Cdn Corps Directive, 22 Aug 44)

11. The Army Commander's instruction of 19 Aug (see para 8) had been passed on by Lt-Gen Simonds to his divisional commanders at 1100 hrs the same morning, while the maintenance of the complete encirclement of the enemy still in the pocket continued to be of prime importance (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 19 Aug 44). On 21 Aug the Corps Commander gave orders that while 3 Cdn Inf Div (with under command 2 Cdn Armd Bde) and 1 Pol Armd Div guarded against any enemy breakout from the Trun - Chambois gap, the Corps advance to the north-east would be made on a two-division front - 4 Cdn Armd Div right and 2 Cdn Inf Div left (AEF/First Cdn Army/C/E, Docket II: 2 Cdn Corps Directive, 21 Aug 44). By these orders 2 Cdn Inf Div was to move east from Falaise, cross the Dives River and advance towards Vimoutiers to protect the Corps left flank north of the route followed by the armour (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Div, August 1944: Appx 30, Ops Log, 20 Aug 44, Serials 5767, 5777; and Appx 27, Message 20 0200B). Indeed 2 Cdn Inf Div had already moved away from Falaise on 18-19 Aug, to begin the eastward march to the Seine (W.Ds., H.Q. 4, 5 and 6 Cdn Inf Bdes, 18, 19 Aug 44). (See [Report No. 169](#), para 200). By the evening of 22 Aug Maj-Gen H.W. Foster, newly-appointed to command 4 Cdn Armd Div, had concentrated 4 Cdn Armd Bde south of Vimoutiers, about Fresnay-le-Sansom, and had 10 Cdn Inf Bde disposed in the Coudehard - Ecorches region ([Ibid](#), para 201). To the north 1 Brit Corps had already crossed the Touques south of Lisieux (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, August 1944: Appx 104, Serial 81). Preparations were now completed for 2 Cdn Corps' participation in the Army's pursuit of the enemy - a pursuit which was to drive him across the Seine, bottling up large garrisons in the Channel ports and the islands off the Dutch coast, and which was to free a large area of Belgium and Holland before a final halt was made.

12. The task allotted to the Canadian divisions were further defined by General Simonds in a directive of 22 Aug. He indicated that when 2 Cdn Corps had freed the necessary routes, 12 Corps would advance with 15 (S.) Div on the immediate right of 2 Cdn Corps, along the axis Trun - Vimoutiers - Le Sap. 1 Brit Corps would move forward on 23 Aug with 7 Armd Div on the immediate left of 2 Cdn Corps along the axis Lisieux - North of Thiberville - Pont-Authou. In the avenue between commencing its pursuit on 23 Aug, 2 Cdn Corps was directed north-eastward to the R. Seine exclusive of Louviers but inclusive of Chaumont. The narrow sector in which the Corps had to operate, and the lack of a sufficient number of main roads, necessitated an initial advance on a two-divisional front, 2 Cdn Inf Div would continue along the axis Thiberville to point 179 in the area 8096 - Brionne - Bourgtheroulde, and position itself in the area Moulineau - Boscherville - Bourgtheroulde; 4 Cdn Armd Div would advance on the axis Les Champeaux - Le Sap - Monnai - Broglie - Bernay - Le Neubourg - Surtauville, to take up positions in the area Pont de L'Arche - St. Etienne du Vauvray - La Haye Malherbe. Later, 3 Cdn Inf Div, when the enemy had been cleared from the area of the Forêt de Gouffern and the valley of the River Dives, would follow 4 Cdn Armd Div through Les Champeaux and proceed along a central axis, Vimoutiers - Orbec - Thiboutière - Valailles - Boisney - Harcout - St. Pierre des Fleurs, to the area of Elbeuf - St. Germain - St. Amand. The Polish Armoured Division was to concentrate in the area Ammeville - Grand Mesnil - Les Moutiers en Auge and prepare to move to the R. Seine not before 27 Aug 44. (AEF/First Cdn Army/C/E, Docket II: 2 Cdn Corps Directive, 22 Aug 44)

THE GENERAL TOPOGRAPHY WEST OF THE SEINE

13. In general the ground over which formations of 2 Cdn Corps would have to pass was, except for the transversing rivers, well-suited for mobile warfare. There are broad open fields, with few hedges to break the monotony of the landscape. Such a type of terrain becomes more obvious after the Touques river is crossed; between the Dives and the Touques the region is broken by the narrow valleys of tributary streams, and it consists mainly of pastures and orchards. Between Rouen and Evreux the Campagne de Neubourg, a fairly level cultivated plateau averaging 450 feet in height, slopes gently down towards the north-east. Steep escarpments on the edge of this feature overlook the Seine and Risle valleys, which are joined by short, deep valleys that afford the best access to the plateau itself.

14. Of the river obstacles in the path of the advancing forces, the Seine was the most formidable. Between Elbeuf and Le Havre this river describes eight meanders in a wide flat valley, which varies in width from one to two miles as it descends from Rouen to Quillebeuf. Invariably the ground on the inner bank of each curve is low and marshy near the river and wooded as it raised to the surrounding plateau, while on the outer bank the valley slope drops abruptly to the river in a steep escarpment. Along these sharp ascents and spread over sections of the high table land are several heavily wooded areas. Among the largest of these, on the left bank of the river, north of Elbeuf, is the Forêt de la Londe. The alluvial river flats, the largest of which are the Marais Vernier below Quillebeuf and the land south of the Tancarville Canal, have been drained, and the river is held to its channel by dykes. The Seine is tidal up to just below Elbeuf. The width of the river increases from about 490 feet at Elbeuf to 1000 at Duclair while at Quillebeuf

it is 1600 feet from bank to bank. There are no bridges below Rouen, and the three at Rouen and those further up the river had all been severely damaged by bombing.

15. All rivers south of the Seine flow generally north into the English Channel or into the Seine itself. The most important of these are the Dives, the Touques and the Risle, rising, as do their tributaries, in the main watershed of the area - a ridge formed by the Perche Hills and the Collines de Normandie, about 70 miles inland. Whereas the Dives valley is subject to flooding, the Touques is characterized by a narrow deep valley, and the Risle with its two or three channels was to present a particularly difficult problem in crossing. There are no high hills in the area, but the gradual slope downwards of the plateaux from south to north produces certain factors of tactical significance. Thus the main road from Caen to Lisieux is overlooked on the south by the heights north of Falaise and those which lie between the Dives and the Vie. Similarly the valley of the Dives in its lower reaches is completely dominated by the high ground to the east which rises sharply from the Valle d'Auge. As we have seen, the Seine valley is overlooked by steep heights on both sides.

16. The roads, especially the main highways, had been designated by the Germans as "Priority Through Routes". These, the routes through Caen - Lisieux - Rouen, Gacé - Lisieux - Honfleur, and Caen - Honfleur - Pont Audemer - Rouen, had been selected, marked and improved by the German High Command in order to facilitate their troop movement, and they were most likely to be in good repair and generally in much better condition than other roads in

Northern France. As a whole the area was well served by an excellent network of communications; the limiting factor in their use for military traffic was the bridging problem. This complication ranked above the enemy's use of mines, obstacles and booby-traps, as the most formidable obstacle in delaying the pursuit. It was appreciated that, apart from this main difficulty, movement generally for all arms would be comparatively easy. The stiffest test was expected to be encountered in the 300-foot descent from the plateau to the Seine valley, down the steep wooded slopes which became cliff-like in places. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, August 1944: Appx 6, Int Summary No. 50, Appx "A", 18 Aug 44)

THE ENEMY'S PLIGHT

17. On the whole the enemy could only expect to delay the advance temporarily while withdrawing his shattered armies. This he could best do by determined rearguard action at the river crossings. A definite line along the Seine to deny the ferry and bridge crossings would only be possible if formations in sufficient numbers were available to patrol and hold its many bends. This in his present state of disorganization appeared unlikely and was ultimately to prove virtually impossible. His only hope then lay in the possibility of organizing a line of defence along the Somme and the Marne rivers. But the utter confusion into which his armies were thrown by the speed of the Allied advance, his grave lack of personnel and the catastrophic destruction of his war material denied him any opportunity for such a stand. He was to find that of necessity he must flee to the safety of the Siegfried Line before he could organize any action to call a halt to the Allied pursuit.

18. The situation of the enemy as the pursuit started was indeed precarious, and to give any accurate estimate of the formations and troops available or to pinpoint their dispositions is well-nigh impossible. Elements and remnants of so many formations and units of his shattered Seventh and Fifth Armies were to be found on the Allied front that no coherent order of battle can be deduced. There appear to have been three sectors, 81 Corps on the German left opposing the American and British thrust, 86 Corps on the right opposite 1 Brit and 2 Cdn Corps, and in the centre, as an available reserve, 2 S.S. Pz Corps (AEF 45/First Cdn Army/L/F, Docket III: Special Interrogation Report Gen der Inf Eugen-Felix Schwalbe, Commander 344 Inf Div). Most battleworthy of these formations were the divisions of 86 Corps - 272, 346 and 711 Divs - for it had been their good fortune to be stationed between Falaise and the Channel, and had therefore managed to survive the débâcle in fair condition. In poorer shape were the divisions which formed 81 Corps - 331 and 344 Inf and 17 G.A.F. Divs, and remnants of 2 S.S. and 116 Pz Divs - and 1 S.S. Corps, which commanded remnants of 9 S.S., 10 S.S. and 21 Pz Divs. Then enemy had hurriedly formed a number of battle groups in an attempt to restore some organization to his shattered formations, and these were to be found in all three Corps. Elements of the Coastal 245 and 348 Divs were also reported south of the Seine (W.D., G.S. Int, H.Q. First Cdn Army, August 1944: Appx 6, Int Summaries Nos. 54, 22 Aug 44; 55, 23 Aug 44; and 56, 24 Aug 44). Prisoner identification revealed further that elements of 1 S.S., 2 S.S., 2 Pz and 9 Pz Divs, 3 and 6 Para Divs, 48, 331, 338 and 708 Inf Divs and 83 Werfer Regt were also included in the general mêlée. None of these formations, with the possible exception of 6 Para Div, could be looked upon as other than shadows

of their former selves.² No definition of areas of divisional responsibility is possible nor, after his defeat in the pocket, did the enemy appear to have a plan for his defence. Surprisingly enough, generally speaking the morale of his forces had not suffered to the extent that might have been expected. It is significant of the degree of their disorganization that the S.S. troops now began to appear in the role of saboteurs. A round hundred of these in civilian clothes were reported operating in the area of Vimoutiers, while six were captured wearing British uniforms. (Ibid, Int Summary No. 55, 23 Aug 44)

19. Although the enemy's transport and armour had sustained terrible blows in the pocket, it had not been completely destroyed, and considerable quantities escaped towards the Seine. His chief difficulty lay in obtaining sufficient petrol and lubricants, and failure to secure supplies caused many vehicles to be abandoned. Others later were unable to find suitable crossing over the Seine. It seems probable, though, that after 21 Aug he had still for his use west of the Seine a possible 30,000 vehicles, 700 tanks and S.P. guns, 700-800 lightly armoured vehicles and 400-500 guns. These estimates have been

² The following enemy dispositions during the retreat to the Seine were given by Col-Gen Dietrich, and show some differences from the sources quoted above.

The retreat of Fifth Panzer Army to the Seine was conducted with 86 Corps on the right flank consisting of 711, 346 and 272 Inf Divs, and with 1 S.S. Pz Corps on the left now containing 21 Pz, 9 S.S. Pz and 10 S.S. Pz Divs. 12 S.S. Pz Div no longer existed as a fighting formation, and 1 S.S. Pz Div was now with Pz Gruppe Eberbach... Of the armoured strength of the eight panzer divisions that conducted the offensive towards Mortain, Dietrich estimates that little more than 100 tanks were salvaged.

(AEF 45/First Cdn Army/L/F, Docket III, Special Interrogation Report, Joseph "Sepp" Dietrich)

arrived at by adding the number known to have been destroyed in the retreat towards the Seine to those estimated to have crossed that river. (AEF/21 Army Gp/C/F, Docket III: No. 2 Operational Research Section, 21 Army Gp, Report No. 15, Pts IV and V)

THE ADVANCE TO THE SEINE BY 2 CDN CORPS

20. At 1330 hours, 22 Aug 44, the C.-in-C. gave the release to First Cdn Army for 2 Cdn Corps to commence the advance to the Seine. 4 Cdn Armd Div was to start the pursuit on the morning of 23 Aug; although already the divisional reconnaissance regiment (29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt), and 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt was exploring forward to the east. Second Army at the same time received the green light to move forward towards the Seine. The Chiefs of Staff of the two armies agreed that the two corps concerned (2 Cdn Corps and 30 Brit Corps) should make mutual arrangements for clearing the axis of advance for 12 Corps of Second Army (see para 9), and of these arrangements the Chief of Staff 2 Cdn Corps was notified. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. First Cdn Army, August 1944: Appx 111, Ops Log, Serial 48, 22 Aug 44)

21. The divisions of 2 Cdn Corps prepared to move off from their concentration areas at first light 23 Aug 44 - 3 Cdn Inf Div to cross the R. La Vie at Vimoutiers and 4 Cdn Armd Div to cross the river further south. Thus the La Vie and the Touques (in 1 Brit Corps sector) formed the start line for the pursuit by First Cdn Army, whose main difficulties were to lie in finding suitable bridges and river crossings. This fact had early been discovered by 2 Cdn Inf Div, commanded by Maj-Gen C. Foulkes, C.B.E., whose

eastward march had already commenced, when on 21 Aug 44 at 1620 hours 5 Cdn Inf Bde set out along the road through Vimoutiers, Orbec and Thiberville (W.Ds., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Div, 21 Aug 44; H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 21 Aug 44). On the left flank of this division 7 Brit Armd Div, under command of 1 Brit Corps, commanded by Lt-Gen J.T. Crocker, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C., which had been driving ahead since 17 Aug 44, had a bridgehead over the Touques south of Lisieux (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, August 1944: Appx 104, Serial 88). (See Map "A")

22. 5 Cdn Inf Bde proceeded with R.H.C. in the lead, followed by R. de Mais, while Calg Highrs took an alternative route previously reconnoitred and found suitable by 8 Cdn Recce Regt. 6 Cdn Inf Bde followed along the axis La Chapelle - Vimoutiers, passing through 5 Cdn Bde the following morning after the latter had established a bridgehead over the Touques R. (W.D., G.Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, August 1944: Appx 111, Ops Log, Serial 81, 22 Aug 44). The brigade met scattered but not serious resistance until Camerons of C. were held up on the outskirts of Orbec. Elements of 8 Cdn Recce Regt surprised the enemy, however, by entering the town from the north. S. Sask R. was then ordered to clear Orbec while Fus M.R. moved north-west to cross the R. d'Orbec and capture St. Germain-La Campagne, two miles to the north. Although the French Canadian regiment had considerable difficulty at St. Germain-La Campagne these tasks were completed by 0035 hours 23 Aug 44 (AEF/6 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, Docket II(a); Account by maj Dextraze of the Attack on St. Germain La Campagne on 23 Aug 44 by Fus M.R.). Meanwhile 4 Cdn Inf Bde, bringing up the rear of the division, was ordered to Livarot to relieve 131

Brit Inf Bde - the infantry brigade of 7 Armd Div - there. The Essex Scot advanced eastward through Barou and Ammeville meeting no resistance, but were challenged at Tortisambert; after a short delay they proceeded to Livarot, which they took over at 0400 hours on the 22nd. The brigade then moved on, in fair weather, to Notre Dame de Courson on the Touques, mid-way between Vimoutiers and Fervaques, where a blown bridge covered by enemy fire forced R.H.L.I. to halt (W.D., R.H.L.I., 23 Aug 44). 8 Cdn Recce Regt found a suitable crossing and held it until Essex Scot effected a bridgehead. A few miles further on, enemy rearguards brought the battalion to a temporary halt at Les Aunais, but overcoming this resistance it quickly pushed on through Cernay, La Cressonnière and northwards through Tordouet to reach, on 23 Aug, the La Chapelle-Yvon area on the d'Orbec River (W.D., Essex Scot, 21-22 Aug 44). R.Regt C. moved from Livarot to Fervaques, on the Touques, on 22 Aug, to relieve a battalion of 7 Brit Armd Div there (W.D., R.Regt C. 21-22 Aug 44). The way was now clear for 3 Cdn Inf Div to follow along the 2 Cdn Inf Div axis and relieve that formation in the Orbec bridgehead.

23. The other formations of 2 Cdn Corps were quick to pick up the chase with 2 Cdn Inf Div. At 0914 hours, 23 Aug, 28 Cdn Armd Regt (B.C.R.) began the advance from 4 Cdn Armd Bde's concentration area about Champosoult (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 23 Aug 44, Serial 26; W.Ds., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde and 28 Cdn Armd Regt, 23 Aug 44). 10 Cdn Inf Bde with 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt followed from the Coudehard area (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, August 1944: Appx 41, Sitrep 22 Aug 44). The armoured brigade proceeded along the 4 Cdn Armd Div axis, Orville - Le Sap - Monnai - Broglie - Bernay, against no opposition, although the speed of the advance was slowed by the exuberant and

festive people who showered the troops with cheers, flowers and wine (W.D., 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt, 23 Aug 44). The rate of advance was not rapid, for another reason. Let the historian of one of 4 Cdn Armd Div's units describe the scene:

Progress was slow, for the roads were so badly blocked with debris that a bulldozer had to clear a way before the column could pass. The scene that greeted the troops as they drove over that narrow winding road defies description, but once seen could never be forgotten. Farther back near Trun and Chambois the army and airforce had shared honours for destroying the 7th German Army. Here, however, the treatment meted out to the fleeing remnants was the work of the air force alone. Tightly packed columns of lorries, staff cars, tanks, guns and carts had been caught in the deadly rain of destruction that dropped from the skies. It is not difficult to imagine the scene: one vehicle on fire, and blocking the road; terrified horses screaming and desperate men shouting as vehicle after vehicle lumbered to a halt; then the planes swooping low in the sunlight, raking the column from end to end with machine gun and cannon fire. Some men would escape but not a vehicle could get out of that tangled burning mass of shapeless debris. The Battle of the Gap destroyed the German army in Normandy, but the destruction wrought on these narrow roads ended forever any hope the beaten enemy may have held of making a stand on the banks of the Seine with the salvaged remnants of men and equipment.

Engineers with rags tied around their face struggled to drag the rotting horses out of the way. Bulldozers attacked the broken, battered, burnt-out rubble that was once materiel of war, and cleared a narrow track through which the armour of 4th Division could pass. All morning the column inched slowly forward. As the sun grew warm the smell of smouldering vehicles and decaying flesh, both horse and human, became unbearable. The sight of dead enemy is an easy one for troops hardened to battle, but there is something extremely distasteful in the sight of dead horses lying with their bloated bellies upturned by the side of the road.

(History of the 15 Cdn Fd Regt,
R.C.A., 1941-1945, pp. 122, 123)

24. The limitation of the Corps' pursuit to a narrow two-divisional front meant that individual divisions frequently had to be restricted to a single route, or indeed at times to share a road in turn with another formation. Infantry divisions generally moved in a narrow order of march with brigades passing main West-East roads. To increase mobility and maintain a satisfactory rate of advance, the reserve brigade of the division was shuttled forward in T.C.Vs. (AEF/2 Cdn Inf Div/C/F, Docket I: Summary of Cdn Ops and Activities H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Div, 1 Aug - 31 Aug 44). 4 Cdn Armd Div was, of course, not faced with this problem of mobility and was able to proceed more rapidly. 3 Cdn Inf Div, with whom was initially grouped 2 Cdn Armd Bde, solved the difficulty by making use of the latter's tanks on which to mount its marching troops. At 0930 hours (23 Aug), elements of the division were

let loose and 7 Cdn Inf Bde mounted on the tanks of 2 Cdn Armd Bde leaped forward in pursuit along the axis Champeaux - Vimoutiers - Orbec - Bernay against little or no opposition; by 1200 hours they had leading troops in Orbec and had begun to relieve 6 Cdn Inf de (W.D., G.S., H.Q. First Cdn Army, August 1944: Appx 116, Ops Log, 23 Aug 44, Serial 55). By mid-day the Corps front reached from Monnai to Orbec, and the line of First Cdn Army continued north along the R. d'Orbec to Lisieux (where 1 Brit Corps was overcoming stubborn resistance), and then down the R. Touques to the sea at Deauville les Bains (Ibid). The Army was well on its way, with "its right leading".

25. Along the Corps right-hand axis Maj-Gen Foster, commanding 4 Cdn Armd Div, had been directed to attack the high ground in the general area of Courteilles, to ignore anything in the Bois de Broglie, and by by-passing Broglie to the west advance on Bernay. But speed was to be tempered with precaution. He was instructed to halt in the evening in time to make certain that his tail was well rolled up and that he had re-armed and refuelled by the morning of 24 Aug 44. (Ibid, Serial 100). The division pushed up the Monnai - Broglie axis, and at 1700 hours on the 23rd armoured cars were in contact with the enemy holding the high ground in the area north of Bavign, while 22 Cdn Armd Regt was encountering anti-tank defences in the region of St. Germain-l'Aunai north of Monnai.

26. On the left the advance of 3 Cdn Inf Div along the axis Vimoutiers - Orbec - Thiboutière (Ibid, Serial 34), had not been as rapid as earlier progress promised. 8 Cdn Inf Bde, at 1210 hours, was given the task of consolidating the bridgehead formed by 2 Cdn Inf Div at Orbec, and proceeded

to cross this river with the enemy still in the south of the town (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div, August 1944: Ops Log, 23 Aug 44, Serial 62), while 7 Cdn Inf Bde was assembled waiting to pass through 8 Cdn Inf Bde. The divisional reconnaissance regiment, 7 Cdn Recce Regt, was preparing to push out at first light the following day to make contact with 4 Cdn Armd Div at Bernay (W.D., 7 Cdn Recce Regt, 24 Aug 44). During the afternoon 2 Cdn Inf Div turned northwards to lead the way into Ghiboutière. The three battalions of 6 Cdn Inf Bde were astride the Thiberville road north of Orbec; 5 Cdn Inf Bde was pushing through, and Calg Highrs had taken the woods near Bellangerville. R. de Mais passed through to Le Planquay, and from there R.H.C. advanced on Thiberville. On the left of the highway 4 Cdn Inf Bde had R.H.L.I. in Courtonne la Ville that evening, with Essex Scot moving north from St. Pierre-de Mailloc. The bridging of the Touques at Fervaques was almost ready, and on its completion R.Regt C. came forward by T.C.V. convoy to take Cordebugle and move on to Thiberville. (Ibid, Serial 100). There had been some trouble in maintaining communications between 2 Cdn Inf div and 2 Cdn Corps, during the previous night, for the line had been cut in several places, and large pieces carried away, it was thought by S.S. troops operating, probably in civilian clothes, behind the lines. (Ibid, Serial 100). 2 Cdn Armd Bde, less two regiments - one each under command 2 Cdn Inf Div and 3 Cdn Inf Div - was assembling north of Meulles (on the Vimoutiers - Orbec road), where it reverted to command of 2 Cdn Corps (Ibid, Serial 104). All resistance had been typical rearguard action, for withdrawal followed when strong pressure was applied. Prisoners of war were coming in from the wooded areas; indeed, the Corps Commander thought that he was the only officer who had not captured one that day! (Ibid, Serial 100)

27. Pressure towards the R. Risle continued unabated on 24 Aug 44 as the intentions for 2 Cdn Corps remained unchanged. 4 Cdn Armd Div advanced on Bernay, while 3 Cdn Inf Div was moving through Orbec, and 2 Cdn Inf Div was moving through Orbec, and 2 Cdn Inf Div was directed on Thiberville. The Corps Commander appreciated that as soon as 4 Cdn Armd Div had secured the high ground (Point 208) south of Broglie the enemy would withdraw, but if a stiff defence were made, he intended to punch hard on his right with 4 Cdn Armd Div assisted by 3 Cdn Inf Div. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, with the intention of bypassing Brogile, proceeded from Courteilles, along its main axis of advance (Brogile - Bernay), with 10 Cdn Inf Bde following in the rear (W.D., G.S., H.Q. First Cdn Army, August 1944: Appx 120, Ops Log, 24 Aug 44, Serial 80). By 1630 hours, 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt was reported in the centre of Bernay and, except for road obstacles, encountering only light opposition; other elements of 4 Cdn Armd Div had reached Broglie (Ibid, Serial 112). Leaving 8 Cdn Inf Bde in the area of Orbec, 3 Cdn Inf Div proceeded along its axis to Thiboutière, with 9 Cdn Inf Bde up followed by 10 Cdn Armd Regt, 7 Cdn Inf Bde and Divisional Headquarters (Ibid, Serial 82). At Thiboutière the division swung sharply to the right, away from 2 Cdn Div's axis, and headed eastward to pass north of Bernay. By nightfall 7 Cdn Recce Regt had reached La Pilette, and 9 Cdn Inf Bde were in St. Vincent-du-Boulay, eight miles north-east of Thiboutière. On the left 2 Cdn Inf Div (with 27 Cdn Armd Regt under command) began to turn eastward. R.R.C. of 4 Cdn Inf Bde entered Thiberville at 0730 hours (24 Aug) the enemy having withdrawn at 0200 hours, and 5 Cdn Inf Bde began to pass through towards Brionne by way of Duranville, Bazoques and Giverville, against increasing enemy resistance (Ibid, Serials 31, 39, 50, 57). Spearheading the divisional advance, 8 Cdn Recce Regt reached the main

Bernay - Lieurey road between Courbepine and Bazoques. It was evident that the enemy was withdrawing south-east from Bernay and not directly east, as the most serious demolitions on the Corps front had been carried out on the line of the R. La Charentone south of Bernay. (Ibid, Serial 112)

28. As the Canadian infantry battalions followed the leading reconnaissance and armoured units into the newly liberated Breuch towns and villages they received from the rejoicing inhabitants the warmest of welcomes. After the grim and bitter fighting of the past month the passage to the Seine brought to the Canadians what one writer has called "unbelievably happy days".

Will Bernay ever be forgotten? Bernay where the people stood from morning till night, at times in the pouring rain, and at times in the August sun. Bernay where they never tired of waving, of throwing flowers or fruit, of giving their best wines and spirits to some halted column. Bernay where the local schoolmistress had her children lined along the main street singing in unison and in English, "Thank you for liberating us." It was the Brigade's first large town, and many a hardened lad from Caen and Falaise felt his eyes fill as he witnessed the joys, the smiles, the tears, of wild gratitude and triumph all around him. These were the days of tremendous confidence and a realization that maybe it was worth while, and that those boys left along the hedges, in the grain fields, in the casualty posts of Normandy might not have fallen in vain. The never failing hand, the smiles of these people along the road, in cottage, hamlet or town, flooded us with

emotion for we knew we had kept faith with them and had come back as those men at Dunkirk promised long ago.

(A History of the 10 Cdn Inf Bde,
p.31)

29. Meanwhile operations by 1 Brit Corps were proceeding favourably on First Cdn Army's left flank. Lisieux had finally been cleared of its last snipers by 51 (H.) Div, and both 49 (W.R.) Inf Div and 6 Airborne Div had bridgeheads over the Touques. Further south 7 Armd Div, on the immediate left of 2 Cdn Inf Div, was meeting stiff resistance from well-established rearguard defenders; by 1430 hours 24 Aug, however, leading armour of the division had made contact with elements of 2 Cdn Inf Div in Thiberville (Ibid, Serials, 35 and 77).

30. On 2 Cdn Corps' right, 30 Brit Corps, commanded by Lt-Gen Sir B.G. Horrocks, K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O., M.C., was temporarily forming Second Army's left flank. As we have seen, 12 Corps (whose 7 Armd Div was being used to spearhead the advance of 1 Brit Corps) was waiting in the Chambois area for 2 Cdn Corps to clear its axis of advance, which lay, as shown above (para 12), through Vimoutiers - Le Sap - Monnai - Courteilles - Broglie - Sebecourt - Emanville, the route coinciding with 4 Cdn Armd Div's axis as far as Broglie. The G.O.C. 12 Corps, Lt-Gen Sir N.M. Ritchie, K.C.B., K.B.E., D.S.O., M.C., therefore made no move until 0630 hours 24 Aug, when 15 (S.) Div started the pursuit, which was to end at the Seine opposite Louviers. (AEF/12 Corps/C/1, Docket III(d): 12 Corps Ops Instr No. 6, 22 Aug 44; AEF/12

Corps/C/H, Docket III, 12 Corps Sitrep 87, 25 Aug 44). 30 Corps had reached the Laigle - Rugles area on the night of 22 Aug, and on the 24th 43 Inf Div, designated to force a crossing of the Seine for the Corps, moved forward from the Gacé area to Breteuil. At first light on 25 Aug the division started its rush to the Seine. (AEF/30 Corps/C/F, Docket II: Advance of 30 Corps Across R Seine to Brussels and Antwerp, 24 August to 4 September 1944; 4/Summs C.I.G.S./2/2: C.I.G.S. Summary Nos. 81-82, 25, 26 Aug 44)

31. Air support for the advance took the form chiefly of harassing the enemy withdrawal, rocketing strongpoints and destroying equipment. Pilots were having a field day and enemy losses in equipment were rapidly mounting. He was forced to abandon even greater quantities of material because he was unable to bring up fuel and oil. The bombing of roads and bridges along the enemy's line of retreat continued, and his railway communications received close attention. During the week ending 24 Aug the Allied Air Forces reported that:

About ten bridges over the River Risle were bombed by Marauders and seven over the River Meuse by Fortresses. Attacks were also made on several railway centres, including the one at Connantre (70 miles E. of Paris); which was bombed by Halifaxes and Lancasters...

In the above attacks, about 3,800 tons of bombs were dropped and hundreds of rocket projectiles fired.

17-24 Aug 44)

32. The pursuit by 2 Cdn Corps was accelerated on 25 Aug as all three divisions overcame the obstacle of the bridgeless River Risle. Early that morning 4 Cdn Armd Div, advancing rapidly, having passed through Broglie and Bernay, established a firm base with the armoured brigade³ in the area of Serquigny, at the junction of the Risle and La Charentonne Rivers, while one squadron of 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt, swinging to the left, crossed the R. Risle south of Fontaine and reconnoitred forward to the divisional centre line near Nassandres (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 25 Aug 44). 3 Cdn Inf Div, having passed through Thiboutière, was now concentrating ready to cross the Risle, with 9 Cdn Inf Bde in the general area of St. Martin-du-Tilleul, Fresne, east of Thiboutière, and 7 Cdn Inf Bde mid-way between them in Tourmesnil. A temporarily repaired (Class 9) bridge (892868) allowed the reconnaissance regiments of both 2 and 3 Cdn Inf Divs to cross at Valleville (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Div, August 1944: Ops Log 25 Aug 44, Serials 6170 and 6176). 6 Cdn Inf Bde, led by S. Sask R. was soon astride the stream at the point of bridging, and up into Brionne; 4 and 5 Cdn Inf Bdes, concentrated about Thiberville, were preparing to follow (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 25 Aug 44, Serials

³ 4 Cdn Armd Div's advance was led by "DEANE" Force, an ad hoc group commanded by Lt-Col R.A. Keane, O.C. Lake Sup R. (Mot) and consisting of:

Lake Sup (Mot)
2 squadrons 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt
2 squadrons 28 Cdn Armd Regt
One battery 23 (S.P.0 Fd Regt R.C.A.
A. & S.H. of C.
One battery, 3 Med Regt R.C.A.

(W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 24 Aug 44)

4, 6, 8). Engineers immediately went to work upon the construction of two bridges - one for each of the infantry divisions - in Brionne (895898 and 898901) (W.D., R.C.E., 3 Cdn Inf Div, 25 Aug 44; 2 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 25 Aug 44, Serial 6242). During the day the rear brigades of the two divisions - 8 Cdn Inf Bde had followed 8 Cdn Recce Regt across at Valleville - moved up and crossed the Risle in Brionne.

33. During the morning reconnaissance elements (18 Cdn Armd C. Regt) with 4 Cdn Armd Div and 2 Cdn Inf Div reported contact with American units in the area of Le Neubourg and Le-Haye-du-Theil (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 25 Aug 44, Serials 14 and 32). A redefinition of boundaries was obviously necessary, and United States forces began to withdraw south of the Louviers - Le Neubourg road (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 25 Aug 44). 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt pushed forward on either side of Harcourt, while the remainder of 4 Cdn Armd Div was crossing the R.Risle, using a Class 30 bridge established by the divisional Engineers at Fontaine. (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 25 Aug 44, Serials 15 and 41; W.D., R.C.E., 4 Cdn Armd Div, 25 Aug 44). By noon the spearhead of the advance had reached the Forêt de Louviers, north of Louviers (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 25 Aug 44, Serial 58). Before night, all 4 Cdn Armd Bde was established at Crasville, four miles west of Louviers, with 10 Cdn Inf Bde at Vraiville and Mandeville, just west of La Haye Malherbe. 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt, which was east of La Haye Malherbe and in close liaison with United States units, claimed the honour of being the first regiment of 21 Army Group to reach the Seine (W.D., 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt, 25 Aug 44).

34. Units of 2 Cdn Inf Div, on the road between Brionne and Bourgetheroulde, had established a line Malleville-sur-le-Bek - St. Thaurin des Ifs - St. Paul de Fourques, five miles north-east of Brionne; where they were held up by heavy fire from medium machine-guns. The infantry division was in close contact with 7 Brit Armd Div, which was roughly on an extension of the same line to the north-west (one of the armoured regiments, 11 Hussars, had made contact with American units midway between Le Neubourg and Elbeuf at 1100 hours that morning) (W.D., G.S., H.Q. First Cdn Army: Ops Log, Appx 123, 25 Aug 44, Serial 69). By nightfall 3 Cdn Inf Div was on a line that ran from Harcourt, south-east of Brionne, to Bose-Yves, just west of Le Gros Thiel (Ibid, Serials 90 and 130).

35. The junction that was thus effected between First Cdn Army and First U.S. Army had been foreseen by Field Marshal Montgomery, and was in accordance with the plans notified in his directive to the Army Groups on 20 Aug. On that date he had forecast:

When the "bottle" has been finally ironed out, and all enemy troops in it destroyed or captured, then the cork will be withdrawn and 21 Army Group will advance rapidly to the Seine....

12 Army Group, meanwhile, will have driven north-west to LOUVIERS, and ELBEUF, and beyond. This movement has already begun, and its strength will be greatly increased tomorrow. The enemy will thus find his lines of withdrawal across the Seine in Allied hands and his situation will then be very awkward.

(G.O.C.-in-C./1-0, Operations

21 Army Gp, Directive M519,

20 Aug 44, paras 8, 9)

36. The same directive had set forth the boundary between 12 Army Gp and 21 Army Gp (see para 6). While this limit kept American formations to a line south of Argentan - Nonant - Laigle - Dreux - Mantes, the C.-in-C. in effect authorized a crossing of this boundary near the Seine, when he ordered, in the same directive, that 12 Army Gp should

... develop at once a strong thrust northwards from the general line MANTES - DREUX - VERNEUIL. The right flank of the movement will be along the south bank of the Seine. The left flank of the movement will be a route inclusive: VERNEUIL - BRETEUIL - CONCHES - LE NEUBOURG - BOURGTHEROULDE. From the BOURGTHEROULDE area, light forces will be pushed towards the mouth of the Seine.

(Ibid, para 14)

37. In accordance with these instructions First U.S. Army had made rapid progress up the west bank of the Seine, directly across the front of Second Brit Army and 2 Cdn Corps. As the general surge forward of the units of the British and Canadian formations continued on 26 Aug, the American forces with whom contact had been established continued their mopping-up operations in the Forêt d'Elleuf and the area about Loviers while awaiting a take-over preparatory to moving southward (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 26 Aug 44, Serials 7 and

8). It was now necessary to re-establish the inter-Army Group boundaries, in order that the rapid advance from the Seine northwards into Holland might be facilitated. Such adjustment could not fail to create a certain amount of complicated manoeuvring, and nearly 48 hours were required to sort the armies into their correct sectors (Maj-Gen Sir Francis de Guingand, Operation Victory, p.408). On 26 Aug 44 the C.-in-C. 21 Army Gp agreed with General Bradley "on a forward boundary on the line Mantes - Beauvais - Trounais - Alost - Antwerp (all inclusive to Second Army)". (Normandy to the Baltic, p. 154). Thus American forces had to withdraw a considerable distance in order to clear the axes of both Second Brit Army and 2 Cdn Corps.

38. On 30 Corps front, 43 Div crossed the R. Eure, and in a burst of speed 129 Bde cleared the Seine obstacle at Vernon at 0500 hours (Ibid, Serial 26). On the morning of 26 Aug all along the Army Group front the race to the Seine was nearing completion. For the Canadians it was a day of remarkable advances. With 7 Cdn Inf Bde leading off from Harcourt 3 Cdn Inf Div moved forward through Le Gros Theil, to reach the Elbeuf area early in the evening (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 26 Aug 44, Serials 18 and 19). 2 Cdn Inf Div was still concentrated in the area reached the night before, although Brionne had been freed and bridges constructed over the Risle in the area of St. Philbert-sur-Boisse. The division's approach to the Seine lay by way of Bourghtheroulde, and enemy resistance was found to be increasing greatly (Ibid, Serial 18). At the same time, on 2 Cdn Inf Div's left, 22 Armd Bde of 7 Armd Div was established near Freneuse-sur-Risle, with elements over the river at Glos-sur-Risle (Ibid, Serial 10). 4 Cdn Armd Div pushed on rapidly through the Forêt Domaniale de Bord, north of Louviers, as 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt - 11 miles into

the woods north of Louviers - crossed the R. Eure, without finding any opposition. The armoured division, advancing with 4 Cdn Armd Bde on the right directed on Pont de L'Arche and 10 Cdn Inf Bde on the left on Criquebeuf-sur-Seine, reached the Seine between these points at 1132 hours, determined to secure crossings over the river as soon as possible (Ibid, Serials 52 and 67).

39. The honour of establishing the first Canadian bridgehead over the Seine went to the Scout Platoon and "D" Coy of Line & Welld R. who, using a small boat and shovels as paddles, took up a position in some houses in the area of 0117 at 1700 hours 26 Aug 44 (W.D., Line & Welld R., 26 Aug 44). Thus only 2 Cdn Inf Div on the left flank of 2 Cdn Corps and 1 Brit Corps on the Army's northern flank were meeting any form of organized resistance, which was coming from strong enemy forces firmly based on the forests in the great loops on the west bank of the Seine. At this time, as Canadian artillery fire began falling in the 7 Armd Div area, boundary adjustments became necessary between 2 Cdn Corps and 1 Brit Corps (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 26 Aug 44, Serial 39). St. Julian de Mailloc but inclusive Livet, exclusive Cordebugle - Giverville, inclusive Pont-Authou - Boisse-le Chatel, exclusive Berville-en Boumois - Caumont (Ibid, Serial 36).

THE ADVANCE OF 1 BRIT CORPS, 17 AUG 44

40. With 2 Cdn Corps at the Seine, it is time to turn back and examine the progress made in the pursuit by First Cdn Army's left flank. Until 16 Aug 44, 1 Brit Corps had played a relatively minor part in the operations of First Cdn Army in the great offensive that was to destroy the German Seventh Army. The Corps role on the Army's left flank had been mainly a holding one. This was particularly the case with 6 Airborne Div at the northern end of the line, in positions which were almost static along the wooded regions of the west side of the marshy Dives basin between Troarn and the sea. Further south, 49 (W.R.) Inf Div, facing south-east and east in less difficult country, had during the first half of August, made some progress along the general axis of the Caen - Mezidon railway towards the R. Dives. Keeping pace with the advances made in Operation "TOTALIZE", bridges of this division moved forward from the Bourguebus - Soliers area to Bellengreville and Vimont. Still further south, 51 (H.) Inf Div - which after 9 Aug had reverted from command 2 Cdn Corps to 1 Brit Corps - had protected the left flank of 2 Cdn Corps in Operation "TRACTABLE", and by 16 Aug had reached St. Pierre-sur-Dives ([Report No. 146](#), para 114).

41. On 16 Aug General Montgomery directed First Cdn Army to mount a thrust towards Lisieux in fulfilment of his plan for the Army while completing its task in the Trun - Chambois area to advance its left wing towards Lisieux and Rouen. (G.O.C.-in-C., Army Gp, 20 Aug 44). General Crerar gave this task to 1 Brit Corps, to which 7 Armd Div was to be transferred from the Conde area. ([Normandy to the Baltic](#), p. 133)

42. On 15 Aug 44, 51 (H.) Inf Div - on the Corps' right flank - was in the area of Percy-en Auge, south of Mezidon, and had cleared the road from St. Pierre-sur-Dives, which town was being held by its 52 Inf Bde. On the same day, further north 29 (W.R.) Inf Div reported that the enemy appeared to be withdrawing on their front and that Billy, south of Vimont, was clear. 146 Inf Bde with two squadrons of 49 (Brit) Recce Regt took over the woods east of the village, and 147 Inf Bde occupied Vimont (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, August 1944: Appx 82, Ops Log, 15 Aug 44, Serial 94). Patrols reported Quezy clear and reached Cesny-aux-vignes, north-west of Mezidon. 146 Inf Bde then proceeded to Airan and Ingouville, 147 Inf Bde to the woods Moulton and Argences - all villages east and south-east of Vimont in the direction of Mezidon. 6 Airborne Div was occupying the same line that it had held for several weeks previously, running from west of Troarn along the western edge of the Bois de Bavent to the sea at Sallenelles. Such was the line from which 1 Brit Corps was to begin its advance on 17 Aug (Ibid, Serials 89 and 93).

43. On 16 Aug, 1 Brit Corps received from General Crerar its orders to advance on Lisieux (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, August 1944: Appx 66, G.S. memo re Operational Instructions, 16 Aug 44)

I advised Lt-Gen Crocker that my requirement from him was to press on along the ST PIERRE-SUR-DIVES - LISIEUX axis, and to assist him, 7 Brit Armd Div had been transferred to First Cdn Army and I would place it under his command forthwith.

(W.D., Lt-Gen Crerar, August 1944:

Appx 6, Notes, 16 Aug 44)

The boundary between 1 Brit Corps and 2 Cdn Corps ran roughly through St. Pierre-sur-Dives - Livarot - Fervaques - Thiberville - Pont Authou to east of Bourgtheoulde. Although minor adjustments followed, this line served in general for the overall operations (see Map "A"). It was the intention of the Corps Commander, Lt-Gen Sir John Crocker, to have 51 (H.) Inf Div secure the R. La Vie from St. Julien-le-Faucon to Le Mesnil Mauger for the passage of 7 Armd Div. To this end 49 (W.R.) Inf Div was to take the high ground between inclusive Mezidon and Le Bras d'Or and have the reconnaissance regiment at the R. Dives on the outskirts of Mezidon (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, August 1944: Appx 82, Ops Log, 16 Aug 44, Serials 83 and 84). At 2300 hours, 16 Aug, 7 Armd Div, now under command of the Corps to provide the necessary armour, was put on two hours' notice to move, with the reconnaissance regiment, 11 Hussars (Prince Albert's Own) under command. This unit was to cross the river at first light and reconnoitre towards the area Pont l'Evêque - Lisieux - Dozulé and the road St. Pierre-sur-Dives - Lisieux (Ibid, Serial 107). 6 Airborne Div, reporting on 16 Aug that the enemy were withdrawing on their front, was ordered to advance on two routes. On the left 6 Air Landing Bde was to push towards Cabourg at the mouth of the Dives River. On the right 3 Para Bde - which included 1 Cdn Para Bn - was ordered to seize and hold Bures, while 1 S.S. Bde was directed on Bavent and Varaville. (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Para Bn, August 1944: Appx "A", Op Order, Exercise "PADDLE", 9 Aug 44)

44. Two new formations came under command 1 Brit Corps on 11 Aug 44. These were 1 Belgian Group (Light Brigade) and the Royal Netherlands Brigade (Prinses Irene) which were placed under command 6 Airborne Div (W.D., G.S., S.D., H.Q. First Cdn Army, August 1944: Appx 116). The inclusion of these contingents - and later that of the Czechoslovak brigade at Dunkirk - made the First Cdn Army a truly international force, working as a whole with precision, purpose and mutual understanding. It was the policy of 21 Army Group governing the employment of these numerically small formations that they should be given "operational experience in quieter sections of the line in the hope that ultimately they would return to their own countries and form nuclei around which larger national forces might be organized." As a result they were not to be immediately employed in major offensive operations (AEF/First Cdn Army/C/I, Docket III(d): Op Instruction No. 9, 2 Aug 44, The Employment of the Dutch and Belgian Contingents).

