

REPORT NO 188

HISTORICAL SECTION

CANADIAN MILITARY HEADQUARTERS

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

Part VI: Canadian Operations, 1 Oct - 8 Nov
The Clearing of the Scheldt Estuary

CONTENTS

Page

CONSIDERATIONS OF OFFENCE AND MAINTENANCE	
THE OPERATION TO CLEAR THE SCHELDT IS ASSIGNED	
CONSIDERATIONS OF TOPOGRAPHY	
THE POSSIBILITIES OF FLOODING	
THE ENEMY AND HIS DEFENCES	
THE ENEMY'S INTENTIONS	
THE ENEMY'S POINT OF VIEW: GENERAL VON ZANGEN	
THE ENEMY'S POINT OF VIEW: LT-GEN DASER	
THE ENEMY'S DEFENSIVE POLICY ON THE WEST SCHELDT	
PRELIMINARY PROBLEMS OF PLANNING	
PRELIMINARY ARMY APPRECIATION, 19 SEP 44	
APPRECIATION BY LT-GEN SIMONDS	
PRELIMINARY AIR POLICY	
CONSULTATION WITH THE ROYAL NAVY, 21 SEP 44	
PLENARY PLANNING CONFERENCE, 23 SEP 44	
APPARENT IMPRACTICABILITY OF FLOODING BY AIR ATTACK	
CONCURRENCE OF HEADQUARTERS 21 ARMY GROUP, 26-27 SEP 44	

TEMPORARY CHANGES IN COMMAND, 26-27 SEP 44

THE CASE FOR THE BREACHING

THE GENERAL SITUATION, 27 SEP 44

THE TASK OF FIRST CDN ARMY, 2 OCT 44

THE CORPS COMMANDER'S OUTLINE PLAN FOR OPERATION "SWITCHBACK"

THE 3 CDN INF DIV PLAN

INTELLIGENCE AND TERRAIN

THE 7 CDN INF BDE PLAN

CO-OPERATION OF 4 CDN ARMD DIV

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE LEOPOLD CANAL BRIDGEHEAD, 6-16 OCT 44

THE ASSAULT ACROSS THE BRAAKMAN INLET

- A. MAJ-GEN EBERDING'S DILEMMA, 6 OCT 44
- B. ASSEMBLY OF 9 CDN INF BDE GP
- C. THE PLAN
- D. THE ASSAULT DELAYED
- E. THE ASSAULT GOES IN, 9 OCT 44
- F. THE BRIDGEHEAD ESTABLISHED, 9-10 OCT 44

CHANGE OF DIVISIONAL PLAN, 9-10 OCT 44

EXPLOITATION OF THE BRAAKMAN BRIDGEHEAD

THE JUNCTURE WITH 4 CDN ARMD DIV, 14-15 OCT 44

THE LINKING OF THE BRIDGEHEADS, 16-19 OCT 44

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE COAST, 20-29 OCT 44

KNOCKE, SLUIS AND THE END, 1-3 NOV 44

OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

OPERATIONS NORTH OF ANTWERP, 1-9 OCT 44

THE GENERAL SITUATION, 1-6 OCT 44

RENEWED ATTEMPT TO CLOSE THE ISTHMUS, 10-16 OCT 44

21 ARMY GROUP'S CHANGE OF PLAN, 9 OCT 44

RESPONSIBILITIES OF 1 BRIT CORPS, 16 OCT 44

OPERATIONS OF 4 CDN ARMD DIV, 17 OCT - 8 NOV 44

THE ASSAULT ON SOUTH BEVELAND BY 2 CDN INF DIV, 23 OCT 44

THE CROSSING OF THE BEVELAND CANAL, 26-27 OCT 44
OPERATIONS OF 52 (L) DIV, 27-28 OCT 44
SOUTH BEVELAND CLEARED, 29-31 OCT 44
THE CAPTURE OF NORTH BEVELAND, 31 OCT - 1 NOV 44
THE WITHDRAWAL OF 2 CDN INF DIV, 2 NOV 44
JOINT PLANNING FOR THE ASSAULT ON WALCHEREN
WEATHER AND TIMING
OPERATION "INFATUATE", GENERAL PLAN OF ATTACH
THE AIR ASSAULT OF WALCHEREN
AIR AND FIRE SUPPORT FOR D DAY
FINAL ARRANGEMENTS, INTENTIONS AND TASKS
THE ASSAULT ON FLUSHING, 1 NOV 44
THE ASSAULT AT WESTKAPELLE, 1 NOV 44
THE ISLAND OVERRUN, 2-8 NOV 44
THE FLOODING JUSTIFIED
THE PORT OF ANTWERP OPENED, 8 NOV 44
CONCLUSION

APPENDICES

"A" - ORDERS OF BATTLE - "SWITCHBACK", 3 CDN INF DIV, 6 OCT 44
"B" - 4 S.S. BDE GP 0.0. NO. 6, OPERATION "INFATUATE"
"C" - 4 S.S. BDE GP ORDER OF BATTLE NO. 2
"D" - NOTES SUR L'ORGANIZATION THEORIQUE D'UN COMMANDO
"E" - TROOPS AND UNITS ATTACHED TO NO. 4 COMMANDO FOR THE INITIAL STAGES OF
OPERATION "INFATURATE I"
"F" - FIRST CDN ARMY/84 GP R.A.F., OPERATION "INFATUATE", PRE-PLANNED AIR
TARGETS PRIOR TO D-DAY
"G" - OPERATION "INFATUATE", AIR PLAN
"H" - SUMMARY OF TARGET ALLOCATION
"J" - "INFATUATE II", COVER AND CLOSE SUPPORT - D-DAY

"K" - ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE REPORTS ON WHICH THE ACCOUNT OF THE ASSAULTS
ON WALCHEREN IS BASED

"L" - G.S.G.S. MAPS

MAPS

"A" - OPERATION "SWITCHBACK". OPERATIONS TO CLEAR THE SCHELDT, 6 OCT-2 NOV 44

"B" - OPERATIONS NORTH OF ANTWERP BY 2 CDN INF DIV AND 4 CDN ARMD DIV, 1 OCT-
6 NOV 44

"C" - OPERATING "VITALITY" AND "INFATUATE", 23 OCT-8 NOV 44

"D" - THE ASSAULT ON FLUSHING BY 4 CDO OF 4 S.S. BDE AND THE SUBSEQUENT
EXPLOITATION BY 155 (L.) BDE, 1-8 NOV 44

"E" - ROUGH SKETCH OF WESTKAPELLE GAP

R E P O R T NO. 188

HISTORICAL SECTION

CANADIAN MILITARY HEADQUARTERS

7 Apr 48

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

Part VI: Canadian Operation, 1 Oct - 8 Nov
The Clearing of the Scheldt Estuary

1. This report takes up the detailed narrative of Canadian Operations in North-West Europe at the point reached in [Report No. 183](#) and carries it through the ensuing phase of some five weeks when First Canadian Army was engaged in clearing the enemy from the shores and islands of the Scheldt estuary. In scale and method the report is uniform with its predecessors in the series. The fullest possible use has been made of the available sources of evidence, including existing narrative material such as Major J.R. Martin's battle report on Operation "SWITCHBACK", which with some further amendment and revision has been incorporated in the text.

CONSIDERATIONS OF OFFENCE AND MAINTENANCE

2. The long distances over which the Allied Armies had pursued the enemy had carried our fighting troops so far away from their bases of supply within the bridgehead in Normandy as to place our administrative services under very considerable strain. While this condition remained it would be impossible to sustain the momentum of our advance along the entire front and it had already

begun to appear that the Germans, reorganizing with desperate efficiency and disposed to take their stand in rearguard actions of increasing bitterness might succeed in prolonging the defence of their own country through a winter campaign. Given better fortune, the further projection of our offensive by means of the airborne thrust across the Mass and Rhine might have deprived the enemy of any such opportunity. On the other hand, our early possession of the port of Antwerp, which had fallen into our hands so surprisingly without resistance, and so marvellously intact, had invited an immediate effort on the greatest scale to eliminate the enemy from the environs of the city and the shore lands of the estuary as a preliminary to making use of those ample docks and warehouses for the purposes of supply.

3. That this alternative was rejected in favour of the attempt to effect a crossing of the Rhine before the Germans could recover sufficiently to develop the full defensive potentialities of their river constituted one of the most important decisions of the campaign. Yet it accorded only partially with the ideas of Field Marshal Montgomery on how best to exploit the situation and bring the German war to an end. "My own view, which I presented to the Supreme Commander," he has written, "was the 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". As has been seen ([Report No. 183](#)), General Eisenhower was unwilling, however, to accept the full implications of this reasoning, for according to the C.-in-C., "success in such a plan would have been, to my mind, dependent upon our ability to concentrate sufficient administrative resources, to ensure the maintenance of the momentum from the time we crossed the Seine. The project therefore involved calling upon the combined Allied resources in the widest sense; and would have entailed reverting sectors of the Allied Front to a purely static role". ([Normandy to the Baltic](#), p. 149.) To demand that the Allied advance elsewhere be brought to a standstill was to ask too much, yet the possibilities of breaking into Germany swiftly by the north-east were too

promising to be denied. The main weight of the attack, therefore, had been thrown into the assault on the river crossings: the American front continued, though more slowly, to close up towards the Rhine, and the allocations of resources for the opening of Antwerp gave place in the order of priorities. Momentarily, offence was more important than maintenance.

4. General Eisenhower thus reports the consequences of this decision and declares his acceptance of full responsibility for making it:

In part, the slow-down along the front facing Germany was due to my decision to employ our greatest strength in the north to attain flanking bridgeheads across the lower Rhine beyond the main fortifications of the Siegfried Line. In view of the fact, however, that the main highway to Berlin -- the plains and level fields of Northern Germany -- lay beyond the Rhine in the north, and that the southern country was unsuitable for the desired rapid advance and continued exploitation by reason of its mountainous and forested terrain, my commanders and I were in full agreement as to the desirability of exerting our strongest pressure in the north. The attractive possibility of quickly turning the German north flank led me to approve the temporary delay in freeing the vital port of Antwerp, the seaward approaches to which were still in German hands...

...I took the full responsibility for this, and I believe that the possible and actual results warranted the calculated risk involved. Had our forces not pushed north and east to hold the line of the Maas and Waal well north of Antwerp, the port itself would have been in constant danger not only from a blow possibly synchronized with the later breakthrough in the Eifel but from independent attacks launched at close range from Holland.

(Report by the Supreme Commander to the Combined Chiefs of Staff on the Operations in Europe of the Allied Expeditionary Force, 6 June 1944 to 8 May 1945, pp 67, 68.)¹

The risk was well taken, and when the counter-offensive came to be made that winter through the Ardennes the Allied line was in sufficient depth to enable First Canadian Army to stand along the northern approaches across the Maas with undiminished confidence.

5. The partial frustration of the plan to lay open the way by the northern bridgeheads to the Ruhr did nothing to lessen the strain upon our extended lines of supply and forced the High Command to accept the alternative of diverting attention and resources to the establishment of a main Allied base at Antwerp. Thus it came about, in the words of General Eisenhower, that:

With the completion of the MARKET-GARDEN operation the Northern Group of Armies was instructed to undertake the opening of Antwerp as a matter of the first priority. While the city and port installations had fallen virtually intact to 30 Corps on 4 September, the harbour had proved and was to continue to prove useless to us until the Scheldt Estuary had been cleared of mines and South Beveland and Walcheren Island, commanding the sea lane to the harbour, had been reduced. The operation to achieve this involved the employment of amphibious forces, and the joint naval, air, and ground force planning was immediately undertaken and worked out during the latter part of September and early October at the Headquarters of the Canadian First Army.

(Supreme Commander's Report, p. 68)

¹ Page numbers are those of edition published by The Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington.

THE OPERATION TO CLEAR THE SCHELDT IS ASSIGNED

5. There had been no doubt at Lt-Gen Crerar's Headquarters concerning the urgency of the operations which were now to be undertaken. Even before the attack on the river crossings over the Maas and Rhine had gone in, and while the Canadians had still to deal with the enemy in Boulogne, Calais and Dunkirk, the C.-in-C. signalled his growing concern for the opening of the Scheldt:

...THE EARLY OPENING OF THE PORT OR ANTWERP IS DAILY BECOMING OF INCREASING IMPORTANCE AND THIS CANNOT REPEAT CANNOT TAKE PLACE UNTIL WALCHEREN HAS BEEN CAPTURED AND THE MOUTH OF THE RIVER OPENED FOR NAVIGATION. BEFORE YOU CAN DO THIS YOU WILL OBVIOUSLY HAVE TO REMOVE ALL ENEMY FROM THE MAINLAND IN THAT PART WHERE THEY (ARE) HOLDING UP NORTH-EAST OF BRUGES. AIRBORNE ARMY CONSIDERS NOT POSSIBLE USE AIRBORNE TPS IN THE BUSINESS. GRATEFUL FOR YOUR VIEWS AS TO WHEN YOU THINK YOU CAN TACKLE THIS PROBLEM...

(G.O.C.-in-C./1-0, Operations 21 Army Group, Folio 77, 12 Sep 44.)

6. The withholding of the use of airborne troops could only mean greater risk and difficulty for all others concerned, since the sea-girt, water-logged and confined areas to be attacked made the enemy's positions on peninsula and island peculiarly inaccessible. The reasons for the refusal are thus laconically recorded by Lt-Gen Lewis H. Brereton, who commanded the Allied Airborne Army:

I refused Operation Infatuate because of intense flak on Walcheren, difficult terrain which would prevent glider landings, excessive losses likely because of drowning, non-availability of U.S. troops, and the fact that the operation is an improper employment of airborne forces.

(Lt-Gen Lewis H. Brereton, The Brereton Diaries, pp 340, 341.)

7. But on this rather crucial issue Field Marshal Montgomery remained unconvinced, as he intimated to General Crerar in the following letter, written on the next day, asking him to give immediate consideration to the problem of clearing the estuary even while still engaged with the ports of the Pas de Calais. The expectation that paratroops would be allotted helped considerably in the Canadian assessment.

PERSONAL AND TOP SECRET

My Dear Harry

1. Since last meeting you, we have had a great victory with SHAEF, and the main weight of maintenance is now to be diverted to the northward thrust against the RUHR.
2. I am delighted that you have captured HAVRE, and please give my congratulations to 1 Corps and the Divisions concerned.
3. The things that are now very important are:
 - a. Capture of BOULOGNE and DUNKIRK and CALAIS.
 - b. The setting in motion of operations designed to enable us to use the port of ANTWERP.
4. Of these two things, b. is probably the most important. We have captured a port which resembles LIVERPOOL in size, but we cannot use it; if we could use it, all our maintenance troubles would disappear. I am very anxious that a. and b. should both go on simultaneously if you can

possibly arrange it, as time is of the utmost importance. I wonder whether you could possibly use one Corps HQ to control the operations from BOULOGNE to DUNKIRK, and the other Corps HQ to control the operations for the opening of ANTWERP. Perhaps you would let me know what you think about this.

6. 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 city of ANTWERP itself from Dempsey as soon as possible; you will want that place and certain ground east of it, so that you can develop operations to push the enemy northwards from the city. You may also possibly want to develop operations westwards along the neck of the peninsula towards WALCHERN.

6. Dempsey is launching Operation MARKET on Sunday 17th September. This is the operation designed to secure the crossings over the MEUSE and the RHINE in the ARNHEM area, and three Airborne Divisions are being used.

7. I have arranged that Airborne Forces (Para Troops) will be available for you to assist in the capture of WALCHEREN Island.

8. The really important thing is speed in setting in motion what we have to do. I hope very much that you will be able to tackle both your tasks simultaneously, i.e., the PAS DE CALAIS Ports and the ANTWERP business.

Yrs ever

B.L. Montgomery

(G.O.C.-in-C./1-0, Operations 21 Army Group, Folio 79, 13 Sep 44.)

8. But the C.-in-C's. expectation that airborne troops would be forthcoming proved to be too optimistic. His argument, reiterated at Supreme Allied Headquarters, failed to move those who held that they should not be used in such an enterprise. The final decision against their employment is thus recorded in Lt-Gen Brereton's diary:

Paris, 21 September 1944 (D-plus-107). Called to a conference at SHAEF to discuss General Montgomery's urgent request for an airborne operation on Walcheren Island. With the backing of ACM Leigh-Mallory, I convinced General Eisenhower that the airborne operation was not sound. General Eisenhower sent a message to Field Marshal Montgomery informing him that airborne troops would not be employed against Walcheren. He stressed also that this decision was in no way due to a possible high rate of loss being suffered by airborne troops, but was due entirely to terrain characteristics which made the operation intrinsically unsuited as an airborne task.

(The Brereton Diaries, p. 353.)

9. During the previous week the studies on which General Crerar's planning staff actually set to work on 11 Sep (W.D., Plans Section, H.Q. First Cdn

Army, September 1944) had proceeded on the assumption that we should be able to throw troops on to Walcheren by air as well as by land and sea, for it was clear that combined operations would have to be undertaken and the closet relationship maintained between the services if the whole of the intricate and watery region of the West Scheldt was to be wrested quickly from the enemy. Even so, the task looked none too easy. On a first view, offered by General Crerar in reply to the C.-in-C's. letter, and before his staff had had time to make further detailed study, extricating the enemy's oyster from its Zeelandic shell would require the heaviest of implements:

The capture of WALCHEREN and BEVELAND islands look like very tough propositions, to me - at this stage - and to require a lot of "doing". I certainly will want to secure the mainland end of the peninsula leading from ZUID BEVELAND before launching a final assault, but my studies have not yet proceeded sufficiently to indicate how I would propose to conduct that operation as a whole. In any event, I feel that maximum heavy bomber effort on these islands should be carried out whenever Bomber Command is not required by me for specific support of attacks on BOULOGNE, DUNKIRK and CALAIS.

(G.O.C.-in-C./1.0, Operations 21 Army Group, Folio 82, 13 Sep 44.)

On closer scrutiny both by the planners at Army Headquarters and by Lt-Gen Simonds, on whom, as Commander of 2 Cdn Corps, the responsibility of carrying out the operations would fall, General Crerar's impression was confirmed. It was encouraging, therefore, when renewed assurance of strong support from the air came in the directive put out by the C.-in-C. on 14 Sep:

... First Canadian Army

8. Complete the capture first of BOULOGNE, and then of CALAIS.

9. DUNKIRK will be left to be dealt with later; for the present it will be merely masked.
10. The whole energies of the Army will be directed towards operations designed to enable full use to be made of the port of ANTWERP.

Airborne troops are available to co-operate.

Air operations against the island of WALCHEREN have already commenced and these include:

- a. the isolation of the island by taking out the road and rail bridges;
- b. attacks on coast defence guns; and
- c. attacks on other artillery, including flak...

(G.O.C.-in-C./1-0, Operations 21 Army Group,
Folios 86, 87, 14 Sep 44.)

It seemed evident that all this would be needed to overcome both the defences that the enemy had himself set up and those other barriers of water, dyke and polder which belong to the topography of the region.

CONSIDERATIONS OF TOPOGRAPHY

10. As the enemy had not failed to appreciate, any commander given the task of seizing the lands comprising the general area of the West Scheldt would be confronted with the comparative inaccessibility of his objectives on the north shore. The islands of Walcheren and North Beveland and the peninsula of South

Beveland can only be approached on the landward side across a narrow isthmus of salt flats and polders joining South Beveland with the mainland and supporting the causeway which carries the main road and railway line into Brabant. Some 23 miles farther west another causeway links the peninsula with Walcheren. On the way road and rail cross the South Beveland canal over a double bridge. There are other canals on the peninsula but the South Beveland canal is the most formidable as a military obstacle. It gives access to barges moving up from the West Scheldt to thread the northern channels of the archipelago and in normal time stakes more traffic probably than any other canal in Europe, a burden of about 28 million tons passing through in a year. It is about four and a half miles long, 21 feet deep and between 130 and 160 feet wide. Farther west the peninsula itself at its widest part is eleven miles from shore to shore. Although there are other secondary roads, the main highway is the only one which runs from one end of South Beveland to the other, and in view of the difficulties of deployment over the sodden country on either hand, it afforded good defensible advantages to the enemy. This was particularly true at the narrowest part of the isthmus, where although there are also two subsidiary roads on the south, the Germans, when forced back upon it, would be holding a front of only 2000 yards.

11. On examination it seemed that the chances for an amphibious attack might be considered. The whole of the coast of South Beveland is protected by a dyke fronted by a shore of mud or silt, or of salt marsh bound with separate grass, offering a precarious but possible foothold and even wheel hold, given the most favourable conditions. Our intelligence reported that as the seaward slope of the dyke is moderate, it would be negotiable by infantry, and considered that tracked vehicles, landed at high tide, could probably cross the dyke at most points and pass inland. The most suitable places on the south shore were at the small tidal harbours like Hoedekenskerke, where entry might possibly be attempted up the wooden or stone-faced ramps believed to exist there. (AEF/First Cdn Army/L/F, Docket IV, Vol II; Int Report No. 2,

folios 29 and 76, 16 Sep 44.) Given the necessary craft and crews, high tide and suitable timing, a landing was not, therefore, out of the question so far as topography might affect the issue.

12. But the crux to the strategy of the Scheldt lay in Walcheren, the outermost of the islands and the inner citadel of the German scheme of defence. It is separated from South Beveland by the Sloe Channel, a shallow, treacherous, partially silted gap, shining with ooze, runnels and water, forbidding alike to boat or beast, but crossed by the causeway bearing the road and railway line from South Beveland. The island is about nine miles from north to south and roughly the same distance across at its widest part from east to west. The same landscape of polders and intricate system of drainage prevails as elsewhere throughout the region, though with rather more rough pasture and with the attendant hindrances to movement across country, especially after rain. For the level of saturation underground is never deep, and towards the end of September a very slippery surface laced with ditches would slacken and hinder the passage even of tracked vehicles off the roads, and the pace of infantry would be slow. (Ibid, folio 55, ff.) Though predominantly agricultural, the island has two largish towns -- Flushing at the south end of the Walcheren Canal, well known to cross-Channel travellers from England in happier times, and of some industrial importance, and Middelburg, the market town and capital. Like the rest of the group, Walcheren lies for the most part below high water level, and but for its ancient dykes and dunes would be lost to the sea.

13. The seaward approach on the north-west and south-west is encumbered with shoals and must be made through various local channels or gats. There are eight miles of sandy beach on the north-west shore, backed by dunes and in part protected by groynes. The western tip of the island is solidly buttressed by the dyke at Westkapelle. It was on the south-western shore, where in front of the dunes a board beach stretches almost to Flushing, that a

foothold seemed to offer to the invader, providing that he were lightly armed and unencumbered. For the rest, the dykes march with the sea, except when the flats and salt marshes are left bare beneath them by the ebbing tide, and for one small beach, not thought suitable for landing, on the north-east. (Ibid, folios 30 and 76.) In most places, therefore, it would only be possible for infantry to penetrate, for it was observed that the dunes were too steep on the seaward side for vehicles to climb up the soft, loose sand. Here and there men could get up a more gentle slope and squeeze through the rows of stakes set along the bases of the dykes to support them. Apart from the occasional small harbour, the only possible landing places for mechanical transport were through two sandy exits from the beach on to a brick road leading from the village of Domburg, on the north-west coast, or over the earthen dykes by a similar road into Flushing. Thence a broad main road ran to Middelburg and on by the causeway to South Beveland, although deployment would be difficult where the road followed the bank of the canal, and there was every chance that the Germans would prevent an invading force from following this route to South Beveland by blowing the bridge at Middelburg. (Ibid.)

14. Much the same configuration governed the life of North Beveland, the smaller island crowning the group on the East Scheldt, and determined the possibilities of our attacking it.

15. It was on the south shore of the estuary, however, that the enemy offered the most immediate obstruction to our designs against Walcheren and here, too, that the terrain lent itself to his defensive purpose, since, although more narrowly, that exiguous segment of Holland was likewise contained by water. The opening stages of our operations were in fact to be closely associated with two negotiable waterways, the Leopold and Terneuzen Canals, the first of which was to be our chief obstacle and the second to aid us to break into the enemy's stronghold amphibiously from the rear. Within

the confines of this area along the shore, enclosed on the east by the Braakman Inlet² and for 25 miles on the south and west by the Leopold Canal, the Germans could expect to stand at bay and hold us off from the main onslaught against Walcheren. For beyond these water barriers the ground which the enemy defended gave him many advantages. It lay almost at sea level, a honeycomb of polders fringed on the coast by dunes and dykes, throughout its entire area liable to saturation or flooding. Except along the edges of embankment or canal, or in occasional wooded depressions, trees were few, ditches took the place of hedges, and a sparse population had scattered its farmhouses wherever the soil was firm and dry, or strung its cottages along the roads or on the brink of the polders. It was not a country for armour, and amphibians were the only other sort of vehicle likely to flourish there. (AEF/First Cdn Army/L/F, Docket I, Vol I; Int Summary No. 66, 3 Sep 44: Appx "D".) A few villages like Eede, Oostburg, Sluis and Cadzand, and places on the coast, like Knocke and the port of Breskens, offered the prospect of resistance behind rubble and concrete.

THE POSSIBILITIES OF FLOODING

16. So far the environment of the coming battle for the use of Antwerp might appear only to have served the purposes of defence and to have deprived the attack of all normal advantage. But the restrictions imposed upon us by topography were not altogether one-sided. Once the isthmus into Beveland had been closed, the German garrison would be cut off from all contact with their own military hinterland except by sea to the northern islands. Thus imprisoned, they would share the vulnerability of the Zeelanders themselves to the hazards of tide and flood. Deliberate inundation was a two-edged weapon, a fact not to be missed by General Simonds in the calculation of his

² Better known during the actual course of the battle as the Savojaards Plaat, which is the name of the shoal rather than of the opening itself.

requirements for reducing Walcheren, that first and final obtrusion in the neck of the Scheldt.

17. Were it not for the dunes and dykes which surround the island as rim to a saucer, raised up with arduous ingenuity by countless generations of Dutchmen in their own unending war against the sea, its cultivated fields and thriving communities, like those of the entire group, would be reduced to the banks of mud from which they were reclaimed. All that would be left above water at high tide would be some of the roads, irrelevant on their dykes, the remnants of the sea defences and the dunes on the perimeter, tree-tops, the roofs of farm buildings, the port of Flushing and the town of Middelburg, itself an uncertain and dwindling island. Such engineering, now overhung the helpless Dutch.

18. There were several ways of bringing it about, one of them already put into effect by the enemy in Normandy and Flanders. This was to stop working the drainage system. If the pumps cease to maintain the flow from ditch to canal and the sea, the ditches fill, the polders become saturated and in due course flooding sets in. The Germans might again resort to this expedient in order to make it even more difficult for our troops to get at them, especially over the isthmus: in their time the Dutch had tried it with effect against Spaniards when the drowning of their land was the price of its political freehold. Another method was by breaching the dykes and letting in the sea. If this were done, the menace and destructive potentiality would grow with the tide: were it to be full and the gap wide, our Intelligence expected that a deluge from eight to ten feet deep would rush in and that, in the shape of a huge tidal wave, the sea would begin a relentless reconquest of the land. In about three days Walcheren would be covered. (AEF/First Cdn Army/L/F, Docket IV, Vol II; Int Report No. 2, folios 31 and 76.)

19. The worst results would follow in the westerly parts of the island, where the dykes were particularly strong, but it was thought that their destruction would prove to be too difficult a task. Elsewhere the havoc wrought by breaching would not be so sudden or overwhelming, although the sum of loss and misery among the inhabitants would still remain high. Yet it has to be recounted among the ironies and bitterness of war that in examining the physical conditions affecting our ability to carry our task to the swift conclusion necessary to the early success of the Allied Armies in the west, our Intelligence assumed that the flooding of Walcheren by blowing the dykes would be a conceivable resort of the enemy, not of ourselves, but that he would be deterred from it by reasons of morality. The case was thus stated at the time:

...Apart from the physical difficulties involved are the moral questions. At this stage of the war, and for purposes so fleeting, it is unlikely that even exponents of total war would bring down on their nearest neighbours a calamity equal to an earthquake or volcanic eruption. It is possible but improbable.

(Ibid, folio 31.)

20. Such reasoning sprang from an impression of imminent victory in the west, since the appreciation was made on 16 Sep, the day before Field Marshal Montgomery proposed to drop his airborne carpet over the rivers into northern Germany and thus bring the enemy to abrupt capitulation. But as time would show, the war was to go on through two more dreary, costly seasons into another spring, and as the enemy was to demonstrate by his savage concentration of V-weapons on Antwerp that autumn and winter, the port was a strategic prize on which the issue hung. So it fell out that to hobble and distress the emplaced and resistant garrison and thus to ensure the success of our hazardous enterprise and thus to ensure the success of our hazardous

enterprise and diminish the number of our casualties which promised to be heavy, the Canadian command came to consider the drastic and terrible device of letting in the sea.

THE ENEMY AND HIS DEFENCES

21. In mid-September, with the enemy's rout still unretrieved, it was no simple matter for our Intelligence to make any accurate assessment of the forces defending the islands or of their dispositions. For the time being it was feasible to discuss only the widest possibilities and the general plans for defence disclosed by photographs and captured maps. Specific identification and more detailed arithmetic would have to wait until the wreckage of the Fifteenth Army had passed through the islands and the troops allotted to hold them came more clearly into view.

22. After the airborne landings and the thrust of Second Army to the Neder Rijn, the bits began to take on some semblance of order and to fall into place within reasonably predictable alternatives. (Ibid, folios 23 and 71.) The twelve divisions from which the strongholds about the estuary might have been garrisoned were now known to be spread out all the way from Dunkirk to the British right below Arnhem. It appeared that the bulk of these formations would be used either to contain the penetration of Second Army or more probably to break through to the east and the relative security of the German frontier.

23. Two of them, 64 and 70 Inf Divs, were believed to have been left in the country adjacent to the Scheldt. Two of the Grenadier regiments of 64 Inf Div had been discovered in the vicinity of the Leopold Canal, and a prisoner had said that one of them had orders to fight to the last man. The evidence seemed to indicate that the division would hold the bridgehead behind the canal until it became untenable, and we concluded that its remnants would then

be ferried across to continue the fight on Walcheren. It could hardly be called a strong formation, since the infantry numbered only about 1750, or the equivalent of three and a half battalions. Assuming that its supporting arms and services would be called upon to man defensive positions, the total of effective was put at some 4000. Most of the gunners and engineers had fallen safely into our hands at Boulogne. It was thus fortunate for our opponents that they had the choice of ground.

24. The comparable figures for 70 Inf Div looked slightly more impressive at about 6000 to 6500 men; but the fighting ability of these troops and their morale under the trying, not to say hopeless, conditions which we had it in our power to impose upon them, would in part be determined by the odd and interesting fact that many of them came from 165 Trg Div, specially formed for men suffering from chronic stomach ailments. Such was the seriousness of the enemy's dearth of manpower and his ingenuity in eking it out: but we were soon to learn that even dyspeptic, well armed and entrenched, can exact their toll. The division had previously formed part of the garrison on Wallcheren, and had then moved over towards Ghent, but with unfortunate results, for after losing some 600 prisoners to Second Army, it had beaten a hasty retreat to the river again. (Ibid, folios 70 and 71.)

25. Both the divisions suspected of remaining about the estuary were thought to be reinforced by stragglers from 226 and 712 Inf Divs and by various other elements, including naval artillery and flak battalions, engineers, gunners and harbour guards, which together would bring the defence force to the sizeable total of some 20,000 men. (Ibid, folio 67.) Of these it was considered that fewer than 4000 would be required to man the two Bevelands, with not more than 300 on the island and 3500 on the peninsula. The main body would probably be withdrawn into the fastness of Walcheren, where we knew that there were 37 strong points to be manned on the coast and eight more inland, including Middelburg. These would take at least 3000 men. We could expect an

additional 2000 infantry to be distributed across the island in reserve. The 82 gun positions known to us would absorb a further 2300 artillerymen. It was estimated that the garrison of Walcheren including all arms, would amount to 11,500 men. Such a computation would place some 15,300 of the defenders on the northern shores of the estuary and leave a balance of about 4400 troops to deny us our approach on the south. (Ibid, folio 68.)

26. The enemy had concentrated most of his resources in guns and material on Walcheren. He had sited his cannon primarily to cover the entrance to the river (and provided cross fire from the south shore for that purpose) and devised his defences to prevent a seaborne landing from the west. The shores of the island were protected on the north-west, south-west and south by underwater obstacles, wire infantry positions and pillboxes set up on the sand dunes and the dykes. These were supported by some 25 batteries of guns and gun howitzers, including one with a calibre of 220 mm, five of 150 mm, one of 120 mm, thirteen of 105 mm, two of 94 mm and three of 75 mm, a forbidding armament, especially as it had to be assumed that all the coastal batteries would be capable of firing with an all-round traverse: the 220 mm battery at Domburg was definitely known to be capable of firing on Flushing. It was also reasonable to expect that when they had lost their foothold on the south side of the estuary, the Germans would increase the number of guns available for the next phase of the struggle by moving over batteries, including those of a motorized artillery battalion, from the north side of the island for use both on Walcheren and South Beveland. (Ibid, folios 25 and 26.) Many of the guns on the south shores were sited on the sea wall and on the crests of the dunes. The defences were particularly strong in front of Flushing, which had been converted into a fortress cut off on the north by two water-logged anti-tank ditches, protected by wire and mines, and covered by case-mated guns. About half of the very heavy assemblage of anti-aircraft guns on the island were concentrated within the vicinity of Flushing; about a third were deployed to protect the defences on the west coast, and the rest were placed about Veere

and Middelburg. The enemy had supplemented these guns with a liberal distribution of anti-air landing devices and mines, although few of them were detected about the centre of the island or in the east of it, that is over about a third of the entire surface. (Ibid, folio 15.)

27. The strength of the fortifications on Walcheren varied greatly. In Flushing and along the sea-front strongpoints were heavily fortified. The scale of defence was also fairly heavy from Flushing to Westkapelle. The outer perimeter of Flushing was based on strong points at Koudekerke and Ritthem, sporadic pillboxes and a system of field works. From Westkapelle along the northern and north-eastern coasts strong points were more scattered and less heavily fortified, but there were many field works, probably because of the difficulty of putting up concrete in the soft dunes. From Veere to Flushing strong points were few and concrete was rare. The same observations held for the two Bevelands. As might have been expected, however, there was well defended position astride the causeway from Beveland into Walcheren. Several sources confirmed the presence of flame-throwers, which were to be used chiefly to block exits through the dunes and to form traps on the beach in front of strong points. There was evidence also that the dunes had been thoroughly mined, and it was known that French artillery shells were adapted for the purpose as early as 1943. The anti-tank ditches were improved with minefields along the whole of their length. (Ibid, folios 24 and 25.)

THE ENEMY'S INTENTIONS

28. Gauging the enemy's intentions concerning the Scheldt was not quite so obscure a problem as determining the resources with which he proposed to carry them out. Following his disastrous retreat, his resources were scattered, disorganized, and wearing very thin. He must conserve what he had, improvise quickly, and above all, if he were to recover his balance, he must gain time. These were the conditions of a respite for the winter. His intentions here

were clear enough. Walcheren was the key to Antwerp. Antwerp could serve our administrative necessities for mounting a rapid advance into Germany. For the sacrifice of only 20,000 men the enemy was now in a position to enervate the Allied strength by barring our way into the river while the weather deteriorated and movement slowed down to the frustration of a static front. To continue to control the West Scheldt met the enemy's first requirements: it was his cheapest way of buying time.

29. He could exercise this control in two ways. He could cover the approaches to the estuary with his coastal batteries at the head of the island and close the entrance by minefields and other local measures centring on the west and south. Of these the guns were the more important, since there could be no ingress from the sea so long as they were still able to fire. It was fair to conclude that the guns were our immediate objective. Once they were silenced and the secondary defences and mines swept away, Allied ships could enter and the enemy's purpose would be defeated. The Germans had not neglected to implement the logic of their gun-emplacements with an appropriate scheme of defence.

30. Out Intelligence reported that the enemy had sited his effective guns in batteries west of a line between Overduin, Middelburg and Flushing. Fourteen of these batteries were either on the south-west coast or within two miles of it. Their observation posts were to be found on the higher dunes and dykes or on buildings and church towers. They were set about with wire, mines and pillboxes, which together formed part of a perimeter defending the beaches on the north-west and south-west of the island, and including Flushing. The general plan for the whole island had been built up to support these positions, but as it was conceived at an earlier stage of the war, and on the assumption that the invader would come in from the sea rather than from the land, the system radiated out from Middelburg, and the reserves and supplies

for the strong points were in relatively undefended areas in the saucer of the island.

31. It is especially interesting to observe that uncontrolled flooding seems to have had no part in the enemy's conception. This was indicated both by documents and by the siting of his reserves, supplies, headquarters and ten of his batteries within the saucer. (Ibid, folio 15.) He had thus left himself open to the most serious consequences if ever such flooding should take place. That we would attempt it had probably never occurred to the Germans: the physical difficulties obviously made it impracticable. This was the mind of the majority of our own planners as well.

32. Since these preparations had been made, however, a completely different situation faced the enemy in Walcheren. His assailant, instead of being away over the North Sea, would be sitting in Antwerp, investing him from Brabant and Zeeland. Instead of being able to draw in extremis upon all the resources of Germany and the rest of the German Army, they now depended on him. In this new situation what changes could or would he make? Such was the question posed to our Intelligence. The curious thing was that air photographs indicated that he had as yet made none. Unless the Beveland peninsula were simply to provide us with an easy way in by the back door, it was imperative that he lose no time in strengthening his defences there. He was almost certain, therefore, to throw up what he could nix the isthmus, get ready to defend the line of the Beveland canal, and at all costs block the causeway on to the island and man the eastern shore. As to supply, as long as he held Veere and North Beveland, he could bring something in by sea from the north. But once he was cut off, and the larger his garrison, the shorter would be the time that he could hope to hold out. We could conclude, therefore, that the enemy's intention appeared to be to hold Walcheren and its guns, in their existing state of readiness, but to extend his defences against air landings

and to supplement his meagre defences along the north bank of the river with more men and weapons. (Ibid, folios 14 and 15.)

33. After further close scrutiny of the German situation, and before handing over detailed planning to Headquarters 2 Cdn Corps, the Intelligence Staff at Army Headquarters issued the following summary of their conclusions on 25 Sep:

- a. The enemy fully appreciates the value of WALCHEREN.
- b. He intends to hold it as fortress probably under command of 89 Corps (General der Infanterie VON UND ZU GILSA).
- c. He intends to hold NOT only the island itself but also the BRESKENS bridgehead SOUTH of the SCHELDT, and NORTH and SOUTH BEVELAND.
- d. His defence is directed against seaborne assault, passage up the SCHELDT, airborne assault and assault from the SOUTH and EAST. Defences consist of strong points and gun positions protected by wire, anti tank ditches, obstacles and flame throwers.
- e. The weight of this defence is seaward and as yet there are NO heavy defences facing EAST.
- f. The enemy is NOT likely to use widespread flooding in WALCHEREN but can employ it to advantage SOUTH of the SCHELDT and on SOUTH BEVELAND. There are as yet NO further indications of this.
- g. For these tasks the enemy will have available 64 and 70 Inf Divs, possibly remnants of other divisions, flak, coastal artillery and naval units - a total in all of 20,000 men.

(Ibid, folio 77.)

THE ENEMY'S POINT OF VIEW: GENERAL VON ZANGEN

34. This diagnosis of the enemy's case at a time when his position in the west remained in the utmost confusion was to be shown afterwards to be very substantially correct, for General von Zangen, who commanded the Fifteenth Army, has since given us his own view of the matter as a prisoner of war. It was he who conducted the German rearguard action along the Channel coast and the retirement behind the Leopold Canal leading to the evacuation through Breskens to Flushing (see [Report No. 183](#)), and he is thus especially well qualified as a witness to the extremity of the enemy's plight during the crucial month of September. His story reveals not only some of the facts for which our Intelligence was groping, but indicates how precarious the Germans felt their situation to be, and without taking into account either the acuteness of our own problem of supply or our larger designs for carrying the war into Germany itself and finishing it there, offers criticism of what von Zangen could only consider to be a lost opportunity of entrapping the remains of Fifteenth Army in the islands. His comments on Allied strategy illustrate at least the enemy's state of mind.

Von Zangen believes that a great strategical mistake was committed by the Allies in their failure to push north from Antwerp immediately after the port was taken. If the relatively short distance from Antwerp to the entrance of the Beveland Isthmus had been covered shortly after 4 September, the remnants of Fifteenth Army would have been trapped. According to the General, while the evacuation was going on from Breskens to Flushing, his staff was constantly concerned that this manoeuvre would be carried out. There was only a weak, untreated infantry division holding north of Antwerp and although von Zangen realized that the Allies were relatively weak in Antwerp, he felt that a

greater effort should have been made to advance north. By the Allies not covering this distance of about fifteen miles, he was enabled to bring out 62,000 men and 580 guns. This force was thus able to take up positions south of the Maas and play an important part in frustrating the object of the Allied airborne landings at Eindhoven, Nijmegen and Arnhem.

(AEF: 45/First Cdn Army/L/F, Docket III: Special Interrogation Report, General Gustav von Zangen, p. 3.)

35. Von Zangen is thus reported on the consequences of the capture of Antwerp as it affected the German dispositions:

The sudden fall of Antwerp had placed the Germans in a very awkward position because they had no available troops in this region. Information was very scarce as to Allied progress and individual officers had to act on their own initiative. One of these officers was Lieutenant-General Chill, commanding 85 Infantry Division, recently arrived from Germany. On 2 September, when he heard that the Allies were approaching Brussels, he disposed his division east of Antwerp along the Escaut and Albert Canals running through Herenthals to Hasselt. Spreading his division thinly behind this water barrier and reinforcing his division with German police, security troops and stragglers that he had collected, he was holding this line when Antwerp fell on 4 September. The next day, realizing the precariousness of their line east of Antwerp, the German High Command ordered General Reinhardt of 88 Corps to take over the sector then being held by Chill. To bolster Reinhardt's force he was sent 719 Infantry Division from Holland which slowly made its way southwards and took up a sector, holding north and east of Antwerp. With this comparatively weak and inexperienced force Reinhardt held along the line of the Canals while

Fifteenth Army made its escape through Welcheren and Beveland. As the divisions made their appearance on the mainland they reassembled and then thickened the line being held by Reinhardt. During this period 88 Corps was under Student's First Parachute Army. The staff of Fifteenth Army remained in Middelburg until 19 September, when it also came out on to the mainland and made its way to Dordrecht.

(Ibid, p. 3.)

36. The German Commander's afterthoughts on the defence of Walcheren largely confirm the forecasts of our Intelligence:

When von Zangen left Walcheren he left two last-ditch garrisons holding north and south of the Scheldt. He thereby deprived the Allies of the use of the port facilities in Antwerp until these garrisons were eliminated. Although Walcheren had been designated as a fortress long before the fall of Antwerp, von Zangen received his orders to hold south of the Scheldt only about 12 September. He therefore ordered 64 Infantry Division to defend to the last in the Breskens area, while 70 Infantry Division held Walcheren Island. In von Zangen's opinion the object of these fortress troops was two-fold. First, to deny port facilities and second, to hold down as many Allied troops as possible. Von Zangen claims he did not have any definite idea as to how long Walcheren would hold, but he did believe that it would last at least three to four weeks after a serious attack against it was begun.

(Ibid, p. 4.)

37. Von Zangen's account of his deployment and intentions on the mainland of Brabant after the Allied air landings on 17 Sep, suggest the nature of the operational problem on the left flank of 21 Army Group.

Once Fifteenth Army had safely crossed from Walcheren to the mainland it took up its positions from Antwerp to the area north-west of 's Hertogenbosch. Along this sector the tired divisions that had escaped from France took up the battle once more. 67 Infantry Corps was responsible for the area from Antwerp to Turnhout, while 88 Infantry Corps took over the rest of the Army area. 67 Infantry Corps had under command 711, 346 and 719 Infantry Divisions, while 88 Infantry Corps was composed of 245, 59, 89 and 712 Infantry Divisions. Von Zangen's instructions at this time were to hold as long as possible south of the Maas. The chief object of remaining in this rather exposed position was to prevent Allied troops from concentrating for an attack in a north-easterly direction. It was realized that if Fifteenth Army retired behind the Maas the Allies would then be given a natural river line to hold. This would enable them to switch their forces east. Von Zangen's role was to prevent this transfer of troops taking place. There was no thought of attempting to retake Antwerp since von Zangen's force was not strong enough by itself for such a task, and there was little chance of his receiving any more men...

(Ibid, p. 4.)

Thus the enemy facing 21 Army Group awaited the prospects of a dispiriting but not yet disastrous October.

THE ENEMY'S POINT OF VIEW: LT-GEN DASER

38. But there are other and more local details to be added to the account from the side of the enemy. This time the witness is Lt-Gen Wilhelm Daser, Commander of 70 Inf Div, who was similarly interrogated after the war. Daser knew the islands well. He had first entered them during the previous winter to take over 165 Reserve Inf Div which, in accordance with general policy, was

in occupation of this operational area while carrying out its training. His garrison was augmented by the First Battalion of 89 Festungs Steamm Regt, consisting of about 1000 men convalescing from wounds or otherwise unfit. Shortly after the Allied invasion had gone in, Daser received word to be ready for another landing which was expected to be made in the neighbourhood of Antwerp, and the campaign was hardly a week old when units of 165 Reserve Div began to move out to take part in the fighting in France. Daser was then notified that his training division was to be given the status of a fighting formation and a new designation.

39. It was in these circumstances that the curiously recruited 70 Inf Div came into being, its personnel consisting of men whose digestive troubles had made them a liability in their original units. Hard up for men, and with characteristic resource, the High Command had decided to concentrate all such unfortunates into special Magen (Stomach) Battalions where their feeding could be more adequately supervised and their tasks made lighter. Forming these battalions into a division followed in due course. As Daser's original units moved out on their way to France, the invalids moved in, and men recovering from wounds in the stomach, or complaining of stomach ulcers, or nursing stomachs that were abnormally sensitive or nervous, reported to their somewhat discouraged commander. Daser managed to retain the staffs of his divisional and regimental headquarters, a few healthy engineers, a troop of normal artillerymen, and a fit complement of company commanders. All his platoon officers, however, were fellow sufferers along with their men. The nickname found for this clinical assembly - the "White Bread" division - made incidental commentary on the state of the enemy's commissariat. Out of this unlikely material three regiments - 1018, 1019 and 1020 - each of two battalions, were constituted and, together with a fusilier battalions, were constituted and, together with a fusilier battalion, their artillery regiment and three batteries of about twelve guns each, their engineers and signallers,

they took on the outward appearance of a fighting division. (Ibid: Special Interrogation Report, Lt-Gen Wilhelm Daser, pp 3, 4.)

40. The General's opinion of his extraordinary command is hardly surprising.

Daser sympathized with the High Command in their dilemma and felt that a division like his own was a reasonable solution to a difficult administrative problem. But he could not understand why a formation of such obviously low fighting value should be given one of the most vital sectors in Europe to defend - the approaches to Antwerp. The ostensible reason was that Walcheren Island was part of the garden country of Holland where white bread, fresh vegetables, eggs and milk were present in abundance. In Daser's opinion this proximity to a favourable diet did not excuse the High Command for placing ill men to defend the mouth of the Scheldt. The problem of discipline in such a division was surprisingly small. Daser agreed that behind concrete these men could probably pull a trigger as well as another.

(Ibid: Special Interrogation Report, Lt-Gen Wilhelm Daser, p. 4.)

But notwithstanding either its internal disabilities or its commander's doubts, the division was not to be spared the full rigours of combat in the line, for early in September it was ordered into Belgium where, in the divisional sector about Ghent, the fusilier battalion lost some 300 casualties in one day.

41. About 9 Sep Daser was required personally to report to the Headquarters of Fifteenth Army, then occupying the bunkers which he had used for his own headquarters in Middelburg. Taking the ferry from Breskens to Flushing, a means of transport which it was soon to be his business to withhold from Lt-Gen Simonds, he made his way back and was told that he would reoccupy his

former positions on Walcheren. General von Zangen explained that in the plan of defence 712 Inf Div would be responsible for South Beveland and 64 Inf Div for the mainland behind the Leopold Canal. As our Intelligence soon became aware, these three divisions were to be controlled by 89 Corps under General von Gilsa. Although the enemy's arrangements for defending the approaches to Antwerp were completed before the port had fallen, Daser corroborates the other evidence that the sudden capture of the city corroborates the other evidence that the sudden capture of the city came as a complete surprise. The forces opposing our farther advance to the north had to be strengthened, and by the time that 70 Inf Div returned to Walcheren, about 19 Sep, the original plan had been considerably modified. This meant that 712 Inf Div, having made its escape from Breskens to Flushing, had to be rushed out into Brabant, leaving the devoted 70 Inf Div to defend both Walcheren and the two Bevelands. Daser's dyspeptic were then much the worse for their fortnight's fighting on the mainland, and chiefly as a result of engagements around Wetteren and Laerne, were 700 fewer in number. Belgians of the Resistance in the city of Ghent had aided and abetted in their discomfiture. But hardly had the division landed than 1018 Inf Regt was wrested from it, attached to 346 Inf Div, the holding a sector from Lille to Merxem, and was never seen by Daser again. (Ibid, p. 5.) He was left with the uncomfortable realization that he would be called upon to make a last-ditch stand on the island with what troops he had left.

42. General Daser had heard the term "Fortress" first applied to Walcheren at the end of August.

...It did not make any particular sense to the General then, since his conception of a fortress was a very limited area with sufficient cement and weapons to hold out for a lengthy siege. He assumed that it referred mainly to the port of Flushing where a moat and anti-tank wall gave it the form of a proper fortress. However, this matter was cleared

up in Daser's mind by General von Zangen, Commander of Fifteenth Army, who designated all of Walcheren Island as a fortress. Von Zangen also referred to the area south of the Scheldt in the same terms. Thus the term "Fortress" no longer conveyed any tactical meaning. It merely defined an area where men were to stand and fight "to the last man and the last bullet". Daser twice took his oath as a Fortress Commander, - once before the Army Commander and again before 89 Corps Commander, General von Gilsa. Not only did Daser sign the document which bound him to defend to the end, but every officer down to company commander had to sign the oath as well. There was sufficient ammunition to last for eight weeks, and food for six weeks, after the Isthmus had been sealed off. Daser estimated that his troops might be able to hold out for about four weeks against a direct attack.

(Ibid, p. 5.)

Actually, from the time we began our attack up the Beveland Isthmus, it was to take our troops a week to overrun the peninsula; Daser surrendered his flooded island on the sixth day after the launching of our amphibious attack. Where we were to lose time was in working our way up the "Fortress", for it was to cost us four weeks to clear the Breskens coast and to close the isthmus. Daser's estimate of the time during which he could expect to hold out against a "direct" attack proved to be too hopeful: our own expectations of being able to place ourselves quickly into position for the direct attack were also to be pitched too high. (AEF/First Cdn Army/B/F, Docket I, folio 4: Conference Operations "INFATUATE" and "SWITCHBACK", 1200 A hrs 1 Oct 44; see also AEF/First Cdn Army/C/I: Minutes of Morning Joint Conference, 0830 hrs 6 Oct 44).

THE ENEMY'S DEFENSIVE POLICY ON THE WEST SCHELDT

43. As Daser's evidence indicates, the local defensive arrangements differed in certain respects from the general policy decided upon by Field Marshal Rommel against invasion.

The policy for the defence of Walcheren and Beveland Island had been laid down as far back as March 1944. Then Field Marshal Rommel, putting into operation his views that an Allied invasion had to be defended on the beaches themselves, had ordered that all coastal divisions were to be concentrated within five kilometres of the sea. In other words, all troops, including reserves, were to be stretched along the coastline in the five-kilometre band. For a group of islands, such as Daser's command contained, such a scheme was impracticable. Daser received permission to modify this order to fit into the peculiar geographical conditions involved in his area. The Island of Walcheren itself was circled by a five-kilometre strip of troops as ordered. On North Beveland strong points were built on the western side of the Island facing east. On South Beveland field positions were dug on the southern and western coasts, again facing east. The town of Goes D 32 was designated as a strong point and appropriate defence positions were constructed to provide it with all-round protection. The Beveland Canal D 42 was designated as a second line and field positions were dug here facing east. And finally another position was built at the very edge of the Beveland Isthmus to provide protection against an attempted landward attack from the east.

(AEF: 45/First Cdn Army/L/F, Docket III: Special Interrogation Report, Lt-Gen Wilhelm Daser, pp 5,6.)

44. General Daser accordingly deployed his troops as follows:

1020 G.R. manned the Isthmus from Woensdrecht to the Beveland Canal:

2nd Battalion 89 Festungs Stamm along the southern coast of South Beveland facing the West Scheldt;

1st Battalion 1019 G.R. in the port of Flushing;

2nd Battalion 1019 G.R. along the eastern shore of Walcheren Island and defending the causeway between Walcheren and Beveland;

1st Battalion 89 Festungs Stamm along the north-west shore to Walcheren; and

3rd Battalion 89 Festungs Stamm along the south-west shore of Walcheren.

(Ibid, p. 6.)

PRELIMINARY PROBLEMS OF PLANNING

45. As has been shown in [Report No. 183](#), the earlier calculations for General Crerar's planning staff had to take account of such operational variables as the time likely to be required to reduce the Channel ports and the question of the relative administrative advantages of moving up either 1 Brit or 2 Cdn Corps to deploy for the coming phase. (See also W.D., "G" Plans, H.Q. First Cdn Army, September 1944: Appendices 7, 9, 10, 11 and 20.) A conference held on the evening of 13 Sep by the Chief of Staff at Army Headquarters afforded an opportunity to the heads of Branches and Services and to representatives of the Navy and Air Force to discuss their probable commitments in general terms. The record of their deliberations is indicative of the nature of the problems of foresight and provision which they were

called upon to solve. (Ibid: Appx 7, Operation "INFATURATE" Staff Planning Conference, 13 Sep 44.)

46. As the coastwise situation of the enemy made it likely that amphibious operations would have to be undertaken to dislodge him, an essential preliminary was to enquire into the availability of suitable craft and equipment. But while it was reported that 99 tracked landing vehicles were approximately one regiment of amphibious tanks, yet here again the complement of drivers was doubtful. There were 40 terrapins siting in Brussels and their drivers with them, but drivers would have to be found for 90 more. There might be two or three companies of DUKWS, but this was uncertain. There were 100 weasels available, but these would have to be brought over from the United Kingdom and they had no crews; it was suggested that carrier drivers should be able to operate them. As for landing and assault craft, the question was raised whether the appropriate types could be brought up from the Channel coast by canals and in what numbers and how soon. It had also to be ascertained whether the Royal Navy was prepared to assist in a major combined operation and to provide ships to bombard the German coastal defences. (Ibid.)

47. The Senior Air Staff Officer gave his assurance that 84 Group were prepared to give their support, based as they were, on the Lille group of airfields, although owing to the shorter distances involved, they would prefer to be closer to Antwerp. He offered the opinion that the soft nature of the soil should make it easy to knock the enemy's guns out of alignment by bombing, a prognostication that the continuing accuracy of the enemy's fire was unhappily to belie. As against the German pillboxes the Group would undertake trials with rockets to ascertain the effect of this type of attack. The suggestion that there might be any change in the location of the clutch of airfields was seen at once as being likely to affect the administrative planning, for in such a case it would be necessary to bring up the additional

stores and equipment for laying out new airfields. The Chief of Staff was asked accordingly to make strong representations to Headquarters 21 Army Group that the airfields be left with 84 Group, and not taken over by 2 Tactical Air Force, as seemed possible, until the operation had been completed. (Ibid.)

48. It was also necessary to produce figures to give the Army Commander some idea of the tonnage required to be moved before 1 Brit Corps with 49 Inf Div could be brought up and made ready in the area of Antwerp, although firm estimates would have to await the announcement of the plan which the operations were actually intended to follow. (Ibid.) The magnitude of the business involved in keeping a corps and its divisions mobile may be indicated merely by current demand on supplies of petrol. The daily requirements for 2 Cdn Corps ranged between 132,000 and 150,000 gallons, the variation depending on the activity of the armoured divisions. (Ibid: Appx 8, Visit to 2 Cdn Corps, 11 Sep 44.) Under existing administrative stringency caused by the length and rapidity of the pursuit out of Normandy, the utmost care, ingenuity and foresight had to be exercised by everyone on the "Q" side, if crippling deficiencies were to be avoided. Such were some of the preliminaries which now occupied the minds of General Crerar and his staff.

49. He was called to a conference with the C.-in-C. on 14 Sep and the decision, reached that afternoon, that the Canadian Corps would be responsible for the early development of operations to clear the estuary, enabled arrangements for the necessary regrouping to be set in motion and gave the planners a clearer view of what lay before them. (W.D., G.O.C.-in-C. First Cdn Army, 14 Sept 44; "G" Plans, H.Q. First Cdn Army, September 1944: Appx "A", Minutes of Morning Joint Conference, 15 Sep 44.) On the following morning General Simonds visited the Army Commander and discussed both the winding up of his existing commitments on the Channel coast and the new ones facing him on the inhospitable shores of the West Scheldt. (W.D., G.O.C.-in-C. First Cdn Army, 15 Sep 44.)