45. There were two routes for 6 Airborne Div to follow to the Seine. One led through Troarn - Dozulé - Pont l'Évêque - Beuzeville to Pont Audemer; the other along the coast through Cabourg, Trouville and Honfleur. Both ran through similar country - small undulating hills covered with scrub woods and thickly hedged pasture land - and the coastal road passed through the obstacles of old beach defences of pillboxes and minefields. A series of river passages had to be carried before the final objective at the mouth of the Seine could be reached. Since these were near the sea the rivers were wider and deeper than at crossing points further inland, and were frequently tidal. The two main water barriers to overcome were the Dives and Touques. The former lay in a broad marshy valley and as an obstacle was aggravated by

the derelict Dives Canal. To the east a formidable range of hills overlooked all movement across the valley. The Touques lay in a narrower valley with a flat marshy floor of watery meadows. A few minor streams ran into the sea between the Touques and the Risle. These, although not obstacles in themselves, ran through deep gorges which formed for the enemy excellent delaying positions. The total distance from Troarn to Pont Audemer by road was nearly 45 miles (AEF/6 Airborne Div/C/F: Report on Operations in Normandy, 5 Jun - 3 Sep 44, Pt 1, Sec IV). Further south in the 49 and 51 Div areas the country was less difficult and more suitable to armour, although it did present the same undulating well wooded ground and inevitable hedgerows. The entire coastal area of western Normandy is dominated by and centred on the R. Seine, meandering in its wide flat valley between wooded escarpments at the edges of the rolling plateaux to north and south. Apart from the two large ports of Le Havre and Rouen the countryside is typically rural in character, with open cultivated fields, pastures and orchards, scattered woodlands and a few forests on the slopes of the Seine Valley.⁴ (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, August 1944: Appx "A", Int Summary No. 50, 18 Aug 44)

46. Enemy forces on the front of 1 Brit Corps at the beginning of the pursuit consisted of formations of 86 Corps - 711 Inf Div in the area from the sea to Troarn; 346 Inf Div extended from Troarn through Canteloup (2062) to the Caen - Mezidon railway; while to the (German) left of this formation was 272 Inf Div (AEF 45/First Cdn Army/L/F, Docket III: Special Interrogation Report Genlt Erich Diestel). Abundant evidence existed from identifications that portions of other divisions were present, although there was little

⁴ See more detailed topographical description, paras 13 - 16.

concentration of armour. Some small battle groups were made up of tanks and self-propelled guns from remnants of 12 S.S., 21 Pz and 1 S.S. Divs, whose task had been to hold open the right flank of the "Falaise Gap" while withdrawing steadily to the Seine. Some personnel of 17 G.A.F. Div and 344 Inf Div were also involved. The formations on this front were expected to be better able to put up a stiff resistance to the pursuit than those to the south, as they had not been involved in severe fighting to the same extent. They were not, however, at full strength and were short of equipment and armour. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, August 1944: Appx 2, Int Summary No. 40, 20 Aug 44)

47. As noted above, 7 Armd Div, included 11 Hussars (Prince Albert's Own) (see order of battle at Appendix "A"), had come under command First Cdn Army to provide the necessary armour for the advance of 1 Brit Corps (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, August 1944: Appx 82, Ops Log, 16 Aug 44, Serial 14). The Corps pursuit began early on 17 Aug 44, when 7 Armd Div crossed the Dives south of St. Pierre-sur-Dives to go into action in the Lieury - Écots sector (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, Sitrep, 18 Aug 44). The division was directed by 1 Brit Corps to push out with infantry and reconnoitre along the general axis St. Pierre-sur-Dives - Boissey - Le Mesnil Durand (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, August 1944: Appx 87, Ops Log, 17 Aug 44, Serial 70). 51 (H.) Inf Div was ordered to advance on Lisieux, and 49 (W.R.) Inf Div on Pont l'Évêque (Ibid, Appx 64). On the left, 6 Airborne Div moved forward with gradually increasing momentum over the marshy lands of the Dives estuary, directed on Pont l'Évêque and along the coast towards Trouville (Report No. 139, Historical Section, p.9). During the day (17 Aug) 51 (H.)

Inf Div, with two battalions of 152 Bde in St. Pierre-sur-Dives, completed two bridges over the river and 153 Bde reached the 41 easting at St. Maclou. The enemy, however, still held Moulton. His defence appeared to take the form of covering the lines of approach with tanks, anti-tank guns and 88-mm guns. 49 (W.R.) Inf Div had a battalion (1 Tyne Scots) in Mezidon, but was being held up by blown bridges and obstructions. Units of 146 and 147 Bdes were in the Pedouze - Ingouville - Argences - Canteloup area, north of the Vimont - Mezidon road. On the coastal flank the Airborne division pushed patrols into Troarn, held Bavent and, crossing the river at Bures, arrived at the 21 easting just south-west of Cabourg (Ibid, Serial 134). Prisoners taken by the Corps during the first day of operations totalled nearly five hundred (Ibid, 18 Aug 44, Serial 98).

48. As units of the Corps entered villages and hamlets barely vacated by the enemy, they met the same welcome, anxiety to help that was encountered all across the Armies' front. Here is a typical incident encountered on 51 (H.) Div's axis:

All the French we passed came running out with garlands of flowers, milk and wine. They all tried to be very helpful with information about the Germans. They pointed out a farm with three soldiers in it, but pas méchants, they said, and we collected them on the way. Soon we were stopped by two dead horses blocking the lane, so, leaving two carriers to clear them away, I returned to give out orders near the cross-roads. Just as I had begun to do so an old Frenchman thrust himself upon us.

There was a dead Mongolian German on his farm, he said, and was it permitted to bury him?

(So Few Got Through, The Personal Diary of
Lieut-Col Martin Lindsay, D.S.O., M.P.,
Gordon Highlanders, p. 54)

49. By 18 Aug it was apparent that the enemy was timing his blowing of bridges extremely well and that the work of the Royal Engineers would play a very important part in this advance. Progress continued steadily. 7 Armd Div, swinging northwards on 51 (H.) Inf Div's right, captured the strongly held hamlets of Boissey and Mittois east of St. Pierre-sur-Dives. 51 (H.) Inf Div had one complete Brigade - 152 (H.) Inf Bde - over the river in St. Pierre-sur-Dives and concentrated in the area 2649. Quite early in the day 49 (W.R.) Inf Div formed a bridgehead at 2560 north of Magny and by midnight had established itself on both sides of the river between Mezidon and its point of crossing. Moulton had been taken and the high ground to the east, while reconnaissance units had penetrated eastward across the La Vie River to Crevecoeur-en-Auge, reporting contact with the enemy in fairly large numbers. On the left 6 Airborne Div, hampered by lack of transport, was keeping well along, and by midnight was in the area of the last villages west of the Dives - Varaville, Petiville, Robehomme and Bricqueville. The division's right hand formation, 4 S.S. Bde, crossed the river to occupy St. Samson, and cleared the Jauville - St. Pair area south of Troarn. The advance north-west of Cabourg was hampered by a stubborn defence of a strongpoints and by an enemy line

which held along the Canal le Condes. (AEF/1 Brit Corps/C/H, Sitrep, 18 Aug 44, Serial 143)

50. As the advance progressed during the day, 7 Armd Div got a battalion into Écots, and by evening had 131 Brit Inf Bde at Ste. Marguerite des Loges. As resistance was being met on the high ground at 4071 and in Livarot the plan of advance was now changed. The division was to cross the river north of Livarot. 1 Black Watch of 51 (H.) Inf Div probed into St. Julien-de-Faucon, and was ordered to cross the La Vie, where 22 Brit Armd Bde would pass through to advance on Lisieux. The Highland division later met strong opposition, although 153 Inf Bde reached Ecajeul. 49 (W.R.) Inf Div pushed two of its battalions across the Dives at Mezidon and had leading troops at Le Bras d'Or. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, August 1944: Appx 93, Ops Log, 18 Aug 44, Serial 98). Elements of its 70 Inf Bde held the high ground in area 3158, east of the La Vie, and 146 Inf Bde had a good proportion of its troops west of that river opposite Crevecoeur-en-Auge and Vieville-en-Auge. (Ibid)

51. On 19 Aug, as the Falaise Gap was closing, the advance of 1 Brit Corps progressed steadily, against stiffening enemy resistance; 7 Armd Div reached the general line Notre Dame-de-Fresnay - Le Havoeel and linked up with 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt on the 40 northing line. Livarot was taken by 131 Inf Bde after patrols had entered the town and reported it as being lightly held. 51 (H.) Inf Div advanced across the Mezidon - Vimoutiers railroad and took St. Julien-de-Faucon. By midnight forward units of the division had crossed the La Vie River at Coupesarte, although these locations were not firm (Ibid: Appx 96,

Ops Log, 19 Aug 44, Serials 198, 120 and 126). Moving north-east, 49 (W.R.) Inf Div had one brigade established in area 2359 at Bissières, and another attacking over the La Vie in 3158. A strong enemy counter-attack at 0630 hours, however, had driven 10 D.L.I. (Durham Light Infantry) of 70 Bde back to Le Mesnil, and the Lincolns (of 146 Bde) were also forced to pull back (AEF/1 Brit Corps/C/H, Docket III: Sitrep 1200 hrs, 19 Aug 44). 6 Airborne Div, making steady progress, was east of the Dives at St. Samson and patrolling north-east. 3 and 5 Para Bdes were now clear of the "island" between Troarn and Goustranville and were advancing on Dozulé. 5 Para Bde took Putot-en Auge. 6 Air Ldg Bde was holding Gonneville-sur-Mer and Franceville-Plage, but was held up by strongpoints in the western outskirts of Cabourg (Ibid, Sitrep 2359 hrs, 18 Aug 44). The forward momentum was blunted somewhat by demolished bridges and a more determined enemy resistance. During the next four days the advancing troops were to encounter more of these difficulties, although the main original plan was followed and pressure was maintained on the retiring enemy (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, August 1944: Appx 96, Ops Log, 19 Aug 44, Serial 130).

52. As 1 Brit Corps advanced the troops were enthusiastically greeted by the rejoicing people as described in the following typical reception:

Livarot was our first real experience of "liberation". Tricolour flags were out before our troops arrived; the apothecary was arrested as a collaborator, and, for those who got in early, excellent wine, as a change from Calvados or watery cider, was produced by the proprietress of the principal local cafe. The welcome was restrained but sincere,

and here for the first time we met the Resistance movement, which provided us with good information, and also handed over a number of allied airmen, some of whom had been with them for a considerable time. The battle for Livarot, however, had not been easy. It had taken three days to cover then nine miles from St. Pierre, and daily casualties were some forty to fifty men and three to four tanks. Against this, the daily average of prisoners was slightly greater. Prisoners, indeed, included one young man who was permanently handcuffed to a French girl, a touching example of fidelity perpetuated by inability to find the key, and a tenor from the Armenian opera, who, after one exhibition of his talent, was relegated to dishwashing as a task more becoming to his natural aptitudes.

(A Short History - 7th Armoured Division,
June 1943 - July 1945, p. 63)

53. On 20 Aug determined resistance continued with the enemy fighting stronger rearguard actions. The intention of 1 Brit Corps for this day was to advance on Lisieux and Point l'Évêque. This was to be effected by having 7 Armd Div concentrate in the Livarot area and when that place was clear, advance the division's armoured columns; the infantry brigade (the 131st) would be held in reserve for rest. 51 (H.) Inf Div would push one of its brigades, the 152nd, across the La Vie to the areas 4381 and 4483 north-east of St. Julien-la-Faucon. In 49 (W.R.) Inf Div's area, 147 Inf Bde having relieved 70 Inf Bde, was to attack the high ground north of St. Crespin, crossing by a bridge south of that village, and then striking north.

6 Airborne Div was already attacking Dozulé by a pincer movement from north and south. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, August 1944: Appx 100, Ops Log, 20 Aug 44, Serial 32)

54. The Corps continued to make steady, and in some sectors substantial, progress. By last light on 20 Aug 7 Armd Div was over the La Vie in the Livarot area, and had 22 Armd Bde concentrated west of Fervaques, with one of its armoured regiments proceeding northwards to an area east of Lisieux.

51 (H.) Div had reached within four miles of Lisieux, with 152 Inf Bde in the St. Pierre-des-Ifs - Le Mesnil Eudes area. 49 (W.R.) Div was well across the La Vie, and after some confused fighting in the region of St. Pair du Mont, 146 Inf Bde had reached Bonnebosq. 56 Inf Bde replaced 70 Inf Bde in the divisional command. Further north, Dozulé was still a stumbling block in the path of 6 Airborne Div. (AEF 44/1 Brit Corps/C/D, Docket I: Extracts from W.D. 1 Brit Corps, 21 Aug 44). On the night of 19 Aug, 6 Air Ldg Bde gave over its task in Cabourg to the Belgian contingent, in order to by-pass this strongpoint, while to the rear the Royal Netherlands Brigade had taken over the guarding of the Ouistreham locks (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 21 Aug 44, Serial 9).

55. The advance during 21 Aug was generally highly satisfactory. Early in the morning 5 Royal Tks of 22 Armd Bde crossed the Touques River by a captured bridge in Fervaques, while further north other armoured columns pushed on towards Lisieux. Since the beginning of the pursuit 7 Armd Div had taken 500 prisoners, including "Comd 84 or 85 Div formerly believed comd of 15 Pz Div". (W.D., G.S. Ops, First Cdn Army, August 1944: Appx 104, Ops Log, 21 Aug 44,

Serial 75; A Short History of 7th Armoured Division, June 1943 - July 1945, p. 62.) By nightfall the division had units of the armoured brigade midway between Fervaques and Touques (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 21 Aug 44, Serial 9). That evening, as Canadian troops pressed north-eastward, 4 Cdn Inf Bde relieved 7 Armd Div of responsibility for Livarot, and a boundary adjustment with 2 Cdn Corps took place (see para 22). The new line ran (inclusive to 2 Cdn Corps) through Carel - Lieury - Écots - Livarot (Ibid, 22 Aug 44, Serial 6). 51 (H.) Div moved slowly on Lisieux, and by nightfall its foremost troops (2 Seaforth) were at 5084, within four miles of the town. Other units were disposed to the west and north-west (Ibid, Serial 33). further north 49 (W.R.) Inf Div was able to effect a linking with 6 Airborne Div at Beaufour (W.D., G.S. Ops, Main First Cdn Army, August 1944: Appx 104, Ops Log, 21 Aug 44, Serial 105). Their advance had been aided by the discovery, by the reconnaissance regiment, of an unblown bridge over a tributary of the Dives near Leupartie (4093), across which the Hallams 9146 Bde) moved during the afternoon (Ibid, Serial 95). On the divisional flanks Cambremer and Druval were in turn reported clear. A battalion of 147 Inf Bde took the high ground north of Lecaude, but had to repel a counter-attack there during the night (Ibid).

56. In the hilly country east of the Dives marshes, 6 Airborne Div, too lightly armed and equipped for strongly offensive action, was making only slow progress against the enemy's methodical delaying tactics. The division had very little armour at its disposal (see [Report No. 139](#)), and its part in the eastward advance was to maintain contact with a retreating enemy, driving his rearguards back, and mopping up such isolated pockets of resistance as might

be encountered. Instructions given by G.O.C. 6 Airborne Div to 3 Para Bde prior to the commencement of Operation "PADDLE" were "to advance if and when it is certain that the enemy were withdrawing" (W.D., 1 Cdn Para Bn, August 1944: Appx "A", Extracts from W.D., 3 Para Bde, "Report on Operation 'PADDLE'"). On the 21st the division was still well west of the Touques. 3 Para Bde was fighting about Annebault, but still further west Dozulé had not yet fallen (AEF/1 Brit Corps/C/H, Docket III, Sitrep 136, 21 Aug 44). Along the coast the Belgian Brigade Group was approaching Houlgate. (AEF 44/1 Brit Corps/C/D: Extracts from 1 Brit Corps W.D., 21 Aug 44)

57. All efforts along 1 Brit Corps' front on 22 Aug were concentrated on establishing bridgeheads over the Touques River and in taking Lisieux. Road conditions were hampering movement, for due to enemy destruction of bridges and use of obstacles, secondary roads and bridges had to be employed. Lisieux was stoutly defended, and became a joint objective for 7 Armd Div and 51 (H.) Inf Div. The 11 Hussars found all approaches from the east and south-east held by road blocks covered by spandaus and bazookas. An attempt to cross the R. d'Orbec south-east of the town and reach the high ground to the east had to be abandoned. Lisieux was to require some hard fighting before its capture (A Short History of 7th Armoured Division, June 1943 - July 1945, p. 64). By mid-afternoon 7 Armd Div had one armoured regiment of 22 Armd Bde south of the town, one in the town itself and one west of the river. Of the three battalions of the armoured division's infantry component (131 Inf Bde) one was in Lisieux, another south of the town, and another to the south-west. Close behind these units of 7 Armd Div were the three brigades of 51 (H.) Inf Div, encircling the city to the west and north - 152 Bde in the rear of 131 Bde,

with 153 Bde further back and 154 Bde on its left. 49 (W.R.) Inf Div had reached Coquainvilliers: 147 Bde had a battalion slightly to the north of 154 Bde, and one battalion of 146 Bde was over the Touques south of Les Parcs Fontaines. On the Corps left flank 6 Airborne Div arrived at the Touques during the morning. 3 Para Bde had taken Annebault and was now in Drubec, 5 Para Bde went across the river into Pont L'Eveque, and 6 Air Ldg Bde, having occupied Deauville, was moving into Tourville, having crossed the river in the neighbourhood of Touques. Dozulé at last fell to 4 S.S. Bde. In the meantime the Belgians had cleared the coast from Cabourg to Deauville. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, August 1944: Appx 111, Ops Log, 22 Aug 44, Serials 97 and 99)

58. With all formations except 51 (H.) Inf Div across the Touques, the Corps intentions for 23 Aug were to have 7 Armd Div move as early as possible to secure crossings of the R.Risle between Pont Authou and (inclusive) Montfort-sur-Risle. 51 (H.) Inf Div was to secure Lisieux and to remain in Corps Reserve (providing the situation would permit the passage of all fighting troops to the east of the river) and to concentrate in 7 Armd Div area by dark. 49 (W.R.) Inf Div was to secure crossings of the Risle between (exclusive) Montfort-sur-Risle and (inclusive) Pont Audemer. 6 Airborne Div was directed to clear the area between the Touques and the Risle, but not to attempt a river crossing, as no further operations would be asked of this division. With 51 (H.) Inf Div thus temporarily "pinched" out the new boundary between 7 Armd and 49 Inf Divs was set as follows - inclusive to 7 Armd Div Moyaux - La Motte - St. Georges du Vievre - Montfort-sur-Risle. Between 49 Inf Div and 6 Airborne Div the boundary lay from the railway at

Pont L'Évêque as far as 5906, the track to 6608 (south of Beuzeville) then the railway to 7510 (north of Pont Audemer). (Ibid, Serial 84, 23 Aug 44)

59. With all formations except 51 (H.) Inf Div from operations brought that formation an opportunity for much needed rest and reorganization. The struggle for Lisieux had been severe, especially when securing the exits. Units of the Highland Division had borne the brunt of the struggle, which they had entered both under strength and tired after the heavy fighting of the past two weeks. The experience of 1 Gordons could be matched by all the infantry battalions:

We have lost fifteen officers and about 150 other ranks since the breakthrough started on August 8th. Being under strength before we started, we are now very short-handed indeed. In fact we have only one subaltern, Williams, left. the remnants of the four rifle companies are now amalgamated into one composite company. I have brought up the Pipe Band, the pioneers and as many drivers and clerks as could be scraped together, under the M.T.O., to thicken us up.

(So Few Got Through, p. 64)

60. The morning of 23 Aug was to prove the Corps' plan of the day before somewhat ambitious, as enemy resistance, especially in and east of Lisieux, caused a delay. The main axis was directed towards Pont Audemer (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, August 1944: Appx 120, Ops Log, 24 Aug 44, Serial 16). As Pont Audemer and Bernay were reported centres of activity for

the French Forces of the Interior, it was imperative that the two corps in First Cdn Army waste no time in establishing contact with them (Ibid, Serial 1). North of Lisieux 49 Inf Div managed to secure bridgeheads over the Touques at Le Breuil-en Auge and at Ouilly-le-Vicomte. On the Airborne Division's front 5 Para Bde had established a bridgehead just south of Pont l'Évêque (Ibid, Appx 16, 23 Aug 44, Serials 42 and 13), but was held up at the railway by stiff opposition. 6 Air Ldg Bde was also across the river south-east of the town of Touques (Ibid, Serial 16). 1 S.S. Bde cleared the Bois de Villiers, and at Villiers-sur-Mer found evidence of the launching of "human torpedoes" against Allied supply shipping. One such contraption was found complete, less the dome top half, on the beach north of the sea wall at Villiers-sur-Mer. (Ibid, Serial 67)

61. By mid-day on 24 Aug it was apparent that the enemy was evacuating many points. Pont L'Évêque was reported clear, and down the R. Touques to the sea Trouville, Canapville, St. Martin-aux-Chartrams had all been occupied by the Airborne Division. Patrols of the Air Landing Brigade were within 1000 yards of Honfleur at the mouth of the Seine (Ibid, Serial 117). 49 (W.R.) Inf Div was meeting little, if any, opposition on their front; the Essex Bn of 56 Inf Bde was in Cormeilles (Ibid, Serial 127). By nightfall patrols of 11 Hussars were approaching Brionne, and other armoured units of 7 Armd Div were advancing on Lieurey. Lisieux was free of enemy (Ibid, Appx 120, 24 Aug 44, Serial 64), and its acquisition by the Corps was an important factor in expediting the passage of troops from west to east. Up until that time the administrative services had been supplying the forward formations from the Bayeaux roadheads (No. 1 Cdn Army Roadhead). It was important that 1 Brit

Corps clear the area east of the Touques as rapidly as possible, in order that 3 Cdn Army Roadhead could be established at Lisieux for operations over the Seine⁵ (Ibid, Serial 88; AEF/First Cdn Army/RCASC/C/F: S & T Operations in France, Belgium and Holland from 23 Jul - 31 Oct 1944, p. 4).

62. The crossing of the R. Risle marked the next "bound" for 1 Brit Corps, with Pont Audemer the key point to be taken. Units of three divisions were directed on this important objective. The axes of both 6 Airborne Div and 49 (W.R.) Inf Div converged upon Pont Audemer, and on 25 Aug 11 Hussars moved northward to assist the 49 Recce Regt in attacking the town. (First Cdn Army Ops Log: Appx 123, 25 Aug 44, Serial 12). By mid-day the whole front was quite fluid. A steady advance had been made with opposition coming chiefly from well sited machine guns and anti-tank guns covering the lines of approach. The enemy was spread very thinly on the ground. The armoured division moved rapidly forward, and elements of the fast travelling 11 Hussars crossed the Risle at Pont Authou and Le Romancon. By nightfall they had reached St. Philbert-sur-Boissey, five miles north-east of Brionne. Behind them 22 Armd Bde had reached St. Pierre des Ifs, just west of the river, and had occupied St. George-du-Vievre. 49 (W.R.) Inf Div had reached the Calonne R. above and below Cormeilles (Ibid, Serials 18, 23, 72, 81, 98). On the coastal flank, where wider river obstacles strengthened the enemy's resistance, 6 Airborne Div had covered half the territory between the Touques and the Risle Rivers. 1 Brit S.S. Bde was astride the Morette River, while

⁵ For details regarding the maintenance of First Cdn Army during these operations see An Account of Operations of Supplies and Transport Service, First Canadian Army, France and Belgium, 23 Jul 44 - 31 Oct 44, compiled by S.&T. Branch, H.Q. First Cdn Army, 15 Dec 44.

5 Brit Para Bde, with the Netherlands Brigade under command, was midway between Pont L'Évêque and Beuzeville on the main Pont Audemer road (Ibid, Serial 98). The Belgian Gp, moving with 6 Air Ldg Bde along the coastal road that ran through Honfleur, had reached Criqueboeuf quite early that morning. Troops of the Air Landing Brigade took Honfleur during the day (Ibid).

63. By the morning of 26 Aug Pont Audemer remained the chief objective south of the Seine on 1 Brit Corps front. The infantry division (49th) was assigned to its capture (Ibid; Appx 129, 26 Aug 44, Serial 15), but by 1030 hours 6 Airborne Div reported that 1 S.S. Bde had occupied Beuzeville to the west of the city, and that 5 Para Bde was in Pont Audemer, the enemy having withdrawn after blowing all bridges (Ibid, Serial 54). With 6 Air Ldg Bde in Berville-sur-Mer at the mouth of the Risle, and Toutainville further up the estuary occupied by 4 S.S. Bde, the Airborne Division had completed the task assigned to it - that of clearing the coastal flank. 7 Armd Div, whose forward armour had crossed the Risle farther upstream the previous day, found little opposition east of the river and during the morning drove its tanks along the main Pont Audemer - Rouen road to the road junction 9607, well up to the western fringes of the Forêt de la Londe. (Ibid, 26 Aug 44, Serials 22, 54, 57, 87, 94)

64. The whole corps front had by noon reached the line of the Risle, and many strong groups were not only over but were thrusting towards the Seine crossings in a way that was aimed at splitting the enemy into two groups - one in each of the river loops covered by the Forêt de Brotonne and the Forêt de Maunay. 6 Airborne Div, preparing to withdraw from 1 Brit Corps, was ordered

to hold its positions until relieved by 49 (W.R.) Inf Div (Ibid, Appx 133, 27 Aug 44, Serial 15). 51 (H.) Inf Div (which had remained since 24 Aug concentrated near Lisieux) began moving up into position on the right of 49 (W.R.) Inf Div to assist in the clearing of the south bank of the Seine. In so doing it replaced 7 Armd Div, which was ordered to come under command of Second Brit Army on mutual arrangements between that Army and First Cdn Army (Ibid, Appx 129, Serial 95, 26 Aug 44).

65. There remained the task of mopping up the remnants of the enemy which had not escaped over the Seine. It was the armoured division which found a gap at the western end of the enemy's main line of resistance, Canerville - Bourg Achard, and two regiments advancing three miles along an undefended main road caused great destruction to his soft skinned vehicles caught in the open. Although both 49 and 51 Inf Divs were across the Risle on 27 Aug, they found progress slow due to mines and obstacles. 7 Armd Div, having completed its task with 1 Brit Corps was withdrawn on 28 Aug preparatory to coming under command 12 Corps the following day. It consequently fell to the two infantry divisions to clean up the areas still in enemy hands in the two great loops on the west bank of the Seine. The Highland division began operations in the Forêt de Maunay, while 49 (W.R.) Inf Div found enemy resistance decidedly determined in the Forêt de Brotonne. By 30 Aug, however, both areas were cleared. Large quantities of enemy equipment were found at the Duclair and Caudebec crossings. Although a great part of this had been destroyed, in the haste of his flight the enemy abandoned vast quantities of serviceable material of all kinds. On 31 Aug patrols from the corps made several crossing of the Seine at various points.

66. On the afternoon of 30 Aug 6 Airborne Div, less 1 and 4 S.S. Bdes, left the command of 1 Brit Corps in preparation for its return to the United Kingdom (W.D., G.S., S.D, H.Q. First Cdn Army, August 1944: Appendix 275, S.D. 45 Warning Order). It was no mean feat that the formations and units of the division had accomplished since the beginning of their campaign in the early hours of D Day. 6 Airborne Div had set the pace for the whole of 1 Brit Corps, and in its sector had liberated more than 400 square miles of France and had captured over 1000 prisoners. General Crerar made it quite clear how much the men of the Airborne Division had done when he sent the following signal to G.O.C. 1 Brit Corps⁶:

Desire you inform Gale of my appreciation immense contribution 6 Airborne Div and Allied contingents under his command have made during recent fighting advance. The determination and speed with which his troops have pressed on in spite of all enemy efforts to the contrary have been impressive and of great assistance to the army as a whole

(AEF/6 A.B. Div/C/D, Docket 1, 6 Airborne Div Report on Operations in Normandy, 5 Jun to 3 Sep 44, para 26)

FIRST CDN ARMY PLANS FOR THE SEINE CROSSINGS

⁶ In the advance of 1 Brit Corps to the Seine it is of interest to note that two Canadian units operated as part of 6 Airborne Div - 1 Cdn Para Bn of 3 Para Bde, and 1 Centaur Bty, R.C.A. An account of the operations of these two units is given in [Report No. 139, The 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion in France \(6 June - 6 September 1944\)](#).

67. Long before the formations of First Cdn Army reached the Seine River tentative but detailed plans had been made for an opposed crossing of the river, should such an operation be necessary. On 21 Aug the Chief of Staff - Brigadier C.C. Mann - reminded General Simonds of "certain studies" that had already been completed at Army Headquarters in regard to a crossing of the Seine in the Elbeuf bend, and informed him of the study material available to 2 Cdn Corps for planning purposes. This included "a complete study by the Chief Engineer's Branch of the Elbeuf bend." (AEF/First Cdn Army/C/E, Docket II: 603/Directive/1, 21 Aug 44). In requesting General Simonds to submit his proposals as to the various quantities of special assault equipment that 2 Cdn Corps might require, the Chief of Staff pointed out that the totals to be apportioned between Second Brit and First Cdn Armies were approximately 150 D.D. tanks, 300 D.U.K.Ws., 115 L.V.Ts. and 130 Terrapins (Ibid). The Chief of Staff expressed doubts, however, that the Canadian crossing would be likely to meet enemy resistance.

Within the inter-army boundary, an assault crossing in the ELBEUF bend seems indicated, if required at all, which seems to be unlikely.

(Ibid)

On 25 Aug General Crerar gave instructions that 2 Cdn Corps "plan, and make initial preparations, for an opposed crossing of R SEINE between incl PONT DE L'ARCHE - incl ELBEUR", but in the same directive he pointed out that "the development of firm plans for the crossing of R SEINE by First Cdn Army and

its subsequent advance..." would be "importantly influenced by the actions of Second Brit Army on our right, and of 12 U.S. Army Group." (G.O.C.-in-C. 1-0-4, Directive to Corps Commanders, 25 Aug 44)

68. These "actions" General Crerar described in his appreciation of the general situation on the 25th.

The Second Brit Army is proceeding to take over the areas recently secured by XV and XIX Corps of First US Army and by 2 Cdn Corps of First Cdn Army, within the Brit Army boundary.

When this re-grouping is completed, 30 Brit Corps, on right Second Brit Army, is to expand and exploit the bridgehead, now obtained, EAST OF R. SEINE in the vicinity of MANTES-GASSICOURT. 12 Brit Corps is to take over the left sector of the Army front and when the enemy "pocket" between Second Brit and First Cdn Armies has been eliminated, is to be responsible for the development of a bridgehead EAST of the R SEINE, vicinity of LOUVIERS. 8 Brit Corps is to be held, temporarily in Second Brit Army reserve.

(Ibid)

It will thus be observed that the weight of 21 Army Group's thrust over the Seine was to be delivered on the right. Indeed, the stance in which General Crerar had, in an earlier directive, visualized for 1 Brit Corps, to "move with its right shoulder up and with its left, periodically, echeloned

considerably back" (G.O.C-in-C., 1-0-4, 6 Aug 44), might now be considered as applying to the relative order of advance of all the major components of the British-Canadian Army Group.

69. By 26 Aug the march of events pointed still more clearly to an unopposed crossing by 2 Cdn Corps. On that day the C.-in-C. defined the immediate and future operations of 21 Army Group. Second Brit Army was to be the spearhead of the general advance towards Belgium.

Second Army will cross the SEINE with all speed, will advance rapidly northwards, and will establish itself in the area ARRAS - AMIENS - ST POL as soon as possible, quite irrespective of the progress of the armies on its flanks...

The Army will move with its armoured strength deployed well ahead; its passage northwards must be swift and relentless. By this means it will cut across the communications of the enemy forces in the coastal belt, and will thus facilitate the operations of Canadian Army.

(G.O.C.-in-C. 1-0, C.-in-C. Directive
M520, 26 Aug 44)

PREPARATIONS BY 2 CDN CORPS

70. In transmitting to his Corps Commanders the information and directions contained in the C.-in-C's. directive, General Crerar, reporting that 43 Brit

Inf Div (of 30 Corps) already had one brigade across the Seine at Vernon, pointed out that the progress made by Second Army should importantly assist the operations to be undertaken by First Cdn Army (G.O.C.-in-C. 1-0-4, Directive to Corps Commanders, 26 Aug 44). As a result, the G.O.C.-in-C. foresaw the possibility of getting over the Seine without the need of mounting a full-scale formal attack. Declaring that the first task of the Canadian Army were "to clear the enemy from the west bank of the R. Seine and to establish a bridgehead across that river", he urged 2 Cdn Corps to take "immediate advantage of any opportunity afforded by the enemy suitably to establish itself across the river by coup-de-main tactics." (Ibid). It was apparent that the main problem confronting the Canadian Corps was one that the Engineers must solve.

71. "It is clear", concluded the G.O.C.-in-C.

... that the enemy no longer has the troops to hold nay strong positions - or to hold any positions for any length of time - if it is aggressively outflanked or attacked. Speed of action and forcible tactics are, therefore, urgently required from commanders at every level in First Cdn Army. We must drive ahead with utmost energy. Any tendency to be slow or "sticky" on the part of subordinate commanders should be quickly and positively eliminated.

(Ibid)

72. Opposite Elbeuf a narrow loop of the winding River Seine enclosed a long spit of land thrusting westwards from its base at Tourville (1820), some eight miles south of Rouen. The Corps plan provided for establishing bridgeheads along this narrow peninsula, and moving thence to the north and north-east along its pre-arranged axis of advance. In defining the area in which the Canadian crossings should be effected, General Crerar gave as objectives the securing of the following successive bridgeheads beyond the Pont de l'Arche - Elbeuf sector:

- a. PONT ST. PIERRE (3101) - MESNIL-ESNARD (2211)

- b. VASCOEUIL (3913) - MOROMME (1619) - R SEINE (1615)

- c. VASCOEUIL - FONTAINE-LE-BOURG (2527) - PAVILLY (2029) -
CAUDEBEC EN CAUX (9326)

(G.O.C.-in-C., 1-0-4, Directive to Corps
Commanders, 25 Aug 44)

73. In accordance with these instructions the Corps Commander defined the detailed divisional tasks as follows:

- 1. (a) 4 Cdn Armd Div will by coup-de-main seize a bridgehead on the north bank of the R SEINE both incl PONT DE L'ARCHE 2299 - CRIQUEBEUF-SUR-SEINE 1899.

(b) 3 Cdn Inf Div will by coup-de-main seize a bridgehead incl ELBEUF 1199 - incl rly bridge at 111008.

(c) 2 Cdn Inf Div will clear the meander incl OISSEL 1803 - LE PT QUEVILLE 1614 - MOULINEAUX 0804 and will, by coup-de-main, seize bridgeheads at rly bridge 188033 and the bridges SOUTH of ROUEN.

2. C.E., 2 Cdn Corps, will allot to each of 2, 3 Cdn Inf and 4 Cdn Armd Divs equipment to provide two Class 9 and two Class 30⁷ ferries for each division.

3. Depending on the tactical situation and the technical considerations, following the coup-de-main by divisions, G.O.C., 2 Cdn Corps, will decide on the site for construction of one Class 40 floating bridge.

(AEF/First Cdn Army/C/E, Docket II:

G.O.C.8, 25 Aug 44)

General Simonds further indicated in his directive the order in which the divisions should have priority for crossing the Class 40 bridge as soon as it had been completed; 4 Cdn Armd Div was to be given first place. (Ibid).

⁷ The distinction between Class 30 and Class 40 ferries was not always clearly drawn. Thus, Army Engineers supplied Class 40 rafts in response to 2 Cdn Corps demands. Formation and unit war diaries vary in their designation of the heavy ferries that were put in operation for the 3 Cdn Inf Div and 4 Cdn Armd Div crossings.

74. As the troops of First Cdn Army began their tasks of securing and expanding bridgeheads across the Seine, the enemy struggled desperately through the final phases of the headlong flight of his battered formations to the northern bank. He was indeed in sorry plight. An estimate made at the time placed German losses in the battle of Normandy at over 400,000 men, 1300 tanks and 3500 guns. Twenty German Army, Corps and Divisional Commanders had been killed or captured, 25 divisions eliminated, a further 20 savagely mauled (First Cdn Army Int Summary No. 61, Appx "A", 29 Aug 44). The task of attempting to cover the disorganized retreat across the Seine of these stragglers who had survived the closing of the Allied trap, east of Falaise, was given, on the front opposite First Cdn Army, to the divisions of 86 and 81 Corps - which had been outside the pocket, and whose ranks were therefore more nearly intact than those of their luckless fellow formations. These divisions were disposed along the Seine between the estuary and 86 Corps, and 331, 344 Inf Divs and 17 G.A.F. on 81 Corps. Priority of escape had been given to the armoured formations of 2 S.S. Pz Corps which had survived in any appreciable form of completeness - 9 S.S., 21 Pz and 116 Pz Divs; these had been withdrawn well to the rear in the Beauvais area for reorganization, and to provide an armoured reserve for use against the expected breaches in the front from Paris to the sea. On the left of 81 Corps, opposite Second Brit and First U.S. Armies, were fresh divisions that had scarcely been west of the Seine - 49, 18 G.A.F., 6 Para and 47 Divs (Ibid). Through the ranks of this line of weary infantry divisions passed the survivors of the Falaise debacle (1 S.S., 10 S.S., 2 Pz, 12 S.S., 84, 89, 271, 276, 277, 326, 353, 363 Divs, 3 Para Div), from all of which formations only remnants had struggled out (Ibid). The ferries at Quillebeuf, La Mailleraye-sur-Seine, Duclair, Grand

Couronne and Rouen operated day and night, while the depleted formations of the Fifth Panzer Army, aided by the winding course of the Seine - which lent itself admirably to such a type of military operation - fought delaying actions to hold securely the southern base of each river loop through which the evacuation was proceeding. (First Cdn Army Int Summary No. 59, 27 Aug 44)

75. Preparations for transporting 2 Cdn Corps across the Seine were rapidly pushed forward. The immensity of the task confronting the Engineers is indicated in a summary of the situation prepared on 26 Aug by S.O.R.E.1, First Cdn Army.

1. (a) At 251400 B hrs received by phone from CE 2 Cdn Corps demands for eqpt, all on wheels, and units, as listed below, to arrive night 25/26 Aug. Apparent that Corps foresaw possibility of an immediate crossing of the SEINE.

Eqpt - 6 Close sp rafts (cl 9) and propulsion units.

6 Hy rafts (cl 40) and propulsion units

All available storm boats and engines

One cl 9 br

One cl 40 br

(Total tonnage approx 1000 tons)

Units - HQ 1 Cdn AGRE

HQ 13 AGRE

1 Cdn A Tps Engrs

2 Cdn A Tps Engrs

8 GHQ Tps Engrs

86 Br Coy RCASC

147 Br Coy RASC

(b) All these resources had been nominated to CE 2 Cdn Corps for the SEINE crossing plus additional rafts and brs, but necessarily subject to release from 1 Corps RISLE crossing and army maint commitments. Fwd dumping of eqpt had just started on a coordinated Q tpt plan giving br eqpt top priority. Start of dumping considerably delayed as roadhead area EAST of LISIEUX not cleared of enemy till afternoon 24 Aug and no suitable site WEST to town.

(W.D., Chief Engineers Branch,
H.Q. First Cdn Army (Main),
August 1944: Appx 23, Sitrep
Engr Resources 25/26 Aug 44)

76. An earlier forecast of the Engineer programme likely to be needed to fit in with the course of operations had foreseen the possibility of establishing a forward dump of bridging materials in the area behind Elbeuf for use in the Seine crossing (Ibid: Appx 21, Minutes of C.E. Conference - Coming Ops, 21 Oct 44). But the speed with which the Canadian troops had reached the Seine found the Army Engineers still filling their foremost dump at Lisieux. Nevertheless C.E. 2 Cdn Corps was immediately advised that all units asked for

(except 13 A.G.R.E., which had just arrived from the United Kingdom and was not considered of immediate value) would be available and under command 2 Cdn Corps from 0600 hours 26 Aug. In order to facilitate the work of the Corps and Divisional Engineers large quantities of bridging equipment were brought forward in tactical loads from the Engineer Stores Base Depots west of the Orne, while it was found possible to draw some loads of Bailey bridging direct from the newly established dump at Lisieux, thereby saving the hard pressed transport vehicles a long turn around. By 1100 hours on the morning of the 26th, in spite of difficulty in securing sufficient transport for the long hauls, over 700 tons of ferry and bridge equipment had reached the 2 Cdn Corps area, and the remainder of the demand (chiefly 400 tons of pontoon equipment) was on the road (Ibid: Appx 23)

77. As 4 Cdn Armd Div and 3 Cdn Inf Div prepared to cross the Seine (while 2 Cdn Inf Div concentrated on the task of clearing its area in the Seine meander - the Forêt de la Londe) Divisional Engineers hurriedly began the work of establishing ferries in their respective areas. With much of the necessary equipment being held by Army far in the rear, the demands upon the Engineers for an early crossing of the river imposed a severe test upon their efficiency and resourcefulness.

Late in the afternoon [26 Aug] it became apparent that a crossing of the R. Seine was going to be done tonight... Very little time was available to tie up details with the infantry before their crossing, but as very little, if any, opposition was expected it was not considered very serious. Work on building the rafts and operating storm boats, assault

boats etc was issued to the companies late that night and after strenuous efforts by all concerned the equipment was got up to the sites and the infantry was transported across.

(W.D., H.Q. R.C.E., 3 Cdn Inf Div,
26 Aug 44)

78. The provision of assault boats for the first waves of infantry and rafts for the reinforcing columns preceded the commencement of work on the construction of bridges. In the sector allotted for the 3 Inf Div crossing opposite Elbeuf 6 Cdn Fd Coy R.C.E. toiled through the night of 26/27 Aug to put storm boats into operation for the first assaulting infantry of the division. These boats were being used for the first time, and their motors reached the field company still crated. (W.D., H.Q. R.C.E., 3 Cdn Inf Div, August 1944: Appx 4, Unit History, 6 Fd Coy R.C.E., 27 Aug - 2 Sep 44). 18 Cdn Fd Coy assembled light Class 5 and Class 9 "close support" rafts, and early next morning 16 Cdn Fd Coy began work on ramps in the same area for the two Class 40⁸ rafts assigned to the division. Once the necessary equipment had been brought forward the rafts were speedily put together, and by 1530 hours (on the 27th) they were in operation, ferrying wheeled traffic and armour across the river to reinforce the bridgehead. (W.Ds., R.C.E. 3 Cdn Inf Div, and 16 Cdn Fd Coy R.C.E., 27 Aug 44)

79. Upstream in the sector selected for 4 Cdn Armd Div's initial crossing Divisional Engineer units (8 and 9 Cdn Fd Sqns R.C.E.) began work during the

⁸ See footnote to para 73.

night 26/27 Aug on a suitable ferry site at Criquebeuf. Storm boats were late in arriving - 6 Cdn Fd Pk Sqn reported the despatch, at 0045 hours on 27 Aug, of an officer to guide a lost Assault Platoon from Le Neuborg Sqn, although under mortar and shell fire which cost them eight casualties, completed a Class 40 raft and the necessary approaches and landing points (W.D., 9 Cdn Fd Sqn R.C.E., 27 Aug 44), and by late evening 8 Cdn Fd Sqn had in operation a Class 30⁹ raft (W.D., 8 Cdn Fd Coy R.C.E., 27 Aug 44). During the day Army Troops Engineers, placed under command R.C.E. 4 Cdn Armd Div, assumed responsibility for maintaining and operating the ferries as they were completed (W.D., H.Q. R.C.E., 4 Cdn Armd Div, 27 Aug 44).

4 CDN ARMD DIV BRIDGEHEAD, 27 - 28 AUG 44

80. On receipt of the Corps Commander's instructions the G.O.C. 4 Cdn Armd Div called an orders group at 2100 hours, 26 Aug 44, and outlined his plans for the establishment of a bridgehead (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 26 Aug 44). 10 Cdn Inf Bde would seize a bridgehead on the north bank between exclusive Alizay and Les Bocquets; the tentative time for the commencement of the operation was to be midnight 26/27 Aug (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, August 1944: Appx 48, Outline Plan for Establishing Bridgehead over R. Seine, 27 Aug 44). Assault boats were to be supplied by 1 Cdn A.G.R.E., and 4 Cdn Armd Bde was detailed to support the infantry crossing with all available fire power. A ferry site for the crossing was selected at Criquebeuf. The infantry brigade was ordered to seize and establish itself in the general area Point 95 - Point 88 - Point 80, north and east of Sotteville and Igoville.

⁹ See footnote to para 73.

This would prepare the way for a Class 40 ferry to be completed across the river at Pont de l'Arche. For the assault A.& S.H. of C. reverted from under command of the armoured brigade to 10 Cdn Inf Bde, and the motor battalion (Lake Sup R. (Mot)) replaced it in Pont de l'Arche. The position already occupied at Criquebeuf by Line & Welld R. was to be used as a base from which Alq. R., followed by A.& S.H. of C., would make the crossing. After these two regiments were established, Line & Welld R. would follow, H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde bringing up the rear. Initially, only fighting echelon vehicles would be taken over the river (Ibid). (See Map "B")

81. Assault equipment was late in arriving (see para 79) and the operation did not commence until the morning of 27 Aug. Alq. R. passed through the Line & Welld R. positions to cross the Seine at 0715 hours, 27 Aug, in assault boats supplied by the bridging company allotted to 2 Cdn Corps. The crossing came under fire from 88-mm guns and mortars, but the troops landed without difficulty and began to fight their way through fairly heavy opposition towards Scoteville. advancing from the railway running along the Seine with two companies up the Algonquins were under fire from the enemy established in Scoteville and Igoville and on the heights behind the former place. Nevertheless, "D" Coy, attacking in open formation against fierce resistance over 450 yards of open ground, finally entered and consolidated in Scoteville. "B" Coy, which had been directed to attack the high ground beyond, was met by heavy fire and unable to proceed, was forced to halt in the western part of the village. "A" Coy then passed through "D" Coy to take over the eastern half. Casualties were quite severe. (W.D., Alq R., 27 Aug 44)

82. A. & S.H. of C. followed across the Seine at 0815 hours. Due to the heavy check to the Alq R., the Argylls, who originally had been directed on Igoville and the high ground beyond, were now ordered to occupy only the village. The attack, led by "B" and "C" Coys, went in at 1500 hours and met very heavy opposition, but the position was finally consolidated by 1800 hours. By some mistake the battalion headquarters party was directed down the main road into Igoville while the place was still in enemy hands. Of the group, three escaped, two were killed, and the balance, fifteen in number, including the Adjutant and one Major, were taken prisoner. The battalion suffered 75 casualties during the day's operations. (W.D., A. & S.H. of C., 27 Aug 44). Line & Welld R. crossed the river on rafts at 2000 hours and proceeded without difficulty to take up a line along the railway (W.D., Line & Welld R., 27 Aug 44). Earlier in the day - at 1230 hours - the battalion's "D" Coy, which had made the first Canadian crossing on the previous evening (see para 39), linked up with C. Scot R. in the 3 Cdn Inf Div bridgehead near Freneuse (Ibid). The remainder of 10 Cdn Inf Bde was ordered to cross during the night and to be established in the bridgehead by first light. Through the good services of the Engineers considerable numbers of vehicles - which included the armour of 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt - were ferried over. (W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 27 Aug 44)

83. While 10 Cdn Inf Bde was thus establishing itself across the Seine, 4 Cdn Armd Bde remained concentrated on the south bank, ready to pass over the river when a suitable crossing for their armour should have been constructed (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 27 and 28 Aug 44). In the meantime, however, 3 Cdn Inf Div had gained a bridgehead at Elbeuf, and a Class 40 bridge would be

ready there by 0600 hours the next morning. At a conference held by the Corps Commander at 1800 hours, 27 Aug, it was decided that the armoured brigade should be sent over the river at Elbeuf and given full priority in the use of the bridge there (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 27 Aug 44). 10 Cdn Inf Bde was to continue to use the ferries at Criquebeuf. The further tasks of the infantry brigade were:-

- a. to capture as soon as possible 28 Aug the general area Point 135 and the woods 2302 - 2301;
- b. simultaneously with the advance of 4 Cdn Armd Bde clearing the wooded area 2304 - QUEVREVILLE-LE-POTERIE and thence north to the woods in the area of BOUGELON ABBESSE - BOOS; and
- c. the bridge would finally dispose itself into the general area BOOS - LEFAULX - Point 163 - Point 159, and form a firm base for the division.

(W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div,
August 1944: Appx 56, Confirmatory Notes,
"O" Group, 28 Aug 44)

4 Cdn Armd Bde at the same time would

- a. advance, after the capture of ST. AUBIN-CELLOVILLE by 7 Cdn Inf Bde on the left and Point 135 by 10 Cdn Inf Bde on the right, to the general area BOOS; and
- b. it would finally dispose itself as follows:-
 - (1) one regiment in the area of Point 164 (2907);
 - (2) one regiment in the area of LA NEUVILLE CHAMP D'OISEL - LA MARE DEMONT; and
 - (3) one regiment in the area of LES GDES MASURES.

(Ibid)

18 Cdn Armd C. Regt was ordered to disperse its squadrons, one to Fresne-le-Plan, another to Point 140 (3307) and a third to Pont St. Pierre. The regiment would move independently or follow the armoured brigade to its objectives (Ibid). During 28 Aug, in accordance with these intentions, 4 Cdn Armd Bde crossed the river at Elbeuf and concentrated in the area of Scotteville, while 10 Cdn Inf Bde consolidated and re-grouped in the area of Igoville and completed plans for the advance to their objectives, to be made on the following day (Ibid, 28 Aug 44).

3 CDN INF DIV BRIDGEHEAD, 27 - 30 AUG

84. Meanwhile, 3 Cdn Inf Div, established at Elbeuf, completed plans for crossing the Seine. At an "O" Group held at 2000 hours, 26 Aug, the G.O.C. directed that 7 Cdn Inf Bde should lead off that night. Regina Rif was to cross followed by 1 C. Scot R. and so proceed with two battalions up - 1 C. Scot R. right and Regina Rif left. R. Wpg Rif was to follow up and seize the high ground Point 80 (1901) and the railway bridge (W.D., H.Q. 7 Cdn Inf Bde, 26, 27 Aug 44). It was not possible to specify the time for the crossing to be commenced; this would be dependent upon when the Engineers could get their boating equipment ready (W.D., Regina Rif, 26 Aug 44). The night passed without any assault being made. In the early hours of the 27th, Regina Rif was ordered to send patrols across the what the enemy was doing. They reported tanks and machine guns in and around the village of St. Aubin-Jouxte-Boulleng, the selected crossing site. By this time, however, the Divisional Engineers had brought up the necessary bridging material and assault boats and had put the latter into operation in preparation for the assault. The passage of the river began at 0900 hours, and in half an hour Regina Rif had two companies completely across, meeting no opposition. Villagers cheered our troops as they landed (Ibid, 27 Aug 44). At the same time 1 C. Scot R. reported one company over, and by 1030 hours both battalions had their line companies across the river. Rafting operations progressed favourably and the completion of the Class 5 and Class 9 ferries by 1230 hours (see para 77) permitted the next stage in the "build-up". At 1330 hours R. Wpg Rif started to move the line companies over, and by 1600 hours the battalion had taken up positions West of Freneuse. (W.D., H.Q. 7 Cdn Inf Bde, 27 Aug 44). When Regina Rif entered St. Aubin it was discovered that of the F.F.I. rounding up enemy stragglers. Both battalions when formed up decided to push on to their

objectives in spite of some slight opposition. Regina Rif on the left began to advance at 1500 hours on two axes. The northerly force, "D" and "B" Coys, moving north-east along the river from St. Aubin reached their objective - the area 1802 just north-west of Tourville - with little difficulty, and had consolidated by 1700 hours (W.D., H.Q. Regina Rif, 27 Aug 44). The remaining companies of the battalion moved along the southerly axis (main road). "C" Coy was halted by fire coming from its objective, Tourville, and since the ground was not suitable for a frontal assault on the village and 1 C. Scot R. had not yet come up on the flank to the right, Regina Rif consolidated for the night at 159023, north-west of Tourville (Ibid). Because of the halting of 1 C. Scot R., the final objective - Point 80 - was not attacked by R. Wpg Rif that day, and the plans were revised to attack the following day. Casualties for both operations had been very light.

85. Meanwhile, 1 C. Scot R. had advanced initially with no difficulty, battalion headquarters finally being set up in Freneuse. About 1430 hours, after reporting an enemy tank in its area, "B" Coy lost communication with Battalion Headquarters and advanced along towards the battalion objectives - the railway junction near Tourville. when it reached Tourville, it commenced its own private battle. It was suddenly realized that the company was out of communication with its left flanking company and with units of 4 Cdn Armd Div expected to come up on the right, and that both its flanks were open. Heavy fire from the objectives, which overlooked the lines of approach, pinned down the two leading platoons. The third platoon was moved to the high ground on the right to protect that flank, and a lost platoon from "C" Coy came up and provided most welcome assistance, which enabled the Company Commander to

withdraw his forward troops from their exposed position. The high ground was held and provided a firm base for the attack of 7 Cdn Inf Bde on the following day. Casualties in this combined company amounted to 17, while the enemy, an estimated 300, is believed to have suffered at least twice the number (W.D., 1 C. Scot R., 27 Aug 44; and Appx 11, Maj P.F. Ramsay, Personal Account of the Coy Activities around Tourville).

86. On the morning of 28 Aug, H.Q. 7 Cdn Inf Bde moved to Freneuse, where the brigade commander, Brigadier J.A. Spragge, issued orders for the operations of the day. These changed the previous day's plans. 1 C. Scot R. on the right was now to seize Point 80, Regina Rif on the left to take Bois de Tourville, and on completion of this phase, R. Wpg Rif was to pass through and seize Point 85 (Les Authieux-sur-le Pt St. Ouen). In Phase III, 1 C. Scot R. would take over Point 88 north-east of Sotteville from Linc & Welld R. of 10 Cdn Inf Bde. (This feature was the centre of enemy resistance, and was one of 10 Cdn Inf Bde's main objectives for the 28th (see para 83). On completion of these tasks 7 Cdn Inf Bde would reorganize and provide a firm base for the crossing of the Seine by 2 Cdn Corps. The operation started at 1215 hours and within the hour 1 C. Scot R. reported they had reached Point 80, having met little or no opposition (W.D., H.Q. 7 Cdn Inf Bde, 28 Aug 44). They consolidated at this objective and waited for R. Wpg Rif and Regina Rif to pass through. At 2100 hours that evening the regiment moved with the aid of tanks to relieve Line & Welld R. on Point 88 (W.D., 1 C. Scot R., 28 Aug 44). In the meantime, Regina Rif carried on through the town of Tourville, and by 2000 hours had cleared the Bois de Tourville, where they consolidated for the night (W.D., Regina Rif, 28 Aug 44). R. Wpg Rif passed through these

positions towards their objective (Les Authieux) to meet heavy fire from tanks, artillery and small arms. Tanks of 10 Cdn Armd Regt were called on for support, but did not arrive in time. The situation was cleared up, however, and by 2000 hours all units reported their objectives taken (W.D., R. Wpg Rif, 28 Aug 44). A firm bridgehead had now been established by 7 Cdn Inf Bde across the "peninsula" on the line Les Authieux - Bois de Tourville - Point 88, to link up with 10 Cdn Inf Bde's positions at Igoville. From this base the remaining formations of 2 Cdn Corps could continue the pursuit of the enemy.

87. While 7 Cdn Inf Bde was thus consolidating its hold on the north bank, the intentions for 10 Cdn Inf Bde on 28 Aug were to take Points 88 (north of Igoville) and 95 (between Igoville and Alizay) (W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 28 Aug 44). The task of seizing the former position was assigned to the Line & Welld R., who decided to attack by having "B" Coy advance on the point from the west while the other three companies circled north-eastward and seized the road and track junctions in the area. "C" Coy coming under heavy fire, during which the company commander was killed, secured the objective; "B" Coy suffered fairly heavily in accomplishing its task. However, by 1700 hours all objectives were secure and 1 C. Scot R. (of 7 Cdn Inf Bde) moved to Hill 88 to attack northwards while the Line & Welld R. proceeded to establish a firm brigade base at Igoville (W.D., Line & Welld R., 28 Aug 44). In the meantime, after a heavy artillery concentration had been directed on Point 95, A. & S.H. of C., attacked the feature at 1700 hours with three companies and a company of Alq R. supported by "C" Sqn 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt (S. Alta R.). In 45 minutes the high point was captured with the loss of but ten casualties. With

the seizure of these points the bridgehead was secure and the way open for a rapid advance by 10 Cdn Inf Bde north-eastward in the direction of Boos and Buchy (W.Ds., A. & S.H. of C. and Alq R., 28 Aug 44)

88. It was not until the afternoon of 28 Aug that 9 Cdn Inf Bde was able to send reconnaissance parties across the Seine, and during the early hours of the following morning the complete brigade moved over the Seine through Freneuse, finally establishing itself in the area north of Guoy (W.D., H.Q. 9 Cdn Inf Bde, 28-29 Aug 44). 8 Cdn Inf Bde, since 26 Aug 44, had been maintaining a firm base west of Elbeuf for the operations of the Division. The difficulties that 2 Cdn Inf div had encountered in their task of clearing the Forêt de la Londe served to hold the brigade in its position south of the Seine, and it was therefore not relieved of this role until it moved over the river on 30 Aug. (W.D., H.Q. 8 Cdn Inf Bde, 30 Aug 44)

89. The Engineers lost no time in bridging the Seine. As we have seen, by 1030 hours on the 27th light rafts were taking traffic at Elbeuf and tanks were being ferried over on two Class 40 rafts before nightfall (see pra 79). The first bridge, a Class 9 F.B.E. (Folding Boat Equipment) was completed at Elbeuf by 2100 hours after twelve hours work by 2 Cdn Corps Tps Engineers with 13 A.G.R.E. and 1 Cdn A.G.R.E. under command (W.D., C.E. H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, 27 Aug 44). Work begun that morning by 8 G.H.Q. Tps R.E. on construction of a Class 40 Bailey Pontoon Bridge in Elbeuf (113990) was finished at 0730 hours on the 28th (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn A.G.R.E., 28 Aug 44). These two bridges supplemented the ferries in carrying the load of the crossings at Elbeuf for the first three days, and a third bridge (a Class 40 Bailey Pontoon) was

completed by 8 G.H.Q. Tps R.E. (at 120988) on 30 Aug (Ibid: 30 Aug 44). Work on a Class 40 Bailey Pontoon Bridge at 4 Cdn Armd Div's point of crossing at Criquebeuf (18300) commenced on the morning of 28 Aug, but soon ceased as the site came under enemy fire. Later in the day 1 Pol Armd Div Engineers came under command 1 Cdn A.G.R.E. and construction began again on the 29th. The bridge - named "WARSAW" from the nationality of its builders - was completed on the afternoon of the 30th (Ibid: 28-30 Aug 44). On the same day construction of a second Class 40 single-span bridge began at Point de l'Arche (221997), and was completed on the 31st (W.D., C.E. H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, 30-31 Aug 44). There was thus provided ample means of crossing for the immediate traffic needs of 2 Cdn Corps.

90. While 2 Cdn Corps was thus establishing itself across the Seine, generally satisfactory progress was being made on both flanks. On 27 Aug, on the Canadian right, 30 Brit Corps, using 43 Inf Div, was enlarging its bridgehead at Vernon, where resistance, after heavy fighting during the morning, had rapidly diminished; by nightfall it was found difficult to maintain contact with the enemy. 12 Brit Corps was completing the take over of Louviers - Le Neuborg - conches from XIX U.S. Corps, which was moving out from this front. To the left of 2 Cdn Corps, 7 Armd Div was completing its tasks for First Cdn Army before being transferred to the command of Second Army. 22 Armd Bde had cut the road running south-west from Bourneville, and one armoured regiment was approaching that place, while other units were moving forward in an attempt to break through the defences west of Bourg Achard. 51 (H.) Div was in process of advancing from the area of Marolles into position on the left of 2 Cdn Corps, preparatory to relieving 7 Armd Div,

for the clearing of the Forêt de Maunay (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 27 Aug 44, Serial 43, and 28 Aug 44, Serial 5), which with the Forêt de Brotonne - to be cleared by 49 Inf Div - were the only remaining obstacles on the front of 1 Brit Corps south of the Seine. The enemy on 2 Cdn Corps front was still holding the Forêt de la Londe south of the river. These three areas were to cause considerable trouble, and 2 Cdn Inf Div especially was to have heavy fighting before completing its task of clearing the Forêt de la Londe.

CLEARING THE FORET DET DE LA LONDE, 4 CDN INF BDE OPERATIONS,

27 - 30 AUG

91. On 26 Aug at 0415 hrs, 2 Cdn Inf Div began to advance towards Bourgtheroulde with R.H.C. of 5 Cdn Inf Bde leading in an attack from the north-east (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, Serial 57, 26 Aug 44). It was planned that 4 and 6 Cdn Inf Bdes would clear the Forêt de la Londe on the 27th (Ibid, 27 Aug 44, Serial 17). The object of the operation was to protect the left flank of 3 Cdn Inf Div while it was engaged in forcing the Seine crossing at Elbeuf (see Map "B"). 4 Cdn Inf Bde was to provide this flank protection and to push up the isthmus and peninsula formed by the river loop, with 6 Cdn Inf Bde on the left, both brigades heading towards Rouen. It soon became apparent, however, that the enemy intended to hold the narrow point of the isthmus in order to allow time for the withdrawal of his forces to the north. Thus possession of the ground became vital to both sides in the area running north-west from Port du Gravier along the two railways to their junction at 0930, and thence to La Chenaie (0904) and La Vacherie (0805) in the vicinity of Moulineaux. (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 26 Aug 44). The extreme left was

open level ground that could not be used because of enemy fire from the north bank of the Seine. The rest of the isthmus consisted of heavily wooded hilly ground with a maze of tracks approaching it through the forest. Along the railway line the enemy could obtain excellent cover and he had the advantage of high ground, good observation and fields of fire and well prepared positions. From a Canadian viewpoint the few lines of approach were not good, as they could be dominated by both small arms and artillery fire (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 28 Aug 44). The troops holding the sector were some of the enemy's best; they included both paratroops and S.S. men in an estimated strength of two battalions. They had orders to hold at all costs. Our forces were thus presented with formidable opposition before commencing the assault. Their task was to prove more difficult since an appreciation from available information indicated that the enemy had evacuated the area and that there could be little opposition (AEF/2 Cdn Inf Div/C/F, Docket 1: Summary of Cdn Ops and Activities, H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Div, 1 Aug 44 - 31 Aug 44, Sesia to C.M.H.Q. "G" Branch, Hist Sec, 23 Sep 44). The appreciation proved sadly wrong, and hence, what was intended to be a march to keep contact with the enemy became a regular "slogging match" as enemy rearguads fought fanatically and furiously to protect their lines of retreat (W.D., Camerons of C., 27 Aug 44).

92. The successful prosecution of the operation was further obstructed by the use of faulty maps, on which tracks shown proved unreliable on the ground and practically worthless as axes of advance (W.D., R.H.L.I., 28 Aug 44). There was a scarcity of good air photographs, and little time had been allowed to make proper preparations for the attack (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 27 Aug

44). Furthermore, when the operation started, the Canadian battalions attacked after a week of continuous and strenuous pursuit, which had followed a month of extremely hard fighting. Indeed, the troops were considered by some authorities to be too exhausted for further fighting. They entered the forest considerably under strength and in many cases units were made up of relatively new reinforcements whose standard of training was extremely doubtful. Certainly it appeared inadequate for fighting in close woods where skill, initiative and ability to act individually were required of all ranks, and where team work was essential (Summary of Cdn Ops and Activities, 1 Aug 44 - 31 Aug 44, paras 19, 20). At a conference at 4 Brigade Headquarters with the G.O.C. 2 Cdn Inf Div and the Brigade Commander present it was reported that "the C.Os. of both the R.H.L.I. and R. Regt C. were strongly of the opinion that this task was beyond the powers of a battalion composed largely of reinforcement personnel with little training." (W.D., R. Regt C., 28 Aug 44)

93. There is little doubt that reinforcements had become a troublesome problem at this time. The unfavourable situation was especially noticeable in the French speaking regiments, but conditions were also unsatisfactory in the other battalions. The deficiencies in other ranks from the war establishments of the units of 2 Cdn Inf Div are shown by the following figures taken from the field returns as given, less first line reinforcements, for 26 Aug 44:

4 Cdn Inf Bde

5 Cdn Inf Bde

6 Cdn Inf Bde

Essex Scot	223	R.H.C.	176	Fus M.R.	331
R.H.L.I.	187	Calg Highrs	205	Camerons of C.	187
R. Regt C.	<u>229</u>	R. de Mais	<u>246</u>	S. Sask R.	<u>228</u>
	<u>639</u>		<u>627</u>		<u>746</u>
			(W.Ds. of units listed, August 1944)		

Since the greatest wastage during operations invariably fell on general duty infantry, it seems probable that a very high percentage of these deficiencies came from the rifle companies (C.M.H.Q. file 1/COS/18, Stuart to D.N.D., 20 Sep 44). A letter from general Simonds to his divisional commanders on 29 Aug, in which the Corps Commander directed that every effort should be made to reduce to a minimum cases of "battle exhaustion" and "stragglng and absenteeism", emphasized the concern with which the reinforcement situation was regarded (W.D., A.G. & Q.M.G. Br, H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, August 1944: Appx 46, Simonds to Div Commanders, 29 Aug 44). Earlier warning that such an unfavourable condition might develop had not been lacking. On 7 Aug General Simonds had reported to First Cdn Army that 2 Cdn Inf Div was then short 1900 personnel, and in his estimation might conceivably be 2500 under strength on the completion of Operation "TOTALIZE", which was then about to be launched.

No definite information is available to this Headquarters concerning further arrivals of Infantry general duty reinforcements and it is felt that, for one reason or another, the system for the supply of reinforcements to this theatre is not functioning satisfactorily and

that reinforcements in sufficient quantities to take care of actual and probable losses are not immediately available.

(Ibid: Appx 8, Simonds to First Cdn
Army, 7 Aug 44)

94. On the following day the Corps Commander reiterated his concern at the reinforcement situation. He pointed out that on one occasion during July it had been "necessary to transport reinforcements from ships newly arrived at the Beach directly to units involved in battle". An infantry draft announced in advance at 1600 strong had arrived two days behind schedule and had then consisted of 690 infantry reinforcements and 160 for other arms of services. General Simonds expressed his fear that matters would not improve.

I feel that field units should be relieved of any anxiety concerning the availability of reinforcements when an operation is required to be undertaken. From the facts recorded it is apparent that this has not been the case, nor does there appear to be any reasonable assurance of an improvement in the situation.

(Ibid: Appx 14, Simonds to G.O.C.-in-C.
First Cdn Army, 8 Aug 44)

95. Various expedients to remedy the situation were being considered, but had not yet come into effect. By November divisional commanders had, with certain reservations, approved a scheme to lower the physical requirements for

line units to PULHEMS gradings of 2212221 (C.M.H.Q. file 1/COS/18, Tel 9169, Murchie from Montague, 13 Nov 44). Already the number of reinforcements for the three French-speaking units in 2 Cdn Corps had been increased by the combing of divisions and units for French-speaking personnel (Ibid: C. of S. C.M.H.Q. to C.G.S., 2 Aug 44), but this had failed to meet the need. The battle efficiency of the French-speaking line regiments was beginning to suffer, and by the end of October General Simonds advised C.M.H.Q. that it had been "necessary to give special battle tasks to these units because of dwindling strengths" (Ibid: Tel GS 3373, Stuart from Macklin, 28 Oct 44). Proposals put forward for meeting the French-speaking units' requirements were suggested by the Corps Commander as follows:

- a. To make available sufficient additional French-speaking reinforcements from Canada to maintain fighting strengths;
- b. Cannibalize one battalion and replace in order of battle by English-speaking battalion; and
- c. Use English-speaking reinforcements to reinforce French-speaking units by forming one complete English-speaking company in each battalion with English-speaking officers and N.C.Os.

(Ibid)

Any improvements however in the reinforcing procedure had not appeared to affect the divisional strength before the end of August, and many of the ideas for a larger pool were as yet only in mind.

96. The charge that reinforcements were not fully trained deserves some analysis. There appears to be little documentary support for such a sweeping statement, but some substantiation can be found. There was foundation for the implication in the remustering of excess personnel from other arms and services to the Infantry Corps, for which authorization had been previously provided (1/REINF 21 A Gp/1, 44/21 Army Group/1 (D.C.G.S.) 1 May 44, Proceedings of Conference Held at C.M.H.Q. 28 Apr 44 for the Purpose of Discussing the Provisions of Reinforcements for Canadian Component 21 Army Group, para 6c). The sending forward of reinforcements with uncompleted training seems to have been accepted as unavoidable in certain cases.

It was also agreed that if it became necessary to send forward personnel who had not completed their training in full that the standard reached should be appropriately indicated, in order that Commanding Officers could be made aware of the necessity of bringing them up to the standard required... It was thought that no serious repercussions would arise from this policy since in the case of infantry reinforcements, battalions would have the required facilities to bring personnel up to the required standard of training. Some departure might temporarily have to be accepted in other Corps.

(Ibid, para 6b)

It is to be noted that an infantry force in one instance was reported as arriving in the field on 6 Jul 44 without proper training (Ibid, 544/GEN/1 (A.A.G.) Beament to C. of S., C.M.H.Q., 13 Jul 44). Investigation was ordered and appropriate steps were taken to prevent any recurrence of such an incident (Ibid, 1/REINF 21 A Gp/1 (TRG) Penhale to H.Q., C.R.U., 17 Jul 44, para 6). What is certain is that 2 Cdn Inf Div was under strength when it reached the Seine, and consequently not up to full battle efficiency. An attack on such a strongly defended position as the enemy held in the Forêt de la Londe was bound to tax to the limit the depleted resources of the rifle companies, which must be considered at this time as averaging less than half strength.

97. Early on 26 Aug R.H.C. took Bourgtheroulde in an unique but successful attack, in which they surprised the enemy by coming in from the rear, or north-east (AEF/5 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, Docket No. IV: Account by Colonel F.M. Mitchell of the Capture of Bourgtheroulde by the R.H.C. 26 Aug 44)

(See para 91). The operation was a prolonged one, and enemy action with mortar and artillery fire continued with some intensity on the square for most of the day, causing a congestion on the routes through the town (Ibid: Account by Lt Shea of the Capture of Bourgtheroulde by R.H.C. 26 Aug 44).

With the town under control 2 Cdn Inf Div planned to engage the enemy believed to be occupying positions in the Forêt de la Londe. The original task allotted to 4 Cdn Inf Bde was the seizure of Oissel and the territory north and west by Essex Scot, and the occupation of Grand Essart by R. Regt C. R.H.L.I. was to occupy the high ground overlooking the Seine south of Grand Essart (W.D., R. Regt C., 26 Aug 44). It was decided, early in the afternoon of 26 Aug, in view of the success of the R.H.C., that 4 Cdn Inf Bde would move

forward embussed to Bourgtheroulde, and thence by march route north-east through the forest to take up positions in the general area of Moulineaux. The order of march within the brigade was Essex Scot, R.H.L.I. and R. Regt C. (Ibid). Road movement was slow, and on reaching the area of Point 132 (0002) the column halted for a considerable time, while information was received that Essex Scot had encountered resistance on the outskirts of Bourgtheroulde. The same evening the Brigade Commander (Brigadier J.E. Ganong) visited R. Regt C. and announced a further change in plans. The R.H.L.I. was now to lead, while the Essex Scot was to disengage and follow them, with R. Regt C. remaining as reserve battalion. The new route would take the brigade through Elbeuf and thence up the left bank of the Seine, where R.H.L.I. and Essex Scot were to seize the high ground overlooking the river, while R. Regt C. was to pass through to a position just south of Grand Essart (Ibid).

98. The night march of 4 Cdn Inf Bde was trying, but generally uneventful. From Elbeuf the road to the objective led through a narrow defile between precipitous hills and the River Seine. Information about the enemy was but scanty. (The progress of each battalion will be recorded in turn.) On the evening of 26 Aug R.H.L.I. moved by transport along the highway from Bosrobert-aux-Poulets to Bourgtheroulde, and thence east towards La Bissonnière (0060), midway to Elbeuf. The battalion's objective was to secure the high ground in 1004, to give protection to the Elbeuf crossing. Near Bourgtheroulde the regiment was forced to debus, as transport in the lead came under heavy shelling. On resuming the advance leading vehicles ran into mines, and the road the villages had to be cleared. on reaching the road junction (109010) at Port du Gravier, the battalion took the left fork in

error, and reached the railway bridge at 108105 before being halted by road obstacles. The enemy suspecting their presence, illuminated the area with Very lights and brought down machine gun and mortar fire, which caused some casualties. "F" echelon had to fall back towards Elbeuf, and during the early morning hours of 27 Aug all companies were withdrawn to the high ground in 1001. Enemy machine guns, mortars, and snipers operating from the corresponding heights (1102) across the road and railway, kept the companies under cover, and inflicted a considerable number of casualties on personnel as well as seriously damaging a number of vehicles (W.D., R.H.L.I., 26, 27 Aug 44).

99. The Essex Scot encountered similar difficulties. At 2000 hours, 26 Aug, the regiment passed through R.H.C. in Bourgtheroulde, becoming engaged in some heavy fighting within the town limits. At 2350 hours the march continued and the regiment passed through Elbeuf along the road on the left bank of the Seine towards Port du Gravier. As the battalion approached the village, while in the neighbourhood of Orival (1000) - some 500 yards south of the railway - fire was opened on it from the road forks at 109010. "B" Coy, in the lead, halted and deployed to cover, undergoing mortar and small arms fire during the process. The enemy fire was generally inaccurate and very few casualties were suffered. The battalion now took up a position on the river bank with two companies ("A" and "B") deployed along the railway tracks to the right front, and the remaining two along the road to Elbeuf, from which positions they were later moved forward to cover the left flank, while R. Regt C. had also been halted west of the road by the enemy rearguard fire (W.D., Essex Scot, 26, 27 Aug 44).

100. The Royal Regiment, which had been following the leading battalions as brigade reserve, found itself, when the main column halted at Orival at first light, in an unenviable position between the river and a hill so steep as to be almost a cliff, towering to a height of 300 feet. In order to obviate the possibility of attack from above "C" Coy was sent to climb the hill and secure it (W.D., R. Regt C., 27 Aug 44). At about 0900 hours Brigadier Ganong came forward and, appreciating that neither Essex Scot nor R.H.L.I. was likely to make much progress in a frontal assault on the main hill feature which overlooked the river east of the railway, ordered R. Regt C. to make a wide flanking movement, first north-west and then east across the Elbeuf - Moulineaux road, in order to reach the high ground north of the enemy-held feature to the left of the Elbeuf - Rouen road which ran through the centre of the "peninsula". (Ibid)

101. The attack by R. Regt C. began at about 1130 hours on the 27th (4 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 27 Aug 44, Serial 169). The battalion made only slow progress through the woods, and at about 1500 hours its leading troops encountered a company of Fus M.R., who were advancing on the right of 6 Cdn Inf Bde's front (W.D., R. Regt C., 27 Aug 44). Arrangements were now made for Fus M.R. to pass under command of 4 Cdn Inf Bde. 6 Cdn Inf Bde was notified by 2 Cdn Inf Div to this effect at 1519 hours:

Warning Order. Situation 4 Bde still unsatisfactory. Warn Fus M.R. it may be necessary to use them to assist 4 Bde unit:

(2 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 27 Aug 44,
Serial 6554)

At 1616 hours the regiment from Montreal was reported as having passed to
4 Bde control:

Fus M.R. now under comd 4 Bde. Have rep from Fus M.R. report to
R. Regt C. Inform Fus M.R. that they will continue their role as laid
down by 6 Bde until new instructions are rec'd from 4 Bde.

(4 Cdn Inf Bde Ops Log, 27 Aug 44,
Serial 201)

102. R. Regt C. was now ordered by the Brigade Commander to proceed with an
attack across the Orival - Moulineaux road, using artillery support previously
arranged for Fus M.R. (W.D., R. Regt C., 27 Aug 44). The proposed attack,
however, was shortly afterwards cancelled, and the Royal Regiment was ordered
to move northward by track through the Forêt de la Londe and to rendezvous
with Essex Scot (Ibid). (The unit war diary does not identify this
rendezvous, but an entry in the R.H.L.I. Diary names a road junction at 082032
- W.D. R.H.L.I., 27 Aug 44). The battalion moved off at 1830 hours but did
not effect the rendezvous. Guided by a member of the Maquis who was familiar

with the woods, R. Regt C. reached a railway station¹⁰ (presumably the Halt at 094025) without incident two hours later. A depleted company of Fus M.R. was established on high ground to the south and west of the station. The leading R. Regt C. Company quickly came under machine gun fire, but the extent of enemy positions. The exhausted and hungry troops were therefore not further committed before first light (W.D., R. Regt C., 27 Aug 44).

103. Essex Scot, following up the attack of R. Regt C., made little progress and suffered casualties (W.D., Essex Scot, 21 Aug 44). Late that evening the Brigade Commander had to report failure to reach objectives:

Attack arranged for this afternoon bogged down entirely in thick wood. Have ordered units concerned back to SOUTH. As soon as locn received from Essex, I intend to put on attack on SOUTH OBJECTIVE with Essex and on NORTH OBJECTIVE with Fus M.R. Presume Fus M.R. still under comd. Will send you locn of two sub-units of Essex and R.H.L.I. and details as soon as I get them.

(4 Cdn Inf Bde Ops Log, 27 Aug 44,
Serial 229)

104. Shortly before midnight 27/28 Aug, the G.O.C. conferred with the Commander of 4 Cdn Inf Bde, when plans for next day's operations were decided on (Ibid, Serial 230). An early morning attack was ordered for R. Regt C. and

¹⁰ R. Regt C. War Diary names this La Londe Station, although the hamlet bearing that name is 3500 yards to the south-west.

Essex Scot ("C" and "D" Coys) in a further attempt to outflank the enemy machine gun positions dominating the line of advance. 3 Cdn Inf Div had now crossed the Seine at Elbeuf without meeting opposition, and 2 Cdn Inf Div had received orders to push on towards Rouen. During the night Fus M.R. reverted to command of 6 Cdn Inf Bde (6 Cdn Inf Bde Ops Log, 28 Aug 44, Serial 5) and Brigadier Ganong had to find another battalion to use in the attack on his left flank. Early in the morning of 28 Aug R. Regt C., in position at the railway station, was ordered to cross the lines in front and capture the high ground (1002) lying between the main road to Rouen in the south east and the railway tracks on the south west. (This high ground, which was heavily wooded, was code-named "MAISIE"). The orders were for a move at the earliest possible moment, but the arrival of rations and water - the men having been without food or drink of over a day - delayed the start until first light. Between the battalion and its objective was a low hill (Chalk Pits Hill) astride the eastern railway track through which it tunnelled.¹¹ This hill was held by the enemy, who thus had observation over all the surrounding low ground. An attempt by "C" Coy to storm the position by using its platoons in a pincer movement failed. Casualties were heavy, and as it was evident that the task was too great for a single company, "C" Coy was ordered to withdraw (W.D., R. Regt C., 28 Aug 44).

105. It was now planned to subject the area to artillery concentrations before launching a battalion attack. This programme took some time to arrange, and it was not possible to bring down medium gun fire on Chalk Pits

¹¹ A rough sketch map appended to the R. Regt C. War Diary has been used as a guide in tracing the course of the battalion operation (W.D., R. Regt C., August 1944: Appx 2, Sketch of La Londe Area)

Hill as the exact positions of units of 6 Cdn Inf Bde on the left were not at this time known. As a result, in spite of additional mortar fire being laid down, the enemy positions on the left flank were not neutralized. The battalion attack started at 1130 hours, with "B" Coy working north along the first railway track with the intention of storming the hill from the north-east. The company ran into heavy mortar fire as they endeavoured to cross the open ground in front of the hill. On the other flank "A" Coy attacked through the low scrub and reached the line of the second railway with very few casualties. The company's intention was then to move north along the railway to join "B" Coy. As progress was thus being made on the right, "D" Coy was ordered forward to reinforce "A" Coy's success (Ibid).

106. In the position reached at 1300 hours, "A" and "D" Coys remained pinned down for the next 24 hours. These sub-units were widely separated from the rest of the battalion; they were faced by a steep slope and a large chalk pit with a perpendicular face above which the enemy was holding positions just inside the tree line. The two companies, unable to dig in - for in spite of their proximity to the enemy they were apparently so far undetected - made themselves as comfortable as possible for the night. (W.D., R. Regt C., August 1944: Appendix 3, Story of "A" and "D" Coys at La Londe, 28-29 Aug 44)

107. Meanwhile, the remnants of "B" Coy R. Regt C. had definitely bogged down during the afternoon. The remaining forces at the disposal of the battalion - some 20 odd men who still survived from "C" Coy - were too few to use as reinforcements. An attempt to effect a withdrawal of "B" Coy by use of a smoke screen during the afternoon was unsuccessful because of the large area

which had to be smoked. Even battalion headquarters west of the railway embankment came under severe mortaring and gun fire of fairly heavy calibre. (W.D., R. Regt C., 28 Aug 44)

108. The attack by the two companies of Essex Scot on the afternoon of 28 Aug had not fared any better. "C" and "D" Coys went forward through Port du Gravier at 1330 hours after a very intensive barrage. On reaching the area of the right fork - the river road - they found a steep slope down which they had to slide in full view of the enemy. The two companies descended with great gallantry under heavy fire, but were unable to proceed and, after sustaining heavy casualties, dug in along the left branch of the road. Nothing further could be done and the battalion remained in position occasionally harassed, though to a decreasing degree, by some small arms fire. After darkness "C" and "D" Coys were withdrawn to the area they had originally occupied on the main road south-west of Port du Gravier. (W.D., Essex Scot, 28 Aug 44)

109. At 1600 hours (on the 28th) the G.O.C. and the Brigade Commander held an orders group at brigade headquarters with the three battalion commanders. Plans were made to pass one battalion by night through the positions occupied by "A" and "D" Coys of R. Regt C. It would then swing south-east to take the key position which was holding up Essex Scot. The battalion commanders of R.H.L.I. and R. Regt C. are reported as expressing the opinion "that this task was beyond the powers of a battalion composed largely of reinforcement personnel with little training." (W.D., R. Regt C., 28 Aug 44). They emphasized that the enemy was stronger than intelligence reports had

indicated, and that the ground was eminently suitable for defence. They also pointed out that the route proposed for the move passed up a draw on both sides of which enemy machine guns had been spotted by O.C. "A" Coy. Nevertheless, R.H.L.I. was ordered to prepare to move as soon as possible with the object of passing through Fus M.R., capturing the heights ("MAISIE") and assaulting the main enemy positions at first light. R. Regt C. was to provide guides from "A" and "D" Coys to lead R.H.L.I. forward from the Fus M.R. area. The two R. Regt C. companies were to remain in position until R.H.L.I. had passed through (Ibid). Throughout 28 Aug R.H.L.I. had been retained near Bas de la Vigne (0800) in a reserve role. The battalion, because of inaccurate maps, had difficulty in collecting its companies, from which there were several missing personnel (W.D., R.H.L.I., 28 Aug 44). R.H.L.I. finally got on their way from their positions about midnight (W.D., R. Regt C., 28 Aug 44).

110. Through the early morning hours of darkness on 29 Aug the battalion's progress was unsatisfactory due to difficulties of navigation, enhanced by the unreliability of the maps employed. An early morning divisional sitrep placed - presumably mistakenly - forward elements at 110020¹² (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, August 1944: Appx 5, 2 Cdn Inf Div Sitrep, 290530B). At first light leading troops had reached a point 096025 - just east of the railway halt - where it came under heavy machine gun and mortar fire from high ground to the east. Four enemy machine gun posts were located in the area, and it was

¹² Examination of unit war diaries and ops logs of the formations concerned in the fighting in the Forêt de la Londe reveals frequent obvious discrepancies between map reference points as reported and the actual locations they are intended to indicate. Such deviations must be attributed to the non-availability of accurate maps to the units engaged in the operations.

decided to attack these positions from the flanks with artillery support, with particular emphasis on smoke. "D" Coy on the right closed in quickly on the enemy and advanced well until previously undisclosed machine guns opened up from the right flank. As the company pushed forward it was seen that its position was becoming untenable, and an orderly withdrawal was made under cover of artillery smoke. "A" Coy on the left succeeded in getting one platoon forward over the railway bridge 100025, when again previously undisclosed machine guns inflicted heavy casualties. At 1326 hours the battalion sent an unsatisfactory report back to Brigade:

Situation with us is as follows. 3 coys involved suffered heavy casualties - 2 coys have been pulled back 4 or 500 yards and still under heavy MG and Mortar fire. Sunray feels that it is impossible to proceed with original plan and that position must be taken from another direction.

(4 Cdn Inf Bde Ops Log, 29 Aug 44,
Serial 306)

During the afternoon the battalion retained its positions in heavy rain and without food. That night they were withdrawn to R. Regt C. area (Ibid: Serial 312; and W.D., R.H.L.I., 29 Aug 44)

111. Meanwhile, on the Essex Scot front on the brigade right flank there now appeared to be evidence that the enemy had pulled back; "A" and "B" Coys were therefore moved further up the river road beyond the fork. Shortly before

noon they were reported to have advanced along this road 800 yards beyond the railway (4 Cdn Inf Bde Ops Log, 29 Aug 44, Serial 301). "B" Coy established its headquarters in a large house beside a cave extensive enough to house the vehicles of the battalion. there were numerous caves in the area, and these were subjected to fire from our machine guns and from a 6-pr, which was dragged up the railway embankment and used on suspected enemy positions. Some continually appeared out of caves in the line of fire and swarmed over battalion headquarters. That evening the battalion was informed that it would be relieved by 8 Cdn Recce Regt and would move the following morning. (W.D., Essex Scot, 29 Aug 44)

112. R. Regt C., with no commitments during the day other than to hold its present position, was able to watch the fruitless attack of R.H.L.I. During the afternoon permission was given for "A" and "D" Coys to withdraw from their advanced positions and this was accomplished under cover of an artillery smoke concentration. Arrangements were made for the battalion to move that evening into a concentration area in the neighbourhood of La Capelle (0597) west of Elbeuf. The Royals reported total casualties in the operation in the Forêt de la Londe as 149 all ranks. (W.D., R. Regt C., 29 Aug 44). During the period 26-29 Aug 4 Cdn Inf Bde's already diminished ranks had been further weakened by casualties totalling 29 officers and 289 other ranks (W.D., A/Q Branch, Adm H.Q. First Cdn Army, August 1944: Appx 12, C. and S. States, 26-30 Aug 44) (See Appx "F").

113. During the morning of 30 Aug, the units of 4 Cdn Inf Bde moved to concentration areas in preparation for what was expected to be a rest of two

or three days. R.H.L.I. went into comfortable billets in Le Thuit Signol (0596) (W.D., R.H.L.I., 30 Aug 44), and Essex Scot moved to a position in the same area about two miles south-west of Elbeuf. But their hopes of a rest of long duration were doomed to disappointment. During the course of the day the units were informed that they would be on the move again next day - en route for Dieppe (W.D., Essex Scot, 30 Aug 44).

OPERATIONS OF 6 CDN INF BDE, 26-30 AUG

114. It is now necessary to go back several days to recount the operations of 6 Cdn Inf Bde on 2 Div's left flank. On 26 Aug the brigade, four miles south-west of Bourgtheroulde, received orders to pass through 5 Cdn Inf Bde and clear the Forêt de la Londe. Unit objectives were given as S. Sask R., La Bouille - Le Buisson; Camerons of C., La Chenaie - Moulineaux; Fus M.R., area 1003 (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, August 1944: Appx 11, Trace Route and Report Lines through Forêt de la Londe).

115. The move commenced on wheels at 0800 hours, 27 Aug, with S. Sask R. leading along the brigade axis, which followed the road running north-east from Bourgtheroulde, to reach the Seine at the northern boundary of the "isthmus" which contained the Forêt (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 26, 27 Aug 44). The regiment from the prairies proceeded to T.C.Vs. to just north of St. Martin (0301), where they debussed and split into two groups. "A", "B" and "D" Coys continued to advance along the main road to the road junction at Le Buisson, south of La Bouille, while "C" Coy did a left flanking movement by way of the railway bridge (037046) to the north-west to reach the hamlet in

0506, and thence to the road junction to rejoin the rest of the battalion. The company's detour established the absence of enemy from the western part of the brigade's objectives in the Forêt de la Londe. The battalion then proceeded to clear the high ground south of La Bouille to take up defence positions on their objectives (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 27 Aug 44; W.D., S. Sask R., 27 Aug 44). Camerons of C. proceeded along the same route and debussed at the same place as the S. Sask R. They advanced on foot north-east towards the Seine, meeting stronger resistance from small arms and machine gun fire as they proceeded. They crossed the road and railway junction at 055041 and soon found themselves, as they tried to make their way eastward along the river, engaged by tanks and S.P. guns, as the enemy with great determination was protecting his lines of retreat across the Seine. (AEF/6 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D Docket III: Account by Capt Bruce Marshall of the Camerons of Canada in the Forêt de la Londe 27-30 Aug 44). The Camerons occupied La Vacherie (0805) on the river and by 2000 hours reached the area 0904; but heavy fire coming from positions about 1000 yards forward halted the battalion short of its objective. During the day, however, both battalions had taken many prisoners. (AEF/2 Cdn Inf Div/C/F, Docket I: Hist Offr's Summary of Cdn Ops and Activities H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Div, 1-31 Aug 44; and W.D., Camerons of C., 27 Aug 44). Fus M.R. proceeded without difficulty to Le Buquet, where they first contacted the enemy in the Forêt de la Londe, and heavy fighting followed. The battalion was able to occupy its objective, the enemy withdrawing towards the Seine (W.D., Fus M.R., 27 Aug 44).

116. At an orders group held just after midnight 27/28 Aug, the Commander 6 Cdn Inf Bde, A/Brigadier F.A. Clift, set out the plans for the brigade's

advance. Objectives were given in the direction of Oissel¹³, where it was hoped to make contact with 4 Cdn Inf Bde. These were defined as the areas 1404 - 1503 and 1604 - 1704 (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 28 Aug 44). The attack would be launched by S. Sask R. and Fus M.R. - the latter battalion reverting from under command 4 Cdn Inf Bde (see para 101). Camerons of C. were to remain in their present position commanding the German escape route at La Vacherie. It was planned that S. Sask R. should take the first objective (1403 - 1503); Fus M.R., following in their path, would then swing left and capture the more easterly target (6 Cdn Inf Bde Ops Log, 28 Aug 44, Serial 5). S. Sask R. made an early start, advancing south-eastwards from La Bouille towards the railway bridges south of La Chenaie. "C" Coy in the lead reached the bridges (093036) without encountering opposition and proceeded to cross the railroad. When approximately half the company (company strength then about 35) had got across the first bridge they came under fire from snipers and machine guns on the left flank. Two separate flanking attacks on either side failed to make any progress; the platoon on the left lost contact with company headquarters, and was presumably ambushed. The remainder of "C" Coy, after coming under small arms fire, received orders to withdraw. Again they were swept by heavy fire and lost many personnel including all their officers; the company was now reduced to 13 men. The battalion withdrew to the road junction at Le Buisson (0605) and reorganized in a defensive position. (W.D., S. Sask R., 28 Aug 44)

¹³ The objectives given 6 Cdn Inf Bde for 28 Aug coincide in general with those of 4 Cdn Inf Bde on the 27th. It must be assumed, although documentary evidence to that effect is lacking, that these were transferred to the brigade on the left when 4 Bde failed to make progress in their assignment.

117. Meanwhile Camerons of C. were firmly entrenched in their first objective, in a position west of Moulineaux overlooking the R. Seine and cutting off the German escape route by way of the La Vacherie ferry. Throughout the night of 27/28 Aug they were heavily shelled and mortared, while in the daylight hours the enemy, under cover of the woods, moved close to their position seeking sanctuary from our artillery and especially from the attacks of the Typhoon rocket-firing planes. Both sides engaged in a battle of mortar fire, with the Canadian battalion enjoying the advantage of high ground, but with its observation handicapped by the trees. Heavy casualties inflicted on the enemy were matched by Canadian losses as German artillery from across the river and their S.P. guns on the south bank joined in the mortar battle. (W.D., Camerons of C., 28 Aug 44)

118. In the meantime, Fus M.R., ordered to withdraw into the 6 Bde area north of the 03 grid line and "EAST of the rly line" (although the enemy appears to have been holding this position in some strength), had failed to complete its move, and was therefore unable to fulfil its part of the brigade plan in following S. Sask R. (6 Cdn Inf Bde Ops Log, 28 Aug 44, Serial 5). Machine gun and mortar fire kept the battalion practically immobile, and its sub-units were reported in locations in the 0900 and 09001 areas throughout the day (Ibid, Serials 9, 21, 37, 60).

119. As Fus M.R. were not thus available for action, during the afternoon the Brigade Commander gave orders for a second attempt to be made to reach the brigade's objectives. S. Sask R. was again directed on the same target - the high ground west of Oissel - while Camerons of C. were to assume Fus M.R.'s

commitment and seize the wooded area north-west of the village. Calg Highrs of 5 Cdn Inf Bde would relieve Camerons of C. for the attack (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 28 Aug 44).

120. S. Sask R.'s second attack of the day began at approximately 2130 hours. Late in starting, the battalion did not therefore get the full benefit of an artillery barrage put down from 2000 to 2030 hours. (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 28 Aug 44). The battalion moved forward with "A" Coy leading along the axis of advance - the "Y" road at 0704, cross-roads 0804 and the main Moulineaux - Port du Gravier road running south-east through 0903. "A" Coy moved forward through a clearing and passed a monastery at 085044. "D" Coy following was met at the cross-roads with considerable small arms and mortar fire. "A" Coy took up a position by the monastery and began to clear out the machine gun and sniper posts beyond. At 2230 hours the advance continued with "A" Coy leading, followed by "D" Coy, battalion headquarters and "B" Coy. At a point 093039, 300 yards west of the railway "Y" junction, they took up a firm position and dug in along the road (W.D., S. Sask R., 28 Aug 44). During the day they had advanced only 1500 yards from their starting point (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 28 Aug 44).