50. Among other visitors to General Crerar's Headquarters during the next few days were Brig-Gen Stuart Cutler from H.Q. First Allied Airborne Army and Brig C. Richardson, Brigadier General Staff Plans at 21 Army Group, who came on 17 Sep to discuss the employment of airborne troops, a possibility which had not yet been finally turned down. (See paras 5, 6 & 7 above.) In view of the decision ultimately reached, and the nature of the tasks set for our forces attacking across the isthmus and estuary, it may not be irrelevant to note the course of the discussion at this particular stage.

51. General Cutler informed the Army Commander that General Bradley was making a strong plea for the use of airborne forces when 12 U.S. Army Group had reached the Rhine and that his bid might affect the Canadian claims to use them over the Scheldt. On the other hand, if priority were to be given to First Canadian Army, two parachute regiments (brigades) of 17 U.S. Airborne Division might be available, although these were new troops who had not had the experience of a tactical dropping under the conditions of actual battle. General Cutler went on to say that by 1 Oct, however, 6 Brit Airborne Div should be ready, and suggested that the two parachute brigades of this formation would probably be better trained than the Americans. (The use of air landing brigades was not contemplated owing to the unsuitability of the ground.) He added that his headquarters had first turned down the request for airborne forces for the capture of Walcheren since they were under the impression that the assault was to be left entirely to them. The fact that they were actually being asked to assist in a combined operation made it more attractive so far as they were concerned and they were now prepared to reopen their studies.

52. The Army Commander explained that until he had had further opportunity for discussion with General Simonds he could not state where precisely the airborne attack might be carried out and for purposes of study indicated the possibility of dropping troops over the narrow part of South Beveland to the

north of Bath, astride the South Beveland canal and the vicinity of Hansweert, the neighbourhood of Hoedekenskerke, and at both ends of the causeway between South Beveland and Walcheren. Each of these areas were to be the scenes of action when the attack came to be mounted, but by that time the infantry had learned that they must do the job themselves. Meanwhile, the Army Commander advised General Cutler that it was then possible to give anything like a definite date for the operation: it might take place within ten days or two weeks, but the assumption might be made that the airborne troops would not be required earlier than 27 Sep and in all probability not before 1 Oct. As the current battle progressed the estimate would be revised and General Cutler's Headquarters kept closely informed. Discussions could be resumed when General Simonds had formulated his outline plan. (W.D., "G" Plans, H.Q. First Cdn Army, September 1944: Appx 16, Use of Airborne Troops.)

PRELIMINARY ARMY APPRECIATION, 19 SEP 44

53. In order to ensure every assistance to General Simonds in evolving his plan a detailed appreciation was put out on 19 Sep by the Plans Section at Army Headquarters on the basis of all available information, and on the assumption that the south shore from Antwerp to the sea had been cleared of the enemy. After rehearsing the various considerations of topography and intelligence, availability of equipment and other resources, the courses open to the enemy, and the alternatives open to us, the planners compared their relative advantages, and offered a set of conclusions as to the most favourable conditions under which the assault might be made. (Ibid: Appx 17, Operation "INFATUATE" - An Appreciation.)

54. The appreciation showed that good progress had been made in providing for crafts, special vehicles and naval support, and it now appeared that by 24 Sep the complete 5 Assault Regt, Royal Engineers, of 79 Armd Div, reinforced to comprise five squadrons with a total of approximately

40 terrapins and 100 tracked landing vehicles, were to be concentrated in readiness on the Scheldt above Antwerp. Weasels were in rather more doubtful supply. The 60 within reach were of the type which floated but was incapable of swimming under its own power. a completely amphibious vehicle of the same species, however, had arrived in the United Kingdom, and 100 were expected to be ready for shipment to France on 20 Sep. Timing the arrival of equipment, which in this case had had to be brought across the Atlantic, could be drawn exceedingly fine. (Ibid, p. 2)

55. The Royal Navy as a source of supply were contriving well and had advised through the Allied Naval Commander Expeditionary Force ("ANCXF") that they could produce 70 assault landing craft (L.C.A.) and 20 tank landing craft (L.C.A.), although of these some would have to be carried up by tank-transporters from one of the Channel ports, possibly Ostend, and brought down to the estuary by inland waterway. For this part of the project the Chief Engineer was afraid that a good deal of work would have to be done on demolished bridges and damaged lock gates before the canals could be made usable. Nor could he be certain that our own Bailey bridges would be high enough to allow of the passage of such craft underneath. Moreover, the Navy pointed out that the crews lacked the training necessary for them to carry out a combined operation on any considerable scale. Getting our men afloat was thus to be no simple matter. But once aboard, they would receive substantial support from the sea, for the monitors, H.M.S. "Roberts" and H.M.S. "Erebus", old allies of the Canadian from the days of Normandy, were to bombard the enemy with their four fifteen-inch guns. (Ibid, pp 2,3.)

56. A good deal depended on the weight of the bombardment which could be hurled at the enemy, both on the assumptions of the appreciation by the Plans Section and in the actual course of events. As things stood, he had a large and strongly posted garrison and an evident intention to defend the Scheldt.

But that he might yet be dissuaded from giving battle in that region at all could still seem to be reasonable hypothesis. As the planners argued:

...if he is faced with the possibility of these forces being cut off by the thrust of Second British Army, and if his defences of these islands are subjected to heavy bombardment by naval and ground artillery together with heavy air attack, he may decide to leave only a small retaining force. Therefore any plan for the capture of these islands by us should embrace plans for the quick exploitation of light enemy resistance.

(Ibid, p. 3.)

But as the Germans accepted the risks of losing the garrison to a man, since the strategic issues at stake were of sufficient magnitude to render the sacrifice a cheap one, there was really no chance of any such easy entry; at the same time, there was never any question that in any case the heaviest preliminaries by high explosive would be necessary. The appreciation kept this essential to the fore:

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

(Ibid, p. 4.)

57. Of the alternative methods of capturing our objectives, the planners considered that if airborne forces were available, the most suitable would be to develop a landward thrust along the peninsula, and to gain control of the rest of South Beveland after the canal had been reached by using a parachute brigade to give us the small harbour of Hoedekenskerke through which waterborne troops could strike inland. A similar descent by parachutists could secure a bridgehead on the enemy's side of the causeway into Walcheren, whence the island would be subdued by the forces already on Beveland. But if airborne troops were withheld, the course proposed as offering the fewest difficulties was to loosen the enemy's resistance against our advance along the peninsula by putting in landings on his right flank, mounted from either the north or south shore of the estuary as circumstances required. With Beveland in our hands, we would then make a frontal attack on the causeway and aid our chances there by means of an assault crossing of the gap farther south. The enemy's defences at Middelburg and Flushing and along the coasts would then be overwhelmed by further inroads across the island from the bridgehead. (Ibid, pp 4-8.)

58. The courses put forward were thus founded on the assumption that Walcheren would be too difficult to overrun before we had firmly planted ourselves on the landward approach to it, an hypothesis which proved to be correct; but the planners at Army Headquarters thought it reasonable also

...to discard at the outset the possibility of mounting a successful combined op to capture WALCHEREN island by assaulting the only possible suitable beaches, which are on the North-West and South-West coasts because this could only be done after considerable time spent on combined training and preparations.

(Ibid, p. 3.)

There can be no doubt that the hazards involved in setting these disabilities aside would be very great, but if the island was forbidding on the sea-coast, it was also sufficiently strong from the east across gap and causeway. A frontal attack there, unaided by the infliction of any other serious diversion or extremely upon the enemy could also carry the promise of failure. Such was the view of General Simonds, who believed that both extremity and diversion must be tried, notwithstanding the disadvantages and the risks in putting on the play without rehearsal and when the actors had scarcely time to learn their parts. Only by tormenting and distracting the enemy and by doing that which he considered to be an impracticable operation of war, would it be possible to persuade him soon enough that his fastness was untenable.

APPRECIATION BY LT-GEN SIMONDS

59. General Simonds' comments on the appreciation by the Plans Section and the counter-proposals submitted by him for consideration at the forthcoming conference called by the Army Commander are extremely illuminating, illustrating, as they do, the incisiveness and originality which he brought to bear on the very difficult problems confronting him. In a memorandum to General Crerar on 21 Sep he introduced his thesis with a significant definition:

As I understand it, the object of the operation is NOT "to capture the islands of 'WALCHEREN and SUID BEVELAND'" but "to destroy, neutralize or capture enemy defences which deny us free passage through the WEST SCHEDULE to the port of ANTWERP."

(AEF/First Cdn Army/C/E, Docket II: No. 28, folio 50.)

This distinction was to lead to some very important conclusions.

60. General Simonds was concerned first with the assumption that we held the south shore opposite Flushing where "all available artillery resources for this operation, apart from the artillery of the division to whom is allotted the task of capturing these islands, should be positioned to commence the neutralization of the enemy's batteries." (W.D., "G" Plans, H.Q. First Cdn Army, September 1944: Appx 17, Operation "INFATUATE" - An Appreciation, p. 8.) He thought that it might cost us a bitter struggle to possess ourselves of the flat, low-lying domain between the canals and coast, and anticipated the effects of the enemy's use of water both on the course of our operations and on the deployment of our guns for firing across the estuary. His comments were as follows:

The Appreciation begins with the assumption that we hold the whole of the SOUTH bank of the R. SCHELDE. At the present time the enemy is strongly posted along the line of the LEOPOLD CANAL from about HAVEN 1804 to HEYST 8614. With the exception of a few dyke roads, the areas between HAVEN and 0102 and between OOSTKERKE 9006 and HEYST are inundated. The gap between these inundations is the only approach to enemy positions NORTH of the LEOPOLD CANAL and most of this gap is covered by the dual courses of the LEOPOLD and LYS CANALS - a most difficult obstacle. It is within the enemy's power to increase the inundations or indeed, except for the dune area along the NW coast, to "sink" the whole of the area between LEOPOLD CANAL and the SCHELDE. The clearing of this area may be a major operation and barring the fact that it will deny to the enemy the employment of his guns around KNOCKE 9015, it may be so saturated that it would be useless to us for gun positions from which the WALCHEREN defences may be commanded.

(AEF/First Cdn Army/C/E, Docket II: No. 28, folio 50.)

61. The Corps Commander, being already fully aware of the enemy's skill in exploiting the terrain over which his battle would be fought, observed that it was not necessary for him to attempt to flood the country in front of his defences with any great depth of water; saturation would achieve his purpose equally well: soggy, even partially covered fields would force our troops to confine their advance to dyke and road on which he would concentrate his fire. If the prospects of assaulting Walcheren by sea were uninviting, so were the narrowing perspectives of firm ground leading to the enemy's lines by land. It appeared to General Simonds that both ways of approach might have to be tried:

In most military appreciations the ground is the one constant on which firm conclusions can be based. This is not the case in the particular problem under consideration. A German document in our possession makes it clear that the conditions most advantageous to the defence and most disadvantageous to us are those of "ground saturation". This denies to us the use of the ground for movement to exactly the same extent as if it was completely flooded but allows the enemy the use of his roads, avoids the flooding of buildings, stores and many works which must be of importance to him. Attacking across a "saturated" area, movement is possible only on top of dyke roads. We sacrifice every advantage which we normally possess in the offensive. The defensive fire power can all be concentrated on narrow approaches. Mines and obstacles are most effective. With room to deploy on a "dry belt" behind a saturated area, the enemy can concentrate their fire while keeping their dispositions well concealed and well dispersed. The land approach via SUID BEVELAND appears attractive but it may well turn out to be an approach down a single stretch of road some five miles in length, bordered by impassable ground on either side. It would be equivalent to an assault landing on a "one craft front" on a coast where it was only possible to beach one craft at a single pre-known point on which the whole fire power of the

defences could be concentrated. I consider that the project of an assault across water cannot be ruled out if WALCHEREN ISLAND must be taken. It may be the only way of taking it. Though it would be a last resort and a most uninviting task, I consider it would be quite wrong to make no preparations for it, and to be faced at some later time with the necessity of having to improvise at very short notice. I am strongly of the opinion that the necessary military and naval forces should not be earmarked, married up and trained against the contingency that they might be required.

(Ibid, folios 50, 49.)

Nor did General Simonds mask the fact that the state of the ground would affect the operations of airborne troops in the same way as it did those of infantry:

...Intelligence sources state that thoroughly saturated ground is impassable to infantry and therefore is equivalent to flooding from the point of view of landing airborne infantry upon it.

(Ibid, folio 49.)

62. General Simonds was sufficiently impressed by the strength of Walcheren to be convinced that both ingenuity and variety of method would have to be applied to overcome the defensive advantages of the terrain in which the Germans had so shrewdly installed themselves. His preferred solution constitutes one of the most striking and original tactical statements of the campaign, and is the first documentary indication of the drastic remedy which he sought to apply in order to remove the impediement to our trafficking in the Scheldt.

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

- a. Bombing operations should be undertaken to break the dykes and completely flood all parts of the island below high water level.
- b. Those parts of the island which remain above water should then be systematically attacked by heavy air bombardment, day and night, to destroy defences and wear out the garrison by attrition. RDF stations should have an early priority as "point" targets.
- c. Whenever possible, heavy bombers proceeding to or from targets in Western Germany by day or night should be routed over WALCHEREN so that the garrison can never tell whether the approach of large numbers of aircraft indicates attack or not. This combined with heavy bombing attacks will drive the enemy to cover on approach of large aircraft formations and will help to "cover" an eventual airborne landing.
- d. When it is considered that the morale of the garrison has sufficiently deteriorated, waterborne patrols may be sent to determine the situation.
- e. If found to be ripe, airborne, followed by waterborne, troops should be landed immediately following a bomber raid (when defenders have been driven to ground) and mop up and take the surrender.

(Ibid, folio 49.)

63. The Corps Commander set forth the terms in which he wished to discuss the broader plan of operations as follows:

- a. 2 Cdn Inf Div to push Northward to cut off SUID BEVELAND and exploit the land approach along SUID BEVELAND as far as practicable.
- b. 4 Cdn Armd Div to continue its operations to clear the area NORTH of the LEOPOLD CANAL up to the WEST SCHELDE until 3 Cdn Inf Div is available to relieve it. This is a highly unsuitable task for an armoured division but I have nothing else available within the present constitution and tasks of 2nd Cdn Corps.
- c. As soon as 3 Cdn Inf Div can be released from BOULOGNE - CALAIS area, this division less one infantry brigade will relieve 4 Cdn Armd Div and complete the clearing of the area NORTH of LEOPOLD CANAL if this has not been completed by that time.
- d. One infantry brigade of 3 Cdn Inf Div to be earmarked with necessary Naval counterpart to train at OSTEND for seaborne operations against WALCHEREN.
- e. Airborne forces earmarked for this operation, to study and train for landings on those parts of WALCHEREN ISLAND which cannot be "sunk" by flooding.
- f. Bombing:
 - (1) To break dykes and flood WALCHEREN ISLAND.

- (2) Destroy defences and break morale of defenders of "unsinkable" portions of the island be instituted forthwith.

(Ibid, folio 49, 48.)

These views were sustained by General Crerar who presented them to a plenary conference at his Headquarters on 23 Sep, when General Simonds had the opportunity of developing them in further detail for the benefit especially of representatives of higher headquarters who would be concerned with the decisions affecting the nature and intention of our air attack.

PRELIMINARY AIR POLICY

64. Thus far the shaping of our air policy had not been influenced by the possibility of so major a departure from the normal, or even according to some, the practical, as General Simonds now proposed, but an inter-service planning conference held on 19 Sep had already made recommendations on a less horrific scale with regard to the selection and priority of targets to be attacked from the air prior to the main assault. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, September 1944: Appx "BB", Inter-service Planning Conference, 19 Sep 44.)

65. These recommendations were in part determined by considerations of the available gunfire that could be brought to bear. For the time being, our guns were fully engaged against Boulogne; yet even when they could be moved away, as Brigadier H.O.N. Brownfield, Brigadier Royal Artillery, pointed out to the conference, it would be difficult to deploy them on the south bank of the Scheldt owing to the nature of the ground, and there would be the further problem of bringing up an adequate supply of ammunition. In any case, when the guns were in position they would not be able to engage targets north of a line running east and west through Middelburg. Guns of heavier calibers were

being brought over from the United Kingdom, although they were not expected to be available before 28 or 29 Sep. In the meantime, Brigadier Brownfield would work out a programme for engaging the enemy's own heavy batteries on the south bank, since until these were destroyed or neutralized, the Royal Navy would be prevented from beginning the preliminary mine-sweeping without which naval participation in the operations would be impossible. On the other hand, it was suggested that in addition to the monitors "Erebus" and "Roberts", a case could be made for the employment of H.M.S. "Warspite", whose guns might again be trained on Canadian objectives as they had been in Normandy. (Ibid, p. 1.)

66. It was evident that considerable reliance would have to be placed on the Royal Air Force in the essential work of dealing with the German guns, and it was with this fact in mind that the conference drew up two sets of recommendations, one for targets beyond the resources of 84 Tactical Group and the other for the Group itself. Priorities for the larger tasks were first, the heavy anti-aircraft and other fixed batteries sited to engage targets on the south shore, and secondly, the fixed batteries which would prevent the Navy from sweeping channels to the west of the island for the bombardment ships. As far as might be practicable, these targets were to include light anti-aircraft batteries, fire control posts, and known enemy headquarters within their areas. The list of priorities for 84 Group was set down as follows:

- a. The lock gates at the NORTH end of BEVELAND and WALCHEREN canals. Consideration is to be given to mining the entrance to these canals by resources of Coastal Command.
- b. Enemy shipping in waters lying to the NORTH of the islands.
- c. RADAR stations providing cover to the Western approaches to WALCHEREN Island.

d. Administrative installations:

(1) Ammunition.

(2) Rations.

(After such time as the islands are considered to have been effectively isolated.)

e. HQs and telephone communication centres, insofar as these are NOT covered by the preceding plan; these to be attacked shortly before D Day for any type of an assault on WALCHEREN and ZUID BEVELAND Islands.

(Ibid, p. 2.)

The conference made its recommendations without prejudice to our air support for the operations against Calais and Boulogne. (Ibid.)

67. Assurance that the higher authorities were taking a sympathetic view of our requirements for the air offensive was forthcoming that same afternoon, when Brigadier Richardson, visiting Army Headquarters on a planning mission, said that 21 Army Group had arranged for five of the enemy's coastal batteries to be attacked on the previous day by 25 heavy bombers each, although he could not then say whether the raids had actually been carried out. He added that his Headquarters would continue to try to get such attacks put on until First Canadian Army could make their arrangements through 84 Group and Bomber Command. (W.D., "G" Plans, H.Q. First Cdn Army, September 1944; Appx 18, Memorandum to Chief of Staff, 19 Sep 44.) It was learned afterwards that three attacks had actually been made by Bomber Command on 17 Sep, when over 500 tons of high explosive and some incendiaries had been dropped on targets

at Biggeberke, Flushing and Westkapelle, but that the weather had prevented a similar visitation against Domburg on both 18 and 19 Sep. (AEF/First Cdn Army/S/F/, Folio 18, Bomber Command Attacks, September 1944.) It was unfortunate that during this important phase of the preliminary air bombardment, the weather, like the terrain, tended to favour the enemy.

CONSULTATION WITH THE ROYAL NAVY, 21 SEP 44

68. It was remained to co-ordinate military and air policies more fully with those of the Royal Navy, and to that end Admiral Sir Bertram H. Ramsay, Allied naval Commander-in-Chief, Expeditionary Force, visited General Crerar's Headquarters on 21 Sep. The meeting was attended by Maj-Gen F.W. de Guingand, Chief of Staff at H.Q. 21 Army Group, and by Brigadier Churchill Mann, his opposite number with First Canadian Army. (W.D., "G" Plans, H.Q. First Cdn Army, September 1944: Appx 22, Notes of Conference, 21 Sep 44.)

69. General Crerar opened the discussion by explaining how his preliminary plan would entail and advance westwards into South Beveland, assisted by a waterborne assault to capture the minor harbour of Hoedekenskerke. It would be impossible to go into detail, however, until he knew whether airborne forces would be placed at his disposal, and until both the left bank of the South Scheldt and the area to the north of Antwerp, including Bergen op Zoom and Roosendaal, had been secured, phases which might be expected to be completed by 3 Oct. As for the attack on the island itself, he said that this might require a combined operation with the object of landing infantry on the south-west coast. He intimated that he had accepted the principle of General Simonds' contention when he went on to say that from a purely military point of view he considered it highly desirable, if possible, to flood Walcheren, although he recognized that such a measure would eliminate any prospect of dropping airborne troops elsewhere than on to the peninsula. The tasks for them would be to enable us to get astride the South Beveland Canal,

seize Hoedekenskerke and possibly, also, the causeway to Walcheren. The Army Commander added that the Walcheren Canal had been put out of action at Veere, and that the South Beveland Canal would follow. He stressed the desirability of sustained and heavy bombing attacks against the known and suspected defences of the island on a plan of such complete destruction as had been carried out against Pantellaria, and gave his opinion that this programme should be worked out by his Headquarters in direct touch with Bomber Command. (Ibid.)

70. Admiral Ramsay's first comment was that any assault landing would have to be very well prepared, that it could be done either from L.S.I. (Landing Ships Infantry) or from a base in Belgium, either Ostende or Zeebrugge, and that it should not take long to mount. It appeared to him to be easier to provide supporting fire from the south bank of the estuary than from seaward, but that the two monitors and the battleship "Warspite" would be ready if required. Mining, he said, presented a problem and would prevent us from bringing up landing craft through the mouth of the estuary. The 20 L.C.M. (Landing Craft Medium) asked for on the previous day by General Simonds were being delivered overland into the river at Antwerp. As the military situation would make it impracticable to mount the operation for about two or three weeks, it was agreed that Captain A.F. Pugsley, R.N., whom Admiral Ramsay said was to command the Naval Force appointed to work with 2 Cdn Corps (and who had previously been closely associated with the Canadians as the officer responsible for putting 7 Cdn Inf Bde successfully on to the beach in Normandy) should initiate studies of a possible combined operation to effect a landing on the south-west coast and of the naval support which might be given to an attack from the mainland through South Beveland into Walcheren and by water from the more easterly reaches of the estuary. General de Guingand's main contribution was to inform the Army Commander that he thought he would be able to arrange for the Canadian Headquarters to deal with Bomber Command through 84 Group R.A.F. in putting on the bombing programme, and that he would

undertake to obtain the views of higher authority on the possibilities of the flooding. (Ibid.)

71. After the meeting had broken up, Brigadier Mann received a telephone call from the Brigadier General Staff Operations at 21 Army Group to inform him that airborne forces would not be available, a decision which the Chief of Staff passed on the Headquarters 2 Cdn Corps whither General Crerar had already taken his departure. (Ibid.)

PLENARY PLANNING CONFERENCE, 23 SEP 44

72. Preliminary discussions at Army Headquarters culminated in the plenary conference which met on 23 Sep. In addition to General Crerar's own staff and advisers, and General Simonds and his Chief of Staff. Brigadier N.E. Rodger, the two other Services, First Allied Airborne Army and the staff of Field-Marshal Montgomery were all represented. Among the naval delegation Capt Pugsley appeared as Commander of Naval Force "T", that invaluable component henceforth to be associated with us throughout the operation. The presence of Air Vice-Marshal Oxland of Bomber Command and representatives of the Allied Expeditionary Air Forces and of 2 Tactical Air Force with Air Vice-Marshal L.O. Brown, Air Officer Commanding 84 Group, and members of his staff, was an encouraging sign that our special requirements for the fullest possible support from the air were likely to receive informed and sympathetic attention. (W.D., "G" Plans H.Q. First Cdn Army, September 1944: Appx 24, Conference - Operation "INFATUATE", 23 Sep 44, Appx "A".)

73. General Crerar opened the proceedings by indicating the nature of the responsibility which had been placed upon First Canadian Army. It was obviously going to be a difficult operation, he said, and providing the enemy continued to show his existing determination to stand and fight, it was not going to be a speedy one. Nevertheless, it would be carried out as quickly

and surely as possible. The specific formation given the task to do, 2 Cdn Corps, was still committed in the Pas de Calais. Though Boulogne had fallen, until General Simonds had completed his immediate responsibility of capturing Calais and the enemy's guns at Cap Gris Nez, it would not be possible for him to concentrate his mind, or his resources, on the problem of Antwerp. The Army Commander stated, however, that if Calais did not fall immediately, he would make the decision within 24 hours of the commencement of the operation, whether to go on with the intention of actually capturing the town or simply to mask it. The essential was to destroy the enemy's long range batteries in order that the port of Boulogne could be used and that work might begin on the oil pipe line at Ambleteuse. (Ibid, p. 1; W.D., G.O.C.-in-C. First Cdn Army, September 1944: Appx 9, Notes for Conference on Operation "INFATUATE".)

74. Explaining the possible sequence which our envelopment and possession of the estuary might be expected to follow, General Crerar said that until the day before he had been promised the assistance of two parachute brigades. Yet while dropping conditions in the Dutch islands were undoubtedly poor, so were the other conditions affecting our offensive there, and although a message had been received that the Supreme Commander had decided against the employment of airborne forces, the Army Commander thought that there was still a possibility that they might be made available if a sufficiently good case were presented. He added that Brig-Gen Cutler was prepared to send over an officer to assist in planning in case the decision should be reversed. General Crerar again stressed the importance of very heavy bombing to start as soon as possible and be carried on until the actual assault on Walcheren commenced. He then raised the question of the deliberate flooding of the island by heavy and repeated bombing attacks on the dykes. Resort to such an expedient would depend on whether it were actually feasible in practice and on the sanction of higher authority. (Ibid.)

75. In summing up, General Crerar described how he proposed to regroup his forces. He showed how 1 Brit Corps would be brought up on the right of 2 Cdn Corps at Antwerp to make junction with Second Brit Army. After Calais had been captured, or contained as in the manner of Dunkirk (see [Report No. 183](#)), 3 Cdn Inf Div would relieve 4 Cdn Armd Div and complete the clearance of the mainland between the Leopold Canal and the coast. Then 4 Cdn Armd Div would move over to the right of 2 Cdn Inf Div. Within the next few days, as soon as movement and maintenance were possible, 1 Pol Armd Div would be shifted into the Antwerp area. The force then containing Dunkirk - 4 Brit S.S. Bde - would be relieved by an infantry brigade of 51 (H.) Inf Div in order to begin training for a possible landing.

76. Following the Army Commander, General Simonds said that he had not been able to go into the matter as fully as he would have liked to do, but that he considered that the operation would be in three phases: the first to seal off the eastern end of South Beveland and thrust along the peninsula; the second to clear the south shore; the third to capture Walcheren. He would use 2 Cdn Inf Div to envelop the peninsula and he would direct the Polish armour on Bergen op Zoom and Roosendaal. General Simonds did not miss the opportunity to enlarge upon the favourable situation which would arise if Walcheren could be flooded by breaching the dykes at Westkapelle. In such an event, the enemy would be forced to withdraw to those parts of the island lying above the level of the water, especially to the dunes, where an amphibious assault would render their positions particularly vulnerable, since tracked landing vehicles, disgorged near the breached dyke, could swim through the gaps to take them in the rear. The troops who were to train for such a landing, 4 Brit S.S. Bde, were to be concentrated at Ostend and be ready in 21 days, for, as the Corps Commander informed the conference, the operation could not take place until three weeks from the time that heavy and super heavy ammunition could be delivered through Dieppe at the rate of 1500 tons a day.

(Ibid.) He recommended, however, that heavy bombing on pre-arranged targets should begin without delay.

77. In the matter of air support Brig-Gen Cutler of the Allied Airborne Army informed the conference that the Supreme Commander was prepared to use 8 U.S. Army Air Force to assist in the operation. he added that while planning ought not now to proceed on the assumption that airborne forces would be taking part, he would examine the possibilities of their employment in the capture of South Beveland by a landing in the vicinity of Hoedekenskerke and in the establishment of a bridgehead on Walcheren covering the causeway from the peninsula. It was also arranged to provide Air Vice-Marshall Oxland with a list of the targets and priorities agreed upon with Headquarters 21 Army Group and 2 Tactical Air Force to take with him on his return to the United Kingdom for the information of his command. He personally could not say whether it would be possible to breach the dykes by bombing, and as, in any case, his function was simply that of an air adviser, the decision to engage targets in Walcheren rested with the C.-in-C. Bomber Command and the Supreme Commander.³

78. For the Royal Navy Captain Pugsley said that work had begun on sweeping a channel to a position ten miles west of the island and that the bombarding ships should be able to fire in a few days' time. He pointed out one limiting factor, however, which in due course came to affect decisions, that as the combined operation would probably take place in October, about four days out of six could be counted as being unsuitable, owing to heavy swells. (Ibid.) The energy of the Navy in thus clearing a way through the German mine fields - the first major hazard in the seaward approaches - was a source of encouragement to all.

³ On 25 Sep the control of Bomber Command passed from S.H.A.E.F. to the Chief of Air Staff (Bomber Offensive by Marshal of the R.A.F., Sir Arthur Harris, p. 236, abv 217.)

**APPARENT IMPRACTICABILITY OF FLOODING
BY AIR ATTACK**

79. On the following day (24 Sep), however, a memorandum, apparently decisive in its bearing on the issue of whether the breaching of the dyke at Westkapelle were practicable or not, was laid before the Army Commander by his Chief Engineer. Based upon a detailed study of the available intelligence, including data and opinions supplied by local residents, seamen, and hydrographic engineers, the memorandum set forth its conclusions as follows:

- a. It is not practicable to flood by breaching the WEST KAPELLE dyke by air bombing.
- b. To achieve really complete and deep flooding, the main sluice gates controlling drainage must be in our hands.
- c. Local flooding in the canal area might be obtained by breaching the canal dyke and destroying the lock gates on the canal by air bombing.
- d. Even if the whole island was flooded, it would not be to a sufficient depth to permit the op of assault craft.
- e. The use of amphibians through a breach in the dyke made by bombing is not practicable.

(W.D., "G" Plans, H.Q. First Cdn Army, October 1944:
Appx 21, Flooding - Walcheren & Suid Beveland, folio 37.)

80. The factors leading to these conclusions were stated thus:

- a. The WEST KAPELLE dyke is the largest on the island and one of the oldest in HOLLAND. It is composed of hy clay and, because of its age, will be very thoroughly compacted. At Mean High Water Level it is between 200' and 250' in width with very flat side slopes. In order to rapidly flood the island, complete removal of all material above Mean High Water level would be necessary. To make a gap 100' long required removal of some 10,000 tons of clay. It is very improbable that even the most accurate bombing could produce a clear channel. Rather, a series of craters with high lips which would obstruct the flow of water, is anticipated. As the material is hy clay a rush of water would probably not effectively clear this channel.
- b. The inflow of water through breaches in the dykes or through the existing sluice gates will occur only at High Tide periods and on Low Tide there will be a corresponding run-off from all points not actually below the level of the sluice gates. Assuming the dyke breached to a depth of 6 ft below Mean High Water, flow in through the breach will occur for about 5 hrs and run off will occur through the breach and also through the normal drainage canals for approx 8 hrs in each cycle of the tide. Thus areas below the level of the sluice gates and the breach in the dyke will remain flooded, which areas above this level will be subject to periodic surges and recessions of water and become thoroughly saturated but will be exposed above water for several hrs on each tide. the available maps are not contoured accurately enough to show which areas are above the sluice gate levels, but the zero contour on the GERMAN 1/50,000 map outlines areas approx 6 ft below Mean High Water which will almost certainly remain flooded if the dyke is breached not more than 6 ft below that level. For rapid flooding to any considerable depth, it would be necessary to prevent run-

off at Low Tide periods by closing the sluice gates. In the area of the canal the dyke is smaller, but still up to 100' wide at Mean Water Level. If the lock gates were destroyed, and the canal dyke breached to a sufficient depth, local flooding would result but if it is not considered that sufficient water would enter through the demolished gates to flood the whole island rapidly, and there are a number of minor interior dykes which would prevent general inundation. Breaching at this point would also be subject to run-off at Low Tide as the canal would be rendered tidal by destruction of the lock gates.

- c. Local inhabitants will undoubtedly do everything in their power to assist run-off by operating the sluices, etc., and repairing any breaches made.
- d. While the interior of the island is generally well below Sea Level, at Mean High Tide, there is sufficient variation in the ground that no continuous deep channels could be counted on after flooding. Many points will remain exposed or only covered by a few inches of water and even the lightest craft could not be guaranteed safe passage.
- e. Even allowing for breaching to a depth well below Mean High Tide, the use of amphibians through the breach is not considered practicable. Bombing will not produce a clear channel and will probably leave irregular masses of clay at or below water level on which craft would belly and become stuck.
- f. In general, because of the above conditions, it is considered that achieving rapid and complete flooding by bombing would be extraordinarily lucky even under the best bombing conditions.

(Ibid, folio 36, 37.)

CONCURRENCE OF HEADQUARTERS 21 ARMY GROUP

26 - 27 SEP 44

81. The Army Commander, sceptical in the face of such contrary evidence, referred the matter back to General Simonds. But the Corps Commander, having scrutinized the case against him, still maintained that the attempt to flood should be authorized. On this General Crerar concurred, and on 26 Sep the appropriate request was sent to Headquarters 21 Army Group. The request was approved. On 27 Sep Brigadier Belchem, Field-Marshal Montgomery's B.G.S. (Ops), passed the information by telephone to Army Headquarters, adding that H.Q. A.E.A.F. had been asked through 2 T.A.F. for permission for Bomber Command to deal direct with Headquarters First Cdn Army in planning the attack on the dykes. The confirmatory signal was received shortly afterwards. So far as we know at Canadian Headquarters, however, up to this point S.H.A.E.F. had not actually concurred, nor were Air Force experts and authorities yet convinced that the proposed operation was practicable. (Ibid, folios 36 - 43.)

TEMPORARY CHANGES IN COMMAND, 26 - 27 SEP 44

82. During this most strenuous period General Crerar had been carrying on the exacting functions and responsibilities of his command despite a somewhat serious decline in health. As the essential preliminaries and basic plans for the ensuing phase of the campaign were now well in hand, and in view of the fact that his condition threatened to hinder the efficient execution of his duties, on the day after the conference he drove to No. 16 Cdn Gen Hosp in St Omer for a thorough examination. He was advised that it would be necessary for him to return to the United Kingdom for further diagnosis, tests and treatment. On 26 Sep he flew to Headquarters 21 Army Group to confer with the

C.-in-C. Field-Marshal Montgomery fully agreed in the necessity of following the advice of the doctors and concurred in the nomination of General Simonds as Acting Army Commander during General Crerar's absence. Final arrangements for handling over to General Simonds at Army Headquarters, then situated near Ghent, were completed during the afternoon. After appointing Maj-Gen C. Foulkes to the acting command of 2 Cdn Corps and Brig R.H. Keebler to lead 2 Cdn Inf Div, General Crerar left by air for England on 27 Sep. (W.D., G.O.C.-in-C. First Cdn Army, 24-27 Sep 44.)

THE CASE FOR THE BREACHING

83. General Simonds lost no time in resuming the argument for the practicability of breaching the dyke around Walcheren as part of his plan to capture the island with the least possible loss of life or time. He called a special meeting on 29 Sep to go into the question both with the senior officers of 84 Group, and with Group Captain P.B. Lucas of the Allied Expeditionary Air Forces, and Air Commodore Dickens of Bomber Command. Capt A.F. Pugsley attended to state what air support was desired by the Royal Navy. (W.D., "G" Plans, H.Q. First Cdn Army, September 1944: Appx 28, Op "Infatuate", 29 Sep 44.)

84. Commenting on the many difficulties confronting them from the point of view of all three services, the Acting G.O.C.-in-C. said that it appeared very unlikely that they would be having the assistance of airborne troops: but there was no task which could be dismissed as impossible, and since this particular one had been assigned to us, it was necessary to evolve methods which seemed to offer the best prospects of success.

85. General Simonds then focused attention on the problem in hand. He observed that our information showed that a large part of the island was under sea level. He maintained, therefore, that if it could be flooded, the enemy

would be compelled to concentrate his forces and so render them more vulnerable to attack. He enlarged upon the many serious administrative difficulties which would be imposed upon the enemy. He indicated that the enemy's reserves would be largely immobilized, or perhaps destroyed. It might even be possible to create an entry for amphibians at one or other of the points of breaching and thus enable us to effect a landing on the other side of the German defences. He summed up his case by emphasizing that so many military advantages would accrue to us were flooding to be achieved, that if it were technically possible, we should not hesitate to carry it out. He went on to say that from his study and examination of intelligence, including air photographs, and in the opinion of his engineer advisers, he believed that the greater portion of the island could be flooded at least to a degree which would make the ground soggy and impassable, conditions which would give us most of the advantages we sought. He thereupon invited his hearers to scrutinize a series of air photographs, taken in pairs, by looking at them through a stereoscope: on this evidence he supported his contention that if the dyke were to be breached, the land on the inside was low enough to be inundated, a conclusion borne out by the testimony of Dutch civilians who had said the if the dyke were broken the island would sink. (Ibid, Personal Diary, Maj W.E.C. Harrison, 8 Nov 44). He used other air photographs of bomb-patterns caused in previous operations by the R.A.F. to show that as in the case of the attack on the Ems - Dortmund canal, similar tasks had been carried out with a degree of accuracy commensurate with that required for the target now proposed. (Information given by Lt-Gen Simonds to Lt-Col W.E.C. Harrison, 10 Sep 47.)

86. In the course of the ensuing discussion, it was brought out that the action of the sea could be expected to aid substantially in creating a gap at a point where the dyke had been catered by bombing and the material forming it loosened. It was noted also that the use of delayed action bombs would ensure that the defenders, or the inhabitants, would be unable to take effective

measures to repair the damage. Group Captain Lucas inquired whether other methods of attack were likely to be prejudiced or made more difficult if an attempt at breaching were made but failed. General Simonds replied that no disadvantage would follow, since the situation would simply remain as it existed already. He added that for an initial test one big breach of possibly 100 feet in width would be sufficient. On this Group Captain Lucas remarked that he had not realized that the dyke was so large, and that under the circumstances he thought it would prove to be a long and difficult business. On the other hand, Air Commodore Dickens of Bomber Command thought the conditions for further air attack subsequent to flooding would be improved, since targets would then be isolated and more clearly discerned. He was confident that the resources of Bomber Command, without reinforcement, were quite capable of carrying out the attempt on the dyke at the points selected, although he emphasized that it would not be possible to guarantee that the attempt would be successful. Whereupon General Simonds urged that if permission were actually given to make it, then it must be a full effort to which we ought to apply all the technical experience and skill at our disposal, for the ultimate plan for the capture of the island depended on the conclusions reached after study of the results obtained in the first attacks.

87. The Chief Engineer at Army Headquarters, Brigadier G. Walsh, D.S.O., then handed Commodore Dickens a drawing of a typical cross-section of the dyke. It was undeniable revelation of the difficulties of producing the effect desired on so tenuous a target. The dyke stood apparently 20 feet high and on the seaward side was faced with stone up to three feet above the height of the spring tide, the top, 25 feet across, being either covered with turf, or more usually carrying a double tracked road. The inner slope did not exceed 45 degrees, nor the outer probably more than 30. The width of the base was thought to be not less than 150 feet. According to the Engineers, the core was of sand, bound by a layer of clay at least three feet thick. (Ibid; W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, September 1944: Appx Y-Z, AA-PP,

folio 97.) General Simonds suggested three points within 1000 yards to the north of Westkapelle where the breaching might most suitably be tried, if possible before or during the spring tides of 3 and 4 Oct.

88. The conference concluded (to quote the minutes) with the following decisions touching the enterprise:

Bomber Comd RAF will undertake a deliberate attempt to breach the dyke commencing as soon as:

- a. authority is obtained from the Supreme Comd and notified to them through the normal channels; and
- b. weather and technical conditions permit.

(W.D., "G" Plans, H.Q. First Cdn Army, September 1944: Appx 28.)

It was agreed also that there should be a direct link through H.Q. 84 Group for passing information to Bomber Command on the results.

89. The Royal Navy's immediate requirements were more modest. Commander Prior said that to enable minesweeping to go forward with better safety it was desirable that the radar stations on the island should be put out of action. Having regard to the passive attitude of the enemy's coast batteries for the present, he would not yet request that they be put out of commission, since if the German radar were not functioning, the minesweepers could ensure their own safety during the current phase by making smoke. If any of the batteries opened up later on, it would become necessary to deal with them, as otherwise they were capable of preventing the work from going on. It was agreed that air attacks on any that might prove troublesome should be requested separately as occasion arose. (Ibid.)

90. General Simonds had not long to wait for a decision on his argument in favour of this terrible experiment. The chances of its practicability were accepted by the experts and the grim calculus of cost for cost determined on behalf of the men who would soon be ordered to make the assault by land or water, in the teeth of the enemy's fire. Considerations of strategy prevailed over those of economics; the saving of life had a stronger case than the avoidance of dire hardship and of the loss of land and stock for our helpless friends, the Dutch. Too much depended on silencing the German guns for these unhappy alternatives to be avoided, and Walcheren's rich acres were condemned to the spoliation of the sea. "The wholesale destruction of property", says Air Marshal Sir Arthur Harris, "is, in my view, always justified if it is calculated to save casualties". (Bomber Offensive, p. 237.) Intimation that the necessary final authorizations had been made was received in a message from Headquarters 21 Army Group on the following afternoon (1 Oct).

Op INFATUATE

The Supreme Commander has approved the project to flood the island of WALCHEREN.

(AEF/21 Army Gp/C/H, Docket II, Tele Message, 1 Oct 1150A hrs.)

Headquarters 21 Army Group had already asked that the inhabitants be warned of their imminent danger, a request made known to Headquarters First Cdn Army on the receipt of a copy of the following message to S.H.A.E.F. on 27 Sep:

TOP SECRET. Ref operation INFATUATE. Request immediate preparation and drop leaflets SCHELDT ESTUARY ISLANDS warning civil population imminent heavy prolonged air bombardment. Leaflets should stress danger flooding and urge immediate evacuation of islands or if this is NOT possible of military objectives and low lying ground.

(W.D., "G" Plans, H.Q. First Cdn Army, October 1944: Appx 20, folio 108, PPW 726.)

The blow was to fall within a week of that signal.

91. While these urgent preparations were being made the wider pattern of events into which the Canadian Army's operations had their place was thus briefly, starkly and characteristically described by Field-Marshal Montgomery in the directive issued on 27 Sep:

1. The enemy has re-acted violently since we launched the operations outlined in M 525 dated 14 September. He has had to give serious consideration to the threats to turn the Siegfried Line, to nullify the defensive value of the Rhine, and to outflank the RUHR.
2. The Second Army sector has been given first priority for any reinforcements that the enemy can get together. There is now considerable enemy strength north of ARNHEM, and east and south-east of NIJMEGEN.

The enemy has achieved some success in cutting the Second Army corridor northwards to NIJMEGEN; but this situation has now been got in hand - I hope finally.

3. The enemy is now likely to act as follows:
 - a. He knows we must be stretched administratively, and he will hold the fortresses of CALAIS, DUNKIRK, WALCHEREN, etc., as long as he can.

- b. He will try and hold as economical a line as possible west of the Second Army penetration into HOLLAND. As he is pushed back by the right wing of Canadian Army he is likely to try and stabilize our advance northwards on the line of the WAAL (or lower RHINE).
 - c. He will try and organize a firm line of defence on our eastern flank in order to keep us away from the RUHR. For this purpose he is likely to make use of the MEUSE as an obstacle from GENNEP southwards.
4. We ourselves have had to withdraw from our bridgehead over the NEDER RIJN in the ARNHEM area. But 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 US Army on our right, would be difficult for the enemy to hold.

Furthermore, our bridgehead over the RHINE at NIJMEGEN gives us the ability to operate northwards over the NEDER RIJN whenever such a threat seems suitable.

(G.O.C.-in-C./1-0, Operations 21 Army Group; M 527, folio 92, 27 Sep 44.)

92. The possibilities were therefore still very good, but the phase of the campaign upon which the northern group of armies was now about to enter had the grim connotations of a rearguard action which the enemy seemed willing and ready to fight out on the largest scale and in a mood of unrelenting

stubbornness in order to postpone, conceivably to prevent, our breaking into Germany. The C.-in-C. did not mince his words:

5. The battle is now likely to take a new complexion.

We fought a hard dog-fight battle in Normandy; as a result of the victory there gained, we "tumbled" the enemy back hundreds of miles, so far in fact that we got somewhat stretched ourselves administratively; we then had a "battle for position", from the ALBERT CANAL up to the RHINE at NIJMEGEN. We have won all these different types of battles; and we stand at the door of Germany, and are likely now to have another dogfight battle or killing match.

6. In view of the above considerations, it is clear that the armies which are to capture the RUHR should not now operate on divergent axes.

They must operate on converging thrust lines, and thus become such a powerful force that the enemy will not be able to stand against the combined might of the two armies.

The objective, and the prize, is the RUHR; its capture will mean the beginning of the end for GERMANY.

7. We have also before us another priority objective, and that is the port of Antwerp. We have the city and the docks, intact; but we cannot use it.

The opening of the port is absolutely essential before we can advance deep into Germany.

8. We must therefore now prepare for a hard dog-fight battle, or killing match. If we smash the enemy in this battle and kill or capture the bulk of his troops, he will have little left to oppose our further advance into Germany.

It may well be that the killing match that now lies in front of us will be the last we shall have to undertake.

(Ibid, folios 92, 91.)

Such was the outlook for October along our lengthy northern front across the Low Countries.

93. In the face of these facts the C.-in-C. thus explained his intention:

- a. To open up the port of ANTWERP.
- b. In conjunction with First US Army on the right, to destroy all enemy forces that are preventing us from capturing the RUHR.

(Ibid, folio 91.)

He then prescribed the new boundaries separating the several sectors of the Allied Armies' advance in the north. A line enclosing Hasselt, Weert, Asten, Deurne and Massshees would separate First U.S. Army from Second Brit Army; another including Herenthals, Turnhout, Tilburg's Hertogenbosch, Zaltbommel, Utrecht and Hilversum would mark the right flank of First Canadian Army.

94. Within these sectors, while First Canadian Army was committed on the Scheldt and in Brabant, the British and American Armies were to carry out the

main converging thrusts towards the Ruhr, Second Brit Army being directed as follows:

15. The line of supply running northwards through EINDHOVEN, and up to the RHINE at NIJMEGEN, must be maintained intact and free from enemy interference.
16. A firm bridgehead will be maintained over the RHINE at Nijmegen.

The object of this bridgehead will be to create a constant threat to the enemy of our Allied advance northwards over the NEDER RIJN; it must therefore be an offensive, and a "threatening" bridgehead.

A movement northwards from this bridgehead might well be a suitable operation should the enemy withdraw troops from the ARNHEM area because of our pressure elsewhere; reconnaissances will be carried out accordingly.

17. The major task of the Army will be to operate strongly with all available strength from the general area NIJMEGEN - GENNEP against the N.W. corner of the RUHR.

The right flank of the movement will be directed on KREFELD.

On the left flank, the RHINE will be crossed as and where opportunity offers, and in particular every endeavour will be made to get a bridgehead at WESEL.

These operations will be begun as early as the maintenance situation will allow.

(Ibid, folio 90.)

95. On the right of 21 Army Group First U.S. Army would co-operate as the C.-in-C. thus outlined:

19. One armoured division (7 DIV) has been assigned the task of cleaning up the area SOUTH of the line MASSHEES - DEURNE and west of the MEUSE.

20. Having completed this task, 7 Armd DIV is to hold the line of the MEUSE as a connecting link between Second British and First US Armies, so long as this is necessary.

21. The Army is to develop as early as possible a strong offensive movement eastward up to the RHINE.

The main weight of the movement will be directed on COLOGNE. The left flank of the movement will be directed on DUSSELDORF. Bridgeheads over the RHINE will be secured as opportunity offers.

(Ibid.)

96. Field-Marshal Montgomery described his conception of subsequent operations in these terms:

22. The converging movement of the Second British Army and First US Army against the N.W. and S.W. corners of the RUHR area respectively will be developed in each case as early as is possible. Close touch and liaison will be necessary between the two armies.

23. As the movements progress opportunities are certain to be created in the area of one or other of the armies which are favourable for exploitation. Bridgeheads over the RHINE are a first essential and these must be sought for; once they are obtained we shall be well placed for dealing with the RUHR itself. These bridgeheads will be of the greatest value if they are either north or south of the western face of the RUHR, so that we can deal with that area by outflanking movements and thus isolate it; we do not want to enter the actual area of the RUHR in the first instance if it can be avoided.

24. It is clear therefore that we cannot at this stage decide exactly how the subsequent operations against the RUHR will be organized.

We will first gain contact with the RUHR, get bridgeheads over the RHINE, and then decide on a plan for further action.

(Ibid, folio 90, 89.)

97. The course of First Canadian Army's activities was thus laid down:

12. The left wing of the Canadian Army will complete the operations that are now in progress to enable us to use the ports of BOULOGNE and CALAIS.

DUNKIRK will be masked, and will be dealt with later.

13. The Canadian Army will at once develop operations designed to enable us to have the free use of the port of ANTWERP. The early completion of these operations is vital.

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

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

(Ibid, folio 91.)

98. It will be observed that General Simond's responsibilities covered, therefore, both the plan to open Antwerp and a deeper penetration into Brabant northward in order to enable General Dempsey to wheel his forces round to the north-east for the coming offensive across the Rhine.

THE TASK OF FIRST CDN ARMY, 2 OCT 44

99. Within the week General Simonds addressed a directive to Generals Crocker and Foulkes in which he related the broad policy for the Army Group as a whole with the particular responsibilities falling to himself and his two Corps Commanders. His explanation of purpose, weight and grouping is succinct:

1. First US Army is developing a thrust through AACHEN on the South West corner of the RUHR at COLOGNE. Second Brit Army is developing a thrust between rivers MEUSE and RHINE on North-West corner of the RUHR and KREFELD. In the course of these operations, bridgeheads across the RHINE may be secured and possibilities opened for a drive Eastward into central GERMANY. These operations have prior call on administrative resources. To enable Second Brit Army to regroup and advance South Eastward, it

is necessary for First Cdn Army to clear the Western flank of Second Brit Army by a thrust North-Eastward.

2. In conjunction with these thrusts on the RUHR by First US and Second Brit Armies, the whole weight of the Strategic Air Forces is being thrown against Western and South-Western GERMANY. Bomber Command is, however, making an all out attempt to cut the dykes and flood WALCHEREN Island.

3. 51 (H) Div and 34 Armd Bde less one regiment, have passed to command Second Brit Army. The Czech Bde Group is coming under command First Cdn Army. 51 (H) Div is relieving 15 (S) Div in 12 Corps and is being employed offensively to assist the advance of 1 Brit Corps. It is the C-in-C.'s intention that 51 (H) Div will revert to command First Cdn Army as soon as 53 Div has been pinched out.

(W.D., G.O.C.-in-C. First Cdn Army, October 1944: Appx 1, Directive to Corps Commanders, 2 Oct 44, p. 1.)

100. His appreciation recognized the mounting necessity for improving our administrative facilities through Antwerp and the desirability of being able to end the diversion on the Scheldt as quickly as possible, in order to throw our full resources into the main drive to the north and north-east:

4. I appreciate that the greater the success of the offensive of the First US and Second Brit Armies, the greater will become the demand for the use of the port of ANTWERP and concurrently with this, First Cdn Army may be required to extend its right Northwards and Eastward to cover the outer flank of Second Brit Army and isolate, and ultimately destroy, the German forces cut

off in HOLLAND. It is important that the large forces required for offensive operations to clear the SCHELDE Estuary should be released for operations further Northwards as early as possible - unless engaged offensively they constitute an uneconomic and bad detachment. In spite of the immediate priorities given to First US and Second Brit Armies, the importance of quickly clearing the SCHELDE Estuary is increased, NOT diminished.

(Ibid.)

The early capture of Dunkirk, he added, was of no importance.

101. He thus set out his intention:

6. First Cdn Army will:
 - a. With one corps clear the Western flank of the Second Brit Army by a thrust North-Eastward from TURNHOUT on HERTOGENBOSCH.
 - b. With one corps develop operations to clear the SCHELDE Estuary and open the port of ANTWERP.
 - c. With the Czech Armd Bde, contain DUNKERQUE.

(Ibid, pp 1, 2.)

102. General Simond's instructions for 1 Brit Corps were to:

- a. Thrust North-Eastward on HERTOGENBOSCH.

- b. Direct 2 Cdn Inf Div to clear the area NORTH of ANTWERP and close the Eastern end of the ZUID BEVELAND Isthmus until this division reverts to operational command 2 Cdn Corps.⁴
- c. Subsequently develop operations successively towards BREDA and ROOSENDAAL to cover the Eastern flank and rear of 2 Cdn Inf Div directed Westwards on ZUID BEVELAND.

103. General Simond's orders for 2 Cdn Corps were to

- a. Attack and destroy, or capture, all enemy remaining in the area of BELGIUM and HOLLAND SOUTH of the WEST SCHELDE (Operation "SWITCHBACK").
- b. On conclusion of operation "SWITCHBACK" develop operations with 2 Cdn Inf Div to clear ZUID BEVELAND.
- c. Capture the Island of WALCHEREN (Operation "INFATUATE").

(Ibid.)

As soon as Operation "SWITCHBACK" had begun, 4 Cdn Armd Div would come into Army reserve. The internal and anti-aircraft defence of Antwerp would be carried out by 7 Base Sub Area under the command of First Cdn Army. (Ibid.)

⁴ Under command of 1 Brit Corps since 26 Sep 44 (see [Report No. 183](#)) and now to revert to 2 Cdn Corps on completion of Operation "SWITCHBACK".

**THE CORPS COMMANDER'S OUTLINE PLAN
FOR OPERATION "SWITCHBACK"**

104. On the same day as the Acting Army Commander issued his directive (2 Oct) General Foulkes produced his outline plan along the lines of that drawn up by General Simonds while he was still at Headquarters 2 Cdn Corps. (AEF/2 Cdn Corps/B/I, Docket II: Notes on Planning, folio 2, Operation "SWITCHBACK" Outline Plan, 2 Oct 44; cf AEF/2 Cdn Corps/B/F, Docket II, folio 2, Operation "SWITCHBACK" Outline Plan). His declared object was to clear the area to the north of the Leopold Canal in order to silence the coastal guns covering the mouth of the Scheldt and to provide suitable gun positions for supporting the assault on Walcheren.

105. As it was hoped to gain tactical surprise as to the time, form and intensity of the attack, the following measures were to be taken:

- a. Concentration of 3 Cdn Inf Div EAST of DUNKIRK to be as late as possible.
- b. No preliminary bombardment or CB fire.
- c. Patrolling and securing or information to be carried out by 4 Cdn Armd Div, now in contact.
- d. Training and rehearsals of 9 Cdn Inf Bde and 5 Aslt Bn, RE, to be carried out at a distance from the SAVOJAARDS PLAAT and in a secure area.
- e. Careful screening and camouflage plan in the 4 Cdn Armd Div area.
- f. Rigid tightening up of security measures in the forward area.

(Ibid.)

106. In the first phase of the operation as then conceived we would force a bridgehead and clear the ground between the Braakman Inlet and the Belgian border: the second phase would be devoted to Knocke-sur-Mer and the roads leading into it. While the attack was being prepared, 4 Cdn Armd Div would:

- a. Hold the line of the LEOPOLD CANAL and form a firm base to cover the concentration of assaulting tps and the forcing of the crossing.
- b. Provide suitable diversions and feints to pin the enemy down during the actual assault.
- c. Collect and collate all information required by the assaulting bdes.
- d. (Improve and prepare any tracks, roads or approaches required by the assaulting bdes.

(Ibid.)

107. The troops required for the attack were 3 Cdn Inf Div, with 5 Aslt Bn, R.E., and one squadron of amphibious tanks under command. This force was to:

- a. ...Break into the area in two places
 - (1) Across the LEOPOLD CANAL.
 - (2) Across the SAVOJAARDS PLAAT.

- b. Cut off the enemy's escape routes through the ports of BRESKENS 0919 and HOOFDPLAAT 1615.
- c. Mop up the enemy in the area between the SAVOJAARDS PLAAT and the DUTCH border.
- d. Secure the crossings at SLUIS 9609 and RETRANCHEMENT 9713 as a preliminary for Phase II.

(Ibid.)

The tentative date was 6 Oct. The hour would depend on the tides in the Braakman Inlet, but if it were to be in daylight, the assaulting troops would go forward under cover of smoke. As soon as the tactical situation permitted, the Corps' Engineers would build bridges at Strooibrug and south of Watervliet and open routes to Breskens and Sluis. Initially, the force attacking across the Braakman Inlet would be maintained by a ferry service of terrapins.

108. Medium bombers and rocket-firing typhoons were to be available on call, and the tentative allotment of guns included those of 4 Cdn Armd Div, and eight medium and three heavy regiments (less two 155 mm) batteries) from 2 Cdn and 3 and 9 Brit Army Groups Royal Artillery. (Ibid.) Except for the armoured division, bombardment of the enemy's guns and mortars would be withheld until immediately prior to the attack.