121. During the night and early next morning S. Sask R. resumed their efforts to force a way forward. An attempt by "D" Coy shortly after midnight failed; at 0230 hours "B" Coy managed by means of a right flanking attack to reach the railway "Y" (097038). The battalion could get no further. At first light an enemy counter attack drove the companies back to the area of the cross-roads south-east of Moulineaux, almost on top of the Camerons of C. (W.D., S. Sask

R., 29 Aug 44). Here they established a defensive position with their supporting tanks. During the morning Brigadier Clift issued instructions that Fus M.R. should come into the area, and with Camerons of C. push through the S. Sask R. positions in a further attempt to break the enemy resistance along the axis of advance. (Ibid). Shortly afterwards, the Brigadier was wounded, and Lt-Col J.G. Gauvreau, O.C. Fus M.R., assumed command (W.D., Camerons of C., August 1944: Appx 7, Bn Ops Log, 29 Aug 44, Serial 98). By 1400 hours the fighting strength of S. Sask R. had been reduced to 4 officers and approximately 60 other ranks. About 20 reinforcements were brought up from the dismounted carrier platoon and distributed between the decimated rifle companies (W.D., S. Sask R., 29 Aug 44).

122. At 1500 hours that afternoon (29 Aug) General Foulkes conducted an orders group at Headquarters 6 Cdn Inf Bde and announced that the brigade role would not be to hold a stop line from Elbeuf north to La Chenaie, and to prevent any enemy infiltration which might interfere with the crossing of 4 and 5 Cdn Inf Bdes at Elbeuf (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 29 Aug 44). Later that evening the remnants of the battalion, organized into two small groups, and supported by a platoon of medium machine guns of Tor Scot R. (M.G.), moved forward once more and succeeded in re-establishing positions about the monastery (W.D., S. Sask R., 29 Aug 44).

123. During the night of 29/30 Aug the enemy withdrew, and on the following morning units of 6 Cdn Inf Bde found themselves free from the heavy fire that had assailed them during the past three days. All three battalions were able to spend a quiet day reorganising and receiving much needed reinforcements

(W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 30 Aug 44). For the brigade the Forêt de la Londe battle had been a costly struggle. During the four days it had suffered casualties of 17 officers and 238 other ranks (see Appx "F"). As we have seen, the brunt of the fighting had been borne by S. Sask R., with losses of 12 officers and 131 other ranks; but Camerons of C., subjected to continual enemy fire in positions well marked by the enemy, had lost nearly 100 all ranks (Ibid). On the other side of the balance sheet must be set the heavy toll inflicted by the brigade units on the enemy trying to escape north across the Seine. Great numbers of these - estimated by the diarist of the Camerons to run into four figures - were either drowned or killed by the fire that came from our mortars, artillery and machine guns, as they pursued their flight towards Rouen. (W.D., Camerons of C., 29 Aug 44). There must also be considered, too, the fact that although neither the 4th nor the 6th Brigades had gained the objectives set for them, by keeping the enemy engaged they had assisted in ensuring an uninterrupted passage of the Seine to the other formations of 2 Cdn Corps crossing at Elbeuf.

124. 5 Cdn Inf Bde took only a comparatively minor part in the struggle for the Forêt de la Londe. As we have seen (paras 91 and 97), the task of capturing Bourgtheroulde fell to R.H.C. - an assignment which they completed in a successful, if somewhat unorthodox performance (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 26 Aug 44). Early on the morning of 26 Aug a battle group, consisting of The Black Watch, "C" Sqn 27 Cdn Armd Regt (Sher Fus R.), a platoon of Engineers and a detachment from 18 Cdn Fd Amb headed up the highway from Bosroberts aux Poulets (9292) in T.C.Vs. Disregarding enemy fire along the way, the head of the column pushed right through Bourgtheroulde, prepared to carry on to the

Seine. On the north-eastern outskirts of the town, however, orders were received to clear Bourgtheroulde and consolidate there. But the town was still strongly held by the enemy, particularly in the centre, where at least one 7.5-cm. anti-tank gun commanded the square through which the main route ran. During the initial advance of the head of the column, rear companies had been left rather badly strung out along the road. These now had to run the gauntlet through the town and every seventh or eighth vehicle was caught by the German guns, with resulting heavy casualties. On the far side of the town the Commanding Officer, Lt-Col F.M. Mitchell, now organized an attack from the north-east. The operation caught the enemy by surprise, for most of his weapons were sited for defence against the south-west. Enemy counter attacks during the afternoon were successfully dealt with, although all day long the battalion was heavily engaged with fire from mortars and 88-mm. guns. By nightfall, Bourgtheroulde was firmly in our possession; its capture opened the road into the Forêt de la Londe (AEF/5 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, Docket IV: Accounts by Lt-Col F.M. Mitchell and Lieut Shea, R.H.C.)

125. The remaining battalions of 5 Cdn Inf Bde also played their part in establishing a firm base for other brigades of the division to operate into the forest. Calg Highrs reached Point 132 (008024), about 2500 yards north-west of Bourgtheroulde, where, pinned down by enemy fire, they dug in defensively for the night (W.D., Calg Highrs, 26 Aug 44). On the right flank, R. de Mais took their objective, Point 164 (036987), pushing on to reach the outskirts of the Forêt de la Londe (W.D., R.H.C., 26 Aug 44). By late afternoon 4 and 6 Cdn Inf Bdes had passed through on their way to clear the forest.

126. Throughout 27 Aug the units of 5 Cdn Inf Bde were inactive, and plans were discussed for moving the brigade across the river. On the morning of 28 Aug, however, a call came for them to lend a hand in the forest. R.H.C. was moved forward to La Bouille and established themselves in the area of Le Buisson where they came under heavy mortar and shell fire, without, however, suffering many casualties (W.D., R.H.C., 28 Aug 44). R. de Mais, now at Bas de la Vigne (0800), carried out patrols on the brigade's far right flank (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 28 Aug 44). Calg Highrs marched forward from the Bourgtheroulde area during the day, and after dark occupied the positions of Camerons of C. west of La Chenaie, the move being accomplished before midnight (W.D., Calg Highrs, 28 Aug 44) (see para 119). Here the battalion was in the most exposed position of the whole brigade. Throughout the 29th the Calgaries suffered heavily. In the words of their War Diary:

Today has been a nightmare for the Bn in our hazardous position in the FORET DE LA LONDE. All day long we were subjected to heavy MG, rifle, Schmeisser fire, and to continuous harassing long range shellfire interspersed with 88 from the village of LA CHENAIE. We were dug in on the reverse slope of the high feature west of LA CHENAIE and had little protection from the type of fire that was directed at us...

The day was probably the most hectic one the Bn has had, bar none, and this includes TILLY LA CAMPAYNE and ST ANDRE SUR ORNE. The fire was no heavier than any time before but was certainly more constant.

(W.D., Calg Highrs, 29 Aug 44)

The battalion reported its casualties for the day as 3 officers and 43 other ranks (Ibid). Late that evening the battalion was relieved and moved to a quieter area (0700-0800) near Elbeuf, where it was joined by the remaining units of 5 Cdn Inf Bde, preparatory to crossing the Seine (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 29 Aug 44).

127. With 6 Cdn Inf Bde holding its positions in the Forêt de la Londe (see para 122) the rest of the Second Division crossed the river on 30 Aug and proceeded north towards Rouen. 5 Cdn Inf Bde moved over by the Elbeuf bridges to occupy positions north-east of Tourville - 2002, 2003 - vacated by 7 Cdn Inf Bde (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 30 Aug 44). 4 Cdn Inf Bde followed across on the 31st and took over 9 Cdn Inf Bde's area south of Rouen before moving on through that city (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde, 31 Aug 44). The remaining formation of 2 Div, 6 Cdn Inf Bde, completing its holding task (the enemy having now withdrawn from the Forêt de la Londe), proceeded by road from Moulineaux up the Rouvray "Peninsula" to Rouen. The forward units reached Rouen at 1500 hours (31 Aug) and, crossing the Seine by a repaired railway bridge, moved through the city to a concentration area on the northern outskirts (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 31 Aug 44). An important phase of the pursuit was now completed; 2 Cdn Corps had crossed the Seine (AEF/2 Cdn Inf Div/C/F, Docket 1: Summary of Cdn Ops and Activities H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Div, August 1944).

THE GERMAN CROSSINGS OF THE SEINE

128. Accounts of the German passage of the Seine, as given by interrogated enemy commanders, reveal tremendous losses of equipment and horses, while claiming a reasonable degree of organization at the crossings which aided in keeping losses of personnel at a figure lower than might have been expected. Thus, credit is given to General Obstfelder, Commander of 86 Corps, for efficiently organizing and carrying out the crossings by his three divisions below Rousen. 711 Inf Div on the right flank was given an area between Caudebec and Mailleraye; 346 Inf Div between Mailleraye and Jumieges (9916); and 272 Div between Jumieges and Le Mesnil (0213). It was here, in the Forêt de Brotonne, that 346 Div made its strong defensive stand against the advance formations of 1 Brit Corps (Special Interrogation Report, Genlt Erich Diestel). Further up the Seine, according to Col-Gen Dietrich, the withdrawal across the river of Fifth Pz Army had been conducted "in a fairly orderly fashion." Assistance in holding back the Allies was provided by 344 Inf Div and 17 G.A.F. Div, which under 81 Corps had been sent south of the Seine for that purpose. General Schwalbe, Commander 344 Inf Div, stated that the Corps, which had attempted to hold a line in the Verneuil - Breteuil area straight west of Paris, had been reduced in a week to remnants placed under command of 311 Div and assigned to protect the Rouen ferries (Special Interrogation Report, Gen der Inf Schwalbe). Some 60 ferries were available from Elbeuf to Vieux Port, and with their assistance a large part of the Fifth Army's manpower made good its escape (Special Interrogation Report, Col-Gen Dietrich).

129. The commanders of two of the infantry divisions of 86 Corps emphasized the abandonment of all their heavy equipment on the left bank of the Seine.

During 272 Div's attempt to cross, not less than 1500 horses were lost in trying to swim to the east bank. By the time the passage of the Seine had been accomplished, the fighting strength of the division had been reduced to about 300 men (Special Interrogation Report, Genlt Schack). In the same manner, 346 Div lost one-third of their horse transport (600 horses), although the commander claimed that the crossing cost him no men. This was as well, perhaps, for in the final battles around the Forêt de Brantonne the division had lost 150-200 men (Special Interrogation Report, Diestel). According to the Commander, 1 S.S. Pz Corps, German losses were considerable:

Dietrich had ordered the Flak Troops to set up a defensive barrage at the crossing points but when they reached the river most of the Luftwaffe troops had disappeared. For the last three days of the crossing operations there was no Flak protection provided at all. As a result, in Diestel's opinion, the Seine and the Falaise pocket were about equal disasters from the standpoint of equipment abandoned by the fleeing Wehrmacht.

(Special Interrogation Report,
Dietrich)

130. These German admissions underline the claims made by the Allied air forces. During the last week of August, both by day and at night, enemy crossings on the Sein - particularly in the Rouen area - road movements between Rouen and Beauvais, as well as rail traffic east of Paris, presented inviting targets, of which our planes were quick to seize advantage. In one

attack on MT. vehicles concentrated west of Rouen, medium bombers dropped 270 tons, while a later visitation planted 105 tons of bombs on a ferry at Duclair. During similar missions a further 1200 tons of bombs were dropped and over 2000 rocket projectiles were discharged at the luckless enemy concentrations. The toll on his transportation was bound to be heavy and the following claims of destruction were made, besides large numbers of severely damaged:

1450 M.T. vehicles, 70 heavy duty vehicles, 54 tanks,
45 A.F.Vs., 21 staff cars, 50 horse-drawn vehicles,
110 horses, 3 ammunition trains, 11 ammunition trucks,
515 locomotives, 1100 railroad cars and trucks
(including 200 cars), 40 barges.

(C.O.S. Weekly Résumé No. 261,
24-31 Aug 44)

THE ADVANCE FROM THE SEINE BRIDGEHEADS

131. On 29 Aug, with the crossings of the Seine largely completed, formations of the First Cdn Army were in position for a rapid exploitation of the favourable situation. Second Army was also well prepared to capitalize on the demoralization of the enemy, and the C.-in-C. 21 Army Group was anxious that no opportunities be lost. The tasks which General Montgomery had set 21 Army Group were:

- a. To operate northwards and to destroy the enemy forces in N.E. FRANCE and BELGIUM;
- b. To secure the PAS DE CALAIS and the airfields in BELGIUM; and
- c. To secure ANTWERP as a base.

(G.O.C.-in-C./1-0, Operations 21 Army
Group, Directive M.520, 26 Aug 44)

As its share in fulfilling the Army Group's intention - "to destroy all enemy forces in the Pas de Calais and Flanders, and to capture Antwerp" - First Cdn Army received the following directions from the C.-in-C:

Having crossed the Seine the Army will operate northwards, will secure port of Dieppe, and will proceed quickly with the destruction of all enemy forces in the coastal belt up to Bruges.

One corps will be turned westwards into the Havre peninsula, to destroy the enemy forces in that area and to secure the port of Havre...

Generally, in its move northwards, Canadian Army will operate with its main weight on its right flank - dealing with enemy resistance by out-flanking movements, and "right hooks".

(Ibid)

132. At the time that this directive was issued (26 Aug), it was planned that the Allied Airborne Army should co-operate with the First Cdn Army in the Pas de Calais area. Airborne forces were to be dropped well ahead of the advancing columns under conditions that would enable them to operate on their own for a week or ten days (Ibid). This project, however, was later amended and it was decided to drop the Airborne Corps in the Tournai area (Ibid, M. 522, 29 Aug 44). Yet once again the speed with which the Allied armies drove northwards into Belgium made the airborne operation unnecessary and it was cancelled.

133. The forward boundaries for 21 Army Group were now laid down as follows:

- a. Between Second British and First Canadian Armies all inclusive
Canadian Army: POINT DE L'ARCHE - FLEURY-SUR-ANDELLE - FORGES -
PONT REMY - HESDIN - AIRE - YPRES - ROULIERS - THIELT - SEIZAETE -
Dutch frontier to the Scheldte; and

- b. Between Second Army and 12 Army Gp, all inclusive Second Army:
MANTES - BEAUVAIS - BRETEUIL - ALBERT - DOUAI - TOURNAI - ATH -
ENGHEN - BRUSSELS - LOUVAIN - DIEST.

(Ibid)

134. On 30 Aug General Crerar issued a directive to the two corps under his command to cover forthcoming operations. After naming the boundary between

Second Brit and First Cdn Armies (as above), the Army Commander defined future commitments as follows:

- a. The forward boundaries between 2 Cdn and 1 Brit Corps following the capture of ROUEN by the former, and until the latter has finished its task of clearing the HAVRE peninsula, will be PAVILLY - VERVILLE - FONTAINE-LE-DUN road inclusive 1 Brit Corps;
- b. The immediate task set 2 Cdn Corps is the capture of DIEPPE. Plans for this operation, which is scheduled to be completed by 2 Sep 44, are well advanced. Such formations 2 Cdn Corps as are not required for this particular purpose will continue to thrust along main First Canadian Army axis - NEUFCHATEL - ABBEVILLE - as a preliminary to an early crossing of the R. SOMME; and
- c. 51 (H) Div will be moved into 2 Cdn Corps area, vicinity ELBEUF - BOURGTHEROULDE, commencing 31 Aug 44, and will be passed over the R. SEINE by ELBEUF bridges under command 2 Cdn Corps. 51 (H) Div will revert to command 1 Brit Corps on reaching the general line PAVILLY - DUCLAIR. Detailed arrangements will be made by Corps Commanders and co-ordinated by H.Q. First Canadian Army.

(W.D., Lt-Gen H.D.G. Crerar, August 1944:
Appendix 12, Message to Corps Commanders,
30 Aug 44)

When 51 (H.) Div had returned to its command, 1 Brit Corps would proceed "with speed" to clear and capture the Le Havre peninsula. Plans for the capture of the port were to be drawn up by the G.O.C. 1 Brit Corps in co-operation with naval and air representatives, under co-ordination effected by Headquarters First Cdn Army. The Army Commander pointed out that naval assistance for this operation could not be provided until at least 48 hours after the conclusion of the forthcoming operation against Dieppe. For 49 Inf Div's crossing of the Seine, below Rouen, H.Q. First Cdn Army would give all assistance possible in the provision of ferry, storm boats and D.U.K.W.S. (Ibid)

135. The future speed of the Allied pursuit depended largely on three factors:

- a. the ability of the enemy to stabilize the line;
- b. the nature of the ground; and
- c. the amount of transport available to the Allied armies and the ability of their administrative services to keep up with the armour.

It has been seen that the enemy was very much off balance and had little opportunity or the means to establish himself. The third factor was becoming a serious problem within 21 Army Group, but various expedients, as will be seen, were adopted to meet the situation. Hence the second factor presented the chief problem of immediate importance.

136. After the east bank of the Seine was breached the defensive possibilities offered to the enemy by the terrain were not so apparent. The Dieppe - Neufchatel - Rouen - Le Havre area - the whole making up the district of Caux - is a featureless stretch of open country and would provide excellent going, the only obstacles to movement being the narrow deep valleys running off the plateau into the Seine or directly into the English Channel. The Seine tributaries are narrow but with wooded sides steep enough to form obstacles to cross-country movement. But the rivers flowing into the channel between Dieppe and Le Havre are only small streams which about four miles from the coast become insignificant. The valleys tend to be broad and marshy with wooded banks which in some places form definite obstacles to movement off the roads. Cover is scarce on the plateau, woods being found only along the valley slopes and in small clusters around farms. (W.D., G.S. Int, H.Q. First Cdn Army, August 1944: Appx 6, Int Summary No. 57, Appx "A", 25 Aug 44).

137. The area between the R. Bethune and the Somme, known as Petit Caux, forms part of the Picardy Plain. The country consists of open rolling farm land on the plateau, which is divided into valleys and smaller plateaux by the rivers which flow into the Channel. On the whole there are more wooded areas than in Caux, the largest forests being between the Rivers Varenne and Bethune and on the west bank of the Breale. The Rivers Faulne, Bethune and Varenne join south-east of Dieppe to form the R. d'Arques. Their valleys are flat and susceptible to flooding in the lower stretches; upstream their banks usually become wooded and fairly steep. Apart from these topographical features, the rest of the country is relatively featureless and has no natural obstacles. As a result, there is a dense network of roads covering the whole area. The

only obvious relief features in the coastal strip are the high cliffs fronting the sea and the west side of the Somme valley (Ibid, para 2).

138. Further east the valley of the Somme with its tributaries provides a break in the monotony of the chalk upland, and while less significant than the Seine, it is nevertheless a comparable feature. Its wide, flat-bottomed marshy valley varies from one to two miles in width, opening out on an estuary bordered by low meadows drained and dyked, which is overlooked at its mouth by high cliffs receding inland from the sea and fringed on the seaward side by low dunes. Below Abbeville reclamation projects have saved the land from floods, but between there and Amiens much of the valley is permanently under water. The sides of the valley are about 150 feet high and not heavily wooded. The canalized river itself between Amiens and Abbeville averages about 200 feet in width; from Abbeville to St. Valery-sur-Somme it narrows to 164 feet with a depth of 13 feet. Because of the swampy nature of the valley vehicle movement is virtually impossible except along the roads. Most of the main crossings over the lower Somme are at Abbeville; the next best crossing places, apart from Amiens, are Pont Remy and Picquigny. It was clear that the Somme valley was the only topographical feature north of the Seine likely to cause trouble to the Allied pursuit. All other rivers were short enough to be easily outflanked and could be of little value to the enemy as obstacles (Ibid, para 3).

139. The role of leading First Cdn Army's advance beyond the Seine fell to 2 Cdn Corps, and within the Corps, to 4 Cdn Armd Div. The initial step was a move forward to the line Pont-St. Pierre - Boos - Mesnil Esnard (W.D., G.S.,

H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, August 1944: Appendix 57, Confirmatory Notes G.O.C. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 27 Aug 44). To achieve this it was planned that 10 Cdn Inf Bde would seize the high ground at Ymare, and that the division would then advance out of its bridgehead on a broad front, with 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt on the right seizing and holding the general area Les Gdes Masures - Pont-St. Pierre; 4 Cdn Armd Bde in the centre would take Neuville-Champ-d'Oisel - Boos and 10 Cdn Inf Bde on the left Mesnil Esnard and Notre Dame de Franqueville (Ibid). The division would then exploit forward to the high ground in the area about Buchy, after which there were hopes, based on intimations by the Corps Commander, that the formation would go into Corps reserve for a five-days' rest. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 29 and 31 Aug 44). In order to accomplish the capture of Buchy with the minimum of delay 4 Armd Div would sideslip to the east once Boos was passed and 3 Cdn Inf Div would become responsible for cleaning up Boos and the surrounding area. For 29 Aug 3 Cdn Div planned to concentrate its two brigades that were already over the Seine - 7 and 9 Cdn Inf Bdes - employing the former to extend its bridgehead and reconnoitre routes of advance to the north and north-east (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div, August 1944: Appx 9, 3 Cdn Inf Div Op Instr No. 1, 29 Aug 44). 2 Cdn Inf Div, as yet heavily engaged in the Forêt de la Londe, could make no contribution in the bridgehead at this time (see Map "C").

140. At 0900 hours, 29 Aug, 4 Cdn Armd Bde moved off towards its objectives, but owing to the congestion on the roads, progress was slow. The armoured regiments finally established themselves, however, on the high ground to the north of Les Cdes Masures (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 29 Aug 44). 10 Cdn Inf

Bde's advance went as planned. Linc & Welld R. proceeded at first light to capture Ymare and at 1300 hours Alq R. moved through them to take Quévreville-le-Poterie. At 1800 hours the same day A. & S.H. of C. took over Boos from 28 Cdn Armd Regt, while Linc & Welld R. occupied Franquevillette to the east (W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 29 Aug 44). 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt, which had been following up the armoured brigade, made slow going, but by nightfall it was on the line Boos - Romilly-sur-Andelle (W.D., 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt, 29 Aug 44). With 3 Inf Div planning to follow up next day to take over the Boos area, the armoured division was to continue the advance to Buchy (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, August 1944: Appx 63, Confirmatory Notes, G.O.C. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 30 Aug 44).

141. 4 Cdn Armd Div pushed forward again at 1100 hours, 30 Aug, and reached the line of the river (a tributary of the Andelle) running south-eastwards through St. Denis-le-Thiboult - Blainville-Crevon; here they met some opposition and halted for the night (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 30 Aug 44). When it was found the following morning that the enemy had withdrawn, 4 Cdn Armd Bde resumed its forward drive - passing a number of destroyed V-1 launching sites en route - to reach the Buchy area, where it settled in for an expected four days' rest (Ibid, 31 Aug 44). Meanwhile, 10 Cdn Inf Bde followed the advancing armour and thus met little or no opposition. The bridge firmed up during the afternoon of the 31st in the area Bois Guilbert (4324) where a special force, under command of Major Currie (the St. Lambert V.C. - see [Report No. 169](#)), was despatched to take and hold Forges-les-Eaux on the Army right boundary. It was now that expectations for the forthcoming

rest were rudely shattered, when orders were received at 2200 hours that 4 Cdn Armd Div would push on that night to Abbeville, using a single line of approach, with the infantry brigade leading (W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 31 Aug 44).

142. Before seeking the cause of this change in intention, it is necessary to go back and follow the progress of the remaining formations of 2 Cdn Corps. On the morning of 30 Aug General Crerar informed General Simonds that the immediate task of 2 Cdn Corps was the capture of Dieppe.

Plans for this operation, which is scheduled to be completed by 2 Sep 44, are well advanced. Such formations 2 Cdn Corps as are not required for this particular purpose will continue to thrust along main First Cdn Army axis - NEUFCHATEL - ABBEVILLE - as a preliminary to an early crossing of R. SOMME.

(AEF/First Cdn Army/C/E, Docket II:
G.O.C.in-C. First Cdn Army Directive,
20 Aug 44)

Since it was apparent that the taking of Dieppe could be carried out by the infantry divisions, the thrust towards Abbeville fell to 4 Cdn Armd Div. The honour of avenging August 1942 had long been appropriately reserved for 2 Cdn Div (see para 6). 3 Div was directed forward through Fontaine-le Bourg to St. Saens, a point which afforded a choice of subsequent moves north-west to Dieppe or north-east towards the Somme (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div,

August 1944: Appx 9, 3 Cdn Inf Div Op Instr No. 2, 30 Aug 44). The division's advance by this central route would clear the way for 2 Cdn Inf Div to proceed towards Dieppe on a parallel road to the left through Rouen and Totes. (Ibid)

143. 30 Aug was spent by 3 Cdn Inf Div in preparing for its more northwards. 9 Cdn Inf Bde, instructed to close the eastern exits of Rouen, edged forward during the day from its positions north of Guoy (see para 88) to Mesnil-Esnard. Patrols of S.D. & G. Highrs cleared the river line into Rouen, coming in contact with some of the enemy who were pulling back across the Seine. At 0300 hours on the morning of 31 Aug the brigade was able to report that the main routes through Rouen were clear, and that its patrols were operating four miles beyond the city. The brigade had captured 70 prisoners, and killed 40 Germans in Rouen. (3 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 31 Aug 44, Ser 8). Meanwhile 7 Bde, which had remained in the Igoville area since 28 Aug, moved up to Boos, and halted for the night immediately north and north-east of the town (Ibid, 30 Aug 44, Sers 103, 105, 109). At 0730 hours 8 Cdn Inf Bde, whose task of providing a firm base for the division had been prolonged for the past several days by 2 Cdn Div's difficulties in the Forêt de la Londe (see para 88), began to cross the Seine at Elbeuf. By evening it had moved well up through the former bridgehead to join the rest of the division, taking up a position in the Fontaines-sous-Preaux - Roncherolles area, some five miles north of Boos (3 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 30 Aug 44, Ser 124).

144. While S.D. & G. Highrs were engaged in patrolling into Rouen, the Commander 9 Cdn Inf Bde and his I.O. went forward in the early evening to make

a reconnaissance. The report of their visit illustrates the type of welcome that our advancing troops continually received.

By this time more civilians had gathered and several complained of the bombing of the city by the RAF. It looked for the moment as if we were going to receive a cool reception here. However when the Bde Comd's scout car entered the city square thousands of people crowded so closely that it was impossible to move; people overcome with joy laughed, cried and cheered, pushing forward, eager to touch the car or to shake your hand. Some of the more eager jeunes filles were not content with handshakes, and were determined to place kisses on your cheeks. At last the crowd was persuaded to let the car through, and everywhere we went we were stopped by cheering people. A momentary reminder of the German occupation came when male and female collaborators were seen being marched under guard into the city jail. By this time the scout car became so bedecked with flowers that it resembled more closely a float in a May Day Parade than a weapon of war.

(W.D., H.Q. 9 Cdn Inf Bde, 30 Aug 44)

145. Acting on orders issued late in the evening of the 30th, the three brigades resumed the advance from Mesnil-Esnard betimes next morning. The prescribed axis was Roncherolles - Fontaine-le Bourg - St. Saens (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div, August 1944: Appx 9, Op Instr No. 2, 30 Aug 44). 9 Bde, led by S.D. & G. Highrs, passed through Rouen, where despite the early hour the streets were lined with cheering people "giving wines to those fortunate

enough to halt in the convoy in the streets" (W.D., H.Q. 9 Cdn Inf Bde, 31 Aug 44). So rapidly, however, was the Corps advance gathering momentum, that before the objective of St. Saens was reached, further orders came through for the bridge to push on through St. Saens to Pommerval (Ibid; and 3 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 31 Aug 44, Ser 78). 8 Bde's advance was just as far that day. Starting at 1000 hours from its overnight's halting-place near Roncherolles, the brigade easily reached its first objective - Fontaine-le Bourg - and carried on as far as Grenouville, a half-mile north of Gailly. New instructions started the brigade units moving again towards Neufchatel. (3 Cdn Inf Div Ops Log, 31 Aug 44, Ser 82). Crossing the R. Varenne they reached the area of Brequigny - Bosc Mesnil, on the right and somewhat to the rear of 9 Cdn Inf Bde's area. Here orders were recorded for the following day's move - through Neufchatel and Eu to the Channel coast at Le Treport (W.D., H.Q. 8 Cdn Inf Bde, 31 Aug 44; 3 Cdn Inf Div Op Instr No. 4, 31 Aug 44). When the main divisional axis was clear of 9 Bde, the remaining formation - 7 Cdn Inf Bde - followed from Boos. By the night of 31 Aug the brigade had joined the rest of the division and was bivouacked west of Neufchatel (W.D., H.Q. 7 Cdn Inf Bde, 31 Aug 44).

146. On the last day of August, Headquarters 2 Cdn Corps, 1 Pol Armd Div and 2 Cdn Armd Bde (two of whose regiments were with the infantry divisions of the Corps) crossed the Seine (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 31 Aug 44, Sers 3 and 7). Corps Headquarters concentrated at Boos, 1 Pol Armd Div north of Le Fresne and the armoured brigade just east of Franquevillette. Engineers of the Polish division were at work constructing bridges at Pont de l'Arche (W.D., H.Q. 1 Cdn Army Group R.C.E., 28, 29 Aug 44). The division had up to this time

taken no part in the pursuit, as it was engaged in carrying out much needed refitting after the Trun battle. It had moved forward into the concentration area south-east of Elbeuf on 30 Aug (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 29 Aug 44, Sers 24, 41). The Poles now received orders to follow 4 Cdn Armd Div, and, as we have seen, because of the changing situation, were instructed late on 31 Aug to push on from Buchy. (Ibid, 31 Aug, Ser 34). A new nationality joined the strength of 2 Cdn Corps at this time. 1 Czsk Indep Armd Bde was expected to arrive shortly, and its advance party, already in the area, was placed under command of the Corps to be attached to an armoured formation to gain experience.¹⁴ (Ibid, 29 Aug 44, Ser 2). As we have seen (para 127) 2 Cdn Inf Div crossed the Seine and passed through Rouen on the 31st, proceeding north to Totes, the place whose last claim to fame had been on 20 Aug 42, when Admiral Doenitz and Field Marshal von Runstedt had met there after the Dieppe raid of the previous day. The division was en route to Dieppe, spearheaded by 8 Cdn Recce Regt, whose "C" Sqn found Germans still lurking in Totes and overcame sharp resistance there (W.D., 2 Cdn Inf Div, 31 Aug 44).

147. The task assigned by General Crerar to 1 Brit Corps (see para 134) was detailed in an operation order, issued by General Crerar on 30 Aug 44, to the following effect: the Corps would clear the Le Havre peninsula inclusive and west of the road Pavilly - Yerville - Fontaine-le Dun, and operations would culminate, if necessary, with the capture of Le Havre (Operation "ASTONIA"). 51 (H.) Div would secure the centres of communication of Yerville and Yvetot, and then establish itself in the area of St. Valery-en-Caux, preparatory to

¹⁴ The operations of this brigade during the containing of Dunkirk are described in [Report No. 184](#), Part V: Clearing the Channel Ports, 3 Sep 44 - 6 Feb 45

moving west along the coast to Le Havre. It was to carry out wide and rapid reconnaissance in order to forestall enemy demolitions. 4 S.S. Bde, temporarily taking 51 (H.) Div's place on the Corps front, was to cross the Seine at Duclair and occupy the area Pavilly until relieved again by the Highland Division. 49 Inf Div was also to ferry over at selected sites nearer the sea (using the Duclair area if necessary) and establish itself south of Fauville-en-Caux, taking as its main axis of advance Fauville - Bolbec - Le Havre. The Corps centre line would be Rouen - Yvetot - Bolbec. (AEF/1 Corps/1 Docket III(d): 1 Corps Operation Instruction No. 13, 30 Aug 44)

148. During 31 Aug 44, 51 (H.) Div having completed the clearing of the Forêt de Maunay prepared to cross the Seine. For this purpose the division was put under command 2 Cdn Corps and used the bridges at Elbeuf. 4 S.S. Bde having relieved 51 (H.) Div crossed at Duclair and advanced along the road Barentin - Pavilly. (AEF/1 Brit Corps/C/H, Docket III: Sitrep 0.923, 31 Aug 44). Further downstream Royal Netherlands Bde crossed the estuary the same day at Vieux Port (Ibid). 49 Inf Div's reconnaissance regiment was ferried over the Seine between Quillebeuf and Caudebec; it patrolled northward, and reporting Lillebonne clear of enemy, pushed through towards Bolbec. The remainder of the Division followed, and concentrated in the Lillebonne - Caudebec area.

149. 51 (H.) Div passed through Elbeuf on the night of 31 Aug/1 Sep and headed north-west to the area Pavilly - Duclair, reverting to the command of 1 Brit Corps in preparation for the capture of St. Valery (AEF/First Cdn Army/C/E: Docket II, G.O.C.-in-C., 1-0-4, Main H.Q. First Cdn Army, 30 Aug 44). Elements of the Division and 4 S.S. Bde met at Doudeville (9947)

(AEF/1 Brit Corps/C/H: Docket III, Sitrep 0.947, 1 Sep 44). The Highlanders proceeded without delay to St. Valery-en-Caux, where they had fought in June 1940 with such determined bravery, and early on 2 Sep 44 the Derbyshire Yeomanry entered the little port, to find that the enemy had withdrawn (Ibid, Sitrep 0.951, 2 Sep 44). 51 (H.) Div then concentrated in the area preparatory to moving down the coast to assist in the assault on Le Havre.

150. Meanwhile 49 Recce Regt, patrolling north and north-west from the Seine, made contact with the outer defences of Le Havre about three miles short of R. Lezarde on the morning of 2 Sep. The remainder of 49 Div moved on Le Havre along the Bolbec axis, and by the evening of the same day had driven the enemy from Gainneville (5928) only three miles from the big port. It was found that the enemy was not only destroying bridges, but resorting to flooding and that he was in some strength in the Forêt de Montgeon. (Ibid, Serials 0.947, 1 Sep, 0.951, 2 Sep 44). By last light of 3 Sep Le Havre had been cordoned off from the rest of the peninsula. The division held a line which ran from the Lezarde River at Montivilliers through St. Sulpice and Octeville-sur-Mer to Ecqueville on the Channel coast. 1 Brit Corps was in position for the assault on Le Havre¹⁵ (AEF/21 Army Group/C/F: Docket II, Operation Report No. 54, "ASTONIA", Capture of Le Havre, 10-12 Sep 44, para 2). On 1 Sep General Crerar, in directing that arrangements be made for the transfer of the Dutch and Belgian contingents from 1 Brit Corps had pointed out:

¹⁵ The account of 1 Brit corps' participation in Operation "ASTONIA" is given in Report No. 184, Part V, Clearing the Channel Ports 3 Sep 44 - 6 Feb 45.

It is important that these National Contingents be among the first troops to enter their respective countries.

(AEF/First Cdn Army/C/F Docket II:

G.O.C.-in-C. directive, 1 Sep 44)

151. Now, in keeping with the policy previously laid down (see para 44), 1 Belgian Group came under command of Second Army on 2 Sep, and moved forward to operate in Belgium (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, September 1944: Appx 126, 49 Br Div Op Instr No. 36, 2 Sep 44). R. Netherlands Bde moved into a concentration area (9066) west of Picquigny on 4 Sep, preparatory also to passing to under command of Second Army (Ibid: Appx 17, First Cdn Army Ops Log, 4 Sep 44, Serial 78).

152. While the formations of First Cdn Army had thus been engaged in completing their passage of the Seine and in moving into high gear once more for the continued pursuit, Second British Army had made remarkable progress on 21 Army Group's right flank. In obedience to General Montgomery's instructions (of 26 Aug) to advance rapidly northwards "quite irrespective of the progress of the armies on its flanks" (para 69) each corps had pushed its armour forward with all despatch towards the Somme. On the right, Gds Armd Div and 11 Armd Div had broken out on the morning of 29 Aug from the 30 Corps bridgehead established by 43 Inf Div in the Vernon area. (AEF/30 Corps/C/F, Docket II: Advance of 30 Corps across R. Seine, Brussels and Antwerp, para 8). The armour drove towards Amiens along two axes. On the left 11 Armd Div, after travelling 60 miles in bad weather, entered the outskirts of Amiens

at 0630 hours on the morning of the 31st, seizing two bridges intact and capturing a surprised Seventh German Army Headquarters, including the Commander, General Hans Eberbach.¹⁶ On the Corps right Gds Armd Div crossed the Somme, to get astride the Amiens - Albert Road (Ibid, para 10). In the meantime, 12 Brit Corps, on the immediate right of 2 Cdn Corps, had crossed through 15 (S.) Div's bridgehead at St. Etienne-du-Vauvray (north of Louviers), whence 7 Armd Div - now under command from 12 Brit Corps - was racing towards the Somme on the right of 4 Cdn Armd Div. On 31 Aug, advanced elements had reached the line of the Somme in the Picquigny - Pont Remy area. (AEF/12 Brit Corps/C/H, Docket III, Sitrep 100, 1 Sep 44)

153. In view of these developments the C.-in-C., 21 Army Group, called a conference on 31 Aug 44 of the Army Commanders and ordered that the pursuit be pressed forward with the utmost speed. The following notes were made by General Crerar regarding First Cdn Army's tasks:

¹⁶ Other accounts speak of this as Headquarters Fifth Panzer Army, e.g. Notes made by General Simonds at 1830 hrs on 31 Aug:

Dempsey did night march - got all three bridges AMIENS - captured HQ 5 Pz Army!

(AEF/First Cdn Army/C/E, Docket II, fol 14)

The confusion of designation may have arisen from the fact that on 31 Aug or 1 Sep, General Eberbach, then commanding Seventh Army, was just about to resume his command of Fifth Panzer Army (Special Interrogation Report, General Hans Eberbach).

A marginal comment in General Crerar's handwriting appears on his copy of the notes of his conversation with General Montgomery to the effect that only the Commanding General had been captured (G.O.C.-in-C. 1-0, Operations 21 Army Group, Notes re Conversation with C.-in-C. 21 Army Gp, 1700 hrs, 31 Aug 44).

- a. Second British Army had captured AMIENS this a.m. (11 Armd Div) also H.Q. 5 Pz Army - intact. G.O.C.-in-C., by orders, had directed 11 Armd Div on to PONT REMY and ABBEVILLE, Gds Armd Div taking over AMIENS, and being followed up by 50 Div;
- b. If possible, C.-in-C. desired me to press on tonight, to take ABBEVILLE - PONT REMY by early tomorrow, letting Dempsey go on to secure ARRAS - ST POL. I informed him that I would direct 2 Cdn Corps to do so - using 4 Cdn Armd Div and following this up with Pol Armd Div, by now across R. SEINE;
- c. My latest information indicated that 4 Cdn Armd Div had reached BUCHY - FORGES LES EAUX area. 3 Cdn Inf Div Recce vicinity NEUFCHATEL - BURES - with Div formations closely following up. 2 Cdn Inf Div with one infantry brigade vicinity TOTES. It was possible that DIEPPE would fall to 2 Cdn Inf Div without a "set piece" attack required on 2 Sep. In any event, I felt confident that no restraint was needed concerning the immediate drive forward of 4 Cdn Armd and Pol Armd Divs on this account; and
- d. I left Tac H.Q. 21 Army Gp at 1745 hours, by Auster aircraft, proceeding to Tac 2 Cdn Corps to communicate the situation and required action by G.O.C., 2 Cdn Corps. (W.D., G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army, August 1944: Appx 13, Note re conversation with C.-in-C. 21 Army Group, 1700 hrs, 31 Aug 44)

154. The G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army, arrived at Tac H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps near Boos at 1830 hours and put General Simonds in the picture:

- a. On arriving at Lt-Gen Simonds' Tac H.Q. I informed him of the situation and need to press on, tonight, with 4 Cdn Armd Div, followed by Pol Armd Div, Main axis, which should mark the left of the armoured movement would be NEUFCHATEL - ABBEVILLE. 4 Cdn Armd Div would need to "feel out" well to its right, to establish contact with Second British Army;
- b. Main thing was to get to R. SOMME by daybreak, if at all possible, and to take over ABBEVILLE - PONT REMY crossings - which should have been secured by 11 Armd Div; and
- c. Lt-Gen Simonds issued verbal orders forthwith - "written" following by LO. Stated that refuelling might delay 4 Cdn Armd Div - but otherwise the movement forward would not be delayed.

(Ibid, Appx 14, Notes on Conference with
G.O.C. 2 Cdn Corps, 31 Aug 44)

Such were the circumstances which deprived 4 Cdn Armd Div of its anticipated period of rest in the Buchy area (see para 141).

155. On 1 Sep 44, 2 Cdn Corps thrust forward in a three-pronged pursuit along the main axis Abbeville - St. Omer, with the armoured division on the right

directed on Abbeville and the Somme crossing, 3 Cdn Inf Div towards Lt Treport on the coast, and 2 Cdn Inf Div on Dieppe. 4 Cdn Armd Div proceeded from the Buchy area on one route by way of Forges-les-Eaux - Aumale - Hornoy towards the Somme. Difficulties arose when elements of 7 Armd Div and 52 (W.) Div of 12 Corps began to clutter up the centre line; and when resistance was met at Airaines there was some indecision as to whether 4 Cdn Armd Bde or 4 Armd Bde would deal with it. Finally 4 Cdn Armd Bde by-passed the place by way of Allery (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 1 Sep 44). The Canadian armoured brigade, which had commenced the advance at 0400 hours, about 1000 hours overtook 10 Cdn Inf Bde and by last light, having passed Airaines, harboured south-east of Pont Remy (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 1 Sep 44). The infantry brigade, following in a night march, by-passed the same place and before morning had firmed up on the high ground north-west of Hallencourt. Linc & Welld R. meanwhile had been detached in order to assist in clearing up the resistance at Airaines. (W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 1 Sep 44)

156. 3 Cdn Inf Div moved on three routes towards Le Treport and Blangy (see para 145); squadrons of 7 Cdn Recce Regt led each thrust: along the centre line, Bures - Eu, the left flank Bures to Le Treport, and the right flank Neufchatel to Ault. On the right flank resistance and a demolished bridge over the R. Bresle brought the advance to a temporary halt at Inchville. (W.D., 7 Cdn Recce Regt, 1 Sep 44). During the course of the day 9 Cdn Inf Bde followed 7 Cdn Recce Regt into Eu and halted while the reconnaissance troops and tanks cleared resistance on the high ground overlooking the town. The brigade then crossed the Bresle and took up positions that evening at Campagne (5480) (W.D., H.Q. 9 Cdn Inf Bde, 1 Sep 44). 8 Cdn Inf Bde moved off

at 0620 hours through Brequigny, headed towards Le Treport by way of Neufchatel. Little or no opposition was met, and the brigade finally harboured south-west of Eu near Etalondes (W.D., H.Q. 8 Cdn Inf Bde, 1 Sep 44). 7 Cdn Inf Bde, following these two, had no opposition with which to deal (W.D., H.Q. 7 Cdn Inf Bde, 1 Sep 44)

2 CDN INF DIV RETURNS TO DIEPPE, 1 SEP

157. For the capture of Dieppe, a task appropriately assigned to 2 Cdn Inf Div, Operation "FUSILADE" had long been planned. It involved an all-out land assault with heavy bomber and off-short naval support; it was estimated that the operation could be completed by 2 Sep. (W.D., G.O.C.-in-C. First Cdn Army, September 1944: Unlisted Appx, Despatch to the Minister, 8 Sep 44; AEF/First Cdn Army/B/F, Docket II: Appx "C", Planning Notes Op "FUSILADE"). As events turned out, however, no formal assault was necessary. Driving north from Totes, elements of 8 Cdn Recce Regt entered Dieppe at 0730 hours, 1 Sep, meeting no opposition, the enemy having withdrawn. The leading squadron was commanded by Major D.S.F. Bult-Francis, who had been wounded there in the raid of 19/20 Aug 42. The remainder of the division reached the port by nightfall. Operation "FUSILADE" was cancelled, and hurried calls were made to prevent the planned air attack from taking place (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Div, 1 Sep 44). There was no mistaking the sincerity of the enthusiastic reception given our troops by the civilian population. Less than 24 hours earlier the Germans had dealt their final blow after four years of occupation, by systematically demolishing all quays, bridges and block-houses in the city. The arrival of the liberating Canadians followed so closely the departure of

the enemy that a spontaneous reaction of rejoicing and gratitude ensued. An account given in the local Dieppe newspaper describes the almost hysterical welcome given to the first two Canadian motor-cyclists who arrived in Dieppe:

At this moment, the enthusiasm of the people reached its height. The crowd ran forward to meet them and was so dense that both men could advance no further. Women threw themselves on them and kissed them. All the citizens then gathered around the Monument to Victory, where both soldiers had gone to deposit the flowers that had been given them. There, ceremonies took place and the crowd sang "La Marseillaise", "God Save the King" and "Tipperary".

(W.D., G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army,
September 1944: Appx "C", Translation
from "La Vigie Nouvelle", 5 Sep 44)

158. On Sunday morning, 3 Sep, in the Canadian military cemetery south of the town, memorial services were conducted for the Canadians who had fallen in the 1942 raid. To quote the Dieppe paper again:

The Canadian soldiers killed during the reconnaissance landing of August 19, 1942, were buried near a village called "VERTUS". Their graves have been attended to even since and very often flowers were laid upon them at night by pious hands. Since the arrival of Canadian troops in our region many soldiers, who lost one of theirs during that hectic raid, have knelt by these graves. A ceremony in memory of those killed

took place on Sunday morning. In the presence of several companies, a Protestant service was held by a Canadian priest. Flowers had been sent with the inscription: "To the memory of the officers and soldiers of the Royal Regiment of Canada who died during the battle of Dieppe on August 19, 1942, from their comrades after their victorious entry into Dieppe, September 3, 1944."