THE 3 CDN INF DIV PLAN

109. The battle to eliminate the enemy's holdings behind the Leopold Canal followed so quickly after the reduction of Calais that 3 Cdn Inf Div had to make its preparations somewhat hurriedly. Much needed rest for the men and maintenance for their vehicles had to be forgone, and everyone concerned

became immediately absorbed in the business of mounting the attack across the water-barriers. (AEF 45/3 Cdn Inf Div/C/F, Docket II: Operation "SWITCHBACK", Battle Narrative, Historical Officer, H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div.) On 4 Oct Maj-Gen-Spry had his divisional plan in the hands of his bridge commanders. Though it failed to be carried out as originally conceived, its main lines must be noticed.

110. The division was to concentrate in the wooded region of the Drongen Goed Bosch. The assault would be made by 7 Cdn Inf Bde Gp (with N. Shore R. under command) at first light on 6 Oct on a front running some 6000 yards eastward from the junction of the Leopold and Derivation Canals. The initial bridgehead was to include Moershoofd, Valeiskreek, Aardenburg, Heille and Middelburg. Then 8 Cdn Inf Bde Gp would pass through to seize crossings over the Canal de L'Ecluse at Sluis and over the Uitwaterings Canal to the north-east of the town, while 7 Cdn Inf Bde swing away to the south and west of Sluis to the line of its canal. The enemy's attention would now be distracted from this frontal attack by a descent upon his left flank across the Braakman by 9 Cdn Inf Bde Gp. Having established a foothold from Bieryliet northwards to the sea, this brigade would thence strike at Breskens, while 7 Cdn Inf Bde came up to take Oostburg and Schoondijke and cleared westwards towards crossings seized over the Uitwaterings Canal by 8 Cdn Inf Bde which would conclude the operation by attacking Knocke. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div, October 1944: Appx 8, 0.0. No. 9 Operation "SWITCHBACK", 4 Oct 44.) (See Appx "A".)

INTELLIGENCE AND TERRAIN

111. As we have seen, it was known that the enemy's garrison comprised the main body of 64 Inf Div, with a supplement of certain static defence troops, marines and the remnants of other formations which had lost their identity and most of their numbers in the retreat out of Normandy. Elements of the

division had already been encountered by 3 Cdn Inf Div near Eu during the pursuit across northern France; others had been trapped at Boulogne. Reinforced, however, it remained a formidable and well disciplined opponent, not at all to be compared with the half-hearted garrisons of the Channel ports, and there were possibilities of transfusion through Breskens from Walcheren. Commanding the roads through the saturated fields or sitting behind the concrete at places like Eede and Oostburg, Sluis and Cadzand, the division could await our coming with reasonable confidence, limited only by the fact that the original scheme of defence against invasion from the sea tended to restrict its present effectiveness. The coastal area about Knocke and Breskens was thus most heavily fortified, and in at least one case, that of Schoondijke, the guns and casemate faced so uncompromisingly out to sea that they were useless against attack coming in from the other direction. Yet, as our troops were to know to their cost, the enemy's positions along the bank of the canal and beyond it were fully capable of meeting and holding our attack from the land. (AEF 45/3 Cdn Inf Div/C/F, Docket II: Operation "SWITCHBACK", Battle Narrative, Historical Officer, H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div.) Aggressive patrolling by 4 Cdn Armd Div from its positions along the canal (see [Report No. 183](#)) revealed that the Germans certainly had no intention of pulling out after the fall of Calais, but were determined to keep us on the south bank as long as they could. After several days of fruitless raids and acrid exchanges of machine gun fire, 10 Cdn Inf Bde was able to report a successful patrol across the canal in the vicinity of Krabbe, confirming the presence opposite of 1039 Gren Regt, the third component of 64 Inf Div, and 14 A.Tk Coy of 1038 Gren Regt (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 4 Oct 44.)

112. Intelligence concerning the enemy's forward positions, routes and defences were excellent, as events were to prove. The sole uncertainty was the strength and identification of his reserves, for which we had no reliable source of information. no reconnaissance in force had been made to establish such facts. The answer could only be found after the operation had begun.

It was thus no surprise to our Intelligence to learn towards the end that the total enemy force numbered about 15,000. (Ibid.)

113. The terrain was in the garrison's favour. Backing on the estuary and cut off from the rest of the mainland by its canals, this landward rampart to the fastness of Walcheren is in itself virtually an island. The ground has the same featureless monotony of all that part of the Low Countries and, indeed, of this entire region of north-western Europe through which the Canadian Army, and the troops under its command, were to fight for the remainder of the campaigning season on into a water-logged, static winter. The land has the same laborious structure of polders, dykes and ditches, a rural and marine economy brought into being by silt and drainage, bounded on the seaside by the dunes and a shoreline divided here and there by gaps where small rivers, mixing themselves with the tide, have given rise to tiny ports and the holiday resorts whose visitors that summer had stayed at home. For most of the distance south-west from Breskens towards Nieuport the dunes are narrow and broken, and have had to be reinforced. Eastward the coast is wholly protected by dykes. Inside the dunes and in their lower pockets the ground is apt to be marshy and liable to flooding. There are occasional woods in the depressions, offering some cover to troops.

114. Inland a strip of flat fenland flourishes amidst an abundance of surface water. Normally a maze of ditches canalized rivers and commercial canals, often above the level of the surrounding countryside, their high banks lined with trees, keep the ground barely dry. But for military manoeuvre the indescribable multiplicity of these water-ways offers only continuous interruption and impediment, and the enemy had not failed to exploit the system for widespread inundation. It was clear that the Germans intended to confine our advance to the roads and would train their weapons upon those elevated avenues in grim dissuasion of our further approach. (AEF/First Cdn Army/L/F, Docket I, Vol 1, Int Summary No. 66, 3 Sep 44, Appx "D".)

115. The immediate barrier confronting our troops was forbidding enough. From the point where the Leopold is joined by the Canal de Derivation de la Lys the two run parallel with only a dyke some 30 feet wide between them. The canals themselves are each nearly 100 feet in width, and such a double jump was obviously too hazardous to be attempted. But the tongue of land marking their divergence was already in our hands. It was decided to put in the attack from this intermediate ground. The crossing, therefore, must be made at some distance to the east of our bridging which was to re-establish the road between Maldegem and Aardenburg, since at its tip the promontory was too narrow to be used as a base for an attack.

116. But here, and along the entire length of the Leopold Canal eastward for about seven miles as far as the road from Kerselaar to Watervliet, and again beyond that line for another four miles to the edge of a narrow corridor of polder country at the head of the Braakman Inlet, the Germans, contemplating a situation where they would have to fall back south of the canal in the face of an invasion from the sea, had reinforced the obstacle by inundations on the north. (AEF/3 Cdn Inf Div/L/F, Docket III, 2 Cdn Corps Int Summary No. 77, 2 Nov 44.) But their stratagem served them well enough now, though their tactical provision was working precisely in reverse. A shining sleeve of water extended back two miles opposite to our forming-up area, leaving in front of it only a shelf of relatively dry land about 500 yards in depth for us to along the bank when we had made the crossing. Movement thence towards Aardenburg would be confined to the road and the boggy fields below it to the left, and westwards to the defile of some 700 yards between the edge of the wet country and the two canals (Holland 1/25000 Defence Overprints, 3 Oct 44, Sheets Nos. 21 NE, 21 SE, 22 NW, 22 SW.) Unless our troops were to get away quickly before the enemy had time to realize our audacity in attacking him in such unequal contest with ground and water, they might well find themselves hemmed in by fire as well as flood. Such were the calculated risks which the complexity of the tactical problem imposed upon us. Even so, they seemed less

unfavourable here than elsewhere along the line of the Leopold, especially through the defile of the Isabella polder where the earlier attempt by 10 Cdn Inf Bde to get through with Alq R. in the last days of September had given sufficient evidence of the enemy's ability to hold our entry there. (See [Report No. 183.](#))

THE 7 CDN INF BDE PLAN

117. The first essential in mounting the assault, therefore, was not merely to acquire a foothold on the farther bank but to get through the defiles and deploy before the enemy appreciated that it was here that we really intended to strike and not farther to the east or to the west, where 4 Cdn Armd Div threatened him with every sign of aggressive intent. Brigadier J.C. Spragge's plan to enable 7 Cdn Inf Bde to achieve this was to combine the element of surprise with that of shock, the first of these to be ensured by the unannounced suddenness of the assault and the second by the use of flame-throwing wasps on the fullest possible scale. Thereafter our artillery would come into action. Once our troops had taken possession of the enemy's burnt-out posts on the far bank, they would have the immediate support of 12 and 23 Cdn Fd Regts and 107 Med Regt R.A. and all available 4.2-inch mortars. (W.D., H.Q. 7 Cdn Inf Bde, October 1944: Appx 3, O.O. No. 3; for Order of Battle see Appx "A" to this report.) When the operation had got fully under way, the number of cannon firing across the whole of our front would be 144 25-prs, 128 mediums and 55 heavies and super-heavies, a total of 327 guns of all calibers. (AEF/21 Army Gp/C/F, Docket III: Clearing of the Scheldt Estuary, p. 4.)

118. The assault would be made by Regina Rif on the left directed on Middelburg and 1 C. Scot R. on the right making for Aardenburg, with R. Wpg Rif to follow up and occupy Heille. But in the event the constriction of the ground and the enemy's hard reaction were not to permit the sequence to

be followed: even these initial objectives were not to be won without a drastic change of plan, and the ensuing phases were governed by the altered circumstances of battle.

CO-OPERATION OF 4 CDN ARMD DIV

119. The attainment of surprise and shock were to be aided by 4 Cdn Armd Div, whose troops would both continue to contain the enemy behind the canal and also distract his attention by making two feint attacks, one to the south of Watervliet and the other to the east of Moerkerke. The division had already succeeded in keeping the enemy in a state of nervousness, but his immunity from any serious inroad through wire, water, mines and strong points may also have tended to increase the aggressiveness of his patrols and his self-confidence in defence. At the same time he had been kept too busy to detect the arrival of another formation, and he only became aware of the presence of 3 Cdn Inf Div, which had preserved wireless silence since Calais, when he found that it was attacking him. The armoured division made a further contribution in carrying out experiment and practice in the use of its wasps which were later to take part in the actual assault. A trial along the canal to the north of Balgerhoek showed that by including the carrier up the slope of the bank its flame could be thrown over the crest on the farther side where the enemy might be expected to be lurking in slit trench and dugout. (W.Ds., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 4, 5 Oct 44; AEF/3 Cdn Inf Div/L/F, Docket III: G.O.C.'s Interview with Maj-Gen Eberding.)

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE LEOPOLD CANAL BRIDGEHEAD,

6-16 OCT 44

120. By moonlight in the cold early hours of 6 Oct, no fewer than 27 wasps were accordingly guided into position behind the bank of the canal in the

vicinity of Strooiburg. At approximately 0530 hours they went into action along the whole of the brigade's front and as the first bursts of flame began to shoot across the water, the assaulting companies, two from each battalion, with parties from N. Shore R. to carry the boats, clambered over the bank, ready to launch their craft. (AEF 45/3 Cdn Inf Div/C/F, Docket II: Operation "SWITCHBACK", Battle Narrative, Historical Officer, H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div.)

121. On the right of the sector "D" an "B" Coys of 1 C. Scot R. got over near Oosthoek without opposition and had some benefit from the flame throwers' horrible effectiveness in either destroying the defenders or reducing them to a state of terror. But not all the enemy were dead or stricken, and those who had escaped soon got to work with their machine guns. They were unable to prevent the hasty construction of a foot bridge, however, nor the passage of "A" and "C" Coys to the German side of the water, and within the hour the entire battalion was in position. (W.D., 1 C. Scot R., 6 Oct 44.) The situation then soon resolved itself into two separate actions, one against Moershoofd and the other for the possession of Oosthoek. Some difficulty was to be experienced, both now and throughout the battle, in finding vantage points from which artillery officers could observe and direct the fire of the guns. As soon as there was room to move observation might be had from rooftop or desecrated spire, but in the meantime it was fortunate that our infantry had the alternative support of Typhoons, which did much to discourage the enemy in the sector between St Kruis and Aardenburg. Nevertheless, resistance remained steady, and it cost our troops 29 casualties and hard fighting through the day to share an uneasy neighbourhood with the Germans in Oosthoek and to capture Moershoofd, which they got finally by 1945 hours. (Ibid.)

122. But all was not so well on the left. First Cdn Army H.Q. Def Coy (R.M.R.),⁵ under command of Regina Rif, made the crossing to the north of Moerhuizen before the enemy had time to recover from the flame; but its co-attackers, "A" Coy Regina Rif, hesitated. In that brief interval the Germans had crept back to their posts. They now made the open stretch of water impassable and our assault boats remained behind the dyke, unlaunched. The battalion claimed afterwards that the wasps which fired on their sector did not succeed in quelling the defenders. (AEF/3 Cdn Inf Div/C/F, Docket II, folio 3, Assault Across the Savojaards Plaat, p. 5, note.) Eventually all three remaining companies of the Reginas had to be feared over on the left, where the troops already across were holding in the face of steadily mounting casualties. Against this foothold the enemy directed innumerable counter attacks sustained by a constant flow of reinforcements and incessant fire from mortars, small arms and machine guns on front and flanks. Under this deluge the attached R.M.R. company, which had got over first, was reduced to 12 men, and the immediate expansion, or even union, of the two battalion bridgeheads that day became impossible. (W.D., First Cdn Army H.Q. Def Coy, October 1944: Appx 5, "Attack on Leopold Canal", 6 Oct 44; Battle Narrative, Historical Officer, H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div, op cit.) But when darkness fell, our troops still held their ground, and Brigadier Spragge decided to throw R. Wpg Rif in on the right, where the situation gave better promise for the morrow. The Commanding Officer passed on the order at 2330 hours to his four rifle

⁵ At this time "B" Coy Regina Rif was not with its parent unit; being on "duty exchange" with First Cdn Army H.Q. Def Coy (R.M.R.), which had requested an opportunity to gain battle experience. In the event, R.M.R. received a very thorough baptism of fire. The company, commanded by Capt R. Schwob, launched its attack across the Leopold Canal at approximately 0525 hours. The enemy put up a terrific fight during the crossing, but once on the far bank, the R.M.R. gave an excellent account of themselves, though suffering heavy casualties. By 1300 hours only a handful of men were left, and these remnants were then attached to another of the depleted Regina companies. ("B" Coy Regina Rif returned to its unit on 15 Oct 44.) (W.D., Regina Rif, October 1944: Appx 5, Attack on Leopold Canal - 6 Oct 44; and daily entries 2-6 Oct 44.)

companies to cross with the intention of passing through 1 C. Scot R. and linking up with Regina Rif on the following day. (W.D., R. Wpg Rif, 6 Oct 44.)

123. But our positions on the far bank proved to be too restricted and precarious for the task to be accomplished on 7 Oct. R. Wpg Rif were only able to fight their way about 1000 yards westwards along the side of the canal before the enemy's unceasing resistance brought them to a halt. Not the least of their tribulations in that swept and coverless lodgement, never more than 200 yards from the bank, was the slow evacuation of their wounded across the flooded fields. (W.D., R. Wpg Rif, 7 Oct 44.) Nor could 1 C. Scot R. do much more to improve their prospects of the day before, but were kept fully engaged in beating off successive counter attacks which threatened to overrun their companies by deep penetrations and which caused a further loss of over 60 casualties. (W.D., 1 C. Scot R. 7 Oct 44.) They were glad to be reinforced before the day ended by one dismounted squadron of 7 Cdn Recce Regt (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div, 7 Oct 44.) On our exposed left flank Regina Rif were in no better state, although they were left to wait until the evening for their severest counter attack. Their tenure was made the more uncomfortable by the enemy's long-range guns of high calibre firing perhaps from the coast. (W.D., Regina Rif, 7 Oct 44.)

124. There was little more that either Regina Rif or 1 C. Scot R. could do to break out from their separate and very limited holdings during the course of the next heartbreaking 24 hours (8 Oct). An attempt by R. Wpg Rif, themselves reduced to three companies, to get through to the even more seriously depleted Regina Rif failed gallantly, although 92 reinforcements were got over to ensure that our left flank still held. (W.D., units of 7 Cdn Inf Bde, 8 Oct 44.) There was no better opportunity, either, of committing the units of 8 Cdn Inf Bde for their part in the operation than there had been before. In places we had hardly been able to get any farther forward than the bare

edge of the canal bank, where there was some possibility of digging slit trenches to an adequate depth. Elsewhere they could only be scooped out to a shallow foot or so before water was reached, and any hole in which a man might take refuge rapidly filled and had to be baled out many times a day. In consequence, co-ordinated action, even on the level of the platoon, was impossible. In front the ground as far as the villages of Graff an and Eede was flooded. Routes had to be tested by patrols. Parties of the enemy were frequently encountered and violent skirmishes ensued. (Battle Narrative, Historical Officer, H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div.)

125. That R. Wpg Rif finally succeeded in closing the gap and linking up with the hard pressed Regina Rif as the result of a determined company attack put in at 0500 hours on 9 Oct was no mean feat. (W.D., R. Wpg Rif, 9 Oct 44.) With our bridgehead thus consolidated, the next immediate necessity was to enlarge it northwards, and more especially to push it out farther westward into the direction of the main road to Aardenburg, which would have to be well within our lines in order to enable the sappers to construct their bridges and join the ends of the highway together over the two canals. This meant compressing the entire bridge to the left into a narrower but deeper shape, thus giving it a greater potential to apply to the main effort against Eede. (W.D., H.Q. 7 Cdn Inf Bde, 10 Oct 44; Battle Narrative, Historical Officer, H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div.) 1 C. Scot R. made the thrust to the road on the night 11/12 Oct and by the early morning were astride it. Having made their position firm during the day, they began attacking towards Eede on 13 Oct. (W.D., H.Q. 7 Cdn Inf Bde, 11-13 Oct 44.) As the Engineers, sorely tried by the enemy's fire during their operations everywhere on the south bank, brought their efforts to a climax in completing the construction of the two Bailey bridges carrying the road from Maldegem to Asserdenburg by 2000 hours on the same day, and with R. Wpg Rif into the outskirts of Graaf an, our prospects seemed likely to improve. (W.D., R. Wpg Rif, 13 Oct 44; Battle Narrative, Historical Officer, H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div.) The appearance of four

tanks from 28 Cdn Armd Regt, which crossed the bridges to support 1 C. Scot R. in a successful raid on Eede on 14 Oct, did something to encourage the defenders to give way. Nevertheless, the pressure against us continued to be unyielding until the first signs of relief came on 16 Oct as the result of our more successful penetrations into the enemy's stronghold from the east.

126. It must be said, however, that the enemy had paid heavily for his attempts to throw our troops back across the water. If freedom of movement had been denied to us by the flooding, his own approaches were also limited to two routes on which our hard pressed infantry brought down the fire of heir supporting artillery. Thus disrupted the enemy could only close by stealth and infiltration, and bitter fighting with grenades and small arms and hand-to-hand took its toll of 64 Inf Div. (Battle Narrative, Historical Officer, H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div.) The dogged bravery of the men of 7 Cdn Inf Bde had the effect, moreover, of forcing the German commander to commit the reserve battalions of his three infantry regiments - a substantial contribution to the enemy's ultimate overthrow. (AEF/3 Cdn Inf Div/L/F, Docket III: G.O.C.'s. Interview with Maj-Gen Eberding.)

THE ASSAULT ACROSS THE BRAAKMAN INLET

A. MAJ-GEN EBERDING'S DILEMMA, 6 OCT 44

127. That the complexion of our affairs came to be changed so much for the better was due in part to the fact that with Maj-Gen Eberding's attention fixed on the canal where 3 Cdn Inf and 4 Armd Divs were either attacking or threatening to attack, the enemy commander had somewhat discounted the possibilities of a descent by water from the north-east. Yet it was here that we had observed a notable thinning out of the dense fortifications which the enemy had built along the coasts of all this part of Europe. The reason was clear. The Germans evidently considered that the outer crust of Walcheren and

the mainland opposite was too strong to allow any penetration to be made by water. At Breskens, therefore, the heavier defensive constructions came to and end, and beyond that the stretch of beach could only show a few prepared positions. It was a reasonable assumption, too, that the mud flats would of themselves have effectively defeated any attempt to make a landing there. In this premise the Germans were mistaken. We had learned the precise nature of that shore from aerial photographs and from details supplied by a Dutch engineer. We were thereby led to the conclusion that the flats would not prove impassable to the special vehicles at our disposal, especially since much of their surface was covered with grass. (AEF/9 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, Docket I, folio 1, Account of the Landing.) In any case Maj Gen Eberding had disposed his division with all three infantry regiments along the Leopold, and had barely a sufficient number of men trained and equipped to meet a threat from the other direction. His reserve, a motley assemblage of various battle groups, including marines and gunners turned infantry, he kept in the centre under his own command. The aggressive patrolling of 4 Cdn Armd Div across the south end of the Inlet had confirmed him in the belief that we must come over the canal, and he had moved a company of 1039 Regt into position, to meet the flanking attack which he suspected might follow the patrols. He afterwards confessed that he had not considered that we had the equipment to mount a water-borne operation. (Interview with Maj-Gen Eberding, op cit.)

B. ASSEMBLY OF 9 CDN INF BDE GP

128. Actually 9 Cdn Inf Bde had transported the necessary complement of tracked landing vehicles some 40 slow and tedious miles to the docks north of Ghent, where training with these unfamiliar "vehicle-craft", or buffaloes, on the Terneuzen Canal began in some haste on 6 Oct. Allotting the appropriate assault scales was no small problem. The solution gave each of the two forward infantry battalions six L.Vs.T. Mk II to carry personnel, and 39 or 40 Mk IVs for smaller vehicles. Similar allotments were made for Tactical and

Main Brigade Headquarters, one heavy mortar platoon and one machine gun company. Nothing larger than a carrier could be taken aboard and in personnel strength companies were limited to 90, including their officers. The force was divided into four groups: the Assault Group, comprising Nth N.S. Highrs, H.L.I. of C. and Tactical Brigade Headquarters; the Follow-Up Group, with S.D. & G. Highrs, one platoon of "D" Coy, C.H. of O. (M.G.) and their 4.2-inch mortars, "C" Coy C.H. of O. (M.G.), and Main Brigade Headquarters; the Build-Up Group including one company of 23 Cdn Fd Amb and the rest of the jeeps, carriers and anti-tank guns; and the Residue Group. (See Appx "A" to this report.) Both the equipment and the specialized assistance required were supplied by 5 Aslt Regt R.E. of 1 Aslt Bde (79 Armd Div) which had the task of landing 9 Cdn Inf Bde on the beaches. Additional sappers of 18 Cdn Fd Coy R.C.E. and 149 Aslt Pk Sqn R.E. were to be responsible for preparing and maintaining exits from the beaches for vehicles, marking the routes, fixing beacons and making smoke. (Battle Narrative, Historical Officer, H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div.)

C. THE PLAN

129. Having embarked in the dock area of Ghent, the force was to swim under cover of darkness the 20 miles of the Terneuzen Canal into the estuary and make a surprise landing along the coast in the enemy's rear. The brigade would first establish a bridgehead to include the Thomas Polder and Biervliet and then seize the entire area lying between Ijzendijke, Schoondijke and the sea, including Breskens. (W.D., H.Q. 9 Cdn Inf Bde, October 1944: Appx 6, O.O No. 3, 6 Oct 44. For Order of Battle see Appx "A".)

130. In the first phase Nth N.S. Highrs on the right were to take the beaches outside the Thomas Polder, while H.L.I. of C. on the left would put in to the Paulina Polder on the other side of the drainage canal. H.L.I. of C. would then relieve Nth N.S. Highrs and take over the whole of the lodgement.

S.D. & G. Highrs, following up, would push out to the right to capture the town and harbour of Hoofdplaat. Nth N.S. Highrs would conform on their left north of Biervliet, which H.L.I. of C. would capture before pressing on into the country south of S.D. & G. Highrs, who would by then have established a firm base about Sasput. Finally Nth N.S. Highrs would go through and assault Breskens. The brigade's left flank would be protected by the heavy machine guns of "C" Coy C.H. of O. (M.G.) with 12 P1 under command. (Ibid.)

131. Artillery support would be provided by 4 Cdn Armd Div. In addition to the two divisional field regiments, the C.R.A., Brigadier J.N. Lane, had under his command one heavy battery of 155-mm guns, heavy anti-aircraft guns, searchlights to illumine the beaches and a flight of observation aircraft. Each infantry battalion had a field regiment in support, and direct call could be made on the mediums by all battalions. (W.D., H.Q. R.C.A., 4 Cdn Armd Div, October 1944: Appx 1, Operation Order No. 1, "SWITCHBACK", 7 Oct 44.)

132. The fire plan was devised to make it impossible or highly dangerous for the enemy to use the roads leading towards our bridgehead. Firing was to commence 50 minutes before the hour at which the craft touched down and would then cease. For each regiment 288 rounds were allotted (twelve rounds a gun) for each target; the mediums fired eight rounds a gun on each of theirs, the heavies one round every two minutes on their targets and the heavy anti-aircraft two rounds every minute. Targets were not to be engaged continuously but to receive treatment at various time sand in varying order. One troop (four guns) of 15 Cdn Fd Regt R.C.A. was to begin firing night marker shells at 13 minutes before the zero hour. After the battalions touched down all targets were to be on call. It was not considered that this preparation would endanger the element of surprise, since the time was so short and the activity of our guns had been constantly sustained on various parts of the front by the containing division.

133. Since the enemy could obtain good observation of the beachhead from Beveland and Flushing, it was essential to render his ability to shell the beaches and transport craft ineffective. It had been noticed that unless observation of fire was good, the enemy was often reluctant to use his artillery. A smoke screen was therefore devised to obscure his vision during the twelve hours of daylight. As it was necessary to keep the assault craft and the beaches clean of it, the screen would have to be laid in the estuary itself in a north-westerly direction from outside Terneuzen harbour, a requirement complicated by the presence of sand bars, a difference of 16 feet in the tides and variations of the wind. As the Chemical Warfare Officer of 2 Cdn Corps was already engaged with 7 Cdn Inf Bde, this complicated experiment in obscurity was to be carried out under the direction of Maj J.T. Hugill, G.S.O. II (C.W.) at H.Q. First Cdn Army. (AEF/First Cdn Army C/F, Docket III, folio 4, Report on the Smoke Screening for Operation "SWITCHBACK".)

D. THE ASSAULT DELAYED

134. Loading the assault craft and embarking the brigade were completed in the late afternoon of 7 Oct, and at about 1730 hours the flotillas left their back-water at Ghent and, with only their twin tail-lights showing, swam out into the darkness on their journey down the canal to Terneuzen. The buffaloes, though moving slowly, were not easily steered, and their engines made a noise so like the roar of aircraft that wakeful German gunners across the Scheldt in Flushing fired off their flak spasmodically into an empty sky. It seemed that our intentions were being loudly proclaimed across all that silent, listening region, and our men wished helplessly that the artillery had been firing to deaden the sound. (W.D., H.Q. 9 Cdn Inf Bde, October 1944: Appx 9, 1 Aslt Bde O.O. No. 15, 5 Oct 44; Battle Narrative, Historical Officer, H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div.)

135. At Terneuzen itself an unhappy situation developed. Because the lock was damaged, the craft had to climb out of the canal in order to enter the sea on the other side. The ramps built for the purpose were not proving satisfactory, and each buffalo had therefore to be hauled out of the water by the combined power of its own motor and that of a bulldozer. But in spite of skilful handling and driving, this uncovenanted and awkward business took time, and by midnight - the planned time of departure - only about half the vehicles were ready. It was not until 0300 hours that the majority were lined up ready, and owing to minor defects about 15 of them were unable to start. In these trying circumstances it was decided to postpone the operation until the following night. (AEF/9 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, Docket I, folio 3, Narrative of the Amphibious Operation.)

136. There were two dangers arising from this unavoidable delay. It meant that the severe pressure on the bridgehead across the Leopold would continue without abatement, and that the enemy might discover the presence of the assault force lying in wait in the flat countryside about Terneuzen. These risks had to be taken. Vehicles and men were dispersed among the neighbouring farms and orchards, nets were draped over the ramps, marking lights were removed, and a cordon was put round to restrict the movement of civilians. The waiting men suffered some additional strain, and those of 7 Cdn Inf Bde had another day of dealing with a still confident and untroubled enemy. But our safety measures proved effective. The Germans did not become aware of anything untoward and when the blow fell, it took them completely by surprise. (Battle narrative, Historical Officer, H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div; Interview with Maj-Gen Eberding.)