(Ibid)

159. In the afternoon the whole division held its first ceremonial parade in France. Formations and units marched past in columns of six, as General H.D.G. Crerar, C.B., D.S.O., took the salute (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Div, 3 Sep 44). Let "La Vigie Nouvelle" describe the scene:

For the first time, since its arrival in France, has the Second Canadian Division been passed in review and Dieppe was chosen for this ceremony. It had not been announced in advance, but all the citizens in Dieppe seemed to know about it. The crowd had already gathered along the passage of the troops, but mainly along the Rue CLAUSE GROULARD. Thousands were there waiting.

The Bag-Pipe Band, composed of elements from five different regiments, was lined in front of the "Vigie Nouvelle" and the dexterity of its members was much admired while they gave a concert before the parade started. Another band, relaying it, played "The Marche Lorraine" and the "Madelon". At 3:00 p.m. Lieutenant-General CRERAR arrived Rue

Claude Groulard and was greeted by tremendous cheering. General CRERAR, General FOULKES, in company of their staff officers took place on the official platform with M.M. COLLAS, BIEZ, Major DEBOUDT, etc, and several members of the local committee of National Liberation. On each side of the platform were assembled formations of the F.F.I. Before the parade began, General CRERAR (Commander-in-Chief of the Canadian Army in France) asked to have several members of the Resistance in Dieppe presented to him ...

Then came the parade. Six by six the troops coming through the Rue Gambetta marched into the Rue Claude Groulard. It was a magnificent sight, that gave a sensation of power. The Canadians marched with discipline very much at ease in the uniforms which are the same for the soldiers as for the officers. What a change with the stiffness of the Germans!

Marching at the head of his troops came Colonel ALWAY whose regiment entered Dieppe, the first. Amidst thunders of cheers and showers of flowers came the Regiment de Maisonneuve, the Regiment Mont Royal, the Montreal Fusiliers, the Congress Artillery, the Regiment 55 Medium Artillery, the Engineers, the Medical Corps and the Signal Corps. The parade lasted half an hour. When General CRERAR left in his car, after it was over, the cheers multiplied.

This historical parade will be remembered by the citizens of Dieppe for a long time.

(W.D., G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army,
September 1944: Appx "C", Translation
from "La Vigie Nouvelle", 5 Sep 44)

160. Little time was lost by the administrative services of First Cdn Army in utilizing the captured port to ease the problems of supply for 21 Army Group. Work on repairing the damage began immediately. The harbour was swept of mines, and by 6 Sep was ready to receive its first cargoes (W.D., A/Q Br, Adm H.Q. First Cdn Army, September 1944: Appx 8, D.A. & Q.M.G.'s file on Operation of Dieppe). The first ten ships arrived on the afternoon of the 7th with 3000 tons of petrol, ammunition and supplies. As the railway to Amiens had already been restored to running order, the first train left Dieppe 9 Sep, carrying 400 tons of petrol and oil consigned to Second Army at Brussels (W.D., A/Q Br, Adm H.Q. First Cdn Army, 9 Sep 44).

THE ARRIVAL AT THE SOMME

161. On 1 Sep General Crerar issued instructions for 1 Brit Corps to press on with the clearing of the Havre Peninsula and for 2 Cdn Corps to continue the pursuit.

2 Cdn Corps will advance NE with all speed between the army boundary and the English channel - objective BRUGES and the coastal belt as far as the west Scheldt. The COURTRAI - GHENT - ST NICHOLAS - ANTWERP road is incl Second Brit Army. While forward troops of 2 Cdn Corps should bypass, when possible, such enemy centres of resistance as tend to hold up

the advance, steps will be taken thoroughly to "mop up" such enemy by follow-up formations of the Corps.

(W.D., G.O.C-in-C. First Cdn Army,
September 1944: Appx 1, Directive to
Corps Commanders, 1 Sep 44)

162. The consequent instructions given by General Simonds to his divisional commanders set forth the following intentions:

2 Cdn Corps will continue its pursuit on the axis ABBEVILLE 7883 - ST OMER 1453 - YPRES 5862. On reaching the line of the SOMME:

- a. Polish Armd Div will continue the advance on the axis ABBEVILLE 7883 - HESDIN 1513 - ST OMER 1453 - YPRES 5862, keeping in touch with armoured formations of Second British Army on its right;
- b. 3 Cdn Inf Div on reaching LE TREPORT 4582 will destroy or capture all enemy in the triangle LE TREPORT - ST VALERY SUR SOMME 6594 - ABBEVILLE and will continue its advance on the axis ABBEVILLE - MONTREUIL 7625 - BOULOGNE 6754 - CALAIS 8778 - DUNKIRK 2584;
- c. 4 Cdn Armd Div will re-organize in the area all excl ABBEVILLE 7883 - ST RIQUIER 8786 - AILLY 9080 - PONT EMY 8478 and will keep clear of main roads; and

- d. 2 Cdn Inf Div will complete its present task and re-organize in DIEPPE area ready to pass through 3 Cdn Inf Div when ordered.

(Ibid: G.O.C. 2 Cdn Corps Directive,
1 Sep 44)

163. This plan to send forward one armoured and one infantry division while the remaining two divisions reorganized did not meet with the approval of the C.-in-C., 21 Army Group, who despatched the following message to the Army Commander at 1805 hrs on the 2nd:

SECOND ARMY are now positioned near the BELGIAN frontier and will go through towards BRUSSELS tomorrow. IT IS VERY necessary that your two Armd Divs should push forward with all speed towards ST OMER and beyond. NOT rpt NOT consider this the time for any div to halt for maintenance. Push on quickly.

(G.O.C.-in-C/1-0, Operations
21 Army Group, Tac 21 Army Gp to
Tac Cdn Army, 2 Sep 44)

164. General Crerar's reply was as follows:

G 78. TOPSEC. PERSONAL for C IN C from CDN ARMD COMD. you M 141. Para one. Delighted to learn that SECOND ARMY is now positioned near BELGIAN frontier but would advise you that until late this afternoon SECOND ARMY

troops have no been within five miles ABBEVILLE and that all bridges R SOMME NE PIQUIGNY blown with enemy in considerable strength holding NORTH bank. With assistance flank attack 4 BRIT ARMD BDE from direction PIQUIGNY and POLISH ARMD DIV attacking ABBEVILLE across R SOMME from SOUTH SIMONDS hoped secure crossing tonight. Para two. NOT a case of more divs on line R SOMME but of securing at least one main route crossing of river. In any event 2 CDN INF DIV bns down to average strength 525 and in my opinion a forty eight hour halt quite essential in order it can absorb approx one thousand reinforcements arriving today. para three. You can be assured that there is no lack of push or of rational speed CDN ARMY. ST OMER and beyond will be reached without any avoidable delay.

(Ibid: Tac First Cdn Army to Tac 21 Army Group, 3 Sep 47)

2 Cdn Inf Div remained in the vicinity of Dieppe for another two days (AEF/2 Cdn Inf Div/C/F, Docket I: Summary of Canadian Ops and Activities, H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Div, 3 - 9 Sep 44). It was 6 Sep before an adjustment of the inter-Army boundary made deployment of two armoured divisions on the Canadian Corps front possible and brought 4 Cdn Armd Div once more into action (AEF/First Cdn Army/C/E, Docket II, G.O.C. 2 Cdn Corps Directive, 4 Sep 44).

165. The concentration of 4 Cdn Armd Div across the Somme took place on 2 and 3 Sep. During 2 Sep, Linc & Welld R. had cleared Airaines, and on being relieved there by a battalion of 53 (W.) Div had moved to Sorel en Vimeu. A

4 Cdn Armd Bde reconnaissance of the Somme river with a view to seizing a bridgehead discovered the enemy still in the Pont Remy area, and no crossing was effected. A bridge unsuitable for tank traffic was found in the region of Long (8875) (W.D., G.S. H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 2 Sep 44). It had become necessary to shift the divisional centre line to the left to remedy the confusion that had arisen the previous day when it was found that this line was to the right of the army boundary. As it was found impossible to get the armour over the river, it was decided to have 10 Cdn Inf Bde secure a bridgehead by a silent crossing in the Pont Remy area (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div September 1944: Appx 12, Op Instruction No. 6, 2 Sep 44, and Confirmatory Notes, 3 Sep 44). Patrols from Line & Welld R. and Alq R. crossed the river at last light on 2 Sep and bridging proceeded. By 0430 hours the following morning, three battalions had firmed up on the north bank (W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 2 Sep 44). The concentration of the remainder of the Armoured Division in the S. Maughille (8785) - Ailly - Abbeville region was effected without incident on the afternoon of the 3rd (W.D., G.S. H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 3 Sep 44). With Divisional Headquarters settled at Bellancourt (8381) 21 Cdn Armd Div enjoyed its first rest since 30 Jul. (Ibid, 4 Sep 44). Meanwhile 1 Pol Armd Div had moved up on the left of 4 Cdn Armd Div and was preparing to establish bridgeheads on the night of 2/3 Sep in the region south-east of Abbeville. Speed was essential, and the divisional mortar battalion and an infantry battalion were ordered to cross the Somme by any means possible (W.D., G.Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, September 1944: Appx 8, Ops Log, Serial 120, 2 Sep 44).

166. As we have seen, 3 Cdn Inf Div had been directed to advance from Eu on the axis Abbeville - Montreuil. With this in view, 7 Cdn Recce Regt was ordered to search the St. Valery-sur-Somme - no area for crossings over the R. Somme below Abbeville, while maintaining contact with 1 Pol Armd Div on the right (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div, September 1944: Appx 1, Op Instruction No. 5, 2 Sep 44). During the afternoon of 2 Sep, 8 Cdn Inf Bde moved forward to intermediary positions east of the R. Bresle, Brigade Headquarters being established at Meneslies (5480) (W.D., H.Q. 8 Cdn Inf Bde, 2 Sep 44). 9 Cdn Inf Bde followed S.D.& G. Highrs towards the Abbeville crossings, but due to the convergence there of 1 Pol Armd Div, 4 Cdn Armd Div. Priority over the crossings was given to 1 Pol Armd Div, and 3 Cdn Inf Div was forced to wait for a period of 36 hours. The Brigade withdrew 5000 yards to Frireulles (6582) (W.D., H.Q. 9 Cdn Inf Bde, 2 Sep 44). 7 Cdn Inf Bde was moved to the area of Martaigneville (5585) with no opposition, although a few prisoners were taken when clearing their area (W.D., H.Q. 7 Cdn Inf Bde, 2 Sep 44).

167. The enthusiasm displayed by the inhabitants of the liberated towns and villages knew no bounds. The town of Eu gave "one of the warmest welcomes in any town since landing" (W.D., H.Q. 9 Cdn Inf Bde, 1 Sep 44). It was the same in the smaller communities:

Everyone noticed how enthusiastic the civilians were in this area to be liberated - they lined the roads, cheering and waving - throwing flowers and all sorts of fruit at us - handing us wines and hard boiled eggs and generally overwhelming us with their kindness. Union Jacks, Stars and Strips, and in one case the Canadian Flag, fluttered from nearly every

house in the villages - old and young came out to welcome us and give us their best wishes and speedy "bon voyage" to our destination.

(W.D., H.Q. 7 Cdn Inf Bde,

1 Sep 44)

Members of the Maquis showed their good intentions in a more practical form:

FFI here are doing a good job and on numerous occasions have given us information which has led to the capture of a number of the Boche - they all seem most anxious to help us, and what is more, instead of talking about it they seem very willing to accept the same dangers as our fellows are taking from the Huns.

(Ibid, 2 Sep 44)

168. With the Canadian formation thus halted momentarily at the edge of the English Channel, it is of interest to look back at the record of 21 Army Group's rapid advance from the closing of the Falaise Gap. In eleven days (21 Aug - 1 Sep) forward elements of First Cdn Army had travelled from Trun to Dieppe, a distance of 137 miles. Second Brit Army in reaching beyond Amiens to Vimy during the same period had completed 202 miles. This advance had been made on a 50-mile Army Group front, and during that time, with the exception of two or three days for bridging operations on the Seine, neither army had covered less than ten miles a day. The breath-taking speed with which this great advance had been completed was a measure of the staggering defeats that

had been inflicted on German military power at Mortain, Caumont and Falaise, and the resultant demoralization of the German armies in the west. (First Cdn Army Int Summary No. 65, 2 Sep 44)

169. During this phase of operations the enemy had again suffered heavy losses. From 23 Aug to 1 Sep the number of prisoners taken by First Cdn Army (including those evacuated through medical channels) was 8036. This made the total number captured on the Army front since the opening of Operation "TOTALIZE" in excess of 26,000 (Ibid). In the same period close to 44,000 prisoners of war were taken on 21 Army Group's front.¹⁷ Of the number of enemy casualties in killed and wounded during this time no accurate estimate can yet be made. If, as surmised by Army Intelligence, this number was at least equal to that of the prisoners taken, it meant that the German High Command must now fight its battles east of the Seine with 100,000 men less than it had at the beginning of August. And when the parallel losses inflicted on the enemy by First and Third U.S. Armies from Brittany to the Seine are considered, it is not difficult to realize the need for a German

¹⁷ Figures for German prisoners during the August operations vary in different Army and Corps estimates. In a despatch to the Minister of National Defence, the G.O.C.-in-C. First Cdn Army, reports that 6333 prisoners were taken by First Cdn Army from 23 Aug to 1 Sep, in addition to a number evacuated through medical channels (2555 between 7 Aug and 1 Sep) (W.D., G.O.C.-in-C. First Cdn Army, September 1944; Letter, General Crerar to Minister, 8 Sep 44). Figures taken from daily Army Intelligence Summaries for the period give a total of 7265 through Army cages (First Cdn Army Int Summaries, 23 Aug to 1 Sep 44) (See Appx "D"). During the same period of the pursuit 2 Cdn Corps took 3517 prisoners (Ibid). Estimates for 1 Brit Corps captures show still greater divergences. By subtracting the 2 Cdn Corps total from the Army total, a figure of 8162 is given for the period of the 1 Brit Corps pursuit to the Seine - 16 Aug to 1 Sep (see Appx "D"), but the British Formation gives its total for the month of August at only 4457 (W.D., A/Q Branch & Services, H.Q. 1 Corps, 31 Aug 44).

withdrawal unprecedented in both its magnitude and its speed. (First Cdn Army Int Summary No. 164, 1 Sep 44)

170. Casualties suffered by Canadian troops of First Cdn Army from the time that the pursuit started (24 Sep) until the morning of 2 Sep, amounted to 1706 all ranks killed, wounded and missing (General Crerar's Letter to the Minister, 8 Sep 44). The heaviest Canadian losses had been suffered in the fighting to clear the Forêt de la Londe, when 791 casualties were sustained by 2 Cdn Inf Div in the four day period of operations. (See Appendices "F" and "G". From 16 Aug (when the pursuit by 1 Brit Corps commenced) to the end of the month, the British Component of First Cdn Army received total casualties of 3263 all ranks. The majority of these losses occurred early in the period, the number up to 24 Aug being 2623 all ranks. (W.D., A/Q Branch & Services, August 1944: Appx 2, Casualty States 16-31 Aug 44)

THE GERMAN RETREAT FROM THE SEINE TO THE SOMME

171. With the German decision to give up the Seine, it followed that Fifteenth Army must abandon its position along the Channel coast between the Somme and the Seine. Even in mid-August General Sponheimer's 67 Corps was still under orders to guard against an Allied landing in the area between these rivers. About 27 Aug General von Zangen, Commander Fifteenth Army, ordered 67 Corps to abandon its Channel coast positions (leaving behind a garrison to defend Le Havre to the last). Between Abbeville and Amiens (excl) General Sponheimer took up positions along the river with 226 Inf Div on the right and 245 Div on the left (Special Interrogation Report, General

Sponheimer). The left flank of Fifteenth Army, east and inclusive of Amiens, was to have been held by Seventh Army under General Eberbach. But, as we have seen, before Seventh Army could take over its position, its commander, together with his staff, was taken prisoner on the outskirts of Amiens. The whole plan was thrown into confusion; without a staff to control it, the shattered divisions of Seventh Army were unable to assemble along the Somme.

In a frantic attempt to rectify the situation, Field Marshal Model ordered Sepp Dietrich's Fifth Pz Army [which had been holding the line of the Seine] to take over the sector Seventh Army was supposed to have manned. However, Dietrich, assuming that he would have no more responsibility in this area, had begun pulling his forces back to Germany. To make matters worse, Model did not fully realize how weak Fifth Pz Army had become. As a result of all this chaos, no one turned up on von Zangen's left flank. Amidst the confusion, the Allies speedily captured Amiens, crossed the Somme, and dashed through scattered opposition to Brussels and Antwerp.

(Special Interrogation Report,
General von Zangen)

172. As part of 67 Corps' retirement towards the Somme, 245 Inf Div was constantly harried by the advance of 2 Cdn Corps. The Divisional Commander, Maj-Gen Sanders, describes the speed with which Dieppe was evacuated, demolition, however, first being carried out:

He himself was approached by the Major of Dieppe beseeching him to desist from destroying the port. The General replied that he was quite unable to stop the major programme of demolition which was in the hands of the Navy and over them he had no authority whatsoever.

(Special Interrogation Report,
Maj-Gen Sanders)

He goes on to give a graphic description of the retreat in their area, made all the more tragically comic by the appearance of hoards of sailors from the ports complete with their cases of liquor and girl friends, all mounted high on various kinds of curious transport. Of discipline, there was little, of organization even less, the idea of one and all being to return to Belgium as quickly as the impressed transport could carry them. (Ibid) Only slight halts were possible on the lines of the Yeres and the Bresle rivers, for the German left was always open and there was constant danger of being outflanked. When the Somme was reached, the intention to hold a definite defensive position had to be abandoned because of the fall of Amiens and the collapse of the Seventh Army (Ibid).

173. The retreat of the remnants of 86 Corps was just as hurried. Ordered to proceed to the Amiens sector, General Obstfelder's corps managed to observe a certain amount of order in its retreat, with 711 Div on the right, 346 in the centre and 272 on the left. But, as revealed by the commander of 346 Inf Div:

The retreat was constantly plagued from the air and marching had to be done at night or in bad weather. At Neufchatel the division stayed for 24 hours and then pushed on to the Brasle River. No proper defences were built during this period, with precautions merely being taken to defend their rest areas. By the time the Somme was reached on the 29-30 August, the men were very tired but very few casualties had been suffered.

(Special Interrogation Report, Diestel)

The initial plan was to cross the Somme at Amiens, but on approaching it they began to suspect that it had already been taken by the Allies. Not being entirely sure they switched their course northwards and crossed the Somme on the bridge at Pont Remy. Reaching the other side they were prepared to defend the river, but discovered that they were no longer possessors of any supply troops. (Ibid)

174. The general confusion which prevailed along the Somme was described by the Commander of 272 Inf Div, Genlt Schack:

Once across the Seine the division was ordered to proceed to Amiens where they were to set up a new defensive position on the Somme. The General motored up to reconnoitre this new sector and found a whirlwind of confusion all about him as the marine and Luftwaffe personnel panicked back from their coastal positions. No one knew where the English were, and the General personally listened to the B.B.C.

broadcasts in order to advise his troops as to their next move. It was evident that a line on the Somme was by now outflanked and Field Marshal Model ordered Schack to take his division to South Holland for refitting and reinforcements.

(Special Interrogation Report, Schack)

175. The harassing from the air to which the fleeing enemy had been subjected between Falaise and the Seine continued on the flight across the Somme. Although operations by the Allied air forces were considerably restricted by unfavourable weather conditions, the fullest possible support in the circumstances was given our advancing troops. Enemy transport suffered heavily. On 1 Sep along, fighter bombers and fighters destroyed an estimated 2100 M.T. and other vehicles and damaged a further 1100. Two days later the score was 2150 destroyed and 340 damaged, and as locomotives and barges, to say nothing of bridges vital to the enemy's escaping forces, were destroyed by aerial attack. (C.O.S. Weekly Résumé No. 262, 31 Aug to 7 Sep 44). The last strong reaction by the German Air Force took place on 25 Aug, when the majority of the enemy fighters were destroyed by U.S.A.A.F. Tac Fighters over St. Quentin and Rheims. The retreating enemy continued to be harried by day and by night, whilst our own troops were free from attack from the air. During the early days of September fighters and fighter bombers of the Second Tactical Air Force were obliged to use their long range tanks for sorties into Belgium. Thereafter operations were temporarily restricted by range and forward movement to more advanced bases. (AEF/30 Corps/C/F, Docket II, para 13)

THE THURST FROM THE SOMME

176. While the leading formations of 2 Cdn Corps remained temporarily halted at the Somme, the fast moving armour of Second Army forged rapidly ahead towards the Belgian frontier. During 1 and 2 Sep 44, 30 Corps, with Gds Armd Div on the right, seized Arras and reached forward to occupy Douai. On the left 11 Armd Div cut the Arras - Doullens road. The two armoured divisions halted on the line Carvin - Douai to permit the start of Operation "LINNET", an airborne attack to seize the bridge at Tournai. Approximately 150 miles had been covered from the Seine in four days, and in the advance to Brussels and Antwerp the two divisions would have to cover a further 90 miles. At 2330 hours the airborne operation was cancelled, and at first light on 3 Sep the advance was resumed into Belgium (AEF/30 Corps/C/F, Docket II, Advance of 30 Corps across R. Seine to Brussels and Antwerp (24 Aug - 4 Sep 44), para 2). On the immediate right of First Cdn Army forward elements of 7 Armd Div and 53 (W.) Div, leading 12 Corps' advance, were across the road St. Pol - Hesdin (Ibid, para 12; AEF/12 Corps/C/H, Docket III, Sitrep 39, 3 Sep 44).

177. In order to expedite the advance of 2 Cdn Corps towards Bruges (see para 161) an adjustment in the inter-army boundary on 3 Sep gave to First Cdn Army the road:

MAUGUILLE - AUX LE CHATEAU - LIGNY SUR

CANCHE - FILLIEVRES BLANGY - ANVIN.

(AEF/First Cdn Army/C/E, Docket II,
G.O.C.-in-C. 1-0-4, 3 Sep 44)

It was also planned that the necessary fighting vehicles required to hold open this road would be provided by 12 Corps until the arrival of 2 Cdn Corps, and that reconnaissance elements of 12 Corps would try to hold the bridges at Le Boisle - Hesdin - Blangy - Anvin. Under these arrangements the deployment of a second armoured division for 2 Cdn Corps would shortly be possible (Ibid). Second British Army would use the road Ypres - Roulers - Thielt - Aeltre until the arrival of 2 Cdn Corps troops, when the routes would revert to First Canadian Army employment (Ibid)

178. 1 Pol Armd Div now took over the lead from 4 Cdn Armd Div. A few minutes past midnight (2/3 Sep) foot patrols of 8 Rifle Bn crossed the River Somme in boats and established a bridgehead on the opposite bank. By 0330 hours a foot bridge had been established and a battalion captured Port le Grand, encountering only weak enemy resistance. At 1000 hours on the 3rd, 1 Bn Mounted Rifles took Abbeville, suffering only slight losses. 9 Rifle Bn was now pushed through 8 Rifle Bn in the direction of Grand Laviers, and by 1200 hours the entire 3 Rifle Bde was on the east and north bank of the Somme. Orders were issued at 1630 hours for the divisional pursuit on the axis, Hesdin - St. Omer - Ypres (AEF/1 Pol Armd Div/C/F, Docket II, 2 Sep 44). Meanwhile, 4 Cdn Armd Div remained concentrated in the Bellancourt area (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 3-5 Sep 44). 3 Cdn Inf Div made no move until 4 Sep 44 (W.D., G.S. H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div, 4 Sep 44).

179. 1 Pol Armd Div advanced on two axes, the road Abbeville - Canchy - Hesdin, and the road Hautvillers - Crecy-en-Ponthieu - Aubin. Movement was slow as the pursuit was resumed on the morning of 4 Sep, for there was but one bridge over the Somme available to the division (AEF/First Cdn Army/C/E, Docket II, Simonds to Maczek, 3 Sep 44). Bridging along the axis presented the chief difficulties in the pursuit, and detours had frequently to be made off the centre line in order to find crossing places. By fording the R. Ternoise 24 Lancers were able at 1800 hours (4 Sep) to cut off the enemy retreating from the woods north of Hesdin. The crossing made possible reconnaissance towards St. Omer. By nightfall the division had occupied Fillievres and Hesdin. During the day the Polish Division took 110 prisoners (mainly from 245 Inf Div). (AEF/1 Pol Armd Div/C/F, Docket II, 4 Sep 44)

180. On 5 Sep the pursuit continued again on two axes - the left one Coupelle - Neuve - Fauquembergues - Wizernes - Arques - Cassel, and on the right Fruges - Dennebroeucq - Therouanne - Ebblinghem - Hazelbrouck. 10 Armd Cavalry Bde with 24 Lancers leading met some enemy resistance, but this was speedily overcome, and, passing Campagne, the Lancers seized the bridge near Wizernes at 1100 hours. Resistance was met at Neuf Fosse Canal and to the south, but 3 Rifle Bde seized a bridgehead north of Blaringhem, and Engineers immediately began to construct a bridge over the Canal. Two hundred and ninety prisoners had been added to the Division's total in the day's operations, which had carried it forward 56 km in rainy and stormy weather over muddy roads. (Ibid). It is necessary temporarily to leave the Poles at the Neuf Fosse Canal, to follow the operations of the other formations of 2 Cdn Corps (Ibid, 5 Sep 44).

181. Directed to the task of reducing the ports along the Channel coast (para 162), 3 Cdn Inf Div moved forward behind the Polish Division and crossed the Somme at Abbeville on the morning of 4 Sep. With 7 Cdn Recce Regt leading the division proceeded towards its objective, the Pas de Calais, inclusive of Boulogne, Calais and Cap Gris Nez. The reconnaissance regiment continued to advance with "A" Sqn leading along the centre line, "B" Sqn on the left flank and "C" on the right. At Nampont St. Martin the bridge over the R. Authie had been blown, but another crossing was found and "A" Sqn, hard on the heels of the enemy, entered Montreuil, though not in time to prevent the demolition of the bridge which crosses the Canche north of the town. A reconnaissance conducted personally by the regiment's O.C., Lt-Col T.C. Lewis, discovered a bridge three miles upstream at Brimeux that apparently had not been used for years. There were no roads leading to it, and it had therefore been overlooked by the enemy. "C" Sqn took quick advantage of the find, and soon caught up with a soft-skinned convoy, destroying twelve vehicles, capturing considerable stores and equipment and a large number of prisoners. "A" Sqn, driving far towards the north, ran into a strong force of enemy at Samer, less than ten miles south-east of Boulogne. The squadron commander, making a quick appreciation, took bold action and driving all available fire power into the town square, shot up personnel and equipment, clearing up in a few minutes what might well have taken a much longer time. (W.D., 7 Cdn Recce Regt, 4 Sep 44)

182. 9 Cdn Inf Bde, following the reconnaissance troops, after detouring at Nampont St. Martin to cross the Authie by a hastily reinforced wooden bridge,

reached Montreuil, crossing the Canche west of the town. Although it had been the original intention to reach Boulogne before dark, it was necessary to halt in the area of Hubersent for the night 4/5 Sep (W.D., H.Q. 9 Cdn Inf Bde, 4 Sep 44). After accomplishing a march of nearly 48 miles, 8 Cdn Inf Bde prepared to halt at Ecuire, two miles south of Montreuil. Orders were received from Divisional Headquarters, however, to push on irrespective of the hour, and to occupy the area about Samer. R. de Chaud, in the lead, crossed the Canche at Brimeux. But the bridge proved inadequate, and the brigade was forced to await the construction of a crossing in Montreuil. R. de Chaud with one battery of 13 Cdn Fd Regt positioned themselves astride the Montreuil - Samer road to await the arrival of the other units of the brigade the following morning (W.D., H.Q. 8 Cdn Inf Bde, 4 Sep 44). 7 Cdn Inf Bde, bringing up the rear, proceeded without difficulty. R. Wpg Rif was detached to undertake a special task which involved making a quick dash along the coast to clean up any enemy in the area of Fort-Mahon-Plage and Berck-sur-Mer. The brigade settled down for the night in the town of Sorrus, two miles west of Montreuil. (W.D., H.Q. 7 Cdn Inf Bde, 4 Sep 44)

183. Preliminary reports had indicated that the Boulogne, Dunkirk and Calais areas were deserted, with the enemy moving to the east (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div, September 1944: Appx 4, Op Instr No. 6, 3 Sep 44). These suppositions were not confirmed by reconnaissance and intelligence, as 3 Cdn Inf Div found when it continued its advance on 5 Sep along the axis Boulogne - Calais - Dunkirk. 9 Cdn Inf Bde moved off at 0730 hours through Samer towards Boulogne. Patrol reports and civilian sources reported the port heavily defended and prepared to resist. Leading units of the brigade crossed the

R. Liane, where they met the outer defending forces. Planning for the reduction of these defences now commenced (W.D., H.Q. 9 Cdn Inf Bde, 5 Sep 44). 8 Cdn Inf Bde, following, moved to the north end of the Forêt de Boulogne and occupied the Conteville - Les Croix - La Capelle area astride the main east-west road, St. Omer - Boulogne (W.D., H.Q. 8 Cdn Inf Bde, 5 Sep 44). 7 Cdn Inf Bde, bringing up the rear, kept close to the coast, with R. Wpg Rif searching the brigade left flank. The brigade cleared Berck-sur-Mer and, crossing the Canche river, proceeded to Nesles and swept the enemy from the Forêt d'Hardelot. 1 C. Scot R. was detached to investigate the area west of the divisional axis, where enemy activity was reported. The brigade continued its pursuit to west of Camiers. Regina Rif just failed to entrap reported bands of the enemy occupying a honeycomb of tunnels, but the battalion had the satisfaction of capturing six 6-in coastal guns (W.D., H.Q. 7 Cdn Inf Bde, 5 Sep 44). On the following day the brigade moved to the south and west of Calais in the area of Moyecques, eight miles from the sea port. Here the brigade was quite isolated from the remainder of the division, which was some twenty miles to the south investing Boulogne. It remained in this area to protect the right flank for the pending operation against Boulogne (Ibid, 6 Sep 44). 7 Cdn Recce Regt had experienced some stiff resistance on the two flanks of the divisional axis while spearheading the advance from 5 Sep, especially as the forward troops neared the two large ports. The squadrons now took up a line from Marquise to Guines, cutting the main roads leading to Calais. Regimental Headquarters harboured at Hardingham. (W.D., 7 Cdn Recce Regt, 5 Sep 44). The unit settled down to the task of containing Calais, a task made unpleasant from the continual attention given by the enemy's heavy calibre coastal defence guns, now turned inland against the besieging forces.

184. During this period (3-6 Sep), Second Army on the right flank of the Canadians had continued to make remarkable progress. Gds Armd Div started their advance from Douai to Brussels on two centre lines. American forces - XIX Corps of First U.S. Army - pushing up from the south, were on the line of advance as far as Tournai, holding many of the important bridges. At 2000 hours, 3 Sep, 32 Gds Armd Bde Gp entered the suburbs of the Belgian capital. Meanwhile 11 Armd Div, also advancing from Lens on two routes, passed through Tournai and pushed on towards Antwerp, which the leading tanks reached at 1200 hours on the 4th. During the armour's drive forward flank patrols had penetrated as far west as the outskirts of Ghent. The speed of the advance took the enemy completely by surprise, thrusting him into a state of utter confusion. By 2100 hours all opposition in the central and western portion of Antwerp had ceased, and by the evening of 5 Sep the city, with the dock area and sluice gates in good condition, was firmly held. (AEF/30 Corps/C/F, Docket II, 24 Aug - 4 Sep 44, Advance of 30 Corps across R. Seine to Brussels and Antwerp, para 10)

185. Meanwhile on the immediate Canadian right 12 Corps, which was echeloned back to watch Second Army's left flank, had advanced from the Somme with 7 Armd Div leading. On 3 Sep 53 (W.) Div captured St. Pol, while the armour pushed rapidly ahead to the line of the Aire - La Bassée Canal, to find the bridges, as a matter of course, demolished. Bethune was cleared of the enemy by 5 Sep, and the division pushed on towards Courtrai and Ghent. At 1900 hours 5 Sep, elements of 7 Armd Div entered Ghent and blocked the roads leading east to Lokeren and Calcken. 12 Corps was thus in a position to establish a line along the R. Escaut, and the R. Lys from Ghent to Armentiers

which would counter the enemy's main effort concentrated at breaking out to the south-east in a thrust through Audenarde¹⁸. (AEF/12 Corps/C/H, Docket III, Sitreps 3-6, September 1944)

186. Although the reduction or sealing off of the channel ports - a task to which 1 Brit Corps and 2 and 3 Cdn Inf Divs were now directed - was not completed until the end of September, it is worthy of note that one of the most important of First Cdn Army's operations in the Pas de Calais had been brought to a successful conclusion early in the month. In its rapid advance along the coast the Army had passed right through the heart of the flying-bomb country, and had driven the enemy from such launching sites as had not already been destroyed by the continuous attacks of the Allied air forces. On 7 Sep the B.B.C. was able to announce to the people of England that the menace of the flying-bomb had ceased to exist (First Cdn Army Int Summary, 7 Sep 44). Although there were later a few small-scale air-borne launchings from planes based on airfields in North-West Germany, the last V-1 directed against London from normal static launching sites in France or Belgium was fired on 6 Sep

¹⁸ The interrogation of General Sponheimer, Commander 67 Inf Corps throws light on this planned break-out by the enemy:

It was at this time that the German High Command had realized that some effort must be made to break out of the pocket formed by the Allied capture of Antwerp. A plan for 86 Corps to attack in a north-easterly direction in the region of Audenarde was formulated. Should this break-through attempt succeed then Sponheimer was to follow through. But this attack was never seriously attempted because it was decided that Allied strength was already too strong to make it possible. Instead it was decided that the troops of Fifteenth Army would attempt to make their escape by a crossing of the Scheldt from Breskens to Flushing.

(Special Interrogation Report,
General Sponheimer)

(C.M.H.Q. file 4/Gen Apprec/3/2, General Note on Operations Issued by A.C.I.G.S., War Office, September 1944, quoted in Historical Officer's Report No. 137, Enemy Air Attack and the Canadian Army in the United Kingdom, 1943-45: The V Weapons). Of some 300 sites that existed along the coast from the Pas de Calais to the Cherbourg Peninsula, the great majority were found between Rouen and St. Omer (Report No. 137, para 27). It was the clearing of this area east of the Seine by First Cdn Army that brought to a halt the toll of death and destruction wrought by the first of the enemy's "revenge weapons".

2 CDN CORPS ARMOUR REACHES THE GHENT CANAL

187. Late in the evening of 4 Sep General Simonds issued his orders for 2 Cdn Corps to "continue its pursuit to the R. Schelde" and to "destroy or capture all enemy south of the West Schelde and within First Cdn Army boundaries" AEF/First Cdn Army/C/E, Docket II, Directive to Divisional Commanders, 4 Sep 44). 1 Pol Armd Div would still lead the Corps advance to the Ghent Canal, using the axis Arques - (excl St. Omer) - Cassel - Poperinghe - Ypres - roulers - Thielt - Aeltre. 4 Cdn Armd Div was to advance through St. Omer, Bergues, Dixmude and Bruges to Eecloo and then clear the area between the Ghent - Selzate road and the Dutch frontier. To 2 Cdn Inf Div was assigned the task of moving up from Dieppe - when ordered by the Corps Commander - to clear the coastal strip from (excl) Dunkirk to the Dutch frontier. 3 Cdn Inf Div would ensure a clear route for 2 Div's move and would then reorganize about Calais. (Ibid)

188. Accordingly, on 6 Sep 1 Pol Armd Div, having bridged the Aire - La Basse Canal, continued its advance on two axes towards Ypres. At first only weak opposition was met, but late in the day, after the Belgian border had been crossed, strong and organized enemy resistance was encountered near Ypres. Late that evening 3 Rifle Bde entered the city from the north and north-west, broke the enemy's resistance and proceeded with the mopping up process. During the day's advance Cassel and Poperinghe had been occupied without incident. On the following morning 10 Armd Cavalry Bde reached Passchendale; by nightfall, after some bitter fighting by the armour to take Hooglege, infantry of 3 Rifle Bde began to attack Roulers (AEF/1 Pol Armd Div/C/F, Docket II, 6, 7 Sep 44). There followed a night battle of street clearing, but the occupation was completed by 0300 hours 8 Sep. In the morning a small battle group pushed on north-east to seize Thielt. The western exits from the town were cut, and by 1430 hours Thielt had been captured. Five miles to the north-east the enemy retreating from Thielt was rudely surprised by a quick encircling thrust that cut across the road to Aeltre in the neighbourhood of Ruysselede. A Polish tank regiment took a considerable number of prisoners here and destroyed much equipment. On that day alone, during the fighting near Thielt over six officers and 1227 other ranks - mainly from 712 Inf div - were taken prisoner. With the capture of Aeltre on 9 Sep, 1 Pol Armd Div had reached the Ghent Canal. For two days attempts were made to force a crossing, without success, and on 11 Sep the Division side-stepped to Ghent to relieve 7 Armd Div there (Ibid, 8-10 Sep 44).

189. During this advance, from the Seine to the Ghent Canal, in spite of the handicaps of long supply lines, rain, storms, muddy roads and the urgent need to drive rapidly forward - covering on some days as much as 40 and more miles - 1 Pol Armd Div had accomplished some remarkable feats. Across the many rivers and canals that lay in the path necessary bridging had been frequent but the Engineers had been equal to the occasion. The speed of advance outstripped line communications, but radio operators and mechanics performed miracles to keep the messages going through. Huge quantities of enemy supplies and equipment had been destroyed or captured. Proof of the constant delaying actions that were encountered came in division's capture of 40 officers and 3447 other ranks. Its own losses, amounting to 212 casualties all ranks, were comparatively insignificant. (Ibid, 9 Sep 44)

190. With 1 Pol Armd Div advancing on the axis Cassel - Ypres - Roulers, 4 Cdn Armd Div, after a few valuable days of reorganization at the Somme, was ordered forward on the left to pursue the enemy to the area of Eecloo. This pursuit was to commence on the morning of 6 Sep, and was to be carried out in two phases:

- a. To the area of St. Omer with one brigade up; and
- b. To Eecloo with two brigades up.

(W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div,
September 1944: Appx 6)

At 0630 hours on the day appointed the division proceeded without difficulty, other than that caused by traffic congestions, on the single axis to St. Omer. Here the bridges were blown and one had to be constructed, which was completed at 2215 hours (Ibid, 6 Sep 44). In preparation for the advance two battle groups had been formed, "Battle Group MONCEL" and "Battle Group STEWART", named respectively from the commander of 4 Cdn Armd Bde and the acting commander of 10 Cdn Inf Bde.¹⁹ To spearhead the thrust of the former group, "KEANE" Force was organized from the reconnaissance troop of 21 Cdn Armd Regt and the Scout platoon of Lake Sup R. (Mot). From St. Omer this force hurried along the left divisional axis towards Bergues on 7 Sep. Three miles south of the objective "KEANE" Force ran into some opposition at Soex, which was taken out by Lake Sup R. (Mot). On the approaches to Bergues, however, the vanguard came under heavy shell fire. It was apparent that the enemy was holding the place in some strength. A demand for the surrender of the garrison was rejected, and the G.O.C. 4 Cdn Armd Div ordered the Brigade Group Commander, Brigadier R.W. Moncel, to by-pass the town and carry on the advance. Elements

¹⁹ The following is the composition of the two groups:

Battle Gp "MONCEL"

H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde
 21 Cdn Armd Regt
 28 Cdn Armd Regt
 Lake Sup R. (Mot)
 Alq R.
 23 Cdn Fd Regt (S.P.)
 96 Cdn A. Tk Bty
 70 Cdn L.A.A. Bty
 8 Cdn Fd Sqn
 12 Cdn Lt Fd Amb
 (less one sec)

Battle Group "STEWART"

H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde
 22 Cdn Armd Regt
 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt
 Linc & Welld R.
 A. & S.H. of C.
 15 Cdn Fd Regt
 65 Cdn A. Tk Bty
 101 Cdn L.A.A. Bty
 9 Cdn Fd Sqn
 15 Cdn Fd Amb
 (less three secs)

(W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div,
 September 1944: Appx 13, 4 Cdn Inf Bde
 Battle Groups)

of "KEANE" Force crossed the Belgian border at 1600 hours, and the brigade harboured in the area Isenberghe for the night (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 6, 7 Sep 44). On the divisional right Battle Group "STEWART" pushing off from Hallines (four miles south-west of St. Omer) crossed the Belgian border and reached the area of Loo without opposition. As was to be expected, all bridges along the line of the Dixmude - Ypres Canal south of Dixude were found to be blown (W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 6, 7 Sep 44).

191. As the Division continued its two-pronged drive on 8 Sep, 10 Cdn Inf Bde on the right advanced through Dixmude, meeting chiefly road blocks and blown bridges on the way. At Steenbrugge, three miles south of Ghent, further progress was halted by the lac, of bridges over the Canal de Ghent and an enemy in strength on the opposite bank. The brigade took up positions south and south-east of Stuivenberhe, and A. & S.H. of C. were ordered to seize a bridgehead in the Moerbrugge area (W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 8 Sep 44).

192. The arrival of the armoured formations of 2 Cdn Corps at the Ghent Canal marked the end of a speedy advance and the beginning of a long period of operations against strong opposition, when little ground-gaining was possible. Six months were to pass before the armour could again break out into the open in pursuit of a rapidly retreating enemy. Into the area that lay between the line Antwerp - Ghent - Bruges - Zeebrugge and the sea the remains of the German Fifteenth Army had withdrawn. The capture of Antwerp had cut off the enemy's land route into north-eastern Belgium, but there still remained avenues of escape across the West Scheldt into Walcheren Island and the South Beveland Peninsula. The denial to the allies of the south shore of the

estuary would delay the opening of the port of Antwerp, and it thus became a logical procedure for General von Zangen to attempt a slow evacuation of his troops in the Bruges - Antwerp area, while continuing to hold the southern perimeter as long as possible. (Special Interrogation Report, General Gustav von Zangen)

193. In the achievement of this purpose the enemy was aided by the canal barriers which lay across our path. The Canal de Ghent joins Ghent with Bruges, continuing on to Zeebrugge as the Bruges Ship Canal. Further north the Leopold Canal runs west from the West Scheldt near Terneuzen to the North Sea above Zeebrugge, passing just inside the northern Belgian boundary. Between these two waterways is the Canal de Derivation de la Lys, which runs from the sea alongside the Leopold Canal for twelve miles, and then swings south-east to cross the Canal de Ghent, ten miles west of Ghent. Between Ghent and Antwerp the River Escaut (Scheldt), flowing from Ghent to Antwerp, is paralleled to the north by a number of waterways, chief of which is the Canal de Hulst. Cutting this water bound pocket of north-west Belgium in half is the Ghent - Terneuzen Canal running north from Ghent into the West Scheldt. All these waterways now became potential lines of defence for delaying action on the part of the enemy.

194. As First Cdn Army reached the line of the Ghent Canal and the Bruges Ship Canal, General von Zangen ordered his corps commanders - General Sponheimer of 67 Corps and General Obstfelder of 86 Corps - to make a stand along the northern banks until preparations for the crossing of the West Scheldt had been completed (Special Interrogation Report,

General Otto Sponheimer). The sector assigned 67 Corps reached from Blankenbergh to Aeltre, with 86 Corps holding the line further east. From the North Sea to Bruges Sponeimer manned his line with 3000 marines, who had been stationed in Ostende and Zeebrugge as harbour personnel; in Bruges itself and eastward as far as Moerbrugge he placed 245 Inf Div; the Corps left flank as far as Aeltre was held by 64 Inf Div.²⁰ (Ibid). It will thus be observed that the Canadian attack across the Ghent Canal at Moebrugge had the advantage of being directed at the exact junction of 64 and 245 Divs. Subsequently both German commanders were to blame each other for the Allied success and the presence of strong Canadian forces north of the canal. (Special Interrogation Report, Gen-Major Sanders)

195. The actual crossing of the Ghent Canal by 10 Cdn Inf Bde on 8 Sep was made opposite Oostcamp. Two civilian heavy punts were found, and with these "D" Coy began to cross at 1730 hours, at first without interference. But the enemy quickly realized the intentions of the assaulting force and started to shell and mortar the crossing. Casualties were unpleasantly heavy, "C" Coy suffering 17 losses in two hours. None the less, a precarious three-company bridgehead was established by midnight, and the troops were heavily engaged in street fighting in Moerbrugge. (W.D., A. & S.H. of C., 8 Sep 44). As the enemy reaction became more violent bridge construction ceased (W.D., 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 9 Sep 44).

²⁰ Sponheimer places 711 Inf Div on 245 Div's left, but Maj-Gen Sanders, Commader 245 Div, names 64 Inf Div as being on his left at the time of the Canadian attack at Moerbrugge (Special Interrogation Reports, Sponheimer and Sanders). According to Schwalbe, who supervised the entire evacuation, 64 Inf Div was left to make the final stand after 67 and 86 Corps had withdrawn across the West Scheldt. (Special Interrogation Report, Gen der Inf Eigem-Fexlix Schwalbe)

196. In the early hours of 9 Sep, Linc & Welld R. was brought into the bridgehead on the right flank of A.& S.H. of C., whose struggle to advance was still being met with violent resistance. The infantry fought without the aid of artillery, for it had been considered unnecessary to order a fire support programme. The companies on the far bank were soon reduced to only small arms ammunition and grenades, for all supplies had to be ferried over the canal - source that became increasingly inadequate as all but one boat were destroyed. "C" Coy of A.& S.H. of C., cut off from the other companies and battalion headquarters, underwent an especially difficult time and was repeatedly counter-attacked by the enemy. (W.D., A.& S.H. of C., 9 Sep 44). Linc & Walld R. too was exposed to counter-attacks throughout the whole day, as the enemy strove desperately to cut the battalion off from the canal (W.D., Linc & Welld R., 9 Sep 44). At about 1900 hours the enemy put in what proved to be his heaviest and final attack. He laid down a thick carpet of mortar and shell fire in an attempt to prevent supplies coming up. The effort failed, and by the following morning the Engineers had completed a bridge, and tanks brought welcome aid to the hard-pressed infantry. (Ibid)

197. With the bridge in operation the two battalions were able to consolidate in Moerbrugge, although enemy mortaring and shelling continued throughout 10 Sep (W.D., A.& S.H. of C., 10 Sep 44). The work of enlarging the bridgehead continued for the next two days. Linc & Welld R. was ordered to push on to seize Lekkerhoek (8894) and Veldkapel (8895), two hamlets a couple of miles north-east of Moerbrugge. "A" and "B" Coys fought their way into Lekkerhoek, and "C" Coy was passed through to take Veldkapel. (W.D., Linc & Welld R., 11 Sep 44). A mile or so to the east towards Oedelem 22 Cdn Armd

Regt mopped up Hockske (9193) and Doorn (9194) (W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 11 Sep 44). On 12 Sep patrols reached Assebrouch, and 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt, pushing on to the line of the Leopold Canal, reported all bridges out (Ibid). Meanwhile Alq R., which had reverted to the command of 10 Cdn Inf Bde on 9 Sep, was brought over the Ghent Canal on 11 Sep, and took up positions on the left flank of Linc & Welld R. (W.Ds., Linc & Welld R., and A.& S.H. of C., 11, 12 Sep 44). Alq R. moved into Steenbrugge on 12 Sep and occupied Sysseele (W.D., Alq R., 12 Sep 44). These additions extended the brigade bridgehead to a radius of some four miles.