137. Yet the delay was not all misfortune. It actually afforded us an opportunity of repairing a situation which might otherwise have had the most serious and far-reaching consequences. For with such an expedition putting out in darkness across the banks and shoals of an unknown coast, everything

depended on making a successful landfall. Two Dutch pilots had therefore been engaged to give our soldiers the assurance of their expert knowledge of local waters. These gentlemen were to guide our troops to their destination in each of two motor boats of the type normally used by the R.C.A.S.C. for bridging. But the pilots the enemy might discover the presence of the assault force lying in wait in the flat countryside about Terneuzen. These risks had to be taken. Vehicles and men were dispersed among the neighbouring farms and orchards, nets were draped over the ramps, marking lights were removed, and a cordon was put round to restrict the movement of civilians. The waiting men suffered some additional strain, and those of 7 Cdn Inf Bde had another day of dealing with a still confident and untroubled enemy. But our safety measures proved effective. The Germans did not become aware of anything untoward and when the blow fell, it took them completely by surprise. (Battle Narrative, Historical Officer, H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div; Interview with Maj-Gen Eberding.)

137. Yet the delay was not all misfortune. It actually afforded us an opportunity of repairing a situation which might otherwise have had the most serious and far-reaching consequences. For with such an expedition putting out in darkness across the banks and shoals of an unknown coast, everything depended on making a successful landfall. Two Dutch pilots had therefore been engaged to give our soldiers the assurance of their expert knowledge of local waters. These gentlemen were to guide our troops to their destination in each of two motor boats of the type normally used by the R.C.A.S.C. for bridging. But the pilots had not appeared. By a fortunate chance, the naval Liaison Officer attached to Canadian Army Headquarters, Lt-Comdr R.D. Franks, R.N., happened to be on the spot, and gallantly volunteered to take over the responsibilities of navigator. he spent the day in obtaining a suitable compass, most opportunity provided by the R.A.F. and in making a careful reconnaissance of what he could see of the river by peeping over the dykes, and in studying the chart and assessing the rides. (Narrative of the Amphibious Operation, op cit.) It was only thus, while our men chewed at

their impatience through the endless hours of another day, that we were able to improvise the indispensable technicalities of navigation on which all must ultimately depend.

E. THE ASSAULT GOES IN, 9 OCT 44

138. It was intended to send the assaulting battalions across in two flotillas, each comprising 48 tracked landing craft, the one line, with Nth N.S. Highrs on board and led by the motorboat containing the navigator, to make for the more northerly beach marked by a breakwater, the other bearing H.L.I. of C. and following slightly astern, heading for the beach to the west of the tiny harbour on the bulge of the Paulina Polder. Course was to be set as 0200 hours and one and a half hours were allowed for the trip, which was almost exactly five sea miles. The circumstances of that adventure have thus been recorded by Lt-Comdr Franks:

- a. By 0030 hrs we were lying off the sea ramp in our little motorboat showing two dim red lights astern. Well on time the first LVT waddled down the ramp and splashed into the water. We led slowly out of the canal entrance as more and more took to the water and formed up astern. It was a nearly ideal night, calm and quiet with a half moon behind light cloud, but a bit of haze which restricted visibility to a mile at the most. We were quite invisible from the north shore of the Scheldt, where all was quiet.
- b. We soon reached the main part of the river and turned west along the coast, keeping about half a mile off until we reached NIEUW NEUZENPOLDER. We went slowly, and as far as could be seen, all our LVTs were formed up and following. I then set course due west across the entrance of the SAVOJAARDS PLAAT. Just as we cleared

the land, our artillery barrage started up, "plastering" the far beaches and other targets. The noise effectively blanketed our sounds and was generally most heartening.

- c. Our landfall on the far side was satisfactory and we set course up the channel between the coast and the large sand bank, at a distance of about half a mile from the shore. There was supposed to be a prepared position on the north-east corner of the island and momentarily I expected enemy fire, but we continued unmolested, with the artillery barrage still thundering away and occasionally putting down star shell, which I personally found of little use.

- d. Our touch down was planned to be on either side of a groyne which proved to be a good landmark and we were able to identify it and then lie off flicking our lamps to guide the LVTs in. They deployed and thundered in past us, looking, and sounding, most impressive. Landing was successful and I could see, through my binoculars, the infantry disembark on dry land and form up and move off. The artillery barrage had by now, of course, ceased and there was silence except for the roar of the engines and an occasional rifle shot.

(Narrative of the Amphibious Operation.)

The flotilla on the left similarly made a successful landing, and the two battalions were ashore in their right places practically without opposition.

139. The infantry disembarked in most cases without difficulty. More trouble was experienced by the craft carrying vehicles, which had to negotiate the dyke to discharge their load. Beyond the dyke lay an inevitable ditch which

had to be filled with fascines to make it passable. Then it was found that the buffaloes were unable to get up the steep bank on their return journey and a search had to be made for exists on the landward side. Others bellied in the mud at the water's edge, but by 0500 hours all had been worked free again. The amphibians then made their way back across the Braakman independently to pick up S.D. & G. Highrs and brigade headquarters. To assist them the motor boats placed hurricane lamps on convenient buoys. This seemed to draw little fire, and the crews spent no longer time than was necessary in fixing and lighting them. The third battalion, the headquarters and stores went over in ne large convoy at about 0900 hours. the voyage was skilfully screened from the far shore by our smoke laid down from the DUKWs and storm boats working with smoke floats in the river. "I admired their efforts", says the same observer, "which were drawing the enemy battery fire. However, it ensured a safe crossing for the LVT as the enemy were only able to shell 'blind'." The screen was maintained from Terneuzen to Hoofdplaat until the water route was no longer used for maintenance and supply. Such protection enabled the buffaloes to use a different way in and out. Coming back, they now made a landfall on the west bank of the Nieuwe Neuzen Polder, and circled overland to load and make the return journey from Paradijs Bay. Behind the smoke there was no longer any point in continuing to manoeuvre the craft in the narrow confines of Terneuzen harbour. After several days a squadron of amphibious lorries, called terrapins, was put into service to carry on the work of transporting stores. (Narrative of the Amphibious Operation; Battle narrative, Historical Officer, H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div.)

F. THE BRIDGEHEAD ESTABLISHED, 9-10 OCT 44

140. On landing, Nth N.S. Highrs and H.L.I. of C. each with three companies up, quickly reorganized. While darkness lasted they met with little opposition, for the Germans had not yet realized that they were being invaded. Nth N.S. Highrs were scarcely impeded at all, and it was not until daylight

that they enemy became aware of the full extent of his danger. (W.D., Nth N.S. Highrs, 9 Oct 44.) H.L.I. of C., however, on the left, were not quite so fortunate. The companies were greeted with small arms fire as they landed, and on the extreme left our troops had particular difficulty in overcoming the enemy posted on the seaward junction of the dykes between the Paulina and Elizabeth polders. Despite the fact that their vehicles could not be got up very quickly, the battalions made contact at 0730 hours (W.D., H.L.I. of C., 9 Oct 44), and all objectives on the left had been taken within the next half hour. By about 0900 hours all our people were in position and had established a bridgehead to a depth of about 1500 yards. By this time the enemy had become thoroughly alarmed and was calling down fire from his artillery, more especially from big guns at Flushing, a visitation which made movement by our vehicles a somewhat precarious duty. (Battale Narrative, Historical Officer, H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div.)

141. The Brigade Commander, Brigadier J.M. Rockingham, directed S.D. & G. Highrs, together with the heavy mortars and machine guns of C.H. of O. (M.G.), to the Nth N.S. Highrs's beach, where they assembled by 1030 hours. (W.D., H.Q. 9 Cdn Inf Bde, 9 Oct 44.) At noon the battalion began to move along the coast, in conjunction with Nth N.S. Highrs, towards Hoofdplaat. Artillery fire became much more intense as the day progressed, and the enemy, now offering more organized resistance, counter-attacked H.L.I. of C. several times, although only to be beaten off with the help of our machine guns. S.D. & G. Highrs drew close to Hoodfplaat that afternoon and on the following day (10 Oct) they captured it, although not without the penalty of many subsequent counter-attacks and severe shelling from both Breskens and Walcheren. (W.D., S.D. & G. Highrs, 9, 10 Oct 44; Battle narrative, Historical Officer, H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div.)

142. It would be said that the Engineers had their full share in the success of the landing. The entire plan had depended upon the skilled help of the

British elements from 79 Armed Div in handling the buffaloes, and the platoon of 18 Cdn Fd Coy which went in with the first wave were on hand to keep such unusual traffic on the move. The construction and maintenance of landing ramps for the amphibians and work on the roads were both heavy and hazardous, for much of it had to be carried on under continuous shell fire. The tide gave much trouble, for the inflow of water set the timber afloat and caused the ramps to disintegrate, and considerable ingenuity was needed to keep the exists open. (Battle Narrative, Historical Officer, H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div.)

CHANGE OF DIVISIONAL PLAN, 9-10 OCT 44

143. The contrast between our fortunes across the Braakman and in the costly and contained lodgement over the Leopold Canal proclaimed the necessity of a quick change of plan. Reinforcing the failure of the original crossing had already been discarded as a sound tactic in favour of putting 8 Cdn Inf Bde through the positions held by 4 Cdn Armd Div in the corridor between the flood and the head of the Inlet to link up with 9 Cdn Inf Bde coming down from the north. But the good going farther afield made it seem better to throw in 8 Cdn Inf Bde where the German defence was so demonstrably at its weakest, by shipping that formation across the Braakman. (Ibid; W.D., H.Q. 8 Cdn Inf Bde, 9, 10 Oct 44.) The divisional axis was thus turned at right angles, for the main thrust was now no longer to be made from the south but from the east.

EXPLOITATION OF THE BRAAKMAN BRIDGEHEAD

144. The troops in the bridgehead were joined by 7 Cdn Recce Regt on the morning of 11 Oct, H.L.I. of C. being thereby enabled to put in their attack on Biervliet, from which the enemy withdrew, leaving the place to shelling and to us. We were in possession by dusk and strongly enough to hold out against heavy counter-attacks delivered during the night. (W.D., H.L.I. of C., 11 Oct 44; Battle Narrative, Historical Officer, H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div.) The

problem now was to link up with Nth N.S. Highrs, who were picking a rather detached course for themselves across the polder farther north, and to close the rest of the front towards H.L.I. of C. in Biervliet and thence to the Inlet. For this left flank 7 Cdn Recce Regt was available and the first of the battalions of 8 Cdn Inf Bde to arrive, N. Shore R., was marched into the gap between Nth N.S. Highrs and H.L.I. of C. By this time (12 Oct) the rest of the incoming brigade had been safely delivered and was to assume responsibility for the sector on the left. (Battle Narrative, Historical Officer, H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div.)

145. This undertaking was begun on 13 Oct by N. Shore R., once again under command of its parent formation. Advancing in a south-easterly direction beyond Biervliet against very light opposition, it there made contact with the reconnaissance regiment. Q.O.R. of C. at once relieved H.L.I. of C. in the town, and 7 Cdn Recce Regt came under command of 8 Cdn Inf Bde. R. de Chaud took up position in the rear of the two forward battalions (W.Ds., Units of 8 Cdn Inf Bde would extend southward towards units of 4 Cdn Armd Div, probing through the Isabella Polder, and thereafter continue westward through Ijzendijke and Oostburg. (W.D., H.Q. 8 Cdn Inf Bde, 14 Oct 44; W.D., G.S., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div, October 1944: Appx 12, Operation Instruction No. 2 14 Oct 44.)

146. Meanwhile, 9 Cdn Inf Bde was expanding the bridgehead still further, S.D. & G. Highrs on 12 Oct had pressed southward from Hoofdplaat and killed and captured a large number of the enemy. (W.D., S.D. & G. Highrs, 12 Oct 44.) Nth N.S. Highrs had been attacking westward and after heavy fighting had reached the road running north from Driewegen. (W.D., Nth N.S. Highrs, 12 Oct 44.) Indeed, the going was far from easy, and it was on the evening of 12 Oct that Brigadier J.M. Rockingham, the commander of 9 Cdn Inf Bde, observed that the fighting was the bitterest and heaviest his troops had yet experienced. He spoke particularly of the effectiveness of the enemy's

artillery fire, against which the infantry had little protection. (Battle Narrative, Historical Officer, H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div.) But if the enemy was fighting strongly, he was now beset by all three brigades of 3 Cdn Inf Div, and the growing encroachments on his eastern flank during 13 Oct, and his continuously heavy losses both there and in the centre were beginning to lessen his self-confidence and sap his powers. It was still too early to claim that the garrison was hard pressed, but that the strain was beginning to tell there could be no doubt.

THE JUNCTURE WITH 4 CDN ARMD DIV, 14-15 OCT 44

147. Before we could press on much farther with our advance westward from Biervliet the Germans would have to be removed from the south-west corner of their "island", where they were still contriving to menace our left flank and to stop the entry which 10 Cdn Inf Bde had been trying to force through the Isabella Polder at the head of the Inlet. So far our patrols had made many excursions into the enemy's territory along that part of the front, but a firm defence of what appeared to be the old fortifications of the Dutch-Belgian frontier had foiled every attempt to get in from the south-west. Success crowned the efforts of A. & S.H. of C. at making ingress farther to the left, however, it had been appreciated that our advance on the north might cause the enemy here to pull out. This was confirmed when on 14 Oct patrols crossed the canal in the vicinity of the main road to Watervliet, and found the place empty. On this information the A. & S.H. of C. moved over to occupy the place. At the same time, Alq R., which despite the heroic and costly persistence of their previous attempts - the latest on 10 Oct, by two companies, having been driven back with heavy loss - felt their way from Isabella towards Water-vliet through a maze of mines, traps and concrete strongpoints, and found no enemy, and in the evening made contact with Q.O.R. of C. who had gained control of the Angelina Polder. (W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 6-14 Oct 44.)

148. Our penetration southward had begun the same day (14 Oct). R. de Chaud came down from the west of Biervliet across the polders to Kapitaledam, which they occupied by 1400 hours. Q.O.R. of C. pushed over Biervliet towards Angelina Polder on the shore of the Inlet, where they met the Algonquins that evening. Artillery support for the advance had to be limited because of the expected juncture with our own troops. (W.D., Q.O.R. of C. and R. de Chaud, 14 Oct 44.) It was now permissible to view the evident decline of the enemy's morale, coupled with the increased volume of prisoners, as foreshadowing a general retreat.

149. Reports received during the night of 14/15 Oct indicated that A. & S.H. of C. had advanced beyond Watervliet and held positions just west of 8 Cdn Inf Bde. N. Shore R. therefore set out to make contact with them on the following morning, necessarily without benefit of artillery or air support. Before reaching Mollekot the battalion encountered heavy opposition, but nonetheless gained its objectives. Q.O.R. of C. then moved forward from the Angelina Polder and likewise met severe resistance before establishing themselves just west of Groote Zuiddiepe Polder. It was now evident that A. & S.H. of C. had not been as successful as previously thought, although they still held Watervliet. Contact was made during the afternoon, however, and the south-east corner could be considered cleared. (Battle Narrative, Historical Officer, H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div.) As the road from Bouchaute to Biervliet was opened, it was no longer necessary to send by water across the Inlet and artillery could soon be expected to be brought in. (Ibid.)

150. Though opposition on the northern sector was better sustained, the units of 9 Cdn Inf Bde had been steadily encroaching upon the enemy's territory, Nth N.S. Highrs had fought a slow hard battle on 13 Oct to advance to the line of the dyke and railway at Driewegen. H.L.I. of C. made similar gains the next day to reach the next road some 1000 yards to the west. On 15 Oct S.D. & G. Highrs, advancing about 2000 yards from Hoogeweg and Roodenboek. Nth N.S.

Highrs conformed come level with their left flank and still farther south, on 8 Cdn Inf Bde's sector, Q.O.R. of C. captured Ijzendijke on the following day. (Ibid; W.D., Q.O.R. of C., 17 Oct 44.)

151. We were now in a much more favourable position to envelop the rest of the "island" and to pull the enemy away from 7 Cdn Inf Bde along the canal. Indeed, as Maj-Gen Eberding afterwards confessed, his most difficult moment came when 9 Cdn Inf Bde was thus moving towards Breskens, while 8 Cdn Inf Bde cleared the country to the south towards Isabella. It was at this stage that he was forced to commit most of his divisional reserve against 7 Cdn Inf Bde in the Leopold bridgehead and against 9 Cdn Inf Bde in order to keep it at arm's length from Breskens. Thus the strength he could deploy in front of 8 Cdn Inf Bde was not great and he was afraid that if we were next to strike due west from the northern limit of the flooded area, we would penetrate to the heart of his system with little cost to ourselves. But Maj-Gen Spry's intention was to capture the port of Breskens and thus deny him the route by which he could keep his forces supplied and get them out across the river when the time came. In this he was to prove successful, partly because Eberding was unable to reinforce at Breskens owing to the continued pressure of 7 Cdn Inf Bde. (Interview with Maj-Gen Eberding.)

THE LINKING OF THE BRIDGEHEADS, 16-19 OCT 44

152. The first sign of a break in the resistance to 7 Cdn Inf Bde was the discovery made on 16 Oct that Eede had been evacuated. The village was at once taken over by 1 C. Scot R. who, having thus incurred the enemy's renewed animosity, had to call in a troop of self-propelled anti-tank guns to give support against heavy counter-attacks. Our troops were able even to make some advance across the floods to the north, where R. Wpg Rif penetrated as far as St Kruis over a road which in places was inundated to a depth of from two to three feet. At the far eastern end of their ledge between the floods and the

canal they occupied Kantijne and to the west Den Doorn. On the left Regina Rif reached the line of the Middelburgsche and Doopers Dijks. (W.D., H.Q. 7 Cdn Inf Bde, 17, 18 Oct 44.) Further immediate expansion would attend, however, on the German commander's decision to shorten his lines. (Battle Narrative, Historical Officer, H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div.)

153. In any case, the time had come to relieve the battered 7 Cdn Inf Bde from the harsh and exacting commitment which that formation had so faithfully carried out in circumstances of the most disheartening difficulty. As part of the larger regrouping of our forces 4 Cdn Armd Div during the past week had been in process of withdrawal into the neighbourhood of Antwerp.⁶ The completion of the process was signalled on 15 Oct by the announcement that 157 Inf Bde of 52 (Lowland) Div would relieve 10 Cdn Inf Bde along the bank of the canal. Two days later this had been done. Then at last light on 18 Oct, after 12 days of fierce action, 7 Cdn Inf Bde began to cross the bridges to the south bank and 157 Inf Bde to take over its positions, command passing at about 2230 hours. The newcomers were charged both with holding and, if possible, expanding the bridgehead, and with patrolling on the near side of the Leopold from the Lembeck - Watervliet crossing as far as the sector held by 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt at Moerkerke. For this particular purpose, the brigade had the assistance of elements of C.H. of O. (M.G.) and 3 Cdn A. Tk Regt, and some troops of the Belgian Resistance. (Ibid.)

154. The union between our forces in the bridgehead with those which were pressing the Germans back from the east could not be delayed much longer. With 9 Cdn Inf Bde holding Nommer Een on the coast (W.D., H.Q. 9 Cdn Inf Bde, 17 Oct 44) and 8 Cdn Inf Bde continuing to go forward from Ijzendijke towards Oostburg (W.D., H.Q. 8 Cdn Inf Bde, 18 Oct 44), the German left, in the appreciation of Maj-Gen Spry, could be expected to begin swinging back on a

⁶ 4 Cdn Armd Div went under command, Brit Corps wet 172359 Oct 44. (Info supplied by Capt Bond.)

fulcrum at Oostburg. (Interview with Maj-Gen Eberding.) The enemy's right was similarly being withdrawn to the north-west. It was expected that 7 Cdn Recce Regt, operating on the left flank of 8 Cdn Inf Bde, would make contact with the bridgehead forces first, and with this in view a liaison officer from the regiment took up his abode at Headquarters, 157 Inf Bde. He met his friends on 19 Oct when the juncture was made in St Kruis and again at Moershoofd.

155. As 157 Inf Bde was also able to push out and occupy Aardenburg and Middelbourg without opposition, it was clear that the enemy would now carry on the battle from more favourable ground. His withdrawal into the rings of concentric dykes about Cadzand and Zuidzande had begun. This hard core of his defences still left us with some ugly work to do, for the line through Breskens, Schoondijke, Oostburg and Sluis and thence to the Sluis and Leopold Canals was a strong one, studded with fortified towns and thick-set with those barriers of earth and water normal to this part of the continent. But the towns had already been subjected to attacks by the fighter-bombers of the R.A.F., and these would soon be intensified as the enemy prepared to make a last effort to retain a weakening grasp on his gun emplacements south of the river. So far his losses in prisoners alone amounted to over 3000. (Battle Narrative, Historical Officer, H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div.)

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE COAST, 20-29 OCT 44

156. Maj-Gen Spry's intentions for breaking the enemy's new system was to capture Breskens and Schoondijke with 9 Cdn Inf Bde, pass 7 Cdn Inf Bde through to clear the coast north-east of Cadzand, take Cadzand itself, Oostburg and Zuidzande with 8 Cdn Inf Bde and then clear to the coast. With the exception of the buffaloes and terrapins used in the amphibious assault, no call had yet been made on the various other contrivances at the disposal of 79 Armd Div, which had become so familiar to 3 Cdn Inf Div in operations since the summer campaign in Normandy. There was now some opportunity of

introducing part of the collection of A.Vs.R.E., flails and crocodiles, gathered together under command of 30 Armd Bde, although it was appreciated that narrow roads and soggy ground precluded their employment on any but a meagre scale. It had been arranged to support the attack on Breskens with some of these engines and by 20 Oct they were concentrated in readiness between Biervliet and Ijzendijke. But that afternoon the explosion of a vehicle carrying flame-throwing liquid destroyed eleven A.Vs.R.E. and caused 84 casualties. Postponement of the operation was impossible, and as a result the support of the specialized armour which was to have been available throughout this next phase was materially curtailed. (W.D., H.Q. 9 Cdn Inf Bde, 20 Oct 44.)

157. The assault on Breskens was made on 21 Oct by S.D. & G. Highrs. The operation went well and by evening the battalion had made good progress through defences which included an anti-tank ditch, 30 feet wide, containing some twelve feet of water. The enemy's artillery fire, especially from the guns at Flushing, was heavy. But it incidentally from the guns at Flushing, was heavy. But it incidentally was also a notable day for our own air support; heavy bombers replied against Flushing, medium bombers attacked the batteries at Cadzand, and fighter-bombers strafed Fort Frederick Hendrik, an old, tough stronghold of former days, north-west of Breskens. Altogether, 232 sorties were flown by fighter-bombers in support of the division. As it soon appeared, it had not been Eberding's intention to defend the port itself in any strength, but rather to deny us the eastern approaches, and we had no great trouble in clearing it. In fact, the enemy had neglected even to blow his prepared demolitions, a failure accounted for on the claim that our artillery had prevented the German sappers from fulfilling their tasks. (Interview with Maj-Gen Eberding.) By the next morning S.D. & G. Highrs were completing their occupation of the town and their forward troops were testing the strength of the Fort. The enemy was now denied the use of the port which gave him contact with Walcheren. (Battle Narrative, Historical Officer, H.Q.

3 Cdn Inf Div.) Being thus cut off both from further supply and all hope of escape, 64 Inf Div and its commander could expect to put off the end only for as many days as their stamina and their ammunition made possible. But they were not yet by any means willing to give up the fight.

158. Preparations for breaking the next link in the chain, Schoondijke, involved 7 Cdn Inf Bde, which after being rested for a few days and reorganized was concentrated around Biervliet. On 21 Oct 1 C. Scot R. began relieving H.L.I. of C. of 9 Cdn Inf Bde, to allow that battalion to open its attack on Schoondijke on the following afternoon. By the morning of 23 Oct the town lay securely in our hands, its concrete fortifications having fortunately proved useless to the defenders against an assailant coming in from the land instead of from the sea coast. (Ibid; W.D., H.L.I. of C., 22, 23 Oct 44.)

159. It remained for 9 Cdn Inf Bde to take Fort Frederick Hendrik. On 23 Oct two companies of Nth N.S. Highrs penetrated the outer perimeter, but fell under such fierce fire that they had to be withdrawn. the alternative of a set-piece attack with medium bomber support was then planned. Early on 25 Oct, however, information that the enemy in the fort desired to surrender brought the assault to a halt and Nth N.S. Highrs entered the fort without the assault to a halt and Nth N.S. Highrs entered the fort without further ado and marched out the garrison as prisoners. Their patrols then carried our line forward another mile. (W.D., H.Q. 9 Cdn Inf Bde, 23-25 Oct 44.) The capture of the fort marked the disengagement of 9 Cdn Inf Bde, and its withdrawal into divisional reserve, well to the rear around Biervliet. (Ibid, 25 Oct 44.)

160. To General Spry's astonishment, however, intelligence of this manoeuvre was conveyed to the enemy in an announcement by the B.B.C. Hearing from so impeccable a source that the Canadians had withdrawn from Breskens fortunately baffled General Eberding, however, as much as it did General Spry, and caused

him some concern over the whereabouts of 9 Cdn Inf Bde. He said later that he was much on the alert over his entire front owing to his uncertainty as to where that formation would next be committed. But the whole matter had also given him considerable cause for amusement, as well it might, although in view of the attendant anxiety which it had brought to the German commander, the situation had worked out to the entire satisfaction of General Spry.

(Interview with Maj-Gen Eberding.) On the other hand, it was fortunate that such intervention on behalf of the enemy's intelligence was rare, for on hearing that unexpected item of news General Eberding had changed his tactical dispositions and reinforced Oostburg on the assumption that 9 Cdn Inf Bde would be thrown in against him there.

161. His plan was somewhat upset by the rapidity with which 7 Cdn Inf Bde now struck westward from Breskens. (Ibid.) With Groede declared an open town on 24 Oct, as being full of civilians and wounded, and Fort Frederick Hendrik in our hands, the brigade did make good speed, especially along the sea coast where, as Cadzand was believed to harbour the enemy's divisional headquarters, we attempted an outflanking movement by pushing past the place as far as the entrance to the Uitwaterings Canal. 1 C. Scot R. came close to accomplishing this feat, until the enemy, taking alarm, threw in a strong counter-attack which overran our leading company. But by 29 Oct Cadzand had been abandoned and contact with the enemy was lost. (Battle Narrative, Historical Officer, H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div.)

162. Farther south 8 Cdn Inf Bde with 7 Cdn Recce Regt, which had taken over the sector between Sluis and the Leopold Canal area on the withdrawal of 157 Inf Bde, had a similar experience. Oostburg, heavily fortified to bar the most logical approach from the north-east, fell on 25-26 Oct. Q.O.R. of C. delivered a flanking attack round the basin of the Grosste Got and broke into the town from the south. There was some sharp fighting, but with his strongest defences rendered isolated and untenable, the enemy had to

relinquish his hold. Then on 28 Oct a sudden and widespread deterioration in his resistance across the sector as a whole suggested that another general withdrawal was impending. On the following day R. de Chaud, approaching from the south-east, captured Zuidzande. The amputation of these places and the incision made by 7 Cdn Inf Bde along the coast left the enemy's system with little more to sustain it. His plans disrupted and his vitality diminished, he was retiring for a last stand beyond Retranchement and the Uitwaterings or Lesser Derivation Canal. General Spry's intention was to follow him across, to break through with 9 Cdn Inf Bde and finish him off. (Ibid.)

KNOCKE, SLUIS AND THE END, 1-3 NOV 44

163. As we discovered on 30 Oct, however, the Germans were still manning their coastal guns among the dunes north-west of Cadzand, and being well fortified with concrete, these were strong enough to occupy the attention of 7 Cdn Inf Bde for several more days. The emplacements and bunkers had first to be isolated, and then their occupants slowly extricated, a process for which crocodiles would have been most useful had we been able to get them over the loose, sandy soil. As it was, this tedious bit of ferreting prevented 7 Cdn Inf Bde from wholly joining in the pursuit and destruction of the enemy's main body. (Ibid.)

164. Fortunately, no such hindrances stood in the way of 8 Cdn Inf Bde, which was able to force the pace against negligible opposition. On 30 Oct Q.O.R. of C. got into Retranchement and reached the line of the canal both there and farther south, where R. de Chaud likewise gained the bank north-east of Sluis and 7 Cdn Recce Regt entered the outskirts of the medieval town itself. Not content with holding the east bank, R. de Chaud soon had elements on the other side.