198. In the meantime, on the left, the armoured brigade moved forward from Isenberghe on 8 Sep, its progress impeded by the convergence of both divisional routes through Dixmude over the single bridge that had been completed (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 8 Sep 44). By the afternoon St. Andre, near Bruges, was reached. Again it was found that all the bridges over the Canal de Ghent were blown, although the only enemy resistance was in the neighbourhood of Bruges itself. Although civilian sources reported an enemy garrison of 2000, he seemed to be defending the canals about the city and was not in great strength in the city itself. Because of the great beauty and historical associations of Bruges, the people of Belgium requested the Canadians to spare the city from shelling and bombing.²¹ An attempt was

²¹ The enemy co-operated in the prevention of unnecessary damage to the city.

During the short occupation of BRUGES, General SANDERS [Commander 245 Inf Div] had a long talk with the Mayor of the city, who prevailed on the Divisional commander not to cause needless damage to historical monuments and buildings. As was seen after the departure of the Germans, except for the normal practice of bridge-blowing, the city was hardly touched.

therefore made, but without immediate success, to induce the garrison to withdraw.²² (Ibid)

199. It was apparent that the enemy was escaping north from the Ghent area and ferrying across the West Scheldt into Holland. In order to protect his escape routes he was holding outpost positions on the general line of the canals Zeebrugge - Bruges - Ghent - Terneuzen. His main position was believed to be on the line of the Leopold Canal from Zeebrugge to the Savajaards Plaats. 4 Cdn Armd Div was assigned the task of establishing a solid bridgehead across the Canal de Ghent to dominate Bruges from the east, with a view to forcing an enemy evacuation without causing damage to the city's fabric. The armoured brigade was to cross the canal through 10 Cdn Inf Bde's bridgehead and to concentrate in the area of Berg (9196), from where it would conduct mopping up operations to the west, north and east. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, September 1944: Appx 11, G.O.C. 4 Cdn Armd Div "O" Gp, 9 Sep 44). Lake Sup R. (Mot) was placed under command of 10 Cdn Inf Bde for the purpose of carrying out a diversionary attack on the south-western outskirts of Bruges (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 9 Sep 44). During 10 Sep 4 Cdn Armd Bde remained comparatively inactive, although enemy patrols from Bruges caused some trouble

(Special Interrogation Report, Gen-Major Sanders, Commander 245 Inf Div)

²² The Officer Commander Alq R., Lt-Col R.A. Bradburn, attempted to send an ultimatum into the city on 8 Sep, but enemy sentries prevented its delivery. The following day two enemy doctors, captured in a hospital near Bruges, were taken on a tour of the Canadian divisional area by Lt-Col Bradburn and then despatched to the city. The Commandant of the garrison heard all that they had to say, but in return communicated nothing. The two Medical Officers, having failed to negotiate the surrender of Bruges, were returned to their hospital.

(W.D., Alq R., 9 Sep 44)

when they penetrated as far as St. Andre and St. Michel (Ibid, 10 Sep 44). The following day the brigade crossed the canal and firmed up around Veldhoek (Ibid, 11 Sep 44).

2 CDN INF DIV INVESTS DUNKIRK

200. It is now time to return to the infantry divisions of 2 Cdn Corps. During the first week of September 3 Cdn Inf Div, as we have seen, was preparing to invest the enemy-held ports of Boulogne and Calais. The account of the reduction of these fortresses appears in a later report (No. 184, Part V of the present series), 2 Cdn Inf Div, which had been resting and refitting since 2 Sep in the area of Dieppe, now received orders to move forward, using the route Eu - Abbeville - Montreuil - Samer - Desvres - Andres, and to pass through 3 Cdn Inf Div to Dunkirk on the axis Ostende - Blankenberghe, with the purpose of clearing the coastal strip, between Dunkirk and the Dutch frontier. The division would then reorganize in the area of Ostende - Blankenberghe. (2 Cdn Corps Directive to Divisional Commanders, 4 Sep 44). In accordance with these instructions the division ended its stay in Dieppe on 6 Sep, and carried out an uneventful move through Montreuil to a concentration area in the region of the Forêt de Tournehem, ten miles north-west of St. Omer. Along the route the Canadian formations received what Divisional Headquarters described as "by far our most enthusiastic welcome" (W.D., G.S. H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Div, 6 Sep 44).

201. The unexpected strength in which the enemy was retaining his hold on Boulogne and Calais had brought about a change in Corps intentions during the

first week of September. For 5 Sep 3 Cdn Div had been assigned to continue the pursuit to Boulogne - Calais - Dunkirk (AEF/2 Cdn Corps/C/I, Folio IIIb: 2 Cdn Corps Intentions, 5 Sep 44); next day it was "3 Cdn Div to destroy enemy Boulogne - Calais area" (Ibid, 2 Cdn Corps Intentions, 6 Sep 44); for the 7th the pursuit through Dunkirk was assigned to 2 Cdn Inf Div (Ibid, 2 Cdn Inf Div were tentatively allotted at a divisional conference held in Dieppe on 5 Sep (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Div, 5 Sep 44). 5 Cdn Inf Bde was to proceed to a concentration area (in the Forêt d'Eperlecques) south-west of Dunkirk (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 5 Sep 44). 6 Cdn Inf Bde was assigned the capture of Gurnes (with Fus M.R.), La Panne (Cameron's of C.), and Nieuport (S. Sask R.) - three towns along the coast between Dunkirk and Ostende (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 5 Sep 44). For 4 Cdn Inf Bde no immediate operations were forecast; the brigade would move to the Forêt de Tournehem, where it would remain temporarily in reserve (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde, 5-7 Sep 44). Immediate action to reduce Dunkirk does not appear to have been decided upon at this time.

202. 5 Cdn Inf Bde led the advance of the division from Montreuil to its assembly area in the Forêt d'Eperlecques, seven miles to the south of Bourbourgville (see Map "D"). 8 Cdn Recce Regt reported enemy opposition at Bourbourgville and Gravelines, as well as the bridges being blown. The three battalions were debussed and directed to attempt to seize crossings and bridge sites on the road to Bourbourgville. R.H.C., in the lead, secured the first bridge site, and R. de Mais passed through to secure another near Bourbourgville (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 6 Sep 44). The battalion concentrated near St. Folquin on 7 Sep, and by midnight were north of the

Bourbourg Canal. The church in the town gave the enemy excellent observation, while all approaches could be covered from the market square; the road along which the Canadian troops advanced was commanded by two 88-mm in the town (W.D., R.H.C., 7 Sep 44). By the night of 8 Sep, however, the place was cleared, but not before the battalion had suffered a number of casualties, including three killed (W.D., R. de Mais, 7, 8 Sep 44; AEF/5 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, Docket II(b): Account of R. de Mais at Bourbourgville by Capt. Fafard). In the meantime Calg Highrs were directed north-east on Loon Plage (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 7 Sep 44). The battalion moved up behind R. de Mais in the belief that the French-Canadian regiment was in Bourbourgville. The information proved incorrect, and Calg Highrs was then ordered to attack the railway station which lay to the north of the town. Progress was slow and costly, and because of the flooded fields the column was forced to remain exposed on the open road, enduring some heavy shelling. Nevertheless, after further difficulties and delays which arose from faulty intelligence the Highlanders managed to establish themselves around the station, and prepared to move forward the following morning to Loon Plage (W.D., Calg Highrs, 6, 7 Sep 44). R.H.C. passed through R. de Mais, headed eastwards towards Bergues, but because the roads leading through Coppenaxfort was reported closed by the demolition of the bridge across the Bourbourg Canal, the battalion was directed by way of Looborghe towards Grande Mille-Brugghe, three miles west of Bergues (W.D., R.H.C., 7 Sep 44).

203. In accordance with its instructions of 5 Sep, 5 Cdn Inf Bde made the move from Dieppe on 6 Sep in two stages, halting at Bois Jean, south of Montreuil, and reaching Louches, three miles north-west of Tournehem, in

steady rain late that night (W.D., H.Q., 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 6 Sep 44). At 0300 hours orders came from Headquarters 2 Cdn Inf Div that the brigade was to take Dunkirk. As a preliminary operation Camerons of C. moved against Gravelines. Before nightfall, however, a change in divisional plans assigned the capture of Gravelines to 5 Cdn Inf Bde and restored to 6 Cdn Inf Bde its original objectives of Nieuport, Furnes and La Panne (Ibid, 7 Sep 44). Early on the morning of the 8th the brigade pushed on to the north-east, encountering no opposition except for some shelling when passing to the south of Bergues. Fus M.R. proceeded on foot direct to its objective, Furnes, S.Sask R. to Nieuport, and Camerons of C., travelling forward in T.C.Vs. to save time, by-passed S. Sask R. to occupy positions in the area west of Nieuport (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 7, 8 Sep 44).

204. Because of the low nature of the ground the enemy had been able to flood large areas of country around Dunkirk. As a result, troop movement was confined to the high-built roads and exploitation and patrolling were severely curtailed. Kept thus to high ground and roads, the Canadian forces suffered from shell fire, which he was able to bring down with more effect than ordinarily. By 8 Sep 5 Bde's task had been established as one of containing the Dunkirk garrison, estimated at some 9 to 10,000, by sealing off the routes in and out of the city from the west and south-west. The enemy had outpost positions in a wide perimeter which included Loon Plage, Mardick, Spycker and Bergues, with many section posts and gun positions scattered between these points. The reduction of these outposts became the Brigade's immediate concern. (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 8 Sep 44). Early on the 8th Calg Highrs pushed off from Bourbourgville in a series of company "bites" towards Loon

Plage. Passing through Les Planches, a collection of houses half way to Loon Plage, companies leap-frogged towards their objective, meeting stiffening opposition. There was heavy fighting on the outskirts of Loon Plage and it was apparent that the assault was going to be costly. A left flank attack by "D" Coy from the west managed to get within half a mile of the centre of the town, only to meet more violent enemy reaction. Before R. de Mais could arrive to assist the attackers, Calg Highrs had to withdraw its three forward companies, whose strength was only 30 each, as the men had been without food or water for nearly two days. Enemy infiltration caused some concern during the night 8/9 Sep, but the following morning the defenders withdrew, and Loon Plage was entered without difficulty (W.D., Calg Highrs, 8, 9 Sep 44). R.H.C., using "C" Coy and one troop "C" Sqn 8 Cdn Recce Regt, in order to take Coppenaxfort, had to advance up the road due to the flooding of the fields. All roads were about eight feet above the surrounding land and were under constant observation from the higher forts. For the next week Calg Highrs remained in contact with the enemy using Loon Plage as a base for extensive patrolling and a series of thrusts towards Mardick, three miles to the north-east. the position was finally taken on 17 Sep, and its capture marked the end of 5 Cdn Inf Bde's operations against the Dunkirk defences. (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 17 Sep 44)

205. The advance of R.H.C. to Grand Mille Brugghe was held up on 8 Sep by the continued presence of the enemy in Coppenaxfort - the point where the Bourbourg Canal bends north-east towards Dunkirk. While the bulk of the battalion remained concentrated in Looborghe, "C" Coy and a troop of 8 Cdn Recce Regt was detailed to overcome this point of resistance. The attackers,

moving towards Coppenaxfort from Bourbourgville had a peculiarly difficult problem. The only possible line of advance among the flooded farms and fields was the elevated road running south of the Bourbourg Canal and paralleling it. For 5000 metres both canal and road ran straight as an arrow, and only a few low trees afforded a very meagre form of protection from view. As the small force advanced well spaced under heavy fire, the leading armoured car was knocked out and the company was forced to ground some 500 yards short of its objective. Only when darkness fell was it possible to withdraw to a farm where slightly rising ground made deployment and digging in possible. At first light on the 9th the attack was resumed, and the company pushed forward to find the village vacated (W.D., R.H.C., 8 Sep 44; AEF/5 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, Docket IV: Account by Major Pinkham, "C" Coy R.H.C., of the Attack on Coopenaxfort). Next day R.H.C. moved up along the Canal de la Hte Colme into Grand Mille Brugghe, where it remained until 13 Sep, continually undergoing artillery and mortar fire while engaged in mopping up enemy resistance in the immediate vicinity (Ibid, 9-13 Sep 44). Spycker, a mile to the north-west, was occupied on the 12th in a two-company attack. The enemy immediately counter-attacked, and for two days Spycker and Grand Mille Brugghe came under continuous shelling and mortaring, the enemy having turned some of his coastal guns and brought them to bear on inland targets (Ibid). On the night 13/14 Sep R.H.C. was forced to evacuate Spycker, and the battalion fell back to Bourbourgville. Its withdrawal was covered by R. de Mais, who, since 11 Sep had been engaged in cleaning up the Soex - Hooge Weld - Steene area south-west of Bergues (Ibid; AEF/5 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, Docket IV: Account of a Two-Coy Attack on Spycker by "B" and "C" Coys R.H.C.; W.D., R. de Mais, 11, 12 Sep 44). There was little further activity on the brigade front until its

relief by 4 (Brit) S.S. Bde on 17 Sep (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 13-17 Sep 44).

206. As we have already seen, 6 Cdn Inf Bde had fared much better in reaching its objectives, Funres, Nieuport and La Panne (W.D., Fus M.R., 8 Sep 44) (see Map "E"). The Belgian White Brigade (the designation of the Belgian resistance movement) had cleared Nieuport of the enemy by 1600 hours on 8 Sep (W.D., S. Sask R., 8 Sep 44). The extent to which members of the Belgian underground forces assisted the liberating Canadian troops with specific information is well illustrated by the aid given to S. Sask R.:

At 0100 hrs, a representative from the White Bde showed up at BHQ and reported that the town had been cleaned by 1600 hrs 8 Sep 44 and warned Major G.B. Buchanan that some of the roads were mined. He then produced a detailed plan of the enemy's defences and mined areas. He stated the enemy strength was approx 400 on the west of the river and 200 to 300 on the east of the river, they belonged to an arty bty which had been stationed in that area for the past three and a half years and had been reinforced by odds and ends who had retreated from areas of Dieppe and along the Seine, consisting of all arms of Service. Enemy strongpoints were at 477943 and area 520965.

(ibid, 9 Sep 44)

207. The brigade plan for 9 Sep was to sweep the area from Nieuport to La Panne, a stretch some eight miles in length, the coastal sector of which

contained a number of strongly fortified enemy positions (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 9 Sep 44). Camerons of C., starting from Oost-Dunckerke Bains at 0300 hours 9 Sep, cleared the coastal road as far as La Panne Bains, and entered and consolidate din La Panne before noon (2 Cdn Inf Div Sitrep, GO-6, 9 Sep 44). Again Belgian civilians gave information about the location of mines, M.G. posts, and in some cases German coastal gun positions, that proved of considerable assistance (W.D., Camerons of C., 9 Sep 44). The following day the Camerons, attempting to advance westward from La Panne, met enemy resistance, but were able to occupy a section of German "West Wall" defences just inside the Belgian boundary. The shelter afforded by the deserted casemates was particularly welcome, as the enemy was now bringing fire to bear from a heavy coastal gun and from A.A. guns. Fus M.R., following the inland axis, moved forward on the 10th from Furnes to defensive positions at Adinkerke, south of La Panne, clearing the area from Oost-Dunckerke as they went. Here they were astride the main coastal road, which at this point swung inland from La Panne (2 Cdn Inf Div Sitrep GO-2, 10 Sep 44). The battalion's task was to assist in maintaining pressure on the enemy (W.D., Fus M.R., 10 Sep 44). For the next two days the two battalions, directed on the line Bray Dunes - Ghyvelde made but slow progress against the enemy's determined resistance.

208. Further to the north-east S. Sask R. had discovered that the enemy was established in some strength along the coast to the north and north-west of Nieuport. The battalion's task was to clear the area from the line Nieuport - Oost Dunckerks to the coast. It was a difficult sector in which to operate. The sand dunes and beaches were thick with mines and M.G. posts, and at a

point (477943) a mile west of Nieuport Bains the enemy was holding a fort in strength. Plans were made for S. Sask R. to attack this strongpoint. An attempt by "A" and "B" Coys early on the morning of 10 Sep failed. The enemy was found to be well dug in in reinforced pill boxes with connecting tunnels. During the day an ultimatum for surrender was sent to the garrison commander, who rejected it in a curt written reply in German - "There is no question of it", and in determined but broken English, "It is indigestible". A second attack commenced in the early evening, when "A" Coy assaulted and took its first objectives. Shortage of ammunition because of lengthened supply lines precluded the use of a preliminary artillery barrage. (W.D., S. Sask R., 10 Sep 44). A second phase commenced at 0400 hours 11 Sep with "B" Coy joining in from the right flank, but after two hours of effort against enemy rifle and M.G. fire, there had been little progress, and the companies were ordered to withdraw. For most of the attacking troops it was their first real contact with the enemy, and the failure of the attempt was largely due, it was felt, to the lack of determination and nerve resulting from the inexperience of the new junior officers and new men. In the morning it was decided to send the companies back into the positions gained during the night, in order to force the enemy to disclose his dispositions. The day was spent in intensive reconnaissance for possible approaches. Light anti-aircraft and anti-tank guns were brought forward to assist, but these were rendered ineffective by the very soft ground and the innumerable sand dunes. A raid by Typhoons at 1800 hours missed the main defensive point. (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Bde, 11 Sep 44; W.D., S. Sask R., 11 Sep 44)

209. A 2 Cdn Corps directive on 12 Sep categorically ordered 2 Cdn Inf Div to:

- a. Clear the enemy pocket remaining at NIEUPOINT BAINS H 4794;and
- b. Complete the investment of DUNKERQUE.

(AEF/First Cdn Army/C/E, Docket II:
Directive to Divisional Commanders,
12 Sep 44)

In the morning the Brigade Commander (Brigadier J.G. Gauvreau) visited S. Sask R. and pointed out that the troops should be able to approach much nearer their objectives. A third company ("C" Coy) was brought forward from Nieuport to increase the pressure on the enemy, and in the evening another demand for surrender was made. The ultimatum gave the defenders the news of Le Havre's surrender, and what probably struck closer home, proof of the capitulation to the Essex Scot of a strongpoint (520965) three miles up the coast at Westende (see para 216). The presentation of the pay book belonging to the enemy commander of this captured position seems to have been a deciding factor in negotiating the surrender of the fort. Concessions were granted relative to evacuation of wounded, protection of prisoners and the transportation of officers' baggage. The capitulation was completed on the morning of the 13th, and S. Sask R. moved forward during day to join the rest of 6 Cdn Inf Bde in the area east of Bray Dunes. (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 12 Sep 44; W.D., S. Sask R., 12, 13 Sep 44)

210. Efforts by these other two battalions to advance on 11 Sep had met with little success. Even night patrols had been pinned down by mortaring and M.G. fire, brought to bear with the aid of illuminating flares. With the Nieuport area now clear, the G.O.C. 2 Cdn Inf Div instructed the Brigade Commander to have Camerons of C. press on to clear Bray Dunes, and work along the road to Bray Dunes Plage. (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 12 Sep 44). The battalion planned a right flanking attack with two companies through the sand dunes by way of the coast, while a third was to infiltrate and pave the way for the remaining company to fight its way through the town (W.D., Camerons of C., 12 Sep 44). This attempt, which was launched early on 13 Sep, failed to penetrate the enemy opposition, nor did a second attack, initiated later in the day as a three-company assault through Fus M.R.'s. position, 500 yards east of Ghyvelde, meet with much better success. The enemy still held the main coast road east of Bray Dunes, although "D" Coy Camerons of C. had captured a road block there (346873) and while holding it claimed to have killed 150 of the enemy (Ibid, 13 Sep 44; and Appx 6, Battle of Bray Dune, "D" Coy, Camerons of C.). Again Camerons of C. was ordered to complete the clearing of the village by first light, 14 Sep, and to push on to the high ground to the north and to Bray Dunes Plage. A night operation, however, was once again unsuccessful, and by the evening of 14 Sep the village was still untaken. Typhoon attacks helped to lower enemy morale during the day, although there is evidence that coordination with ground troops was in need of improvement.

During the day some air targets were asked for. Two attacks were made by typhoons - one on the Camerons of C area and one on the Fus MR sector. Morale effect on the enemy is great according to PW. Time

difficulties are reported by COs. Fwd coys would like a pre-arranged sig to fire and when the last bomb or the last 'dive' take place. Inf is not anxious to 'follow up' an air attack as it is impossible to ascertain when the air attack is over.

(W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 14 Sep 44)

211. S. Sask R., who by the evening of 13 Sep had arrived from the Nieuport area, was ordered to take the high ground and church immediately to the north-east of Bray Dunes. The battalion put in a silent night attack, and by 0500 hours 15 Sep the objective was consolidated. Camerons of C. then took over and entered Bray Dunes, while S. Sask R. pushed on to the coast to clear Bray Dunes Plage, a task they accomplished by 1200 hours. (W.D., Camerons of C., 14, 15 Sep 44; W.D., S. Sask R., 13-15 Sep 44). Ghyvelde, which had survived an attack by Fus M.R. on 13 Sep - when lack of information and insufficient fire support were blamed for the failure - was successfully reduced by the same battalion, which this time had the advantage of 48 hours' reconnaissance as well as carefully planned and adequate artillery support. The French-Canadian battalion suffered only a dozen casualties, but took 119 prisoners. (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 14, 15 Sep 44)

212. The capture of Ghyvelde, Bray Dunes and Bray Dunes Plage marked the western limit of 6 Cdn Inf Bde's attempt to reach Dunkirk and brought to an end the brigade's operations in that area. On the morning of 15 Sep the Divisional Commander announced that 2 Cdn Inf Div was to relieve 53 (W.) Inf Div in Antwerp (Ibid, 15 Sep 44). For the next two days units remained fairly

inactive in their positions, their patrols reporting that the enemy had strengthened his F.D.Ls. along the entire front. It was evident that he intended to hold a strong perimeter about Dunkirk (Ibid, 17 Sep 44). Before the hand-over to the relieving force - 4 Special Service Brigade - on 18 Sep²³, Brigadier Gauvreau conducted a study of the operations in which the battalions had recently been engaged. The lessons brought out may well give an indication of the causes of the brigade's failure to have achieved its objectives as rapidly as had been expected.

... The three COs were the lecturers. Major G.B. Buchanan S Sask R, on the night attack, Lt-Col R. Thompson, Camerons of C, on village clearing, Major J.P. Sauve, Fus MR, on Day set piece attack. Lt-Col S.H. Dobell brought out some good points on the employment of arty and air sp. The gen lessons brought by the lecturers can be summarised as follows:

- a. The necessity for good and accurate infm;
- b. Every plan must be simple and must be supported by the maximum fire;
- c. Aggressiveness and determination are essential for the success of any op;

²³ The account of this relief and subsequent operations involved in the containing of Dunkirk is given in [Report No. 184](#), Section "D".

- d. The need to carry food and water on each man when tps are involved in infiltration work; and
- e. The importance of good intercomm, spare 18 set batteries should be carried in coy HQ.

(Ibid, 16 Sep 44)

213. Until 9 Sep 4 Cdn Inf Bde took little part in the activities of the Division. On the evening of the 8th orders were given for the brigade to move to the Ostende area (see Map "F"). With Essex Scot in the lead, the brigade passed through St. Omer, by-passed Bergues, and proceeded through Furnes to Ghistelles, four miles inland from Ostende. (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde, 9 Sep 44). Essex Scot moved on and occupied Ostende without incident, "after considerable assistance from the Belgian Maquis, who seemed even more co-operative than the French". The unexpected German withdrawal was a matter of much gratification, for an examination of the elaborate defences of the city and the surrounding area showed how formidable a task would have been presented by a determined enemy resistance. (W.D., Essex Scot, 9, 10 Sep 44). R.H.L.I. moved into the northern part of the port, clearing the submarine pens and dock area, secured the canal crossings and the sea plane base, and pushed on eastwards to Clemskerke and De Haan (W.D., R.H.L.I., 9 Sep 44). R. Regt C. meanwhile, pushing out from Ghistelles, made contact with elements of 4 Cdn Armd Div and engaged in the Bruges area. The regiment was then ordered to occupy the villages and towns in the coastal area as far as the Bruges Canal - Nieumunster, Wenduynne, Blankenberghe and Uytkerke. By the night of 9/10 Sep

patrols had completed these tasks without difficulty, receiving on all sides an enthusiastic welcome from the civilian population. (W.D., R. Regt C., 9 Sep 44)

214. On 10 Sep reconnaissance elements of R. Regt C. found that while the west bank of the Zeebrugge - Bruges Canal was free of enemy, he was in some strength on the eastern side. The battalion therefore remained west of the canal, containing the enemy and preventing the withdrawal of his units from Bruges along the roads in that sector (W.D., R. Regt. C., 10 Sep 44). Early on 11 Sep, however, the regiment was ordered to proceed to Bruges to assist 4 Cdn Armd Div in reducing that ancient city. Following the route through Stalhille, the Royals concentrated at St. Andre and took up positions for the assault astride the main road to the west. 4 Cdn Armd Div planned to cut the escape routes to the east and north-east (Ibid, 11 Sep 44).

215. In the meantime R.H.L.I. having occupied and cleared a large area to the east of Ostende (W.D., R.H.L.I., 10 Sep 44) moved, on 11 Sep, by way of Oudebrugge, Westkerke and Jabbeke to positions south of Bruges, to assist in the forthcoming attack. But to the immense satisfaction of both the assaulting troops and the civilian population a set-piece attack proved to be unnecessary. Early in the morning of 12 Sep it was found that the enemy had withdrawn, sparing the old city - though not its bridges - and elements of 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt (12th Manitoba Dragoons), closely followed by elements of 4 Cdn Inf Bde, entered unopposed, to be received with no uncertain fervour by the wildly rejoicing population. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Div,

September 1944: Appx 30, Ops Log, Serial 7899, 12 Sep 44; and W.D., 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt, 12 Sep 44)

216. For the third battalion of 4 Cdn Inf Bde, the Essex Scot, there had been a sterner task to face. On 10 Sep the regiment, with part of Tor Scot R. (M.G.) under command, was ordered to proceed from Ostende to Westende to take the strongpoint (520965) in the sand dunes between Westende Bains and Lombartzyde. Many civilians who had worked on the position gave detailed information about its defences. The first two days saw a continuous exchange of fire. The Germans had four old French naval guns and a number of dual purpose anti-aircraft and anti-tank guns, to which the Essex Scot replied on better than even terms with their mortars, anti-tank guns and supporting artillery, which included 17-prs and Bofors. The position itself was very strong and it commanded all the surrounding country. What had at first appeared to be sand dunes were concrete dugouts and emplacements covered with sand. By the morning of 11 Sep as the siege went on the whole battalion was on three sides of the objective with the sea on the fourth. The enemy was firing his big guns at point blank range, but with little success. (W.D., Essex Scot, September 1944: Letter Lt-Col P.W. Bennett to Col Prince, 13 Sep 44)

217. On the 12th the Canadian fire increased in intensity, with a corresponding decline on the part of the defenders. At 1245 hours white flags appeared and the commander of the garrison asked for terms. Thus the Essex Scot were spared an infantry assault against the stronghold which, had to met

with resistance from a determined garrison, must have cost them dear. The prize was cheaply won as the Commanding Officer of the Essex Scot points out:

Before the commander came out the place began to swarm with Germans who flocked out of the main entrance. By now the local population was gathering in numbers. The commander came out and I accepted his unconditional surrender. While one company was dealing with the prisoners the others moved into the positions to search the area. Everything was of course underground and the battalion disappeared into the catacombs. The booty was absolutely terrific. From what I saw of the ammunition stock and food he could have held out for weeks. The quarters all underground were the most luxurious and filled with civilian furnishings of all kinds most of it taken from the villagers. As yet I haven't a complete count of the weapons but the prisoners totalled 316 including 9 officers and 16 wounded... Our total casualties for the whole show were two killed and three slightly wounded.

(Ibid)

218. The outer defences of Dunkirk now centred upon the town of Bergues, five miles south-east of the port. In accordance with the plan to maintain pressure upon the Dunkirk garrison until heavier artillery and assault equipment should be released from operations at the other Channel ports,²⁴

²⁴ The 2 Cdn Corps Operational Directive of 12 Sep instructed 2 Cdn Inf Div to

Plan to take DUNKERQUE by assault with support by heavy bombers immediately the capture of BOULOGNE has been completed. This plan will be without prejudice to capture of DUNKERQUE by infiltration as

4 Cdn Inf Bde was ordered to this strongly held town. On the morning of 13 Sep the brigade - less Essex Scot - were relieved in Bruges by 4 Cdn Armd Div and returned into France to the locality of Bergues. The ground to the south-east of the town had been flooded by the enemy, who were found to be holding the north bank of the Canal de la Colme, and the Bergues - Furnes Canal, both of which ran through Bergues. The brigade plan was for R. Regt, C. to establish a bridgehead over the Canal east of Bergues, with R.H.L.I. attacking the town from close in. (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde, 13 Sep 44). From positions west of Warhem two companies of R. Regt C. prepared to cross the Bergues - Furnes Canal and work in behind the town in readiness for a night attack (W.D., R. Regt C., 14 Sep 44)

219. Although the Royals made a successful crossing during the night, and gathered some 25 prisoners, the attack of R.H.L.I. - scheduled to begin at 0430 hours 15 Sep - begged down from delays in clearing the extensive minefields. At the same time the enemy fired a large patrol dump, the light of which prevented the companies from achieving their starting positions (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde, 15 Sep 44; W.D., R.H.L.I., 15 Sep 44). Attempts to bridge the canal on the 15th failed, and R. Regt C. met with increasing resistance. As a result Essex Scot, who had been brought forward from reserve for the assault, were not committed. During the morning orders were received to the effect that 4 Cdn Inf Bde would move the following day to the Antwerp area, and the attack on Bergues was called off (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde,

opportunity affords.

(AEF/First Cdn Army/C/E, Docket II,
Directive to Divisional Commanders,
12 Sep 44)

15 Sep 44). But the brigade attack had not been in vain. On the following day, 16 Sep, 8 Cdn Recce Regt (14 C.H.) entered Bergues at 1100 hours, the enemy having withdrawn (W.D., 8 Cdn Recce Regt, 16 Sep 44). On 16 Sep 4 Cdn Inf Bde moved to Antwerp - the first formation of 2 Cdn Inf Div to take part in the relief of 53 (W.) Inf Div - and assumed responsibilities from 71 Brit Inf Bde in the lock area (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde, 16 Sep 44).

ALLIED PLANS FOR FUTURE OPERATIONS

220. It is now time to return to the larger picture of Allied operations and to note the extent to which the successful realization of strategical planning depended upon the opening of the Channel ports and the clearing of the Scheldt estuary by First Cdn Army. Such was the all-important influence that the problem of maintenance was now exerting on the advance of the Allied Armies towards Germany. On 1 Sep the Supreme Commander, General Eisenhower, had decided that the size of the operating forces and the extent of the front on which they were engaged made it necessary for him to open his Operational Headquarters on the Continent and take over direct control of the land battle. Field Marshal Montgomery continued to command 21 Army Group, while General Bradley's command, consisting of the U.S. First, Third and Ninth Armies, became known as 12 Army Group. On 15 Sep General Eisenhower assumed command of the Franco-American forces which had advanced from the Mediterranean - the French First Army and the U.S. Seventh Army - designated 6 Army Group, commanded by Lt-Gen Jacob L. Devers. (Report by the Supreme Commander, p. 76). German resistance in western Europe was on the verge of

collapse, and, in Field Marshal Montgomery's opinion, could only offer weak resistance providing no respite was given.

My own view, which I presented to the Supreme Commander, was that one powerful full-blooded thrust across the Rhine and into the heart of Germany backed by the whole of the resources of the Allied Armies, would be likely to achieve decisive results. Success in such a plan would have been, to my mind, dependent upon our ability to concentrate sufficient strength, supported by adequate administrative resources, to ensure that maintenance of the momentum from the time we crossed the Seine. The project therefore involved calling upon combined Allied resources in the widest sense, and therefore entailed reverting sectors of the Allied front to a purely static role.

(Field Marshal The viscount Montgomery of Alamein, Normandy to the Baltic, p. 149)

221. Two lines of approach for a thrust into Germany were apparent, the northern axis through Belgium to the Rhine, crossing the river north of the Ruhr, and thence to the open plains of northern Germany; the other lay through Metz and the Saar area into central Germany.

I favoured the northern route since it would enable us to exploit our greatly superior mobility and strength of armoured forces in the plains of northern Germany, with greater success than would be possible in the more difficult southern country.

(Ibid)

222. The major problem confronting the Allies after crossing the Seine was to get over the Rhine. If the enemy could organize a cohesive front, then it was likely a heavy battle would ensue west of the Rhine which could well last until the spring of 1945, and involve the Allied Armies in an opposed river crossing operation of the first magnitude. It was therefore necessary to maintain the strength and impetus of the operations beyond the Seine sufficiently to keep the enemy on the run straight through to the Rhine. A thrust then over the river north of the Ruhr would isolate the important industrial region and set the stage for operations in the open plains of northern Germany.

Providing, therefore, the essential prerequisites of speed and concentration of maintenance resources could be effected, I favoured a drive into Belgium with the clearance of the Channel coast as far as Antwerp and the establishment of our air forces in Belgium, and a speedy and all-out drive along the northern axis into Germany.

(Ibid, p. 150)

223. The alternative or "broad front" plan open to the Allies was that of advancing simultaneously with all their armies to the line of the River Rhine, and then developing operations for the capture of both the Ruhr and the Frankfurt areas. Operations into Germany could subsequently be staged either on the northern axis, or through the Saar and Frankfurt, or along both routes.

The C.-in-C. 21 Army Group gave his reasons for preferring the "single thrust" policy.

The main point of difference in the two plans was that the broad front policy avoided the risks of developing long range operations on a relatively narrow front; it was the opposite of 'sticking our neck out' in a single deep thrust into enemy territory. On the other hand it clearly involved a slower and more deliberate campaign, because the Allied Armies would have to develop offensive operations on a very wide frontage; our available administrative resources would be spread accordingly, and in my opinion would not stand up to the strain.

Apart from the administrative difficulties, my objection to the broad front policy was that nowhere should we be strong enough to get decisive results quickly; the Germans would thus have time to recover and we should become involved in a long winter campaign.

The crux of the problem appeared to be whether the Allies could concentrate sufficient strength in the broadest sense to ensure the success of a single deep thrust; if such concentration could not be effected, then the broad front plan was the available alternative.

(Ibid, p. 151)

224. The Supreme Commander decided that the broad front policy would prevail and that the Allied Armies would line up along the R. Rhine, establishing

bridgeheads wherever feasible. Operations would not be developed further east until the port of Antwerp was opened and functioning. He believed that it was not immediately possible to concentrate sufficient administrative resources to put forces across the Rhine deep into Germany, as the lines of communication still stretched to the Normandy beaches and Cherbourg peninsula, and autumn weather was close. An early opening of the deep water ports and the improvement of maintenance facilities were therefore a prime requisite to any final all-out assault on Germany. The long line of armies from the North Sea to Switzerland would be completed on the right by a link-up with 6 U.S. Army Group advancing from the south. (Ibid, p. 152)

225. The divergence of the Supreme Commander's views in this matter from those of Field Marshal Montgomery was later pointed out by the latter's Chief of Staff:

In general, Eisenhower was agreed that the major effort should be North of the Ruhr, but he did not believe that the strength of the forces which we could maintain without the use of Antwerp would be sufficient to finish the war - especially in view of the nearness of winter. He also could not agree to relegating a portion of the American Armies to a purely static role - virtually without the means to manoeuvre. He, therefore, agreed to Patton's Army advancing towards Verdun. Montgomery felt that it should be halted protecting Paris from the east.

(Major-General Sir Francis de Guingand,
K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O., Operation Victory,
p. 411)

226. General de Guingand sets out other factors which the Supreme Commander had to consider as militating against the single thrust policy, in spite of the promise of success held out by such a thrust of some twelve divisions. Almost certainly the Germans would leave no bridges intact over the Rhine, and to bring forward the necessary bridging material at that stage of operations would have been a lengthy process. The enemy was not likely to capitulate, and there was the danger that he might sufficiently recover, and to such an extent, as to threaten the flank of the long and particularly vulnerable salient. There was also for consideration the fact that American operations in the Verdun - Metz sector would draw off enemy forces that might otherwise be employed elsewhere against the Allied Armies. Finally, the failure to employ all the armies under the Supreme Commander's control would have a considerable adverse effect on the morale of "grounded" troops and commanders, while national opinion and national pride were matters could not be ignored, particularly should the thrust fail. (Ibid, pp 412, 413)

27. The task assigned to 21 Army Group by the Supreme Commander in the development of the broad front "was to secure the port of Antwerp, to reach the sector of the Siegfried Line covering the Ruhr, and then seize the Ruhr" (Normandy to the Baltic, p. 152). Field Marshal Montgomery's command would include that portion of 12 Army Group operating north of the Ardennes (U.S. First Army), and the First Allied Airborne Army was allocated in support of 21

Army Group's operations until after the Rhine had been crossed.²⁵

Concurrently 21 Army Group was ordered to occupy the Siegfried Line, covering the Saar and to seize Frankfurt. (Ibid)

228. Field Marshal Montgomery points out that in spite of maintenance problems the rapid advance of 21 Army Group from the Seine was carried out with the object of giving the disorganized enemy no respite.

I have mentioned the great importance I placed on establishing quickly bridgeheads over the Meuse and Rhine; I was deeply impressed with the magnitude of the military problem of fighting an opposed crossing over these great water barriers, and wanted to avoid it at all costs.

Although the broad front policy restricted our present aims to reaching the Rhine, I continued to plan the concentration of such resources as I had into a drive that would hustle the enemy straight through to that river; in order to jump it quickly before the Germans could seriously oppose us. The degree of difficulty which this project involved was directly dependent on the vital factor of speed; for this reason I considered it worth while to employ all our resources for its accomplishment, at the expense of any other undertaking.

The Supreme Commander agreed with this conception of the development of my operations, and I therefore gave first priority to the seizure of a

²⁵ All British and American Airborne Forces were placed under the single command of Lieut-Gen Lewis H. Brereton, U.S. Army, on 8 Aug 44, to form the First Allied Airborne Army. The first use of these formations under the new command came on 17 Sep in the operations at Nijmegen and Arnhem. (Report by the Supreme Commander, p. 77)

bridgehead over the Rhine. North of the Seine, the operations of 21 Army Group were managed with this object in view, and the chief problem became the accumulation of adequate strength to ensure success.

(Ibid, p. 153)

2 CDN CORPS TASKS, 12 SEP

229. While 2 Cdn Corps had been completing its drive up the Channel Coast to the Zeebrugge - Bruges - Ghent line, Second Army had continued its advance from the Brussels area against stiffening enemy resistance. Across its path lay the obstacles of the Albert Canal and the Meuse - Escaut Canal, somewhere behind which stood the remnants of three German infantry divisions (176, 719 and 347) bolstered by battle groups formed from parachute formations and what was left of 1 S.S. Pz Div. (Ibid, p. 164). 30 Corps was directed upon Eindhoven, and the Tournhout - Tilburg area. On 8 Sep Gds Armd Div crossed the Albert Canal at Beeringen, and advanced to the line of the Escaut Canal, over which they established a bridgehead, at De Groot on 10 Sep. On their left 50 (N.) Inf Div forced a crossing of the Albert Canal south-west of Gheel on 8 Sep, and five days later 15 (S.) Div, of 12 Corps, having relieved the Northumbrian Division (50 div), gained a footing across the Escaut Canal near the Gheel - Rethy crossing (Ibid, p. 165). These gains precluded a brief period of reorganization for Second Army in preparation for its forthcoming role in 21 Army Group's attempt to cross the Rhine.

230. The regrouping of Second Army led to a shifting of the area of responsibility of First Cdn Army to the right. On 9 Sep General Crerar indicated these changes in a directive to his corps commanders:

In view of the necessity to give first priority to the capture of the Channel ports, ... the capture, or destruction, of the enemy remaining NORTH and EAST of the GHENT - BRUGES Canal becomes secondary in importance. While constant pressure and close contact with the enemy, now withdrawing NORTH of R SCHELDE, will be maintained, important forces will not be committed to offensive action.

During 10 Sep, 2 Cdn Corps will take over from 12 Brit Corps responsibility for GHENT. At a later date and time, suitable to 12 Brit Corps and 2 Cdn Corps, but as soon as possible, inter-Army boundary will be adjusted to give incl First Cdn Army left bank R SCHELDE from incl GHENT to Dutch boundary at MR D5512 - thence due NORTH. Times and details as to above boundary adjustments will be arranged between Corps Comds, and reported to HQ Armies.

(AEF/First Cdn Army/C/E, Docket II,
G.O.C.-in-C. Directive, 9 Sep 44)

231. In accordance with these instructions General Simonds, on 12 Sep, defined the tasks of 2 Cdn Corps, which were, in order of priority, to:

- a. Capture the ports of BOULOGNE, CALAIS, DUNKERQUE; and

- b. Clear the area of BELGIUM and HOLLAND bounded on the WEST and SOUTH by the ZEEBRUGGE G8414 - BRUGES H8500 - GHENT J1880 canal and the R SCHELDE and on the NORTH by the WEST SCHEDLE.

(Ibid, G.O.C. 2 Cdn Corps
Directive to Divisional
Commanders, 12 Sep 44)

General Simonds then set forth the method by which his armoured formations were to carry out their part of the Corps assignments:

1 Polish Armd Div will clear the area incl TERNEUZEN D2812 - thence canal to incl GHENT - thence LEFT bank of R SCHELDE to pt D5513, making its main thrust on the axis GENT - ST NICOLAS J4892 - HULST D4304 - TERNEUZEN.

4 Cdn Armd Div with under command one squadron 18 Cdn Armd C Regt will clear the area bounded on the WEST and SOUTH by the ZEEBRUGGE - BRUGES canal and on the EAST by excl the GHENT - TERNEUZEN canal, making its main thrust on the axis MOERBRUGGE H8894 - MALDEGEN J0198 - BRESKENS D0918.

18 Cdn Armd C Regt less one squadron will conform to the advance of and fill the gap between the LEFT flank of 4 Cdn Armd Div and the sea.

(Ibid)

OPERATIONS OF 1 POL ARMD DIV EAST OF THE TERNEUZEN CANAL,

11-22 SEP

232. The adjustment of the inter-army boundary with Second Army was made to give exclusive to First Cdn Army the left bank of the Scheldt from inclusive Ghent to the Dutch boundary at D5512 (the point of entry of the Scheldt into the West Scheldt estuary), and thence due north. Arrangements were made for 1 Pol Armd Div to take over from 12 Corps the responsibility of clearing the area between the Scheldt and the Terneuzen Canal previously assigned to 7 Armd Div. General Simonds thereupon advised Lt-Gen N.M. Ritchie, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O, M.C., G.O.C. 12 Corps:

I have therefore ordered the Pol Armd Div to move their infantry brigade to GHENT today to relieve the infantry of 12 Corps at present there, and subsequently to re-assemble the whole of the Pol Armd Div in the N.E. of Ghent.

In accordance with the new boundary laid down, I have given to the Pol Armd Div the task of clearing the area incl TERNEUZEN - GHENT - thence left bank of R. SCHELDE to its mouth.

(Ibid, Letter G.O.C. 2 Cdn Corps
to G.O.C. 12 Corps, 11 Sep 44)

233. 1 Pol Armd Div had attempted to force the Canal de Ghent north of Aeltre, on the night of 10 Sep, but the steep banks, the depth of water, the lack of assault boats and unfavourable conditions for artillery observations, had made the task extremely difficult. On receipt of the new orders to take over Ghent and clean up the area to the sea, attempts to cross the canal were abandoned. On 11 Sep 1 Bn Mountain Rifles of 3 Rifle Bde sealed the west and north-west exits of Ghent and occupied the railway station of St. Pierre, while 8 and 9 Inf Bns moved into the northern part of the city. During the night the enemy shelled Ghent with long range 21-cm railway guns without, however, doing serious damage or causing any casualties. The following day mopping up of the northern suburbs continued against enemy pill boxes and strongpoints. In spite of enemy counter-attacks, that gained some initial success, the Poles reached the line of the R. Lieve, three miles north of Ghent, and 10 Armd Cavalry Bde occupied the Lokeren - Sinay - St. Nicolas area. (AEF/1 Pol Armd Div/C/F, Docket II: p. 28, 11, 12 Sep 44)

234. For the next four days, while 3 Rifle Bde gradually increased its holding north of Ghent, the Cavalry Brigade continued to overrun the eastern sector of 1 Pol Armd Div's area of responsibility. Attacking in the direction of Hulst the brigade captured Stekene and St. Gillies-Waes on the 14th. On the 15th a combined group was established in Ghent for its defence, while the remainder of the Rifle Brigade, reinforced by armour and divisional artillery, was moved to the area of St. Paul (north-west of St-Nicolas) to reconnoitre crossings over the Hulst Canal, preparatory to an attack towards Terneuzen. Plans were made to develop operations westward between the Dutch border and the Moervaart Canal, past Moerbeke, because of expected inundations further

south. The newly formed battle group crossed the Dutch frontier at 0700 hours on 16 Sep in the area of Zuiddorpe. Before nightfall one unit had crossed the Hulst Canal between Zxel and Hulst, only to be forced back next day, when attempts to put in a bridge failed. (Ibid, p. 29, 13-17 Sep 44). Although the enemy was showing more inclination to make a stand, he was giving up large numbers of prisoners. During the ten-day period commencing 12 Sep, 1 Pol Armd Div reported the capture of over 1200 officers and other ranks, then majority of them from the luckless 712 Inf Div. (Ibid, 12-22 Sep 44)

235. A further attempt to force the canal east of Axel was made by 3 Rifle Bde on the evening of 18 Sep, this time successfully, and abridge was completed the following day. By mid-afternoon on the 19th, 9 Rifle Bn occupied Axel and 8 Rifle Bn was advancing north towards Zaamslag. Tank patrols striking west encountered enemy still holding the Spui - Kreek canal. On 20 Sep General Maczek ordered operations to be launched that would clear the whole area to the Scheldt Estuary. Groenendijk and Reuzenhoek were occupied, and by evening Terneuzen had been taken and with it 180 prisoners - mostly of 712 Inf Div. During the mopping up operations which followed on 21 Sep, 10 Mtn Rif carried out an extremely daring action, when they used captured craft to seize an enemy invasion barge laying in the estuary. With the loss of Terneuzen the enemy was now confined to the Breskens "island", bounded by the Savojaards Plaat, the Leopold Canal and the sea. The period from 22 Sep until 27 Sep, when it moved east to join 1 Brit Corps, 1 Pol Armd Div spent in harbour and in patrol activities in the area Lokeren - St. Nicolas - Tamise - Axel - Terneuzen (AEF/1 Pol Armd Div/C/F, Docket II: Report on Fighting, 16-22 Sep 44).

236. Although the phase of operations just completed by 1 Pol Armd Div had been designated as "mopping up", the period from 10 to 22 Sep had cost the division relatively heavy casualties. This was due in large measure to the very difficult conditions of the ground after which fighting had taken place. The defending enemy had been at all times favoured by the numerous canals, the inundated areas, the large number of wooded dykes and the narrow roads on which vehicle turning was practically impossible. Administrative difficulties had been increased by the partitioning of the division (for the mopping up operations in Ghent and the forcing of the Hulst Canal) and this splitting of forces had meant a dissipation of artillery support. Losses for the period were 75 killed, 191 wounded and 63 missing - figures which brought to 567 the total number of casualties suffered by the division since its entry into operations north of the Seine on 30 Aug. (Ibid, pp 26, 31)

FIRST CDN ARMY'S RESPONSIBILITY - TO OPEN
ANTWERP TO SHIPPING

237. Up to 12 Sep of the two main tasks assigned to First Cdn Army priority was gen, as we have seen (para 229), to the capture of the Channel ports, with the clearing of the area south of the West Scheldt being regarded as of secondary importance. The position, however, was suddenly reversed, and from the 13th the prime attention of the Canadian Army was directed towards operations that would free the Scheldt estuary and bring into use the port of antwerp. The change of intention coincided with the decision to launch 21 Army Group's projected thrust over the Rhine north of the Ruhr - a decision made possible by S.H.A.E.F.'s increased allocation of maintenance facilities

to Field Marshal Montgomery's Northern Group of Armies. On 7 Sep, and again on the 9th, the O.-in-C. 21 Army Group had reported to the Supreme Commander that at the current rate of administrative build-up north of the Seine, Second Brit Army would have to wait until 23 Sep or later before sufficient resources had been accumulated forward to permit a further advance. After a discussion between Field marshal Montgomery and General Bedell smith on 12 Sep, S.H.A.E.F. agreed to provide 12 Army Group with an increased daily air lift (which later averaged 400 to 500 tons), and special American fast road convoys which would bring 500 tons per day to the roadhead at Brussels. At the same time First U.S. Army was to receive top priority in maintenance in 12 Army Group. With this assistance the date for the drive tot he Rhine crossings was set for 17 Sep. (Normandy to the Baltic, p.166)

238. The plans for Operations "MARKET" - as the proposed thrust was named - involved Second Army's establishing crossings over five major obstacles; the Neder Rijn at Arnhem, the Waal at Nijmegen, the Maas at Grave, and two canals - the Wilhelmina and the Zuid Willemsvaart - which transversed the Army's front between its Escaut Canal bridgeheads and Grave.

The essential feature of the plan was the laying of a carpet of airborne troops across these waterways on the general axis of the main road through Eindhoven to Uden, Grave, Mijmegan and Arnhem, culminating in a bridgehead force north of Arnhem. The airborne carpet and bridgehead force were to be provided by the Allied Airborne Corps consisting of two American and one British airborne divisions and the Polish Parachute Brigade. Along the corridor established by the airborne carpet,

30 Corps was to advance to the Arnhem bridgehead whence it would develop operations to establish a northern flank on the Zuider Zee and an eastern flank on the River Ijssel with bridgeheads beyond it. As 30 Corps advanced north, 8 Corps was to relieve it of responsibility for the right flank of the corridor, and was to widen it to the east; on the left flank, 12 Corps had a similar task with responsibility for widening the corridor to the west.

(Ibid, pp 171-2)

239. On 13 Sep the C.-in-C. wrote to General Crerar apprising him of the decision to launch Operation "MARKET" and the implications that such a development held for the future operations of First Cdn Army. Congratulating the G.O.C. on the capture of Le Havre - which had fallen to 1 Brit Corps on 12 Sep (see [Report No. 184](#)) - the Field Marshal spoke of the urgency of opening Antwerp to shipping.

a. The things that are now very important are:

(1) Capture of BOULOGNE and DUNKIRK and CALAIS; and

(2) The setting in motion of operations designed to enable us to use the port of ANTWERP.

b. Of these two things, (2) is probably the most important. We have captured a port which resembles LIVERPOOL in size, but we cannot use

it; if we could use it, all our maintenance troubles would disappear. I am very anxious that (1) and (2) should both go on simultaneously if you can possibly arrange it, as time is of the utmost importance. I wonder whether you could possibly use one Corps HQ to control the operations from BOULOGNE to DUNKIRK, and the other corps HQ to control the operations for the opening of Antwerp. Perhaps you would let me know what you think about this.

- c. For the operations concerned with ANTWERP, you will need a great deal of air support. I have ordered that bombing to destroy the forts on WALCHEREN Island is to begin at once. On the day concerned we can lay on for you the whole weight of the heavy bomber effort from ENGLAND, both Bomber Command and Eighth Air Force. I would like you to take over the city of ANTWERP itself from Dempsey as soon as possible; you will want that place and certain ground east of it, so that you can develop operations to push the enemy northwards from the city. You may also possible want to develop operations westwards along the neck of the peninsula towards WALCHEREN.²⁶

(G.O.C.-in-C./1-0, Letter,
Montgomery to Crerar, 13 Sep 44)

²⁶ To make Antwerp accessible to Allied navigation meant that the island of Walcheren must first be captured and both banks of the West Scheldt cleared of enemy. Before the task could be successfully undertaken the enemy must be removed from the mainland north-east of Bruges. (G.O.C.-in-C./1-0, M.195 Personal for Army Commander from C.-in-C., 12 Sep 44)

240. General Crerar replied on 13 Sep to these instructions and to a request from the C.-in-C. 21 Army Group for his views on the clearing of the Antwerp approaches (G.O.C.-in-C. put forth a new proposal for taking over the Antwerp area from Second Army.

The situation as regards 1 Brit Corps is that it will take at least ten days to move it to the vicinity of ANTWERP and this would only be possible if extra transport was allotted from Army Group resources and I was given a minimum of one clear route through BRUSSELS. Apart from the question of transport and routes, this delay in getting down to the business would be serious.

I therefore come to the tentative conclusion that, to meet the problem you have set, either 12 Brit Corps should come under my temporary command, or, alternatively, that HQ 1 Brit Corps (less an Adm HQ to look after 49 and 51 (H.) Divs, Corps Troops, etc - for time being held in LE HAVRE - DIEPPE area) should take over 53 Div from 12 Corps, with ANTWERP. The development of operations along the axis BREDA - TILBURG, would then become a Cdn Army responsibility, and the inter-Army boundaries would need to be adjusted accordingly.

(Ibid, Letter, Crerar to
Montgomery, 13 Sep 44)

241. It was not possible to follow this suggestion of General Crerar's. At 1810 hours that same day the C.-in-C. advised the Army Commander that as 12 Corps and 53 Inf Div were both involved in Second Army's plan for Operation "MARKET", neither could come under command First Canadian Army (Ibid, M.201, Personal for Army Commander from C.-in-C., 13 Sep 44). Field Marshal Montgomery instructed that H.Q. 1 Brit Corps and 49 Inf Div be brought to the Antwerp area as early as possible. In order to do this 51 (H.) Div would be completely grounded by dumping all loads from vehicles and using all its transport to lift 49 Inf Div to Antwerp, where it would relieve 53 Inf Div. (Ibid)

242. These orders were expanded in a 21 Army Group directive issued to Army Commanders on 14 Sep. The C.-in-C. reviewed the general situation and the Army Group's intention in the following words:

General Situation

1. Now that HAVRE has been captured, we are in a better position to be able to proceed with operations designed to lead to the capture of the RUHR.
2. We have captured the port of ANTWERP, but cannot make use of it as the enemy controls the mouth of the SCHELDT; operations to put this matter right will be a first priority for Canadian Army.

3. On our right flank, First U.S. Army has entered Germany and is in contact with the defences of the Siegfried Line.

And away to the south, Third U.S. Army had bridgeheads over the MOSELLE.

4. Together with 12 Army Group, we will now begin operations designed to isolate and surround the RUHR; we will occupy that area as we may desire.

Our real objective, therefore, is the RUHR. But on the way to it we want the ports of ANTWERP and ROTTERDAM, since the capture of the RUHR is merely the first step on the northern route of advance into Germany.

Intention

5. To destroy all enemy west of the general line ZWOLLE - DEVENTER - CLEVE - VENLO - MAASTRICHT, with a view to advancing eastwards and occupying the RUHR.

(Ibid, M.525, 21 Army Group
Directive, 14 Sep 44)

243. Second Army, with an airborne corps of three divisions, was assigned the task of securing the Rhine crossings. The whole energies of First Cdn Army

would be directed towards operations designed to enable full use to be made of the port of Antwerp. On the Channel coast the Army was to complete the capture first of Boulogne and then of Calais, leaving Dunkirk to be dealt with later, and for the present to be merely masked. H.Q. 1 Brit Corps and 49 Div would be brought up as soon as possible to the Antwerp area, by grounding 51 (H.) Div, and using all its transport for maintenance and movement purposes. The Antwerp area was to be taken over from Second Army beginning 17 Sep. After completing the operations for the opening of the port, First Cdn Army would operate northwards on the general axis Breda - Utrecht - Amsterdam, destroy all enemy to the west of the army boundary and open the port of Rotterdam. Subsequently the Canadian Army would be brought up on the left (or northern flank) of Second Army, and would be directed on Bremen and Hamburg. (Ibid)

244. General Crerar's resulting directive, on 15 Sep, to the commanders of 1 Brit and 2 Cdn Corps prescribed the procedure to be followed in operation against Boulogne, Calais and Dunkirk, and gave instructions for the assumption of First Cdn Army's responsibilities in the Antwerp area.

7. 2 Cdn Corps will, forthwith, assume responsibility for developing operations to enable full use to be made of the port of ANTWERP. As a first step 2 Cdn Inf Div will take over the city of ANTWERP from 53 Inf Div of 12 Corps, relief to be completed by 18 Sep. Detailed arrangements including temporary inter-Corps and inter-Army boundaries and temporary retention by 2 Cdn Corps of one Armd Regt of 12 Corps, will be made by Corps Comds and notified to this H.Q.

The eventual forward boundary between Second Brit and First Cdn Armies will be, all incl First Cdn Army HERENTHALS - TURNHOUT - TILBURG - HERTOGENBOSCH - UTRECHT, but the extension of Cdn Army responsibilities to the EAST of ANTWERP, and to this boundary, will be gradual and timed to suit the developing situation. Moves of other formations 2 Cdn Corps from their present localities to other areas will be referred initially to this HQ before action is taken, owing to the important effect on the Army maintenance problem of any particular, or considerable, formation movement at this time.

(AEF/First Cdn Army/C/E,

Docket II, G.O.C.-in-C.

Directive, 15 Sep 44)

245. At the time of issuing this directive General Crerar had not received a firm decision from the C.-in-C. with regard to moving 1 Brit Corps forward to Antwerp (G.O.C.-in-C., 1/0, Letter, Montgomery to Crerar, 15 Sep 44). The situation hinged upon the degree of enemy resistance that might be encountered in Calais after Boulogne (expected to fall within a few days) had been captured by 2 Cdn Corps. If a deliberate assault of the port were required, the task would be undertaken by General Crocker's Corps, which would also assume responsibility for containing Dunkirk.

10. On the other hand, should CALAIS quickly capitulate, following the attack on BOULOGNE, then 1 Brit Corps will be directed to take over the right front of the Cdn Army, linking up with 12 Corps and

securing the right flank of 2 Cdn Corps against enemy interference while the latter is engaged in the task set out in para 7.

11. Owing to supply difficulties, 51 (H) Div of 1 Brit Corps will be temporarily "grounded" in the LE HAVRE area, its MT being used under direction of HQ First Cdn Army, as the developments in the near future may indicate.

12. 1 Brit Corps (Less 51 (H) Div), in accordance with orders and arrangements which will be separately notified, will take immediate steps to commence its forward movement. It is most important that no time be lost in the assumption by 1 Brit Corps of one of the alternative responsibilities, shortly to be decided.

(Ibid)

Boulogne did not fall until 22 Sep, and Calais, showing no signs of a speedy capitulation, forced the mounting of a full-scale assault on the 25th. But the increasingly urgent need of freeing the Antwerp sector decided the role of 1 Brit Corps, and on 19 Sep General Crerar ordered the Corps to move forward and take over First Cdn Army's right flank (AEF/First Cdn Army/C/E, Docket II: G.O.C.-in-C. Directive, 19 Sep 44).

4 CDN ARMD DIV'S ATTEMPT TO BRIDGE THE
LEOPOLD CANAL, 13-14 SEP

246. By 12 Sep the gains made across the Ghent Canal by both brigades of 4 Cdn Armd Div had forced the enemy to fall back behind the line of the Leopold Canal. The evacuation of the German Fifteenth Army through the ports of Breskens and Terneuzen was proceeding efficiently under the direction of General Schwalbe²⁷; Headquarters of 67 and 86 Corps had been withdrawn from

²⁷ The manner in which Schwalbe organized and carried out the evacuation of the three corps of Fifteenth Army from the Breskens Peninsula while the line of the Leopold Canal held was later revealed during his interrogation.

The crossings were done at two places, Breskens and Terneuzen D 2712, but the latter port was only used for about eight days when it became untenable due to the advance of the Polish Armoured Division. It was originally intended to move the heavy equipment through Breskens and personnel through Ternauzen but with the fall of the latter, everything had to go by the Breskens-Flushing route. To carry out this task, Schwalbe was assisted by a large number of naval troops and his equipment consisted of two large Dutch civilian ships, three large rafts capable of holding 18 vehicles each, one Siebel-ferry and 16 small Rhineboats with a capacity of about 250 men each.

(Footnote continued from overleaf)

With this fleet, Genlt Schwalbe managed to evacuate the remnants of eight shattered divisions - 49, 245, 331, 344, 17 GAF, 346, 711 and 712. First came 86 Corps, followed by 67 Corps and finally 89 Corps. Only 64 Inf Div remained behind to carry out its sacrifice stand south of the Scheldt. In sixteen days the General estimated he brought to safety some 65,000 men, 12 hy guns (17 cm), 200-215 field or medium guns, 750 trucks and wagons and 900-1000 horses. This was done chiefly at night although about half the days were used as well, since time was pressing. Allied planes constantly harried the evacuation and in one attack on Breskens on the 16 Sep by about 100 Marauders, over 175 Germans were killed and one boat fully laden with troops got a direct hit. But by the 21 Sep 44 the task of saving an Army had been completed. Genlt Schwalbe was in constant fear that we would cut off the Beveland Isthmus by an advance north of Antwerp and thereby trap such troops as were in the process of moving out. an alternative plan was therefore in readiness should this occur. The evacuation would take place through the canals of Schouwen and Overflakee to Dordrecht and Rotterdam. But such a trip would have been a dangerous and slow procedure. It would have taken well over 12 hours as compared with the three-quarters of an hour to cross from Breskens to Flushing and consequently it was planned to leave all heavy equipment behind and merely evacuate personnel.

(Special Interrogation

the line, and their divisions placed under the command of General von und zu Gilsa, of 89 Inf Div, reduced to a strength of 5000 men, had dropped back from the Bruges area to the Leopold and was holding the line of the canal from its junction with the Sluis Canal (9005) and the crossing point of the main Knocke sur Mer road (9702) - a sector which kept it still opposite 4 Cdn Armd Div. On its right were the naval units and its left flank was held by 64 Inf Div. (Special Interrogation Report, Sanders)

247. After 4 Cdn Armd Div's successful crossing of the Ghent Canal at Moerbrugge 10 Cdn Inf Bde was established at Syseele; on its right was 4 Cdn Armd Bde at Oedelem. During the 13th patrols reported that the enemy was clear of the area between the Ghent Canal and the Canal de Derivation de la Lys. It was decided to seize a bridgehead across the parallel Lys and Leopold Canals in the area north of Moerkerke, in the expectation that a sudden surprise crossing would keep the enemy on the move. 10 Cdn Inf Bde was allotted this task, and the brigade spent 13 Sep probing every available source for information concerning the enemy. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, September 1944: Appx 22, 4 Cdn Armd Div Instr No. 8, 13 Sep 44). There were no indications of the enemy being in strength on the opposite side of the canals; it was decided that Alq R. should assault at 2200 hours. Forty assault boats, fourteen reconnaissance boats, civilian craft and special ladders with grappling hooks were provided for the crossing, and the entire divisional artillery and all mortars and machine guns in the brigade were made available in support of the operation. Because of the close country, tanks

Report, Schwalbe)

could not be used except to provide indirect fire. (W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 13 Sep 44)

248. The point selected for the crossing was at a blown bridge site on the road north from Moerkerke. Here each of the canals was 90 feet wide, separated by a dyke of the same width. (Henceforth, except as otherwise specified, the name Leopold Canal will be used to include both waterways). The attack began at 2330 hours with all four companies in line for the assault, and with 80 men attached from Linc & Welld R. as a ferrying party. (W.D., Alq R., 13 Sep 44). Under cover of darkness all companies made the crossing successfully, although one platoon of "B" Coy was unable to get past the dyke in the centre of the canal. Small arms and mortar fire increased, so that the expansion of the foothold became most difficult. "A" Coy reached Moleken (935038), a handful of houses 200 yards from the Canal, and "B" Coy pushed through to the cross roads just beyond. But this marked the limit of the bridgehead. The attackers dug in and were soon repelling enemy efforts to dislodge them, while Engineers started to construct a bridge. (Ibid). During the morning of 14 Sep, "A" Coy was the first to report a shortage of ammunition, and although a supply was brought up before first light, enemy fire prevented it from being ferried over. At the same time the enemy's artillery and mortars forced the Engineers to suspend their work of bridging. While this action about the Canal was going on, enemy shell fire was brought to bear on Moerkerke, where the battalion command post was twice shelled out of its position, and the building used as a R.A.P. was demolished. At 0930 hours, and again at 1130 hours, attempts to get ammunition over the canal were made, but these again failed. On the failure of the second attempt the

battalion commander, Lt-Col R.A. Bradburn, requested ammunition be dropped by parachute, but no planes were available. A further attempt at 1030 hours by the Engineers to put their bridge across met with no success. Finally at 1200 hours, orders to withdraw were received. Under a heavy smoke screen and barrage put down by the artillery and mortars and heavy guns of the 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt tanks, the Algonquins withdrew to the south side of the Canal. Enemy counter-infiltration had reached the dyke in the centre of the canal, and these troops had to be eliminated during the withdrawal. With most of the boats smashed by shell fire many of the men were compelled to swim back to the south bank, and a considerable amount of equipment had to be abandoned. (Ibid, Infantry Brigade, pp 37, 38). Casualties suffered in the action by the battalion amounted to seven officers and 138 other ranks; although it was believed that a great many more than this had been inflicted upon the enemy, he was in a position that prevented accurate estimates of his strength and intentions. But all indications pointed to the fact that he was determined to call a halt to the Canadian advance, and on the line of the Leopold Canal.

249. Just how determined the enemy was to prevent a permanent Canadian crossing of the Leopold Canal is revealed in a reference to the Moerkerke operations by the Commander of the defending German division, General Sanders:

On Sep 15 [sic] the Canadians succeeded in forcing a bridgehead at MOERKERKE C 90 which if it had been allowed to develop would have not only cut short any further evacuation through BRESKENS, but would have secured the vital ground south of the SCHELDT which commanded the estuary and which at this stage the Germans were determined not to give

up. When news reached the Corps Commander, zu GILSA, he came down personally to Gen SANDERS at LAPSCHEURE C 90 giving him the strictest instructions that the bridgehead must at all costs be eliminated, promising him the Corps reserve to help him achieve his task. During this time the division was making every effort to eliminate the bridgehead without extra aid but despite every attempt, the Canadians maintain their precarious foothold.

After the meeting between Corps and divisional commanders and before the Corps reserves could arrive, the Canadians withdrew under cover of the most incredible artillery barrage that SANDERS had ever seen. No one was more surprised than he when at the conclusion of this prodigious effort instead of a renewal of the conflict which he considered was imminent as a result of this fire, he found the enemy had retired and had used this form of cover to evacuate his troops. Not all the Canadians, however, were evacuated and his Division succeeded in taking 60 prisoners.

(Special Interrogation Report,
Sanders)

THE CLEARING OPERATIONS WEST OF THE
TERNEUZEN CANAL, 14-21 SEP

250. On 14 Sep a new policy was laid down by the Commander 2 Cdn Corps, that in future 4 Cdn Armd Div would maintain contact and exert some pressure

without dissipating resources in driving out an enemy who might well be retreating (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 14 Sep 44). The division therefore planned to continue the pursuit to the east without becoming too heavily involved. Lake Sup R. (Mot) crossed the Canal de Derivation de la Lys in the neighbourhood of Celie Brug, and other patrols of 4 Cdn Armd Bde were probing crossings further south. On the night of 15/16 Sep Linc & Welld R. made an unopposed crossing at Balgerhoek on the main Bruges - Eecloo road, and 4 Cdn Armd Bde was instructed to follow across and push on to the area of Eecloo. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, September 1944: Appx 28, 4 Cdn Armd Div Op Instr No. 9, 15 Sep 44). Both brigades were to complete this crossing 16 Sep 44, and firm bases were to be established at Lembeke, Capryeke, Waerschoot and north-eastwards (Ibid; Appx 32, Outline Instructions, 15 Sep 44). These operations were effected without difficulty.

251. With Linc & Welld R. under command, 4 Cdn Armd Bde moved on 15 Sep to the area of Eecloo, and from there commenced to mop up to the east, north of grid line 95. The areas of Oost Eecloo, Lembeke, Capryeke and Bisdom were occupied on 16 Sep. Occupying Nieuwburg the following day and clearing Bassevelde the day after, the brigade established a firm base from which 10 Cdn Inf Bde operated towards Assenede (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 15-18 Sep 44). On the 19th a raiding party - "CROMB" Force - consisting of Linc & Welld R. and one squadron of 28 Cdn Armd Regt, the whole commanded by Lt-Col W.T. Cromb, O.C. Linc & Welld R., made a sally towards Philippine, south of Savojaards Plaat. Road demolitions, covered by mortars and machine gun fire, and flooding stopped progress just short of Bouchaute, which was finally cleared on 21 Sep (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 18-21 Sep 44; W.D., Linc

& Welld R., 21 Sep 44). Patrolling by the armoured brigade continued night and day along the Leopold Canal.

252. Meanwhile 10 Cdn Inf Bde proceeded to an area south of Eecloo on 16 Sep - its task to sweep the area east to the Ghent - Terneuzen Canal and north to grid line 95, the boundary of 4 Cdn Armd Bde's responsibility. The brigade was grouped in two sections for the purpose. Both the sweeps began at first light on the 17th and the northern patrol, which consisted of the Alq R. and 22 Cdn Armd Regt, reported the canal clear at Rieme, east of Ertvelde, Doorezeele and Zandeken were also found abandoned by the enemy. The southern force, A.& S.H. of C. with 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt, discovered that Ertvelde still in enemy hands. Apart from this, the area to the Terneuzen Canal was reported free of Germans (W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 17 Sep 44). On the following day the inter-brigade boundary was changed and 10 Cdn Inf Bde was directed on Assenede. After encountering opposition in the outskirts of the town, Alq r. and 22 Cdn Armd Regt made a set attack at 1250 hours with artillery support, and by midnight had cleared the town. In the meantime A.& S.H. of C. advanced with its armoured regiment towards Selzaeka and Sas-van-Gent, getting as far as De Katte (2496) on 18 Sep. Progress was slow because of demolitions and road blocks, and it was not until the night of 19/20 Sep that the group crossed the Dutch border and occupied and cleared Sas-van-Gent, capturing 110 prisoners. (W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 16-19 Sep 44)

253. During the next two days the brigade continued to free the area west of the Terneuzen Canal. Alq R. Force cleared the road north-east to Philippine

Station (2603) on 20 Sep, and later in the day occupied Philippine itself, three miles to the north-west. Immediately to the west of Philippine, at Isabella (1905), the enemy was holding a narrow neck of land between Braak Man Haven (of Savojaards Plaat) and the inundated flats on his right, inside the Belgian border. His main route of withdrawal from Philippine to Breskens ran through Isabella, and he had chosen a good position (the line of a small transverse canal strengthened by concrete machine-gun posts) from which to check the Canadian pursuit. In keeping with the divisional policy the brigade commander gave instructions on 23 Sep "that in view of the heavy opposition in the gap their task would now be to contain the enemy and harass him with fire and by active patrolling but NO major effort would be made to dislodge him." (Ibid, 23 Sep 44). From Sas-van-Gent, A.& S.H. of C. drove north to take Sluiskil, and on 21 Sep reported the whole area as far as Terneuzen clear of Germans. As activity was slowed down by the tightening of the enemy defence tactics, a redistribution of 4 Cdn Armd Div became necessary. On 21 Sep the inter-brigade boundary was changed to run along the north-south road from Capryeke to Watervliet. Because of the shift of enemy strength to the west, a distribution of strength within the division outside of normal brigade limits had to be made, in order to carry out the patrolling and containing role along the Leopold Canal. Linc & Welld R. was moved to Maldegem, south of the main canal forks, A.& S.H. of C. west to Bouchaute, 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt took over Assenede, while in Bassevelde 22 Cdn Armd Regt relieved 21 Cdn Armd Regt, who moved to St. Laurent (W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 21 Sep 44). Lake Sup R. (Mot) operated westward to patrol the canal from their base at Kerselaer (1202) (Ibid). West of Strooibrug (0001) the line of the Leopold Canal was held by 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt (independent of 4 Cdn Armd Div), with 8 Cdn L.A.A.

Regt under command and 20 (British) L.A.A. Regt R.A. in support (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, September 1944: Appx 53, 2 Cdn Corps Front 21 Sep 44).

2 CDN INF DIV IN THE ANTWERP AREA, 16-20 SEP

254. As we have seen, on 15 Sep General Simonds ordered 2 Cdn Inf Div to hand over the containing of Dunkirk to 4 S.S. Bde and to proceed to take over the Antwerp area from 53 (W.) Inf Div (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 15 Sep 44, Serial 14). 4 Cdn Inf Bde, led by Essex Scot, began moving at 0500 hours on the 16th, and it was 1845 hours that evening when the last unit, R. Regt C., reached the dispersal point. The rapid dash of Second Army which culminated in the capture of Antwerp had so taken the Germans by surprise that they had tumbled out of the great port without effecting any demolitions. As 4 Cdn Inf Bde relieved 71 Brit Inf Bde in the Antwerp dock area, the defence and protection of the all-important locks became of prime significance to the future success of 21 Army Group's operations. The enemy was still hold strong positions in the Antwerp area, and the main harbour locks were frequently under enemy shell fire. The brigade now devoted itself to intensive patrol activity, with constant alertness to prevent any surprise enemy attack on these vital points. (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde, 16-18 Sep 44)

255. Because of the delay in its relief in the Dunkirk area by 4 S.S. Bde, 5 Cdn Inf Bde did not move to Antwerp until 18 Sep. On its arrival the brigade took over the right sector of Antwerp from sub-units of 7 Armd Div, which had previously relieved 160 Inf Bde of 53 Inf Div. The three battalions

manned positions along the canal north of Wommelghem.²⁸ (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 16-19 Sep 44)

256. For the Canadian battalions the ride across western Belgium was a welcome diversion. Let the diarist of the Calgary Highlanders describe the experience.

The route laid down ... was marked throughout by 2 Cdn Inf Div arrows. What a marvellous treat to be able to sit back and enjoy the scenery along the way. Arriving at the Belgian border, it was a relief to know that there would be no customs' inspection. We left French soil, some with a sign, but soon we were engrossed with the beauty of the Belgian countryside. All agreed that the roads were the best that had been seen for a long time. So different was the sight that greeted our eyes, that one almost forgot that we were at war. Beautiful, rolling lush country could be seen for miles. Arriving at the cities, great was the amazement to see three-lane boulevards, smart modern shops and streetcar networks. The sight of a freight train aroused considerable interest. Nearing such famous places as Ypres, Sheet 2 MR H-5963, St. Julien, H-622556652 [sic] Passchendale H-685650, Poelcappelle H-643685, Calgarians began to experience a certain well-known lump in their throats. The same thoughts seemed to be running through the minds of all, and an air of reverence seemed to permeate the troops. The mention of St. Julien Wood to a Calgary Highlander stirs up a host of glorious

²⁸ The Albert Canal between Antwerp and Herenthals coincides with the Meuse - Escaut Canal (Canal de Junction de L'Escaut à Meuse), and is generally so designated.

deeds and recalls in mind the heroic dead who paid the supreme sacrifice. By the magnificent stand of the 10th Bn. on the ever memorable April 22, 1915, which won us the proud privilege, honour and distinction of wearing Oak Leaf should titles, - according to Marshal Foch - "The channel ports were saved". Our present Bn was raised for the purpose of perpetuating the glory of its illustrious predecessor. The Canadian Battlefield Memorial at St. Julien stands significantly in mute and solemn dedication to our valiant dead...

At various points along the way, the entire convoy was showered with gifts of fruit, bread and of course at times with liquers. Handclasping was just as prominent a practice as in France, and the familiar 'Cigarette for Papa' slogan greeted us.

One very pleasant experience was hearing so many people speaking English. The "pubs" reminded one of some of the ones in England. The sight of beautiful poppies caught the eye of many and the full meaning of Flanders fields became self-explanatory. Considerable attention was paid to the members of the fair sex. With few exceptions the majority of the women and young girls were healthy and good looking. From all early reports, it was the general opinion that a reasonably lengthy sojourn in the country would not be too great a hardship on the troops.

Interesting and amusing incidents lent colour to the movement; but the prize event was the scene of a group of raw recruits in the White Brigade drilling near a detour sign. Apparently they were engrossed in

watching our Bn. go by and when the command "Halt" was given the squad telescoped into a pile. Their confusion was exceeded only by their embarrassment.

The convoy did not stop for meals and this was the only hardship of the complete journey.

(W.D., Calg Highrs, 18 Sep 44)

257. Last of the 2 Cdn Inf Div formations to leave the Dunkirk area was 6 Cdn Inf Bde, which moved on 19 Sep to a concentration area in the southern part of Antwerp (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 19 Sep 44). Neither 5 or 6 Cdn Inf Bdes had any enemy activity to contend with for the next two days, and it was possible for at least one battalion to concentrate on the training of its "green" men. (W.D., Calg Highrs, 19 Sep 44). Antwerp was "in bounds", and the almost peace-time atmosphere which characterised its inhabitants, the shops and places of entertainment proved a strong attraction to the troops who could manage to visit the city. (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 19 Sep 44). During the night 20/21 Sep an unsuccessful attempt by R.H.C. to get a strong patrol over the canal confirmed the fact that the Germans were holding the northern bank in strength (Ibid, 21 Sep 44).

258. 4 Cdn Inf Bde, however, with the task of guarding the docks, was in closer contact with the enemy, who was still holding Merxem, a northern suburb of Antwerp. Canadian patrols engaged in frequent skirmishes with enemy patrols, and the villages of Wilmarsdonck and Oorderen, north-west of the

city, changed hands a number of times. The enemy was able to flood the ground, since they still had control of some of the harbour locks. (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde, 19 Sep 44). During 20 Sep the water level rose about Merxem and Wilmarndonck, and at 1730 hours an enemy attack went in on Essex Scot front with the apparent object of blowing the railway bridge at 690994. One company of R. Regt C. was immediately placed under command of Essex Scot and a stand-to of the entire brigade was ordered. After some severe fighting the enemy was forced to withdraw from the bridge, and by 2300 hours the situation was restored. charges which the enemy had succeeded in placing on the bridge were removed in time. (Ibid, 20 Sep 44). On the next evening he made an attempt to blow the lock gates, apparently by a floating mine. R.H.L.I. reported a loud explosion, but found little damage. The incident served to underline the warning given that morning by the G.O.C. 2 Cdn Inf Div, when he visited the brigade. General Foulkes stressed the importance of the docks to the allies, and appreciated that the enemy would make every effort to infiltrate and to blow them up. (Ibid, 21 Sep 44)

1 BRIT CORPS EAST OF ANTWERP, 20-24 SEP

259. The demands of the developing situation on Second British Army front now made it necessary to release more of 12 and 8 Brit Corps units for the task of widening the corridor directed towards Arnhem. First Cdn Army was called upon to position itself in the Antwerp area and northward, and in order to aid the Army in its task of freeing the port, 21 Army Group was prepared to place additional administrative means at General Crerar's disposal. Accordingly the G.O.C.-in-C. ordered certain reliefs, movements and changes in

responsibilities on 19 Sep 44 (W.D., G.O.C.-in-C. First Cdn Army, September 1944: Appx 7, Directive to Corps Commanders).

1 Brit Corps (less 51 (H) Div) will commence forthwith to move from its present concentration area, vicinity of LONDINIERES, and will take over right frontage First Cdn Army, by or before 24 Sep 44. 1 Brit Corps will keep its main strength on its left in order to assist the speedy northward thrust of 2 Cdn Corps, but will link up on its right with the left of 12 Brit Corps.

Boundaries - all incl 1 Brit Corps: Right: HERENTHALS - TURNHOUT - TILBURG. Left: LIERRE - COSTMALLE - BREDA.

The progressive taking over of this frontage, now held by 12 Brit Corps, will be arranged direct between commanders 1 and 12 Brit Corps - Army HQs being notified of arrangements mutually made.

(Ibid, paras 3, 4 and 5)

260. It was planned that 2 Cdn Corps would complete the capture of Boulogne and begin the attack on Calais on 21 Sep, and it was decided that if this assault were not completed with the speed anticipated, it might be necessary to relieve the bulk of 3 Cdn Inf Div of the responsibility for completing this phase of operations. In that case, 3 Cdn Inf Div would commence, on 24 Sep 44, the relief of 4 Cdn Armd Div and possibly 1 Pol Armd Div. To relieve 3 Cdn Inf Div at Dunkirk and Calais, the Commander 4 S.S. Bde would

take over both commitments, retaining under his command the reconnaissance regiment and machine gun battalion of 3 Cdn Inf Div as well as certain additional necessary forces. Headquarters First Cdn Army would take over the direction and administration of these containing forces, in order to free the Commander 2 Cdn Corps of this responsibility. (Ibid, paras 6, 7 and 8). The remainder of General Crerar's directive dealt with plans for the development of operations by First Cdn Army to clear the West Scheldt by gaining possession of the South Beveland peninsula and the island of Walcheren (Ibid, paras 9-14). (These operations are the subject of a subsequent report in the present series.)

261. The long move of 1 Brit Corps commenced by stages on 20 Sep. 49 (W.R.) Inf Div, carried from the Le Havre area in transport of the Highland Division - who remained grounded at Lillebonne on the Seine Estuary - reached their new sector east of Antwerp on 22 Sep, and by evening of the 23rd had completed the relief of 7 Armd Div in positions south-west of Turnhout. Here they were on the extreme right flank of First Cdn Army, Headquarters 1 Brit Corps were established at Keerbergen, south-east of Antwerp. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 1 Brit Corps, 13, 16, 22, 23 Sep 44). By 24 Sep the Corps had assumed responsibility for the frontage between Herenthals and Lierre, relieving 12 Brit Corps "for imminent future responsibilities" with Second Army. (AEF/First Cdn Army/C/E, Docket II: C14, G.O.C.-in-C. to Corps Commanders, 20 Sep 44). Arrangements were also being worked out for 1 Brit Corps to be strengthened by the addition of 1 Pol Armd Div. On 22 Sep the Army Commander signalled General Simonds to the effect that the Polish division should be moved to the Canadian Corps area east of Antwerp as soon as it had cleared its present operational area east of

the Ghent - Terneuzen Canal. (Ibid, C 116, G.O.C.-in-C. to 2 Cdn Corps, 22 Sep 44). The increasingly urgent need to move the division was emphasized again two days later (Ibid, C 120, G.O.C.-in-C. to 2 Cdn Corps, 24 Sep 44), but it was not until 27 Sep that the Polish formation moved to Wommelghem, east of antwerp, to come under command of 1 Brit Corps. (AEF/1 Pol Armd Div/C/F, Course of Ops 23 Sep - 6 Oct 44)

262. On arrival in its new sector 49 (W.R.) Inf Div lost little time in beginning to probe forward. On 22 Sep 49 Recce Regt occupied Herenthals without opposition. Civilians reported both Grobbendonck and Polle clear of enemy, and patrols crossed the Canal de Junction de L'Escaut à Meuse to reach forward to the line of the Antwerp - Turnhout Canal (AEF/1 Brit Corps/C/H, Docket III: Sitrep 1200 hours 23 Sep 44). On the following day Turnhout was reported evacuated, although all approaches were heavily mined (Ibid: Sitrep 1200 hours 24 Sep 44), and 146 Bde, which had reached the Oostmalle area, advanced to the antwerp - Turnhout Canal in the vicinity of St. Leonard (Ibid). Early on the morning of the 25th the brigade forced the Canal to establish a small bridgehead east of St. Leonard and south of Ryckevorsel (in square 9107). A Class 40 bridge was successfully built (Ibid: Sitrep 1200 hours 25 Sep 44). On the same day 147 Bde occupied Turnhout (Ibid: Sitrep 2400 hours 25 Sep 44).

OPERATIONS OF 2 CDN INF DIV AT THE ANTWERP - TURNHOUT CANAL,

23-30 SEP

263. With the need for 2 Cdn Corps to free the Antwerp sea approaches quickly the area from that port northward to Roosendaal and Bergen Op Zoom had to be cleared, both to secure positions from which to launch future attacks and to prevent enemy activities westward (AEF/First Cdn Army/C/E, Docket II: Comd 2 Cdn Corps to G.O.C.-in-C., 21 Sep 44, para 7(a)). 2 Cdn Inf Div was therefore directed to advance north from Antwerp "within resources allotted" (AEF/2 Cdn Corps/C/I: GO-106, 2 Cdn Corps Intentions for 21 Sep 44). The first attempt was made by 5 Cdn Inf Bde. Following the failure of R.H.C. to establish a crossing of the Albert Canal (para 256), Calg Highrs took over from the Black Watch Regiment, and on the night of 21/22 Sep silently pushed a fighting patrol and then a company across the narrow lock gates east of Wyneghen (765970). The remainder of the battalion followed, and a bridgehead was successfully established. Enemy reaction was violent, and at first light a vigorous counter-attack was launched. For the first time in the experience of R.H.C. the Germans were fighting with bayonets. During the day Typhoons came to the support of the Canadians and the enemy thrust was beaten off. the position was consolidated and a bridge was constructed, but not without difficulty. Late on the 22nd Schilde, two miles to the east, was occupied, and R. de Mais was brought into the bridgehead, to push on to Gravenwezel. At the same time one squadron of 8 Cdn Recce Regt was sent to Schooten (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 21-23 Sep 44; W.D., Calg Highrs, 21, 22 Sep 44).

264. With a passage thus won over the Albert Canal 2 Cdn Inf Div's task was now to cross the water barrier which lay to the north. As a result of the bridgehead established by 5 Cdn Inf Bde, the enemy - who in this sector of the front comprised, besides battle groups, 711 and 719 Inf Divs (First Cdn Army

Int Summary No. 84, 22 Sep 44) - was forced to fall back from the area between the canals. 5 Cdn Inf Bde met only light opposition on 23 Sep, as R. de Mais occupied Gravenwezel, and Calg Highrs moved to the west and took up positions along the eastern side of the Antwerp - Turnhout Canal. (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 23 Sep 44). 6 Cdn Inf Bde now moved into the bridgehead to establish a crossing over the Antwerp - Turnhout Canal, in the area of Lochtenberg (2 Cdn Corps Intention for 24 Sep 44). It was apparent that a well-prepared assault would be necessary, as all bridges had been demolished and the enemy was strongly opposing any attempt to cross. He was showing every intention of retaining as long as possible the landward approaches to Beveland. It was planned that while 6 Cdn Inf Bde was attempting to force a bridgehead, Calg Highrs would make a feint fire attack from their positions to the southwest (Ibid, 23 Sep 44).

266. At 0700 hours 24 Sep 44 Fus M.R. crossed the canal a few hundred yards east of the Lochtenberg bridge without difficulty and pushed on to the crossroads in the built-up area. (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, September 1944: Appx 15, Map, Crossing of Antwerp Canal, 24 Sep 44). Here they were held up by heavy fire. They persisted in the attack until about 1430 hours, when the enemy counter-attacked from the front, rear and flank, infiltrating between the companies with both infantry and armoured car support. As no bridge had yet been constructed, anti-tank guns could not be brought in, and the battalion was forced to withdraw over the canal after suffering heavy casualties - in all 150 killed and missing (W.D., Fus M.R., 24 Sep 44). Meanwhile S. Sask R. prepared to cross 100 yards east of the bridge at 0700 hours. when it was learned that the enemy had machine guns in the woods,

earlier considered as a concentration area, the assault point was moved west. The first attempt failed, as the leading company was pinned down on the canal bank. As a result the assault point was again changed, and a new time, 1300 hours, was set for the attack. Under cover of smoke and artillery fire, "A" Coy reached the far bank at 1400 hours, and "B" Coy was then passed over. All efforts to reach Lochtenberg were unsuccessful. The two companies were held to their slender footing as the enemy brought light armour against them. At 1910 hours - when Fus M.R. had already withdrawn - orders were received to recross the canal. By 2100 hours the battalion was back on the southern bank, having suffered 39 casualties in the action (W.D., S. Sask R., 24 Sep 44). During the operations Camerons of C. remained in reserve astride the road south of the canal, and were not called into action (W.D., Camerons of C., 24 Sep 44).

267. Plans for a second attempt to cross the canal were made at a divisional conference on the morning of 26 Sep. 5 Bde was to do a diversionary assault crossing and bridging in the area 7500-7501, some four miles south-west of where 6 Cdn Inf Bde would renew its efforts on its present front. Success of either operation would be exploited to the full. (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 26 Sep 44). That same evening, however, a change in plans sent 5 Cdn Inf Bde on another venture (see para 269 below), and 6 Cdn Inf Bde proceeded with its own preparations for the Lochtenberg assault (Ibid). The failure of the brigade's attempt on 24 Sep had come largely from the inability to complete a bridge by which supporting anti-tank guns could be taken across the canal. For the coming assault the C.R.E. advised the Brigade Commander that it would be possible to put a small bridge across the canal, capable of carrying anti-

tank guns, in 45 minutes, providing that the working of the sappers were not hindered by S.A. fire. Brigadier Gauvreau considered that if it were possible to get one battalion across the canal, the bridgehead would be secure, and he issued orders for S. Sask R. to make the attempt (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 27 Sep 44).

268. For two days Typhoons and Spitfires conducted an extensive programme of harassing known enemy positions, and artillery, mortars and M.M.Gs. did all they could to soften up the German defences. At 1400 hours on the 28th the operation started, and one platoon of S. Sask R. succeeded in making a crossing under cover of heavy smoke. But very heavy mortaring and M.M.G. fire from enemy pill boxes prevented construction of the vital bridge. The Brigade Commander was not prepared to suffer any serious casualties and at 1800 hours ordered the platoon to withdraw (Ibid, 27, 28 Sep 44). General Foulkes, deciding that the likelihood of obtaining a bridgehead at Lochtenberg without incurring heavy casualties held little promise, now ordered the brigade to move to the St. Leonard's sector, where 49 (W.R.) Inf Div had already established a crossing (Ibid; see para 261). On the morning of 29 Sep the brigade moved to Westmalle, and 8 Cdn Recce Regt took over its positions along the canal (Ibid, 29 Sep 44).

269. For the operations in which it was now engaged 2 Cdn Inf Div was placed under temporary operational command of 1 Brit Corps, and continued to function on this basis from 26 Sep to 6 Oct. As early as 22 Sep General Simonds had brought to the attention of the Army Commander the difficulties of a single Corps Headquarters adequately controlling four divisions over a front which

extended for 150 miles, whose commitments at that time included the battle into Boulogne, the screening of Calais and Dunkirk, a two-division effort to clear the area south of the West Scheldt, and a division thrusting north of Antwerp(W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Div, 22 Sep 44). The operations being undertaken by 2 Cdn Inf Div in the Antwerp sector were regarded as being more intimately related to those of 1 Brit Corps, which had (on 26 Sep) 49 (W.R.) Inf Div pushing north on the Massenhoven (8393) - Oostmalle - Breda axis. The result of the change in command in effect moved the inter-corps boundary westward to the R. Scheldt, and relieved 2 Cdn Corps of operational responsibility east of the river. (Ibid, 26 Sep 44)

270. After the cancellation of its intended diversionary attack in support of 6 Cdn Inf Bde on 26 Sep, 5 Cdn Inf Bde was ordered to move to the Westmalle - Oostmalle area, leaving 8 Cdn Recce Regt and the other two brigades of the division to be responsible for the canal line. 5 Bde was to cross the bridge (917078), established by 49 (W.R.) Inf Div south of Ryckevorsel, advance on the axis Brecht - Overbroek - Camp de Brasschaet and establish a bridgehead from the north side of the canal in the neighbourhood of Lochtenberg. 6 Cdn Inf Bde would then pass through to the north-west while 4 Cdn Inf Bde completed the clearing of Antwerp (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 26 Sep 44). On the 27th the brigade moved to its allotted area and, placed temporarily under command 49 Brit Inf Div, prepared to cross into the bridgehead east of St. Leonard (Ibid, 27 Sep 44).