165. Events were moving to a climax. The advance to the canal was immediately followed up by 9 Cdn Inf Bde from its concentration between Cadzand and Zuidzande. During the night of 30/31 Oct S.D. & G. Highrs and H.L.I. of C. passed through Q.O.R. of C. and made the crossing at Retranchement. The Engineers completed the construction of a bridge under shell fire on the following day (31 Oct). With the R. de Chaud well over almost at the same time, it remained only for 9 Cdn Inf Bde to deliver a final blow at the remnants of the enemy taking refuge in Knocke: While these fugitives were being dealt with, 8 Cdn Inf Bde guarded the flank and 7 Cdn Recce Regt took over the Leopold Canal towards Zeebrugge from 52 Recce Regt, which had recently (28 Oct) relieved 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt in the same area on the departure of 157 Inf Bde to join its own division. The resultant gap in our line near Sluis was filled by 3 Cdn A. Tk Regt, employed as infantry under the command of 8 Cdn Inf Bde. (Ibid.) During the envelopment of Knocke on 1 Nov General Eberding, as if already getting ready for a long holiday, was captured in a concrete pill box on the golf course at Het Zoute by Nth N.S. Highrs, a circumstance marking virtually the end of the tenacious resistance which he and his troops had maintained against us, and affording General Spry an opportunity for an interesting exchange on the tactics with which they had fought their battle. To the south 8 Cdn Inf Bde enjoyed equal success in clearing the canal of surprisingly large numbers of the enemy. Action there reopened early on 1 Nov with the capture of Sluis by N. Shore R., which attacked through R. de Chaud's bridgehead from the north-east. Opposition proved light, and the battalion pushed on westward towards the Belgian border to take St Anna Ter Muiden, the last Dutch village, without much difficulty. the line of the Sluis Canal was cleared by 3 Cdn A. Tk Regt, which then went on to capture Oostkerke. (W.D., H.Q. 8 Cdn Inf Bde, 31 Oct 44.)

166. Lingering resistance in the coastal strong points near Cadzand was brought to an end on the following day by 7 Cdn Inf Bde, and the neighbourhood of the Belgian resorts, Knocke and Hoyst, where fairly heavy fighting went on

until the last, ultimately passed into the undisputed possession of 9 Cdn Inf Bde before the day was out. In the flooded country to the south Q.O.R. of C. captured the Belgian Westcappelle, and 8 Cdn Inf Bde reported that the battle was over. The order to cease fire came that evening. In the morning 7 Cdn Recce Regt crossed the Bruges Canal and found no enemy in that part of Belgium. Thus at 0950 hours on 3 Nov Operation "SWITCHBACK" was declared complete (Battle Narrative, Historical Officer, H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div), and Belgium, the first occupied country to be free of the Nazi oppressor, prepared, through its fine city of Ghent, to offer the tribute of a warm, civic hospitality to the tired troops of 3 Cdn Inf Div who, after a period of almost unbroken fighting since June, were now withdrawn for a week's rest.

OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

167. The successful conclusion of the arduous battle for the Breskens "pocket" represented for 3 Cdn Inf Div both the latest phase in the operations to clear the Channel coast and experience in conducting a new kind of warfare. In many ways it had been a unique and perplexing undertaking, even to a seasoned formation which throughout the summer had fought actions of such wide diversity, culminating in the two major sieges of Boulogne and Calais. But little that the division had learned of the art of war thus far had availed to instruct our troops in any special techniques for ousting an enemy dug in at the foot of the dykes where artillery fire could hardly touch him or even for coming to grips with him at all across the flooded polders or up the perilous avenues of the roads. Despite the tactical awkwardness of that highly characteristic terrain, however, and notwithstanding perhaps, the historic warning of the Walcheren disaster of 1809, it was reasoned that a determined infantry assault could achieve success and avoid the deadlock which was all that the enemy required to defeat our entire purpose.

168. Armour was too cumbersome to negotiate the barrier of waterway and flood, and though A.Vs.R.E., flails and crocodiles were called upon, they could not be used on the scale of previous operations. In any case, it was imperative that we avoid making the mistake of blocking the few roads with our own immobilized armour. The prime supporting weapons, exclusive of artillery and aircraft, had therefore to be found among such light tracked vehicles as wasps and weasels, with some self-propelled anti-tank guns thrown in wherever occasion offered. Eberding himself expected and feared that we should make more use of tanks, especially as he thought that he had an armoured division to cope with, but so far as we were concerned, the terrain in this respect was against us. Our troops were at once aware of the handicap and proud of their ability to overcome it. As a soldier in the H.L.I. of C. expressed both his chagrin and his pride: "Wish we could use our tanks and flamethrowers, but it's too muddy and soft and they bog down too much. It's men against men here and we're taking them all the time." (Censorship Reports, 21 Army Group, Vol I, 1944, Period 115 Nov 44, p. 3.) The total take in the end amounted to no fewer than 12,707, which together with an uncounted number of German dead and wounded, meant the annihilation of 64 Inf Div and all its auxiliary troops. (Battle Narrative, Historical Officer, H.Q. 3 Cdn Div.)

169. No reason was found as the result of such an experience to change the opinion that ordinary infantry tactics and battle drill applied to the art of fighting in the polders as elsewhere. The principles of fire and movement remained as before, and it was only in the detail of objectives and consideration of attack that local conditions had their influence on procedure. Where the country lay more open than in the flooded area, normal planning for the advance to be made from one polder to the next, bound by bound, was still relevant, a condition especially characteristic of 9 Cdn Inf Bde's expansion from the bridgehead over the Braakman. For the infantryman, however, the saturated fields, the standing water and the dry but fire-swept and fields, the standing water and the dry but fire-swept and elevated roads

were grim and comfortless alternatives with which our men were to become increasingly familiar as that autumn's fighting took its slow and tortuous course. Our inability to make any detailed reconnaissance, the lack of good observation and the total ineffectiveness of our counter-mortar fire made the capture of each polder a single operation in itself. (AEF/3 Cdn Inf Div/M/F, Docket III, Dyke and Polder Fighting.)

170. The enemy had fought at first with great self-confidence, and always with determination and skill. Despite mounting losses in casualties and prisoners of war, and the ultimate hopelessness of their position, battle groups of varying size and ability continued to be formed and to fight until the end. It was not an unusual occurrence for some of our platoons and even companies to find themselves cut off and captured by this resolute and disciplined defence, and many of our men, taken prisoners in this way were recovered near the end. One of the enemy's methods was remarked in particular. He would use 20 mm anti-aircraft guns to fire high explosive shells into the trees along the dykes. The bursts occurred directly over our slit trenches dug into the banks, where the fragmentation was apt to be the worse for the luckless occupants. (Battle Narrative, Historical Officer, H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div.) The ultimate testimony to the tenacity of this extremely well fought rearguard action lies in the contrast between the urgency of our requirement to seize that part of the coast and the enemy's prolonged possession of it, between our too hopeful estimate that it would take only a matter of three or four days for us to complete the commitment (AEF/First Cdn Army/B/F, Docket I, folio 4, Conference, 2 Oct 44) and the 27 days actually consumed. As Maj-Gen Spry conceded in the remarkable interview which followed his capture of the German commander, our opponents had made very good use of their ground and their weapons. (Interview with Maj-Gen Eberding.) It cannot be denied that Eberding had made the best of the hard bargain forced upon him. Even when we had established ourselves across the Braakman Inlet, the effort to make headway called for the utmost that our troops had in them.

From there on we had not much opportunity for other than a straight pounding attack, using lots of guns and biting off 1000 or 2000 yards of very difficult polder land each day. The progress was maddeningly slow, and the troops, always wet and cold, became tired and fed up with it. the contrast with the flag-waving, bouquet-throwing, cheering dash across France from Normandy must have been pretty tough for them.

(AEF/2 Cdn Corps/K/F: Personal Diary of Brigadier N.E. Rodger,
29 Sep 44.)

171. Maj-Gen Eberding's comment that our superiority in weapons and equipment decided the battle is entirely comprehensible. Our support from the air and from our artillery was undoubtedly heavy, although in the later stages it became necessary to divert a considerable weight of guns to assist the operation against Walcheren. Eberding was particularly impressed by our quick concentrations. The gunners were at distinct disadvantage, however, in that the fragmentation of their 25-pound shells was materially reduced in its effectiveness by the wet mud. It was Eberding's view that our infantry might have made better use of their artillery fire by following it more quickly. Harrassing fire by night had delayed his own movement along the dykes as soon as the shells began to fall. He admitted that movement by day had been prevented by our aircraft, which had also caused him some casualties and limited the activity of his own artillery - a formidable contribution to our success. (Interview with Maj-Gen Eberding.) Such good results were commensurate with a total of 1733 sorties by fighters and 508 by medium and heavy bombers on behalf of 3 Cdn Inf Div. This constant harrying from the air took the various forms of tactical reconnaissance, the heavy bombing of the enemy's gun positions such as those at Flushing, attacks on pivotal places like Breskens, Schoondijke and Oostburg by mediums, the engagement if German Headquarters, field guns, observation posts and positions generally by rocket-firing typhoons, the use of typhoons and spitfires for immediate bombing

attacks as called for by the troops or in their close support, or the special technique of "wrinkling", usually carried out by squadrons of fighters told off to strafe an area rather than a pin-pointed target, with the intention of disrupting communications and created general chaos amongst the enemy's dispositions. (Battle Narrative, Historical Officer, H.Q. 3 Cdn inf Div.)

172. It has to be remarked, since the matter affected the helpless civilian population of our Allies, that such intense activity could not be carried out against a common enemy, deeply imbedded in their country and using it as a battle-ground to defend Germany, by holding us on the Scheldt rather than on the Rhine, without causing widespread destruction to their property and grievous injury and loss to themselves. This stark and ironical dilemma had coloured the whole course of the invasion and liberation from the outset, and would often recur as the tide of war bore us on across the devoted and sorely tried habitations of our friends. During the course of that frank discussion between the two protagonists after the battle had been lost and won, Eberding had ventured to say that he deplored the damage, we had done to villages and farms by our gun-fire and bombing. To this General Spry could only reply that our aircraft and artillery were only brought down on German targets as they were reported by our forward troops or spotted from the air, and that had Eberding chosen to fight elsewhere than on the edge of the built-up areas, the destruction would not have been so great. It may also be recalled in this connection that the reduction of buildings on narrow thoroughfares was done not so much to kill Germans as to block the enemy's lines of communication by choking them with rubble at such points of congestion. Still, Eberding insisted that had we concentrated more on his supply routes, the results would have been more damaging to him. (AEF/2 Cdn Corps/L/F, Docket I: 2 Cdn Corps Int Summary No. 77, 2 Nov 44.) The people themselves accepted such calamities with astonishing fortitude and, with bitterness only against the enemy and war itself, as part of the terrible exaction which our own soldiers were paying to be rid of both.

173. Eberding was very complimentary about our respect of medical installations in Groede and thanked General Spry for his co-operation and for our observation of the Geneva Convention. General Spry replied that his prisoner too had observed the Convention, but that our experience had been that certain S.S. troops and parachute units had not always considered themselves bound by the law. On this Eberding made no reply. (Interview with Maj-Gen Eberding.) Interviewed later on at Headquarters 2 Cdn Corps, he said that he had surrendered when he saw that his position was hopeless on the establishment of our bridgehead over the Uitwaterings Canal. The way of escape from Sluis was threatened and only a narrow corridor had been left through the floods to the north-west of the town. He also expressed his apprehension of the Dutch patriots who were harassing his positions from the rear.

174. The enemy commander was generous in his remarks on the fighting ability of the Canadian soldiers. He said that they were very skilful and versatile in the use of ground, very brave and well provided with good junior leaders. He considered that the command, however, had been too timid in the choice of objectives, that it did not exploit success nor always penetrate deep enough to break up the defence. The effect of their exploits upon the men was one not merely of fatigue but of exhilaration. The knowledge that they had acquitted themselves so well tended vastly to increase their esteem and self-confidence. "Yesterday" said one of them, though guardedly enough, "we won quite a big battle and our winning it means quite a bit towards the end of the war. It should shorten the war by a long way because we can now use a certain Port that we have been wanting to get for a long time". (Censorship Reports, 21 Army Group, Vol I, 1944, Period 1-15 Nov 44.) The Director of Military Intelligence could hardly have expressed himself with greater circumspection. The services, as well as the troops in the line, had their share of hardship. Great work was done by the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps in their unending

and dangerous routine of bringing up supplies. To borrow from their own account:

Driving conditions were perhaps the poorest we have ever faced. Continuous rain, heavy mud, slippery narrow roads added to which were deeply flooded ditches, making travel extremely hazardous and difficult. On one occasion a NCO i/c sec of vehs made a recce in a row-boat before continuing ahead.

(AEF/3 Cdn Inf Div/RCASC/C/F: War History: "Scheldt",
October 1944.)

175. Although as against the total loss to the Germans of more than a division our casualties were comparatively light, they did include one officer commanding a brigade. An unfortunate accident deprived 8 Cdn Inf Bde of its commander at the very height of the battle. On 17 Oct Lt-Col T.C. Lewis, temporarily in command (formerly O.C. 7 Cdn Recce Regt) was killed while on his way to visit R. de Chaud. He was succeeded by Lt-Col P.C. Klaehn (formerly O.C. C.H. of O. (M.G.)) and later by Lt-Col J.A. Roberts, who had previously commanded 18 Cdn Armd C. Regt.

176. The morale of 3 Cdn Inf Div stood high. All ranks were proud of what they had accomplished against bad country, cruel weather and a brave enemy, and they were in good heart for the future. "Have been pretty busy in Holland," said one, "clearing the Hun out of the Pocket. But it is all finished now as is the Leopold Canal, but it was a tough fight. We couldn't get our tanks over to help us, so we did the job ourselves and after that we can do anything." (Censorship Reports, 21 Army Group, Vol 1, 1944, Period 1-15 Nov 44.) The division would fight no less well in the future.

OPERATIONS NORTH OF ANTWERP, 1-9 OCT 44

177. It will be recalled that First Cdn Army was committed to clearing not only the estuary, but also the left flank of Second Brit Army, in order to enable General Dempsey to bring his forces round to the north-west for the main Allied offensive against the Ruhr; that this deployment would conform with the further advance of our forces along the lower reaches of the Scheldt to seal off the isthmus as a preliminary to our invasion of South Beveland; that in its earlier stages the entire manoeuvre would be the responsibility of 1 Brit Corps with 2 Cdn Inf Div under command. (See paras 101-103 above.)

178 At the beginning of October when these moves were taking shape, "the 1st British Corps", as General Simonds reported, "was making rapid progress north-eastward from its bridgehead over the Antwerp - Turnhout Canal. The 1st Polish Armoured Division had elements as far as Poppel. During the next few days it became apparent that the enemy was fighting a delaying action, while withdrawing on his left flank under pressure from the Poles on the Tilburg and giving way more gradually before the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division on his right north of Antwerp". (AEF/First Cdn Army/C/G: Report by Lt-Gen Simonds, 22 Nov 44, forwarded by Lt-Gen Crerar as Despatch to Minister of National Defence.) With the C.R.A., Brig R.H. Keebler, as acting commander, the division had its left flank carried into Merxem by 4 Cdn Inf Bde (Brig F.N. Cabeldu) in the early hours of 2 Oct; in the centre 6 Cdn Inf Bde (Brig J.G. Gauvreau) held the northern bank of the canal at Sternhoven and Lochtenberg; and on the right 5 Cdn Inf Bde (Brig W.J. Megill) was over at Brecht. (W.Ds. of Bdes, 2 Oct 44.) On the right flank 49 (W.R.) Div had taken over St Leonard. (See Reports Nos. 154 and 183.)

179. At first the enemy offered only spasmodic resistance on this part of the front with elements of four hard-driven divisions. In the environs of St Leonard and Brecht contact had been made with a reinforced 711 Inf Div and

a depleted 346 Inf Div, its fighting strength estimated by our Intelligence as being equivalent to only three battalions of infantry. West of Antwerp parts of 70 Inf Div appeared in the line and were reported to be fairly well up in numbers, although the morale of those unfortunate sufferers at the stomach, whom we soon were to meet again on Walcheren, was reported as low. (AEF/2 Cdn Corps/L/F/, Docket I Int Summary No. 63, 5 Oct 44: Appx "B".) Farther to the east at Baarle-Nassau prisoners had been taken from a decimated 719 Inf Div. These formations, together with various satellite battle groups, were clearly in the process of being reorganized and strengthened as fast as the German command could produce the necessary personnel. After a disheartening series of retreats, prisoners had a pessimistic view of the future. Contrasting the previous headlong flight of the German Fifteenth Army with the present effort to defend Walcheren, they gloomily quoted an epigram attributed to one of their battalion commanders: "You can't turn a hare into a porcupine." (AEF/2 Cdn Inf Div/L/F, Interrogation Report on PW, 4 Oct 44.) But as time would soon show, this unlikely metamorphosis was entirely possible, and it was to take us some weeks in the field to scotch the animal.

180. That part of the hunt was still some days in the future, however, and our troops were able to follow on the heels of an enemy still in the process of withdrawal. On 3 Oct 6 Cdn Inf Bde took the Camp de Brasschaet by surprise and without loss, and on the following day sent Fus M.R. across country to occupy the important junction of Capellen. (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 3, 4 Oct 44.) On 4 Oct, the division being directed to continue the advance through Merxem to Bergen Op Zoom, as well as to maintain a protective screen covering the approaches to Antwerp westwards from Brecht (AEF/2 Cdn Inf Div/C/I, Docket III(d), Op Instr No. 2,⁷ 4 Oct 4), 4 Cdn Inf Bde pushed into Eckeren and Ste Mariaburg and thence passed up the main road as far as the canal before Putte. The crossing there was made on the morning of 5 Oct and

⁷ Originally Op Instr No. 1. Number amended to read Op Instr No. 2 by 2 Cdn Inf Div Instr No. 3 of 6 Oct 44.

our troops entered Holland at this point for a stiff fight to take the town. Some three miles to the west the brigade entered Berendrecht. The following day (6 Oct) carried us still farther northward up the road from Putte through country thickly set with woods in which the enemy showed fight continuously but not yet in sufficient strength to prevent our troops from taking Osendrecht and Hondseind by nightfall. Farther south Santvliet fell, to reveal the presence there of about 100 German and Polish political prisoners, a pointed example of the many other subsequent discoveries and liberations which were to recur as we penetrated deeper into the territories hitherto dominated by the Nazis. (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde, 4-6 Oct 44.)

181. As no further progress was immediately possible on the divisional right through the woods and small lakes covering the country north of the road between Brecht and the Camp de Brasschaet, our attention could be concentrated on ensuring our continual progress on the left along the road north to Woensdrecht, Korteven and the sea, for in any case, it was in that direction that we must achieve our primary object of isolating the enemy on South Beveland. The plan to achieve this end was to strike simultaneous blows north and north-east, one in the hope of being able to sever the connection between the highway from the peninsula and the road to Bergen Op Zoom, and the other to improve the position on our flank, which was now becoming dangerously extended. We could hardly expect that the enemy would regard such a severance lightly, since the tactical and strategic consequences would be decisive. The phase of the pursuit was over. The enemy had regained both the willingness and the ability to stand and fight.

182. For the ensuing phase, on 7 Oct, 2 Cdn Inf Div reverted to the command of 2 Cdn Corps. At the same time 7 Brit Armd and 51 (H.) Divs came under command of Lt-Gen Crocker, whose sector was extended some 25 miles to take in that previously held by 12 Brit Corps eastward. (W.D., G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army, October 1944: Letter from Simonds to Crocker and Foulkes,

12 Oct 44.) This extension carried the First Cdn Army's right boundary east of the road between Eindhoven, Veghel and Uden and thence north-eastward to the Maas, the entire front from the Scheldt being therefore some 50 miles in length. (AEF/1 Brit Corps/C/I, Docket III, Op Instr No. 16, 8 Oct 44.) The boundary between 1 Brit and 2 Cdn Corps gave the road between Oostmalle, St Leonard and Brecht to the Canadians and through Wuestwezel, Achterbroek, Esschen and Dinteloord to the British.

183. The plan for 2 Cdn Inf Div to achieve its double purpose of driving on to the north and buttressing our lengthening flank was to pass 5 Cdn Inf Bde through 4 Cdn Inf Bde, then deployed between Ossendrecht and Santvliet, for the attack towards Korteven, and to use a battle group of 6 Cdn Inf Bde for improving our position on the right. The start-lines in each case were to be seized and secured by 4 Cdn Inf Bde, the first through the woods between Calfven and the Groote Meer, the second along the edge of the woods bordering the Witte Hoevenscheheide on the south. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Div, October 1944: Appx 19, Op Instr No.3, 6 Oct 44.) Unfortunately, as it was not found possible to prepare the way for the battle group to go forward on time, a whole day was lost (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 7 Oct 44), and the assault northward by 5 Cdn Inf Bde had to go in alone on the morning of 7 Oct.

184. It was made with two battalions: Calg Higrs on the left, who went through to enter Heide successfully, and on the right R. de Mais, which was directed on Hujbergen but met stronger resistance and fell short of the objective some 1500 yards north-east of the start-line and about 1000 yards south-east of Calg Highrs. (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 7 Oct 44.) On the next morning at 1030 hours R.H.C., who had been following on the tail of Calg Highrs, passed through for the attack on Korteven. But by this time enemy had not only appreciated his danger but managed to bring over reinforcements to meet it. The fighting all along the line stiffened

considerably. R.H.C. had a particularly rough time and were forced to withdraw to their start-line; Calg Highrs were kept fully engaged in mopping up about Hoogerheide (Ibid, 8 Oct 44), although R. de Mais did manage to improve its fortunes on the right, and by 1730 hours had penetrated the outskirts of Huijbergen (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, October 1944: Main Ops Log, 8 Oct 44, Serial 61.) As the day drew to an end, Dutch civilians reported that a large hostile force, numbered variously at between 2000 and 3000 troops with guns and tanks, was concentrated in the wooded country towards Bergen Op Zoom (Ibid, Serial 63). Aerial reconnaissance was ordered immediately to investigate, and by 2030 hours this discouraging intelligence was confirmed. (Ibid, Serial 69.)

185. In view of the vulnerability of 5 Cdn Inf Bde's dispersed positions against a strong counter-attack, the battalions were ordered to go over to the defensive (Ibid, Serial 63.) As night fell, both Calg Highrs on the left and R.H.C. in the centre held the area of Heide, while R. de Mais, strung out on the right towards Huijbergen, conformed as best they could. (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 8 Oct 44.) That night our premonitions were realized, and two enemy counter-attacks, supported by armour and including paratroops, hit our lines in the vicinity of Hoogerheide (AEF/First Cdn Army/L/F, Docket I, Vol I, October 1944, 1-14 Oct 44; Int Summary No. 100, 8 Oct 44; W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Div, October 1944: Appx 2, Int Summary Nos. 79, 80.) Further counter-attacks came in on the following day and forced our troops to make some local withdrawal. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, October 1944: Appx 3, Ops Log, 9 Oct 44, Serials 3, 11.) It was clear that further consolidation, regrouping, and above all, reinforcement would be necessary before we could hope to get much farther along the vital road to Bergen Op Zoom. Our inability to exploit fast enough once Antwerp had fallen into our hands, and the absence of our armour on the Leopold Canal was to cost us dearly both in casualties and in time.

186. Events on 2 Cdn Inf Div's attenuated right flank had hardly taken a more favourable turn. The attack by the specially constituted "Saint" Force, comprising Fus M.R., a squadron of tanks from 10 Cdn Armd Regt, a Squadron of 8 Cdn Recce Regt, and supporting arms, and aimed to engross the country towards Achterbroek and Wuestwezel, failed to get going at the same time as the assault by 5 Cdn Inf Bde because the start-line was still insecure. The weight of the Force was then improved by the addition of another squadron of tanks. It was now the intention to set off on the following morning, that the armour should drive through at full speed to capture Achterbroek, sweep forward from there to Wuestwezel, thence cut back south-west to Klein Gooreind, and finally link up with Fus M.R., who in the meantime would have pushed southward to a rendezvous at Kruisstraat. Some of the tanks would then go on to the south to make contact with Camerons of C. at the Camp de Brasschaet. The object of the excursion was to create confusion amongst the enemy along the whole of the brigade's sector and give him the impression that he was surrounded by tanks. (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 7 Oct 44; AEF/2 Cdn Inf Div/C/I, Docket III(d), 2 Cdn Inf Div Op Instr No. 4, 8 Oct 44.)

187. But when the expedition did get under way on 8 Oct a heavy mist made it impossible for the armour to venture forth; Fus M.R. were themselves delayed, and a visibility grew worse during the course of the morning, it was not until noon that they got the benefit of support from the tanks. They captured Punt Heuvel, however, by 1400 hours, and our troops then went on to fight their way towards Dorp. The enemy, now thoroughly aware that we were abroad, met our threat with an increasing show of strength. Casualties in both men and vehicles began to mount. Fus M.R. did succeed in capturing the place in a fine action by 1830 hours, but by that time the situation had become menacing. While the assault was actually being made, the Divisional Commander warned Brig Gauvreau that the Germans were being reinforced and were threatening the battalion's flank. With night coming on, it would have been folly to

penetrate any deeper into the enemy's territory, and all that was now possible was to try to maintain contact with Essex Scot, with whom Fus M.R. were linked only by the single road along which they had come.

188. The divisional flank thus remained without the hoped for buttress in the large triangle between the Groote Meer, the Camp de Brasschaet and Brecht (Ibid). Some assistance in guarding this long, lean flank, while 2 Cdn Inf div renewed its effort to put a stopper in the Beveland bottle, was provided on 9 Oct by 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt, with a company of Alq R. under its command, an instalment of the larger reinforcement from 4 Cdn Armd Div which became an increasingly urgent necessity as the days dragged on (W.D., 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt, 9 Oct 44). It was not on this sector alone that our advance had lost momentum. That part of the front of First Cdn Army held by 1 Brit Corps was similarly in need of strengthening.

189. The tasks of 1 Brit Corps were still to protect the flank of 2 Cdn Inf Div whilst that formation was engaged against South Beveland, and to clear the enemy then remaining south of the Maas. (AEF/1 Brit Coprs/C/I, Docket III(d), Op Instr No. 16, 8 Oct 44.) But on so extended a front there was no immediate possibility of doing anything more than "maintain a defensive policy with active patrolling and local offensive action when and if considered desirable by Div Comds". (Ibid.) Aggression on a larger scale had to await the arrival of other formations, including 4 Cdn Armd Div which in the first instance, on its release from the Leopold Canal, would be employed for the close protection of 2 Cdn Inf Div. In the matter of timing, Lt-Gen Crocker appreciated that there could be no offensive undertaken in the area of Tilburg until 15 Oct at the earliest, and that nothing could be put on in the region of 's Hertogenbosch until 21 Oct. (Ibid.)

THE GENERAL SITUATION, 1-6 OCT 44

190. This pause and slackening in our ability to strike the enemy hard enough was not confined to the mainland north and north-east of Antwerp. The symptoms were more than local, and taken together with the unmistakable signs of partial recovery on the part of the enemy elsewhere, they prompted the C.-in-C. to reconsider his plan for an early envelopment of the Ruhr.

At the end of the first week in October I had to inform the Supreme Commander that it was necessary to postpone the projected Rhineland attack, because my resources were not sufficient to enable me to continue with this plan in view of other more immediate commitments. The strength of enemy action against our Nijmegen bridgehead showed the necessity for a considerable reinforcement there to ensure its firm retention. Secondly, on the front of First Canadian Army there had been a very noticeable stiffening of enemy opposition, and our initial operations on the Leopold Canal indicated the enemy's determination to prevent us clearing the banks of the Scheldt. Thirdly, the efforts of 7 United States Armoured Division against the enemy bridgehead west of the Meuse gave indications of considerable strengthening in this sector. In spite of our withdrawal from the Arnhem bridgehead, the enemy feared a further thrust north-east across the Neder Rijn, directed either at invading Germany itself or at reaching the Zuider Zee and cutting off Fifteenth Army. Apart from his desire to deny us Antwerp for as long as possible, these considerations obliged him to reinforce his front opposite 21 Army Group as much as his strained resources permitted. By 7 Oct there were about twenty weak divisions, or battle groups of comparable size, including four Panzer divisions, around our front from Roermond to Breskens. Their lack of armour and mobility was offset by the nature of the country, and we had to fight for every water crossing.

Behind this line the remnants of the Panzer, SS and parachute divisions were hastily reforming, but they were kept ready for action in case of a sudden Allied break-through or further air-borne landings.

(Normandy to the Battle, p. 199)⁸

In the case of the paratroops, as we have seen, the threat by 2 Cdn Inf Div to cut off the neck of the Beveland isthmus was already about to bring some of them into battle against us there.