271. 5 Cdn Inf Bde spent the remaining days of the month slowly extending the western limits of the British-held area north of the Antwerp - Turnhout Canal.

On the morning of 28 Sep 44 R. de Mais passed through Ryckevorsel and turned west to capture Oostbrecht by last light (W.D., R. de Mais, 28 Sep 44). R.H.C. then passed through with a view to taking St. Leonard. This proved to be a slow process. Earlier in the day R. de Mais had met considerable opposition, and the Commanding Officer of R.H.C. (Lt-Col B.R. Ritchie) was under no illusion regarding the difficulty of making a night attack on this strongly defended area. He ordered his companies to approach the town by three separate converging roads. The attack went in with tank support during the evening, and by midnight three companies were established firmly in the town. (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 28 Sep 44; W.D., R.H.C., 28 Sep 44). The capture of St. Leonard made it possible to launch Calg Highrs through the R.H.C. positions to objectives west of the town and south of Brecht. The regiment completed its tasks the same afternoon (29 Sep, although opposition was not light, and its success made possible the construction of a bridge (872096) at St. Leonard. (W.D., Calg Highrs, 29 Sep 44; First Cdn Army Ops Log, Appx 134, 30 Sep 44, Serial 58)

272. During 30 Sep Canadian units on both sides of the canal operated to reduce enemy opposition in Eindhoven and its vicinity. During the course of 6 Cdn Inf Bde's move from Lochtenbergt to Westmalle on 29 Sep, S. Sask R., through an error in map reading, had veered to far to the left and came under fire from a large distillery on the north bank of the canal on the outskirts of Eindhoven.²⁹ To protect the brigade right flank Camerons of C. were placed under command of 5 Cdn Inf Bde and moved over the canal in time to relieve R.

²⁹ This Eindhoven (8508), in Belgium, is not to be confused with the city of the same name (4218) in Holland, on the axis of Second Army's advance northwards to Nijmegen.

de Mais east of St. Leonard. (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 29 Sep 44; W.D., H.Q., 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 29 Sep 44). Early on the morning of the 30th R. de Mais started to advance on Brecht, but on running into fairly heavy opposition from fire of all kinds abandoned its attempt, and established firm company localities between St. Leonard and Brecht. The task of taking the town was assigned to R.H.C. for the next day. Meanwhile Calg Highrs, directed upon Eindhoven and the distillery, continued throughout the day to improve their positions along the canal in readiness for a further advance on 1 Oct. (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 30 Sep 44; W.D., Calg Highrs, 30 Sep 44). That afternoon the inter-divisional boundary between 49 (W.R.) Inf Div and 2 Cdn Inf Div was moved westwards, to give the British formation control of St. Leonard. As a result Camerons of C. reverted to 6 Cdn Inf Bde at 1600 hours and concentrated south of the canal once more with the remainder of its parent brigade (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 30 Sep 44). It was not until 1 Oct that R.H.C., driving through the positions occupied by Calg Highrs the previous evening south of the town, succeeded in clearing Brecht (W.D., R.H.C., 1 Oct 44).

273. While 5 and 6 Cdn Inf Bdes were thus slowly driving the enemy from the positions to which he was clinging on to west of the Antwerp - Turnhout Canal, 4 Cdn Inf Bde had been carrying out the less spectacular but extremely vital role of defending the Antwerp locks besides their guard duties. In general the day-to-day programme was one of incessant patrolling in order to keep contact with the enemy, to maintain pressure, but not to attempt major action against him. R. Regt C. were on the right; Essex Scot in the centre, about Merxem; and R.H.L.I. (supplying "LOCK" Force) were in the western sector extending to the Scheldt. On 22 Sep R.H.L.I. launched an attack to drive the

enemy from locks that he was still holding west of Wilmarsdonck, between the Scheldt and the Antwerp docks. After overcoming dogged resistance they dislodged the enemy from his positions, and the flanking towns of Wilmarsdonck and Ooderen were quickly and easily re-occupied (W.D., R.H.L.I. 22, 23 Sep 44). Merxem continued to be held by the Germans (on 30 Sep the Belgian White Brigade estimated enemy strength there at 1100), who squashed all attempts of Canadian patrols to enter the town. (W.D., R. Regt C., 24, 26 Sep 44). On the 26th, as 5 and 6 Cdn Inf Bdes moved eastward towards the 49 Div bridgehead at St. Leonard, 4 Bde's sector of responsibility widened, and the right flank now extended to a point (752007) beyond the junction of the Albert and the Antwerp - Terneuzen Canal (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde, 26 Sep 44). R. Regt C. took over most of the increased brigade frontage, with the assistance from the Carriers of Essex Scot (Ibid). By the end of the month patrols had reached Eeckeren (W.D., Essex Scot, 28 Sep 44), and there were reports that the enemy was moving out of the area of Capellen and Hoevenen and Eeckeren. Merxem, however, was still in enemy hands, as was Schooten, just north of the canal junction (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde, 30 Sep 44).

1 POL ARMD DIV ON THE ARMY RIGHT FLANK, 27-30 SEP

274. The move of 1 Pol Armd Div to the Wommelghem area on 27 Sep to come under command of 1 Brit Corps for operations on First Cdn Army's eastern flank placed it in position with 2 Cdn Inf Div to carry out the task allotted the right wing of First Cdn Army by the C.-in-C. 21 Army Group in his directive of the same day. The Field Marshal reiterated instructions for the Army's left

wing "to complete the operations that are now in progress to enable us to use the ports of BOULOGNE and CALAIS". Dunkirk would be masked to be dealt with later. While First Cdn Army would at once develop operations to provide for the free use of the port of Antwerp at as early a stage as possible:

The right wing of the army will thrust strongly northwards on the general axis TILBURG - HERTOGENBOSCH and so free Second Army from its present commitment of a long left flank facing west.

This thrust should be on a comparatively narrow front, and it is important it should reach HERTOGENBOSCH as early as possible.

(G.O.C.-in-C./1-0, Operations

21 Army Group, M.527, No. 91)

275. General Maczek's division concentrated in the Turnhout area on 28 Sep, and was ordered to seize crossings over the Wilhelmina Canal north of Tilburg (AEF/1 Pol Armd Div/C/F, Docket II, 28 Sep 44). The task was divided into two phases. IN the first a battle group (3 Rifle Bde) was to occupy the area of Merxplas, five miles north-west of Turnhout; a second group (10 Armd Cavalry Bde) would go west to the Oostmalle - Heikand area, and from there, in a second phase, would by-pass 3 Rifle Bde to seize the canal crossings. The first of these phases was completed with relatively little difficulty, when Merxplas was captured on 30 Sep (Ibid, 30 Sep 44). The second phase was less successful, and by 5 Oct the Polish forces had not been able to get beyond Alphen, some eight miles south-west of Tilburg (Ibid, 5 Oct 44).

ENEMY DISPOSITIONS IN THE ANTWERP AREA AT THE END OF SEPTEMBER

276. The enemy formations defending the Antwerp sector opposite 2 Cdn Inf Div during the operations just recounted were those of a partly reformed 67 Inf Corps under command of General Sponheimer. Most of these troops had escaped through Breskens to Flushing, and had been brought down through the South Beveland peninsula to carry on the struggle. The story of the various expedients to which the Corps Commander was now driven in his attempts to withstand Canadian efforts to force a break-through to the Beveland peninsula is best told in the words of his subsequent interrogation.

When Sponheimer arrived north of Antwerp he found 719 Infantry Division attempting to prevent the Allies from pushing north of the port and thereby cutting off the escape route from the Beveland Isthmus. Sponheimer's responsibility was to continue to hold this area until the escape of Fifteenth Army had been accomplished. He was given, at first, 346 and 711 Infantry Divisions, which were two of the formations that had just come out of Normandy through Walcheren. Both divisions were in extremely bade shape, having just been patched up by the addition of supply troops found in the area. They numbered 6,000 to 8,000 each. About 20 September 719 Infantry Division was transferred from 88 Corps and put under 67 Infantry Corps. Thus the first line held by 67 Infantry Corps had 711 Infantry Division on the right flank, facing the West Scheldt from the Beveland Isthmus to Lille. On its left was 346 Infantry Division with a sector from Lille to Merxem, and still further left was 719 Infantry Division along the albert Canal.

Sponheimer's immediate orders were for his troops to begin building a line along the Antwerp - Turnhout Canal, since he realized that his position north of Antwerp could not be held very long. About 23 September 719 Infantry Division was forced to give up its position along the Albert Canal and the corps moved back to take up a new line along the Antwerp - Turnhout Canal. Sponheimer's responsibility now stretched from Lille to Turnhout.

(Special Interrogation Report,
Sponheimer, p. 5)

277. A more detailed account of the manner in which the tired divisions of 67 Inf Corps were employed during the last two weeks of September is given by the Commander of 346 Inf Div, Genlt Diestel.

Having successfully escaped once more, 346 Inf Div marched along the Beveland Isthmus, and reached an assembly area at Maria Ter Heide D7608 some 6 kms northeast of Antwerp. Here they rested for 4 or 5 days and reorganized the Division with the help of the remnants of 331 and 344 Inf Div. From these latter two shattered formations Diestel acquired about 2500 - 3000 infantry, and 331 Artillery Regt provided some 9 or 10 guns to make up what they had lost during the retreat. The Division thus had, at this time, a strength of some 8000 men. Its faithful companion, 711 Inf Div, was also resting and refitting at Maria Ter Heide, and on about the 18 Sep 44, both 346 and 711 Inf Divs were once again put into the line, this time under the command of 67 Corps.

While these tired troops were resting, 719 Inf Div, just down from Holland, with a mixture of battle groups and old remnants, was holding a line north of Antwerp. Its task was to prevent the main road from the Beveland Isthmus being cut, since it provided the only escape route for the divisions still trapped in Western France and Belgium. This job it adequately performed since British armour was not able to advance north of Antwerp at this time. With the aid of the patched-up 711 Inf Div and 346 Inf Div, 67 Corps took up the task of keeping the entrance to the Beveland isthmus open, so that 64 and 70 Inf Divs, the divisions left to defend the approaches to the Scheldt, could be properly supplied. The new line had 711 Inf Div on the right flank, facing the West Scheldt from the main road into the Beveland Isthmus to Lille D6006. On its left was 346 Inf Div lying from Lille to Merxem J7099 and left again was 719 Inf Div along the Albert Canal.

About the 23 Sep 719 Inf Div was strongly attacked on the Albert Canal and was forced to retire. This left the left flank of 346 Inf Div wide open, and on the 24 Sep they also pulled back to the Antwerp - Turnhout Canal. This move almost doubled the sector held by the Division for its right flank still rested at Lille, and its left now extended along the Antwerp - Turnhout Canal to as far east as St. Leonard D8710, an additional 8 kms of front. To aid in holding so broad a front, 1018 GR of 70 Inf Div defending Walcheren, was put under command of 346 Inf Div, and took over the sector from Lille to Merxem. To further complicate matters, about the 28 Sep, the Allies attacked across the Turnhout Canal at Ryckevorsel D9310 and one regt of 711 Inf Div was frantically pulled

out of its sector north of antwerp and sent post-haste against this new thrust. This left the remaining regt of 711 Inf Div, 744 GR, holding the complete sector from the Beveland Isthmus to Lille. This regt was also put under Command of 346 Inf Div, thus giving Genlt Diestel four regiments to look after, instead of his normal two, and providing him with a divisional sector of almost 22 kms in length. To ease matters a bit, the responsibility of the road into Beveland was taken from 346 Inf Div and given to 70 Inf Div. No armour was available to the Division at the time, and only about 6 of his assault guns still remained operational. The Division was thus placed with 744 GR of 711 Inf Div facing the Scheldt, from the Isthmus to Lille; 858 GR on the Turnhout Canal with 857 GR on its left.

On the 30 Sep matters became worse at Ryckevorsel and it was necessary to detach the Fus Bn and one Battalion of 858 GR to aid the sorely-pressed defenders of the Canal. The bridgehead at Ryckevorsel had by this time absorbed almost all the available Corps reserves, for in addition to 719 Inf Div, which had been on the spot, a regt of 711 Inf Div, two battalions of 346 Inf Div and Battle Group Schilling were all doing their bit to stem the Allied tide in this direction.³⁰

(Special Interrogation Report,
Diestel, pp. 6, 7)

³⁰ For a map showing estimated enemy dispositions as on 28 Sep 44 see AEF/2 Cdn Corps/L/F, Docket I, 2 Cdn Corps Int Summary No. 60, 27 Sep 44.

THE WATCH ON THE LEOPOLD CANAL

278. As has been shown (para 253) on the central sector of the long front stretching from Calais to Turnhout for which First Cdn Army was responsible, 4 Cdn Armd Div was spread out along the Leopold Canal and had settled down to the task of containing the enemy within the Breskens "island" while probing for weaknesses in his defences. Attention in 10 Cdn Inf Bde's sector was focused on the reduction of enemy resistance at the Isabella "isthmus". A break through along this narrow neck of land would place Canadian troops on the north side of the Leopold Canal at its eastern extremity. On 22 and 23 Sep Alq. R. made a determined attempt from Philippine to get past the Isabella position. an outflanking company contrived to occupy Maagd van Gent (1705), but enemy counter-attacks were strong enough to repel attempts against the Isabella obstacle either from Philippine or from the Angfort Haven area. The Algonquins suffered heavily, including the loss of a complete forward platoon (W.D., Alq R., 22, 23 Sep 44). No further attempts were made to break through, and battalion activities - as with A. & S.H. of C., whose headquarters were in Bouchaute - to the end of the month were limited to patrol duties. (W.Ds., Alq R., A. & S.H. of C., 24-30 Sep 44). No further attempts were made to break through, and battalion activities - as with A. & S.H. of C., whose headquarters were in Bouchaute - to the end of the month were limited to patrol duties. (W.Ds., Alq R., A. & S.H. of C., 24-30 Sep 44). A vigorous campaign on the part of 4 Cdn Armd Div using every possible means to induce surrender - bombing, shelling, loud speaker broadcasts and showering with propaganda and safe conduct leaflets - brought little in the way of effective results.

279. Meanwhile further west, 4 Cdn Armd Bde, with Linc & Welld R. under command, was extended over a long front which stretched from opposite Watervliet to the Ecluse Canal. The brigade had two tasks - firstly to clean up the area south of the Leopold Canal, and secondly so to position itself as to be ready to pass through Strooibrug to occupy Oostbrug should opportunity present itself (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 22 Sep 44). The dispositions of the brigade group on 22 Sep were as follows. Linc & Welld R. were centred about Maldegem, to be held as a potential raiding force for any part of the brigade front; Lake Sup R. (Mot) were responsible for an area extending about two miles east and west of Strooibrug; 21 Cdn Armd Regt patrolled the right flank to the inter-brigade boundary south of Watervliet, with 28 Cdn Armd Regt in reserve at Cleit (south of Maldegem) as a relief; while on the left 8 Cdn L.A.A. Regt (which reverted on 22 Sep to 4 Cdn Armd Div command) patrolled west through Moerkerke to the Ecluse Canal (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 22 Sep 44; W.D., 8 Cdn L.A.A. Regt, 22 Sep 44).

280. Until 26 Sep the patrol programme was unsuccessful in securing prisoners - indeed, patrols usually experienced the greatest difficulty in landing on the northern bank of the canal (Ibid, 24, 25 Sep 44). As it was essential to gain information, a patrol in force was decided upon. An operation of this nature had been laid down as a recognized task for the armoured division, even though an assault was not regarded within its capacity. On the night of 26/27 Sep Linc & Welld R. put two platoons over the canal in the St. Laurent area. The venture was well-planned and the infantry had the support of a troop of 28 Cdn Armd Regt, two Bofors 40-mm guns firing directional tracer,

regimental mortars, and first call on all divisional artillery resources. Engineers provided the ferrying party. The raid commenced at 0515 hours 27 Sep, and proceeded by 0700 hours the raiding party was back with 15 prisoners who disgorged to Intelligence interrogators a wealth of valuable information. Not the least satisfactory feature of this bold raid was the comparatively light scale of casualties suffered by our troops (W.D., Linc & Welld R., 27 Sep 44).

281. Very little of moment occurred during the remaining days of the month. Normal patrolling, harassing fire, training programmes and leave parties all contributed to keep the troops alert and content. Routine unit moves and reliefs were made within the brigade area. The enemy was apparently now employing their heavy calibre long range guns - located probably at Heyst and Knocke - in an endeavour to harass our troops, and it was observed with satisfaction that many of these rounds were falling short into his own forces' area (Ibid, 30 Sep 44). 4 Cdn Armd Div had been instructed, on 24 Sep, that it would continue its containing role until relieved by 3 Cdn Inf Div (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 24 Sep 44). Until that time arrived (mid-October) the units of the division were satisfied to carry out their assigned programme of maintaining the watch on the Leopold Canal.

282. The last day of September saw the end of the prolonged process of changing 1 Brit Corps' position. 51 (H.) Inf Div which, it will be recalled, had been left grounded in the vicinity of Le Havre, completed its long move from the Channel coast and took up a position, under control of Second Brit Army, just to the right of the inter-army boundary south of Henenthals (W.D.,

G.S.D., H.Q. First Cdn Army, September 1944: Appx I, S.D. 47, 30 Sep 44; 2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 29 Sep 44, Serial 46). As the Highland Regiment came under command 12 Brit Corps, there ended temporarily an association with First Cdn Army which had started with the decisive action fought under command of 2 Cdn Corps in early August, Operation "TOTALIZE" (W.D., "G" Ops, First Cdn Army, September 1944: Ops Log, Appx 134, 30 Sep 44, Serial 28).

THE GENERAL SITUATION, 30 SEP

283. By the end of September First Cdn Army was approaching the conclusion of one of the most spectacular phases of its operations. Since D Day, in a series of hard fought battles and relentless pursuits, Canadian troops had advanced some 400 miles from the Normandy beaches to the Dutch frontier. Since 23 Jul First Cdn Army had captured over 70,000 prisoners (Mann Lectures, 18 May 45). The cost had not been light. The total casualties suffered by all formations of First Cdn Army from the opening of Operation "TOTALIZE" (7 Aug) to the end of September were 18,998 (W.D., A. & Q. Branch, H.Q. First Cdn Army, September 1944: Consolidation C. and S. States, Nos. 39, 31 Aug, 52, 13 Sep and 69, 30 Sep 44) ([Report No. 131](#), Appx "C", gives Canadian Army casualties from 6 Jun to 5 Aug as 11,270). From the time that 2 Cdn Corps' pursuit started on 19 Aug, Canadian losses had totalled 606 officers and 7855 other ranks (see Appx "E").

284. The long spring of the Allied drive to the German borders was almost fully uncoiled. "MARKET GARDEN" had met with violent reaction, and although bridges across the Maas (at Grave) and the Waal (at Nijmegen) were in Allied

hands, the Rhine crossings at Arnhem had not been secured. The port of Antwerp had still to be opened, and until its facilities should become available to us our administrative lines had to be stretched to the limit and operations proportionately hindered. All further efforts to complete the war quickly depended entirely on the rapid build-up of supplies - in effect, the opening of Antwerp. The Germans were well aware of the possibilities of the situation at the end of September and the threat that further Allied successes held, and they were making the most of the natural defences of the Scheldt estuary. With characteristic tenacity the enemy was fighting strong delaying actions on First Cdn Army's right front. While opposite the Poles he was withdrawing on to Tilburg, he was giving way more gradually before 2 Cdn Inf Div on his right north of Antwerp. Behind the Leopold Canal 64 Inf Div, supplemented with battle-tired but determined troops, were resisting all efforts to dislodge them from the Breskens pocket. Indeed it was now obvious that the enemy was calling a halt to his retreats and producing reserve formations, although of inferior quality, to block the many gaps that were appearing in his broken line. He could even stage a counter blow, witness "MARKET GARDEN", when his vital sinews of war were directly threatened, although on all his fronts he had suffered crushing blows.

285. The Allied ring was relentless closing about the German homeland. In the west, the liberation of France was now complete. American armour was across the Moselle, and French and American troops were closing in on Belfort. The Siegfried Line had been breached at Aachen, and for the first time there was fighting on German soil. In Italy the Gothic Line had been broken, and the Allies stood at the entrance to the Po Valley (4/C.I.G.S., W.O. Summaries,

North-West France, 1 Oct 44). On the eastern front the Russians had taken the whole of Estonia and were fighting in the outskirts of Warsaw, and at the same time were on the Czech frontier. Bulgaria had been overwhelmed and, together with Finland, following the Rumanian example, had declared war on its former German ally. These disasters to the German Army, together with vanishing air and sea power, made it appear that resistance might collapse before the end of the year.

286. To the achievement of this desired end 21 Army Group was now in a position to make a major contribution. Although General Eisenhower's Northern Group of Armies was stretched over a wide front from Nijmegen to Calais, on the right flank the long corridor driven towards Arnhem by Second British Army had been retained and expanded in the face of violent counter-attacks. As Field Marshal Montgomery observed on 27 Sep 44, "... we are very favourably situated in that we hold main road crossings over the Meuse and the Rhine on the Eindhoven - Nijmegen axis, and thus have the ability to operate south-eastward between these two rivers. Such a thrust in conjunction with a strong advance eastward on Koln and Dusseldorf by First U.S. Army on our right would be difficult for the enemy to halt" (G.O.C.-in-C., file 1-0, Directive M.527 from C.-in-C. 21 Army Group, 27 Sep 44). But his qualifications were important. "These operations will begin as early as the maintenance situation will allow. The opening of the port is absolutely essential before we can advance deeply into Germany." (Ibid)

287. It is obvious that any future operations depended upon the rapidity with which Antwerp could be opened.

Although we now stood on the threshold of Germany, we were baffled unless we were able to build up our forces rapidly and restore momentum to our attack. A sober appreciation of the situation made it quite clear that we had NOT yet reached the stage of finality in this campaign, and that the door of opportunity was being shut in our face by the recognized skill of the German Command who were doing everything in their power to secure their defensive positions and gather their own reserves, being aided in this by the vicissitudes of weather which played into German hands during the Autumn. To sum up, we were being prevented from using Antwerp and we were being held away from the Ruhr. In the stark phrases of the C.-in-C., we were now in for another "killing match".

(Mann Lectures, 18 May 45)

288. In preparation for First Cdn Army's task in carrying out the forthcoming operations, planning had been going on at Army Headquarters for some time. (The operations to clear the Scheldt Estuary and to advance to the Maas form the subject of a subsequent report in this series, Part VI, Canadian Operations, 1 Oct - 8 Nov 44). When the essential preliminaries had been completed, General Crerar was on 27 Sep compelled by ill-health to return for treatment to the United Kingdom, having first nominated Lt-Gen. G.G. Simonds as Acting Army Commander, and Maj-Gen. C. Foulkes as A/G.O.C. 2 Cdn Corps (General Crerar's Despatch to the Minister, 8 Nov 44). Brigadier R.H. Keebler, C.R.A., took over 2 Cdn Inf Div as Acting Commander at the same time.

289. This report was drafted by Capt. F.N. Fergusson, who participated in the operations throughout while with the 19 Cdn Armd Fd Regt (S.P.), R.C.A. It was extensively revised by Lt-Col G.W.L. Nicholson.

(C.P. Stacey) Colonel
Director Historical Section

ORDER OF BATTLE

FIRST CDN ARMY
17 Aug 44

ARMY TROOPS

H.Q. A.Tps Area
1 Cdn L. of C.
74 A.A. Bde (in U.K.)
107 A.A. Bde
1 Cdn A.G.R.E.
14 Brit A.G.R.E. (Airfields)
22 Dgns (from 30 Brit Armd Bde)
141 R.A.S. less "B" and "C" Sqns

1 BRIT CORPS

CORPS TROOPS

33 Brit Armd Tank Bde (a)
4 A.G.R.A.

49 (W.R.) INF DIV

with under command

R.A.C. 49 Recce Regt
31 Brit Tank Bde, less
one regiment detached
to 12 Corps Area
1 Lothians
150 Fd Regt R.A.

146 Bde

4 Lincolns
1/4 K.O.Y.L.I.
Hallams

147 Bde

1 Leicesters
11 R.S.F.
7 D.W.R.

70 Bde

10 D.L.I.
11 D.L.I.
1 Type Scot

56 Bde (b)

2 S.E.B.
2 Glosters
2 Essex

Divisional Artillery

Divisional Engineers

51 (H.) INF DIV

R.A.C. - 2 Derby Yeo

152 Bde

2 Seaforth
5 Seaforth
5 Cameronians

153 Bde

1 Gordons
5/7 Gordons
5 B.W.

154 Bde

1 B.W.
7 B.W.
7 A. to S.H.

Divisional Artillery

Divisional Engineers

ROYAL NETHERLANDS BDE
(Prince Irene)

1 BELGIAN GROUP
(Light Brigade)

7 ARMD DIV

R.A.C. - 11 H. (attached)
R.A.C. - 8 H.

22 Armd Bde

1 R. Tks
5 R. Tks
5 D.G. (Inniskilling)
1 R.B.

131 Inf Bde

1/5 Queens
1/6 Queens
1/7 Queens
3 Med M.G. Coy

Divisional Artillery

Divisional Engineers

6 AIRBORNE DIVISION

1 Cdn Centaur Bty R.C.A. (u/c)
6 Airborne Div Recce Regt
191 Fd Regt R.A.
68 Med Regt R.A.
1 Bucks

3 Para Bde

3 Para Bde Def Pl
8 Para Bn
9 Para Bn
1 Cdn Para Bn

5 Para Bde

5 Para Bde Def Pl
7 Para Bn
12 Para Bn
13 Para Bn

6 Airlfdg Bde

6 Airlfdg Bde Def Pl
12 Devon
2 Oxf Bucks
1 R.U.R.

1 S.S. Bde

3 Cdo
4 Cdo
6 Cdo
45 (R.M.) Cdo
1 Tp 10 (IA) Cdo
8 Tp 10 (IA) Cdo
One Tp Engr Cdo

4 S.S. Bde

4 Cdo
10 (IA) Cdo
41 (R.M.) Cdo
47 (R.M.) Cdo
48 (R.M.) Cdo

(a) Under command 51 (H.) Div, 24 Aug 44 (See AEF/First Cdn Army/N/H, Docket I: Order of Battle, 29 Aug 44).

(b) Replaced 70 Brit Inf Bde (Ibid).

2 CDN CORPS
24 Aug 44

CORPS TROOPS

2 Cdn Armd Bde (less two regiments)
30 Brit Armd Bde
2 Cdn A.G.R.A. (less 19 Cdn Fd Regt (S.P.) R.C.A.)
1 Cdn A.G.R.E.
9 Brit A.G.R.A. (less 146 Med Regt R.A.
Incl 108 H.A.A. Regt)
6 Cdn Tk Regt R.C.A.
1 Lothians (less "C" Sqn)
"B" Sqn 141 R.A.C. in support only

2 CDN INF DIV
with under command

8 Cdn Recce Regt (14 C.H.)
27 Cdn Armd Regt
Tor Scot R. (M.G.)

4 Cdn Inf Bde

R. Regt C.
R.H.L.I.
Essex Scot

4 Cdn Fd Regt R.C.A.
5 Cdn Fd Regt R.C.A.
6 Cdn Fd Regt R.C.A.
Tor Scot R. (M.G.)
2 Cdn A.Tk Regt R.C.A.
3 Cdn L.A.A. Regt

5 Cdn Inf Bde

R.H.C.
R. de Mais
Calg Highrs

6 Cdn Inf Bde

Fus M.R.
Cameron's of C.
S. Sask R.

2 Cdn Fd Coy R.C.E.
7 Cdn Fd Coy R.C.E.
11 Cdn Fd Coy R.C.E.
1 Cdn Fd Pk Coy R.C.E.
2 Cdn Inf Div Br Pl

3 CDN INF DIV
with under command

7 Cdn Inf Bde

R. Wpg Rif
Regina Rif
1 C. Scot R.

12 Cdn Fd Regt R.C.A.
13 Cdn Fd Regt R.C.A.
14 Cdn Fd Regt R.C.A.
3 Cdn A. Tk Regt R.C.A.
4 Cdn L.A.A. Regt R.C.A.

8 Cdn Inf Bde

Q.O.R. of C.
R. de Chaud
N. Shore R.

9 Cdn Inf Bde

H.L.I. of C.
S.D. & G. Highrs
Nth N.S. Highrs

6 Cdn Fd Coy R.C.E.
16 Cdn Fd Coy R.C.E.
18 Cdn Fd Coy R.C.E.
3 Cdn Fd Pk Coy R.C.E.

4 CDN ARMD DIV
with under command

29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt
18 Cdn Armd C. Regt
10 Indep M.G. Coy

4 Cdn Armd Bde

21 Cdn Armd Regt
22 Cdn Armd Regt
28 Cdn Armd Regt

15 Cdn Fd Regt R.C.A.
23 Cdn Fd Regt (S.P.) R.C.A.
5 Cdn A.Tk Regt R.C.A.
8 Cdn L.A.A. Regt R.C.A.

10 Cdn Inf Bde

Linc & Welld R.
Alq R.
A. & S.H. of C.
Lake Sup R. (Mot)

8 Cdn Fd Sqn R.C.E.
9 Cdn Fd Sqn R.C.E.
6 Cdn Fd Pk Coy R.C.E.

1 POL ARMD DIV10 Pol Armd Bde

10 Pol Mtd Rifle Regt (Armd
 Recce Regt)
 1 Pol Armd Regt
 Pol Armd Regt
 24 Pol Armd (L.) Regt

3 Pol Inf Bde

1 Pol Armd Div M.G. Coy
 10 Pol Mot Bn (Dgns)
 1 Pol Inf Bn (Highland 2
 (Bn)
 8 Pol Inf Bn
 9 Pol Inf Bn

1 Pol Mot Fd Regt (S.P.)
 2 Pol Mot Fd Regt
 1 Pol A.Tk Regt
 1 Pol L.A.A. Regt

11 Pol Fd Pk Sqn
 1 Pol Armd Div Br Tp
 10 Pol Fd Sqn
 11 Pol Fd Sqn

(First Cdn Army and 2 Cdn Corps Order of Battle is that
 given in W.D., G.S. (S.D.), H.Q. First Cdn Army,
 August 1944: Appendices 278 and 280, 24 Aug 44.)

ORDER OF BATTLE

FIRST CDN ARMY
3 Sep 44

ARMY TROOPS

H.Q. A.Tps Area
1 Cdn L. of C. Terminal
74 A.A. Bde
107 A.A. Bde
1 Cdn A.G.R.E.
141 R.A.C. less "A", "B" and "C" Sqns
7 Base Sub Area 42 Aslt Regt R.E.
9 Brit A.G.R.A. less 146 Med Regt R.A.
2 Cdn A.G.R.A. less one Med Regt, two
Btys 155 mm (S.P.), 19 Cdn Fd
Regt (S.P.) R.C.A.

1 BRIT CORPS

CORPS TROOPS

33 Brit Armd Bde
4 A.G.R.A.
31 Brit Tank Bde
14 Brit A.G.R.E.
4 S.S. Bde

49 (W.R.) INF DIV
with under command

R.A.C. 49 Recce Regt
6 Aslt Regt R.E.
"A" Sqn 141 R.A.C.
22 Dgns

146 Inf Bde

4 Lincolns
1/4 K.O.Y.L.I.
Hallams

147 Inf Bde

1 Leicesters
11 R.S.F.
7 D.W.R.

56 Inf Bde

2 S.W.B.
2 Glosters
2 Essex

Divisional Artillery

Divisional Engineers

51 (H.) INF DIV

R.A.C. - 2 Derby Yeo

152 Inf Bde

2 Seaforth
5 Seaforth
5 Cameronians

153 Inf Bde

1 Gordons
5/7 Gordons
5 B.W.

154 Inf Bde

1 B.W.
7 B.W.
7 A. & S.H.

Divisional Artillery

Divisional Engineers

2 CDN CORPSCORPS TROOPS

Royal Netherlands Bde
 2 Cdn Armd Bde (less one regiment)
 30 Brit Armd Bde
 6 Cdn Tk Regt R.C.A.
 1 Lothians
 One Med Regt
 Two Btys 155 mm (S.P.)
 19 Cdn Fd Regt (S.P.) R.C.A.

2 CDN INF DIV

with under command

4 Cdn Inf Bde

R. Regt C.
 R.H.L.I.
 Essex Scot

5 Cdn Inf Bde

R.H.C.
 R. de Mais
 Calg Highrs

6 Cdn Inf Bde

Fus M.R.
 Camerons of C.
 S. Sask R.

4 Cdn Fd Regt R.C.A.
 5 Cdn Fd Regt R.C.A.
 6 Cdn Fd Regt R.C.A.
 2 Cdn A.Tk Regt
 3 Cdn L.A.A. Regt

2 Cdn Fd Coy R.C.E.
 7 Cdn Fd Coy R.C.E.
 11 Cdn Fd Coy R.C.E.
 1 Cdn Fd Pk Coy R.C.E.
 2 Cdn Inf Div Br Pl

3 CDN INF DIV

with under command

C.H. of O. (M.G.)
 10 Cdn Armd Regt
 7 Cdn Recce Regt

7 Cdn Inf Bde

R. Wpg Rif
 Regina Rif
 1 C. Scot R.

8 Cdn Inf Bde

Q.O.R. of C.
 R. de Chaud
 N. Shore R.

9 Cdn Inf Bde

H.L.I. of C.
 S.D. & G. Highrs
 Nth N.S. Highrs

12 Cdn Fd Regt R.C.A.
 13 Cdn Fd Regt R.C.A.
 14 Cdn Fd Regt R.C.A.
 3 Cdn A.Tk Regt R.C.A.
 4 Cdn L.A.A. Regt R.C.A.

6 Cdn Fd Coy R.C.E.
 16 Cdn Fd Coy R.C.E.
 18 Cdn Fd Coy R.C.E.
 3 Cdn Fd Pk Coy R.C.E.

4 CND ARMD DIV

with under command

29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt

18 Cdn Armd C. Regt
10 Indep M.G. Coy

4 Cdn Armd Bde

21 Cdn Armd Regt
22 Cdn Armd Regt
28 Cdn Armd Regt

10 Cdn Inf Bde

Linc & Welld R.
Alq R.
A. & S.H. of C.
Lake Sup R. (Mot)

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15 Cdn Fd Regt R.C.A.	8 Cdn Fd Sqn R.C.E.
23 Cdn Fd Regt (S.P.) R.C.A.	9 Cdn Fd Sqn R.C.E.
8 Cdn L.A.A. Regt R.C.A.	6 Cdn Fd Pk Coy R.C.E.
5 Cdn A.Tk R.C.A.	

1 POL ARMD DIV

10 Pol Armd Bde

10 Pol Mtd Rifle Regt (Armd
Recce Regt)
1 Pol Armd Regt
Pol Armd Regt
24 Pol Armd (L.) Regt

3 Pol Inf Bde

1 Pol Armd Div M.G. Coy
10 Pol Mot Bn (Dgns)
1 Pol Inf Bn (Highland 2
Bn)
8 Pol Inf Bn
9 Pol Inf Bn

1 Pol Mot Fd Regt (S.P.)	11 Pol Fd Pk Sqn
2 Pol Mot Fd Regt	1 Pol Armd Div Br Tp
1 Pol A.Tk Regt	10 Pol Fd Sqn
1 Pol L.A.A. Regt	11 Pol Fd Sqn

(First Cdn Army and 2 Cdn Corps Order of Battle is that given in W.D., G.S. (S.D.), H.Q. First Cdn Army, September 1944: Appx 2, 75-1-2/SD and Appx "A", 3 Sep 44)

ORDER OF BATTLE

FIRST CDN ARMY
30 Sep 44

ARMY TROOPS

79 Armd Div
1 Tk (Training Areas)
30 Brit Armd Bde
31 Brit Tk Bde
1 Aslt R.E.
33 Brit Armd Bde
34 Brit Tk Bde
154 (H.) Div
3 A.G.R.A.
4 A.G.R.A.
74 A.A. Bde
13 A.G.R.E.
14 A.G.R.E.
H.Q. A.Tps Area
1 Cdn L. of C. Terminal
22 Dgns (less two sqns)
11 R. Tks
1 F.F. Yeo
5 Aslt Regt
42 Aslt Regt
3 Super Hy Regt, less one bty and one tp
1 Cdn A.G.R.E.
8 Base Sub Area
150 Fd Regt R.A.
191 Fd Regt R.A.
One tp 6 Cdn A.Tk Regt R.C.A.
107 A.A. Bde, less 2 Cdn A.A. Regt

1 BRIT CORPS

CORPS TROOPS

27 Cdn Armd Regt
7 Base Sub Area
4 Brit A.G.R.A.

49 BRIT INF DIV

with under command

R.A.C. 49 Recce Regt
65 Med Regt R.A.

56 Brit Inf Bde

146 Brit Inf Bde

147 Brit Inf Bde

2 S.W.B.
2 Glosters
2 Essex

4 Lincolns
1/4 K.O.Y.L.I.
Hallams

1 Leicesters
11 R.S.F.
7 D.W.R.

Divisional Artillery

Divisional Engineers

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51 (H.) DIV

R.C.A. - 2 Derby Yeo

158 (H.) Bde

2 Seaforth
5 Seaforth
5 Cameronians

153 (H.) Inf Bde

1 Gordons
5/7 Gordons
5 B.W.

2 CDN INF DIV

8 Cdn Recce Regt
10 Cdn Armd Regt
74 A.A. Bde (less 60 H.A.A. Regt)
Tor Scot R. (M.G.)

4 Cdn Inf Bde

R. Regt C.
R.H.L.I.
Essex Scot

5 Cdn Inf Bde

R.H.C.
R. de Mais
Calg Highrs

6 Cdn Inf Bde

Fus M.R.
Cameronians of C.
S. Sask R.

Divisional Artillery

Divisional Engineers

1 POL ARMD DIV

10 Pol Armd Bde

10 Pol Mtd Rifle Regt (Armd
Recce Regt)
1 Pol Armd Regt
2 Pol Armd Regt
24 Pol Armd (L.) Regt

3 Pol Inf Bde

1 Pol Armd Div M.G.
Coy
10 Pol Mot Bn (Dgns)
1 Pol Inf Bn
(Highland Bn)
8 Pol Inf Bn
9 Pol Inf Bn

1 Pol Mot Fd Regt (S.P.)
2 Pol Mot Fd Regt

11 Pol Fd Pk Sqn
1 Pol Armd Div Br Tp

1 Pol A.Tk Regt
1 Pol L.A.A. Regt

10 Pol Fd Sqn
11 Pol Fd Sqn

2 CDN CORPS

CORPS TROOPS

2 Cdn Armd Bde (less two regiments)
4 S.S. Bde
2 Cdn A.G.R.A.
9 Brit A.G.R.A.
107 A.A. Bde
H.Q. 31 Tank Bde
1 Lothians
"C" Sqn 22 Dgns
141 R.A.C. (less one sqn)
13 Grn

3 CDN INF DIV

7 Cdn Recce Regt
6 Cdn Armd Regt
C.H. of O. (M.G.)

7 Cdn Inf Bde

R. Wpg Rif
Regina Rif
1 C. Scot R.

8 Cdn Inf Bde

Q.O.R. of C.
R. de Chaud
N. Shore R.

9 Cdn Inf Bde

H.L.I. of C.
S.D. & G. Highrs
Nth N.S. Highrs

Divisional Artillery

Divisional Engineers

4 CDN ARMD DIV

29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt
18 Cdn Armd C. Regt
2 Cdn Corps Tps
10 Indep M.G. Coy
19 Cdn Armd Fd Regt (S.P.) R.C.A.

4 Cdn Armd Bde

21 Cdn Armd Regt
22 Cdn Armd Regt
28 Cdn Armd Regt
Lake Sup R. (Mot)

10 Cdn Inf Bde

Linc & Welld R.
Alq R.
A. & S.H. OF c.

15 Cdn Fd Regt R.C.A.
23 Cdn Fd Regt (S.P.) R.C.A.
8 Cdn L.A.A. Regt R.C.A.
5 Cdn A.Tk Regt R.C.A.

8 Cdn Fd Sqn R.C.E.
9 Cdn Fd Sqn R.C.E.
6 Cdn Fd Pk Coy R.C.E.

(First Cdn Army Order of Battle is that given in W.D.,
G.S. (S.D.), H.Q. First Cdn Army, September 1944: Appx 2,
75-1-2/SD, 24 and 30 Sep 44.)

PRISONER OF WAR RETURNS 16 - 31 AUG 44

(Figures taken from First Cdn Army lnt Summary No. 64,
1 Sep 44, and 2 Cdn Corps lnt Summaries Nos. 35 - 46,
16 Aug 44 to 1 Sep 44)*

Date	First Cdn Army	2 Cdn Corps
16 Aug	650	431
17 Aug	434	282
18 Aug	433	326
19 Aug	745	391
20 Aug	2523	2060
21 Aug	3268	2048
22 Aug	7270	6371
23 Aug	1657	1275
24 Aug	544	321
25 Aug	645)
26 Aug	332) 379
27 Aug	900)
28 Aug	550) 575
29 Aug	561)
30 Aug	844	145
31 Aug	1232	211
31 Aug	1232	611
TOTALS	22,588	14,426

* See footnote to para 169 of this report.

CasualtiesFirst Canadian Army, 19 Aug - 30 Sep 44

(These figures are for Canadian personnel and do not include 1 Pol Armd Div of 2 Cdn Corps or non-Canadian units of 1 Brit Corps)

Killed		Died of Wounds (incl P.W.)		Wounded		Missing		P.W. (incl wounded)		Totals	
Offrs	O.Rs.	Offrs	O.Rs.	Offrs	O.Rs.	Offrs	O.Rs.	Offrs	O.Rs.	Offrs	O.Rs.
						<u>19 Aug - 2 Sep 44</u>					
83	1002	20	245	234	3224	12	213	6	89	355	4773
						<u>3 Sep - 16 Sep 44</u>					
27	272	10	117	65	714	9	44	-	-	111	1147
						<u>17 Sep - 30 Sep 44</u>					
28	291	8	87	88	1236	6	127	10	194	140	1935
138	1565	38	449	387	5174	27	384	16	283	606	7855

(C.M.H.Q. Records Office - Statistical Report of Casualties "EA" Appendix to "A" Lists 481-495 and POW 105 107 inclusive, 19 Aug - 30 Sep 44)

Casualties2 Cdn Inf Div by BrigadesInfantry Battalions

19 Aug - 2 Sep 44

	Killed or Died of Wounds		Wounded		Missing (incl P.W.)	
	Offrs	O.Rs.	Offrs	O.Rs.	Offrs	O.Rs.
<u>4 Cdn Inf Bde H.Q.</u>	1	-	-	1	-	-
<u>Essex Scot</u>	2	38	9	108	3	34
<u>R.H.L.I.</u>	2	42	6	64	-	-
<u>R. Regt C.</u>	2	38	16	144	-	1
<u>5 Cdn Inf Bde H.Q.</u>	-	3	-	9	-	-
<u>Calq Highrs</u>	3	72	6	142	-	-
<u>R. de Mais</u>	4	21	6	62	-	9
<u>R.H.C.</u>	7	118	4	94	-	-
<u>6 Cdn Inf Bde H.Q.</u>	-	-	2	1	-	-
<u>Cameron's of C.</u>	3	43	7	160	-	1
<u>Fus M.R.</u>	4	48	7	63	2	30
<u>S. Sask R.</u>	8	80	13	200	-	12
	36	503	76	1048	5	87

(C.M.H.Q. Records Office - Statistical Report of Casualties "EA" Appendix to "A" Lists 481-486, and POW 105 (inclusive), 19 Aug - 2 Sep 44)

These casualties concern only the infantry battalions of the three brigades of this division for the two week period 19 Aug 44 to 2 Sep 44. As the heaviest fighting occurred in the Forêt de la Londe during this two week period these totals given an approximate indication of the casualties of 27-39 Aug inclusive.

CASUALTIES FORET DE LA LONDE

Infantry Battalions of 2 Cdn Inf Div
26 - 29 Aug 44

	<u>26 Aug</u>				<u>27 Aug</u>				<u>28 Aug</u>				<u>29 Aug</u>				Grand Total
	K.*	W.*	M.*	Total	K.	W.	M.	Total	K.	W.	M.	Total	K.	W.	M.	Total	
<u>4 Cdn Inf Bde</u>																	
R. Regt C. Offrs	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	2	1	5	-	6	-	3	1	4	12
O.Rs.	5	20	-	25	3	14	-	17	15	34	-	49	13	16	2	31	122
R.H.L.I. Offrs	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	4	-	4	7
O.Rs.	-	1	-	1	3	22	-	25	3	6	-	9	11	18	-	29	64
Essex Scot Offrs	-	1	-	1	1	4	-	5	2	2	-	4	-	-	-	-	10
O.Rs.	2	16	1	19	10	33	-	43	9	19	-	28	1	2	-	3	93
<u>5 Cdn Inf Bde</u>																	
R.H.C. Offrs	1	2	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
O.Rs.	14	34	-	48	-	2	-	2	-	-	-	-	3	8	1	12	62
R. de Mais Offrs	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
O.Rs.	-	15	-	15	1	1	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	17
Calg Highrs Offrs	4	2	-	6	-	1	-	1	1	1	-	2	-	3	-	3	12
O.Rs.	12	63	-	75	1	-	-	1	-	4	-	4	5	29	-	34	112
<u>6 Cdn Inf Bde</u>																	
Fus M.R. Offrs	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
O.Rs.	-	3	-	3	2	9	1	12	1	3	-	4	-	3	-	3	22

Camerons of C. Offrs	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1									
O.Rs.	-	-	-	-	1	12	-	13	5	34	-	39	6	33	-	39	91
S. Sask R. Offrs	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	2	1	9	-	6	-	6	15
O.Rs.	-	1	-	1	1	18	-	19	29	22	-	51	1	73	-	74	145
Totals	38	159	1	198	23	119	1	143	73	134	1	208	40	198	4	242	791

* Killed, Wounded, Missing

Taken from Casualty Cards