RENEWED ATTEMPT TO CLOSE THE ISTHMUS, 10-16 OCT 44

191. We had no intention of relaxing our pressure on the enemy facing 2 Cdn Inf Div, even if the position lacked the full aggressive potentialities of a safe flank and an adequate number of formations on the ground. It was now proposed that 5 Cdn Inf Bde should take the next bite at the neck of the isthmus, but in considering their prospects on the evening of 9 Oct, Brig Megill's battalion commanders thought that the forces at their disposal were insufficient for the dual task of attacking to the north-west and at the same time preventing the Germans from infiltrating from the north-east. (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 9 Oct 44.) It was decided, therefore, to withdraw the brigade from the line about Hoogerheide, bring in R.H.L.I. to hold firm there and then use the full resources of 5 Cdn Inf Bde for a resumption of the offensive, while 4 Cdn Inf Bde struck a simultaneous blow on the left. (AEF/First Cdn Army/C/H, Docket V, October 1944, L.O's. Report, 1215 hrs 10 Oct 44.)

192. Although the actual process of relieving 5 Cdn Inf Bde during the afternoon and evening of 10 Oct was disrupted by an enemy counter-attack,

⁸ Page numbers are those of the April 1946 edition published for private circulation in the British Army of the Rhine.

4 Cdn Inf Bde had an important success with R. Regt. C., which forced its way forward through the difficult polder land between Woensdrecht and the coast to reach the embankment carrying the railway from the peninsula to the mainland. (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 11 Oct 44, Serials 6, 7.) From their positions here, some 3000 yards west of Woensdrecht, they covered the main road with their small arms, and held on to the positions on the following day in the face of a succession of local counter-attacks which cost the enemy heavy loss. (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde, 11 Oct fell temporarily to 4 Cdn Inf Bde, which had S. Sask R. and R. de Mais placed under command for that purpose as well as to ensure the security of the front. (Ibid; AEF/2 Cdn Inf Div/C/F, Docket I, 2 Cdn Inf Div Op Instr No. 6, 11 Oct 44.) By 1400 hours elements of R.H.L.I. reached the main crossroads north of Nederheide (W.D., R.H.L.I., 11 Oct 44), but an attack by R. Regt C. towards the main junction of dyke and railway west of Woensdrecht failed to attain its objective (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 11 Oct 44, Serial 31). A similar attempt to make ground by S. Sask R. in the line south-east of Hoogerheide was stopped by heavy fire from small arms and mortars (W.D., S. Sask R., 11 Oct 44).

193. After a day of severe local counter-attacks both on the left and right of our positions facing north, and more particularly on the sector held by S. Sask R. to the east of hoogerheide (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 12 Oct 44, Serial 13; 13 Oct 44, Serial 1), 5 Cdn Inf Bde was ready to take over the offensive against the enemy's very tenuous lines of communication along the isthmus on 13 Oct. (AEF/2 Cdn Inf Div/C/I, Docket III(d), 2 Cdn Inf Div Op Instr No. 7, 13 Oct 44.) R.H.C. were thrown in first at 0615 hours in the sector held by R. Regt C. to seize the railway embankment west and north-west of Woensdrecht at the angle of the junction with the main dyke. Almost immediately the Germans put down such a weight of fire that our companies were driven back to the start-line. A second attempt, made in the late afternoon and supported by tanks and flame throwers, did actually carry some of the objectives, but fell short of the embankment itself. Casualties were

extremely heavy. Nevertheless, two depleted companies managed for some hours to cling on to what ground they had gained, but were exposed to a violent and continuous storm of fire. (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 13 Oct 44.)

194. With the two forward commanders wounded and platoons isolated, R.H.C. was soon in the process of being annihilated (W.D., R.H.C., 13 Oct 44). At 0100 hours on 14 Oct, therefore, Lt-Col R.B. Ritchie was ordered to withdraw his men, who all through the hours of darkness had been evacuating their many wounded from their exposed positions in the soggy fields. One company had been virtually wiped out and losses generally left the exhausted battalion completely unfit to take any further part in the fighting until it had been rested and reinforced. In this grim episode among the polders, such costly failure was charged not only to the nature of the ground, the eligibility of the objective itself as a target for the enemy's artillery, and the fighting quality of the defenders, but also to the lack of experience and even of elementary training among the more recent arrivals in the battalion itself. (AEF/5 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, Docket IV, Folio 2, The Action at Woensdrecht 8-14 Oct 44, Account by Lt W.J. Shea, I.O., R.H.C., 15 Oct 44.)

195. Two days later our fortunes began to take a better turn. Re-grouping on 14 Oct gave command of the left sector, then held by R. Regt C. over against the isthmus to 5 Cdn Inf Bde, and the entire right sector, including that part of it held by S. Sask R., to 4 Cdn Inf Bde for an attack on Woensdrecht. Calg Highrs relieved R. Regt C. and Essex Scot took over from R.H.L.I., who were drawn back slightly preparatory to putting in the assault. But as S. Sask R. were being shifted to allow R. Regt C. to come in on their right, an enemy attack overrun one of their companies, and to forestall a serious penetration R. Regt C. had to be hurriedly got into the line and additional help sought from Essex Scot. The assault on Woensdrecht had to wait until 16 Oct. (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde, 14-16 Oct 44.)

196. It went in at 0330 hours, when R.H.L.I. followed closely behind a heavy barrage and got into the village. In a spirited action the battalion took some 60 prisoners, some of them from 6 Para Regt, and by 0700 hours was consolidated in part of that straggling place, together with a squadron of 10 Cdn Armd Regt, although pockets of the enemy by-passed in the advance, made conditions uncomfortable. At 1000 hours the Germans threw in their first counter-attack, supported by self-propelled guns. Though the enemy overran the right-hand company posted north-east of the village, and threatened to engulf its neighbour, he was unable to approach any closer. But the fighting had taken its toll of R.H.L.I. and a company of Essex Scot was put under command and more tanks brought forward. The enemy continued to be most persistent and to harass our troops with fire from his mortars and artillery for the rest of the day and throughout the following night. (W.D., R.H.L.I., 16 Oct 44.)

197. Despite the precariousness of their situation and their sadly diminished numbers, our troops hung on; their state is thus described in the unit's War Diary, which affords further evidence of the very serious effects of our lack of trained reinforcements for the infantry battalions actually in the line:

We did not have enough bodies on the ground completely to control the Woensdrecht Feature and it was possible for the enemy to infiltrate. The enemy appeared to suffer very heavy casualties from our arty fire which was used unsparingly, but he continued to reinforce his posns. We were prevented from probing forward as the average coy strength was forty-five and the casualties amongst our offers and NCOs and older men were very heavy. The bulk of the men in the bn at the present had not had very much inf trg, but had been remustered from other branches of the services.

(Ibid.)

In the morning the Commanding Officer, Lt-Col W.D. Whitaker, reported on the situation to Brig Cabeldu. His view is thus briefly and vividly recorded:

Feels his bn very weak in men and lacking in trg for the type of fighting necessary in that area. The hun is battling most bitterly and seems to have no shortage of weapons. It is close, hand-to-hand fighting - the enemy is not giving up here the way he has in the past. Lt-Col Whitaker reports our fire to have been most effective having inflicted hy cas on the enemy. He further reports what seems to have been the turning pt in the battle during the enemy's counter attack two days ago was a hy medium SOS task called for and put down within Less than 100 yards of our own tps. The fire caught the enemy tps right out in the open whereas our own men were deep down in their slit trenches having been warned beforehand. Our tps cheered; the slaughter was terrific.

(W.D., H.Q 4 Cdn Inf Bde, 18 Oct 44.)

Such were the conditions of the fighting ofr the last strip of territory linking General Daser and his garrison on Walcheren with the mainland. With Woensdrecht partly in our possession, and our troops on the line of the railway over to the left , we were now within an average of only about 1500 yards from that tenuous, contested thread: in point of time, however, we were still a week away.

198. though the Diaries of the units show that our battalions were receiving reinforcements, these were apt to be only very inadequately trained. Thus, on 19 Oct, in the four rifle companies of the Black Watch there were 174 men with only a maximum of one month's training prior to joining the battalion. This was no less than 45 per cent of the total strength of those companies. In the words of a report to the commanding officer:

It is unnecessary to point out to you, sir, that the previous training of a man listed as for instance, "one month" on paper, probably represents considerably less time in actual training. This assumption was borne out by the fact that very few men arrive with knowledge of the PIAT, or elementary section and platoon tactics. Some reinforcements have never fired the bren 1.m.g., or handled grenades.

(W.D., R.H.C., October 1944: Appx 4.)

It is surprising that under these trying circumstances morale was so well sustained and that those who were called upon to carry the responsibility of taking the troops into battle were able to achieve the results they did. The terrible strain on all concerned in keeping up offensive fighting under such handicaps cannot be lightly passed over. As the Diary of the Black Watch records:

The morale of the Bn. at rest is good. However, it must be said that "Battle Morale" is definitely not good due to the fact that inadequately trained men are, of necessity, being sent into action ignorant of any idea of their own strength, and after their first mortaring, overwhelmingly convinced of the enemy's. This feeling is no doubt increased by their ignorance of fieldcraft in its most elementary form.

(Ibid.)

If the Germans were hard-pressed for manpower, as our Intelligence was demonstrating daily, so were our own battalions.

21 ARMY GROUP'S CHANGE OF PLAN, 9 OCT 44

199. Such was our comparative debility in the northern sectors of the Allied front generally at this stage, our administrative requirements being still unsatisfied and the Germans reorganizing themselves with remarkable resources for the defence of their own country both behind the Rhine and in front of it, that the C.-in-C. had to admit a postponement of his great Rhenish offensive, and to concentrate his attention and the strength of the Army Group on other essentials, the conversion of our sitting tenancy of Antwerp into an effective possession and utilization of port and seaway, and the elimination of the enemy's salient west of the Maas. There was also the Nijmegen bridgehead to keep against the time when that narrow entrance could be used for the passage of troops through into the country between the Maas and the Rhine.

200. Field Marshal Montgomery thus outlined his problem:

These three commitments had a direct bearing on future plans for the battle of the Rhineland. In view of the degree of the enemy's recovery, it was clearly unsound to advance between the Rhine and the Meuse with two hostile flanks and risk being hemmed in between those obstacles. We had to clear the west bank of the Meuse and ensure the opening of lateral routes across the river as the operation progressed to the south. Again, we had to be firmly balanced in the Nijmegen salient so that enemy action against the bottlenecks in rear of the Rhineland front could not strike on an axis so remote from the Scheldt until we were certain that the operation there would proceed quickly and relentlessly and that there would be no sudden difficulties demanding reinforcements for the Canadian Army.

(Normandy to the Baltic, p.190.)

Although, Field Marshal Montgomery continues,

Towards the middle of October, the Panzer divisions left 21 Army Group front to meet a more pressing threat from First United States Army ... infantry resistance remained as dogged as before.

I therefore ordered that the offensive between the Rhine and the Meuse would be postponed and that our immediate objects would be to open Antwerp, using First Canadian Army, and to undertake the clearance of the enemy bridgehead west of the Meuse by Second Army.

(Ibid, pp 199, 200.)

201. But six days of fighting by Second Brit Army were sufficient to indicate that the enemy appreciated the tactical value of the Maas bridgehead far too highly to allow himself to be ejected from it without a desperate struggle. In fact, the Allied drive to the Rhine generally had been brought almost to a standstill, and to quote the C.-in-C.:

The opposition along the whole front was hardening. In the central sectors, First and Third United States Armies continued to fight hard along the Siegfried Line from the Aachen area through the Ardennes to the region of Trier and southwards in the sector of the upper Moselle. Further south, Sixth United States Army Group was deployed on the right of Twelfth United States Army Group and carried the area of operations down to the Swiss frontier.

(Ibid, pp 200, 201.)

Moreover,

The ad, omostratove situation was such that until Antwerp was opened the Allies would be unable to sustain further full-scale offensive operation, and, in the obvious difficulties we were going to have in dislodging the enemy from the Scheldt, we had clearly reached the stage when it was necessary to divert the entire resources of 21 Army Group to the task. On 16 October I issued orders shutting down all offensive operations in 21 Army Group except those concerned with the opening of the Schldt estuary, and instructed Second Army to carry out immediate regrouping so as to bring its weight to bear on the west and to operate in conjunction with First Canadian Army.

(Ibid.)

202. In his directive of 16 Oct the C.-in-C. thus emphasized the need for concentrating all resources of 21 Army Group upon the task of opening the Scheldt estuary:

The free use of the port of Antwerp is vital to the Allied cause, and we must be able to use the port soon.

Operations designed to open the port will therefore be given complete priority over all other defensive operations in 21 Army Group, without any qualification whatsoever.

The immediate task of opening up the approaches to the port of Antwerp is already being undertaken by Canadian Army and good progress has been made.

The whole of the available offensive power of Second Army will now be brought to bear also.

(G.O.C.-inC./1-0, Directive M.532, 16 Oct 44.)

The directive cancelled the previous orders (given in the C.-in-C's. directive of 9 Oct) for Second Army to drive the enemy back across the Mass in the Gennepe - Roermond area (see para 200).

203. Field Marshal Montgomery thus outline the manner in which he proposed to put his new plan into effect:

My intention was for Second Army to thrust westwards initially towards Hertogenbosch and Tilburg, while Canadian Army transferred its weight further to the left. The inter-Army boundary was changed to give the road Turnhout - Tilburg to Second Army...

Second Army planned to develop its maximum offensive power in a strong thrust on the general axis Hertogenbosch - Breda, with the right flank on the Maas. Its objective was the general line Moerdijk - Breda - Poppel. Meanwhile Canadian Army was to make every effort to accelerate its operations in South Beveland and against Walcheren, and with its right flank was to thrust northwards from the Antwerp - Turnhout Canal towards Breda - Roosendaal - Bergen-Op-Zoom. I intended not only to clear up the Antwerp situation with all possible speed, but also to push the enemy back across the Maas in order to establish a firm and economical northern flank along the river. I hoped that, as Second Army Operations developed, the enemy opposite Canadian Army would weaken in the face of the threat to the main escape routes to the north.

(Normandy to the Baltic, p. 201.)

RESPONSIBILITIES OF 1 BRIT CORPS, 16 OCT 44

204. But the responsibilities of 1 Brit Corps on the British Army's left and on the Canadian right remained extremely important. For any further progress towards getting into South Beveland would depend on the operations to be initiated by General Crocker to pinch out the enemy from the shoulder of the salient at Woensdrecht and Hoogerheide. This attack northwards would be made through the right of 2 Cdn Inf Div immediately 4 Cdn Armd Div was concentrated. When a line had been established between Zundert, Roosendaal and Bergen Op Zoom, 1 Brit Corps would be prepared to go on through Roosendaal and Breda, and simultaneously or alteratively along an axis through Roosendaal north-east to Lochtenburg. (W.D., G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army, October 1944: Appx "A", Directive, 16 Oct 44.) Both 7 Brit Armd and 51 (H.) Inf Divs, an armoured brigade, a medium regiment and the Royals (1st Royal Dragoons) were lost to Second Brit Army by 1 Brit Corps when General Dempsey, on 18 Oct, took over the line as far as Hilvarenbeek as a first step to acquiring the road between Turnout and Tilburg within his purview.

205. The relief of 2 Cdn Inf Div from the distraction of holding its long flank began on 19 Oct when the assault groups of 4 Cdn Armd Bde moved into the woods south of the Witte Hoevenscheide and 10 Cdn Inf Bde assembled in the neighbourhood of Maria Terheide (W.Ds., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 19 Oct 44.) The divisional boundary on the left ran with that separating the two corps through Capellen, Putte, Hoogerheide to the sea north of Woensdrecht (AEF/1 Brit Corps/C/I, Docket III, Op Instr No. 17, 17 Oct 44). The division was now ready to assist in carrying out the immediate object of 1 Brit Corps as defined in the instruction issued from General Dempsey's Headquarters on the same day: "To prevent the enemy interfering with 2 Cdn Inf Div during its ops to capture SUID BEVELAND." The other formations also available to exert the necessary pressure northwards, 1 Pol Armd Div, 2 Cdn Armd Bde less one regiment, 34 Tk Bde, 49 (W.R.) Div and 104 U.S. Div, then

about to be brought up from Malines, provided a more adequate grouping for the purpose.

206. The Corps Commander proposed to initiate his offensive on 20 Oct with an attack by 49 (W.R.) Inf and 4 Cdn Armd Divs. The British formation, less 146 Bde Gp, but with 2 Cdn Armd Bde less one regiment and 34 Tk Bde and other elements under command, would attack astride the road running north-west from Brecht and capture Wuestwezel and the wooded country on either side of the road thence towards Achterbroek. The Canadians on the left would advance northward from Calmpthout and establish themselves in the vicinity of Esschen with a view to a further projection north and north-west. (Ibid.) This scheme of things was destined to carry our troops out of Belgium and through northern Brabant to the great barrier of the rivers, beyond which the enemy's main body was to be withdrawn as a defensible line for the coming winter.

OPERATIONS OF 4 CDN ARMD DIV, 117 OCT-8 NOV 44

207. Maj-Gen Foster proposed to play his part in the offensive by striking northwards with both brigade groups along the two main routes to Esschen, first to reach and cross the Roosendaal Canal, and secondly to take the town itself as a road centre of obvious tactical importance in relation to the enemy's ability to hold any line westwards towards the sea in front of Bergen Op Zoom. On the right 49 (W.R.) Div would conform and take over Esschen when it had fallen, in order to allow the armoured advance to forge ahead to the north-west without delay. (W.D., G.S. H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, October 1944: Appx 89, 4 Cdn Armd Div Op Instr No. 11, 17 Oct 44, and Appx 110, Op "SUITCASE", 19 Oct 44.)

208. The armoured brigade lying on the left was to establish a firm base between Dorp and Punt Heuvel and strike thence for the canal. The infantry on the right were confronted first with the uneasy task of making their way

through the mined and infested woodland north of the Camp de Brasschaet. Having gained the open country beyond, they would then establish themselves in Achterbroek. (Ibid.) Brigadier Jefferson directed Linc and Welld R. and 28 Cdn Armd Regt along the western edge of the woods north of the Camp de Brasschaet, and Alq R. supported by 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt was to pass through the woods on the right of the main road to the north (Ibid.) Brigadier Moncel's group astride the railway would have Lake Sup R. (Mot) on the left and A. & S.H. of C. on the right, both battalions being supported by 22 Cdn Armd Regt (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, October 1944: Appx 17, Sheet 24, Diagram of Bde Plan; W.D. H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde and units, 18-20 Oct 44). Fire support was to be provided by 4 and 59 A.Cs.R.A., and elements of 74 Hy A.A. Bde, in addition to the divisional artilleries (W.D., H.Q. R.C.A. 4 Cdn Armd Div, October 1944: Appx 2, Op "SUITCASE", 19 Oct 44.) Rocket-firing Typhoons and Spitfires were to be on call (W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, October 1944: Appx 5, Op Instr No. 11, 13 Oct 44).

209. The attack began at 0730 hours on the wet and chilly morning of 20 Oct, with the artillery concentrating for thirty minutes on all suspected hostile positions, and a troop of guns firing white smoke along the main road north of Brasschaet to indicate our own forward positions to the supporting aircraft (History of 15 Cdn Fd Regt, p. 174. The troops moved forward at the same time as the first shells began to fall, and although opposition was not great, their progress was slowed down by the enemy's mines, road blocks and booby traps. After a day of skilful endeavour against small enemy forts and isolated snipers, however, both brigades were well on the way to completing their first tasks (W.Ds. of Bdes and Units, 20 Oct 44). By midnight 4 Cdn Armd Bde had 21 Cdn Armd Regt tight against the right flank of 2 Cdn Inf Div near the Vassenbergen, where the line was being held by Fus M.R. The motor battalion found the going better beyond Punt Heuvel, and by leapfrogging the companies soon had one company probing northward along the railway towards the canal (W.D., G.S. H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde and Units,

20 Oct 44; W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, October 1944: Appx 83, Folio 6, Sitrep No 398). The group on the right were approaching Kruisstraat. (W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 20, 21 Oct 44.)

210. There was little action during the night, and at first light the advance was resumed. Lake Sup R. (Mot) got off their mark early and made a bold dash with one company towards the Roosendaal Canal, but here again the advance was hampered by extensive mining and heavy mortar fire. The immediate object now was to secure a bridgehead over the canal while 21 Cdn Armd Regt secured the ground on the left, and A. & S.H. of C. cleared snipers and an isolated post at Calmptheut. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, October 1944: Appx 85, Army Ops Log 21 Oct 44, Serials 5, 15, 19; W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 21 Oct 44.) Fighting continued all through the day against varying resistance, and by nightfall A. & S.H. of C. had cleared both sides of the railroad up to Noordeind, while Lake Sup R. (Mot) were across the Roosendaal Canal and firm in the region of Boterbergen Hoef to the north (W.D., 21 Cdn Armd Regt, October 1944: Appx 12, Sitrep to 212359 hours). The Infantry Brigade Group also made fair progress. Linc & Welld R. was firm in Kruisstraat by midday, and Brigadier Jefferson was able to push Alq R. through past the villages of Achterbroek and Handelaar to cross by 1900 hours the Roosendaal Canal where it bends away to the north-east (W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 21 Oct 44).

211. Urging the necessity of speed upon his brigade commanders, that morning Maj-Gen Foster explained to them how Second Brit Army was to launch its attack from the east within a few days in the hope of trapping what remained of the German Fifteenth Army south of the Maas. Hence 4 Cdn Armd Div must not only protect the flank of 2 Cdn Inf Div, but also compress the south-western corner of the proposed trap (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 21 Oct 44). There could be no delay, therefore, in the capture of Esschen, which would be taken by a surprise attack at night by 10 Cdn Inf Bde while 4 Cdn Armd Bde guarded

the left flank. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, October 1944: Appx 116, Confirmatory notes, 21 Oct 44; W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 21 Oct 44.)

212. The assault got going in somewhat unorthodox form. Half an hour before midnight on 21 Oct the troops moved forward on foot, in single file, and without heavy equipment, since there was no time to wait for the bridging of the canal and the lifting of mines. On the right of the main road Lt-Col R.A. Bradburn led Alq R. and Lt-Col W. Cromb the Linc & Welld R. on the left. The march was made in complete silence. Some hostile machine guns opened up and there was an occasional skirmish with enemy patrols. But there was no indication that the Germans became aware of the impending assault before the outskirts of Esschen were reached. Everything went without a hitch. With the armour, flails and flame-throwers moving up to assist, Alq R. entered the town at 0615 hours and took the defenders off their guard. (Ibid). As a result of this brilliant enterprise which carried our troops some four miles into hostile territory,

the enemy was literally left behind, and a great many prisoners surrendered from the rear areas the next day. An entire company, four horse drawn mortars, a signal exchange and phones, the commander mounted, walked unawares into a forward Argyll company, and after a brief fight were taken prisoner.

(A Short History of the Tenth Canadian Infantry Brigade, p. 43).

In the course of the division's advance during the night and on the following day no fewer than 450 prisoners were rounded up (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 22 Oct 44). so complete was the surprise that long after the infantry were in position some 22 enemy vehicles drove into the town without being

aware that it was in our hands. By midday the place was clear. (W.D, Alq R., 22 Oct 44.)

213. The fall of Esschen was symptomatic of a general improvement of the allied position along the whole northern sector of 21 Army Group. On the day of its capture the offensive opened by Second Brit Army on the Canadian right began to eat into the enemy's country along the two main roads leading westwards into 's Heretogenbosch. By midday on 23 Oct our leading troops were about two miles from the town. Schijndel was in our hands and we had other elements on the canal north-east of Boxtel and in the eastern outskirts of St. Michiels Gestel (W.D., G.S., Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, October 1944: Appx 89, Sitrep GO 138, 231230, GO (Second Brit Army) 217, Sitrep to 231200). There was no evidence however, that the enemy had lost any control after his initial surprise and our Intelligence assumed that he might be expected to fall back on's Hertogenbosch, littering our path with mines (AEF/First Cdn Army/L/F, Docket I, Vol II, October 1944: Int Summary No. 44, 22 Oct 44). Two days later we had entered the out skirts, but by this time the aspects of the enemy's battle south of the rivers had noticeably changed. To quote the surmise of our Intelligence at this point:

The enemy is faced with a major decision. How much will he risk SOUTH of the WAAL? The garrisons of BRESKENS and of BELELAND - WALCHEREN are already committed. The fate of 67 Corps and 88 Corps on the mainland is in the balance. It is apparent that he cannot hold his present line with the troops available. Already he is withdrawing from the salients our advances have deepened. But he continues to hold firm at BERGEN OP ZOOM.

Thus he is withdrawing to maintain a limited bridgehead but he is pivoting on the defences of BERGEN OP ZOOM. 'S HERTOGENBOSCH and TILBURG lose their importance as it becomes apparent that he is based on

the MOERDIJK bridges and attendant ferries. There his boundaries converge. He must fight there if he is to rescue his main force.

It is quite impossible to detect his intention by a discussion of reasonable probabilities. He has been faced with the problem of how to defend a river and fight a losing battle before. This solution has had less to do with a reasoned appreciation than with the Fuehrer's blind passion to have German soldiers hold their ground.

(Ibid, Int Summary No 116, para 6.)

214. On the Canadian sector our precipitate threat to the line through Bergen, Roosendaal and Breda aroused the enemy to resist any further advance north-west by 4 Cdn Armd Div with new energy. He was here confronted with another lunge forward on 23 Oct by 4 Cdn Armd Bde Gp directed on Wouwsche Plantage from the country between Esschen and Wolfsheuvel, which 10 Cdn Inf Bde would hold until relieved by 49 (W.R.) Div. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, October 1944: Appx 127, Op Instr No. 12, 22 Oct 44; Appx 133, Confirmatory Notes, 23 Oct 44.)

215. Such was the vigour of the enemy's resistance that by contrast with our swift descent on Esschen it took us three days to cover the three miles to Wouwsched Plantage. Our armour had a particularly damaging reception on crossing into Holland on the morning of 23 Oct when 21 Cdn Armd Regt, supporting Lake Sup R. (Mot), ran into a nest of self-propelled guns and lost ten tanks. It was not until the morning of 26 Oct, after continuous heavy fighting across the flat country on either side of the embanked road to Wouwsche Plantage that with some assistance from troops of 10 Cdn Inf Bde the place was taken. (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 23-26 Oct 44.)

216. The relief of 10 Cdn Inf Bde at Esschen by 49 (W.R.) Div on 24 Oct left the brigade free to cross over to the divisional left for the attack on Bergen Op Zoom (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, October 1944: Appx 142, Op Instr No 13, 25 Oct 44). The enemy fought back strongly in the plantations beyond Gentrum where our troops engaged the resourceful 6 Para Regt, backed up by the Hermann Goering Bn, with mutual asperity, attack being followed by counter-attack, and our own superior fire-power being answered with anything the enemy could bring to bear. As our Intelligence observed at the time:

There is little doubt that the enemy's best troops are in this sector as is at once obvious when comparing a group of these paratroops to the ordinary rank and file of the infantry formations on the front.

(AEF/First Cdn Army/L/F, Docket I, Vol II, October 1944: Int Summary No 118, 26 Oct 44.)

It is no small credit to our own troops, many of whom were novices in the skills of the fighting man, that they acquitted themselves so well against the toughest opponents which the enemy could put into the field against them. The Germans were gradually forced back upon Bergen Op Zoom and being unwilling to fight in the ancient town itself, withdrew to the basin forming its northern edge. The inhabitants, rid of the invader, gave us a tumultuous welcome when 29 Cdn Armd Recce Regt entered the market square in the evening of 27 Oct, while the armoured brigade group came up on the east and the infantry from the south (W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 27 Oct 44).

217. The enemy's position along the entire front of First Cdn Army south of the rivers was now crumbling. As our Intelligence reported:

Bergen Op Zooms is free, and patrols have been into the outskirts of Roosendaal but have encountered the enemy in some strength. Further

east the main Tilburg - Breda road has been cut in two places, and with the drive from the east making good progress, only the Moordijk bridges remain as the escape route unless boating commences in a big way on the Waal.

(AEF/First Cdn Army/L/F, Docket I, Vol II, October 1944: Int Summary No 119, 27 Oct 44.)

General Crocker's battle was gathering towards its climax, for while 4 Cdn Armd Bde was cutting the road from Bergen Op Zoom to Breda, 49 (W.R.) Div crossed it farther east, 104 U.S. Div lay firm in the region of Zundert, 2 Cdn Armd Bde was in contact with the enemy at Pennendijk and the Poles were encroaching menacingly from the south-east on Breda (AEF/1 Brit Corps/C/H, Docket III, Sitreps 0475, 0476, 27 Oct 44).

218. It was now General Crocker's intention to continue 1 Brit Corps' advance towards the river line by directing the Poles and 104 U.S. Div to converge on Breda, 49 (W.R.) Div to clear Roosendaal and go on to Kruisland (W.D., G.S., Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, October 1944: Appx 107, Main Ops Log, 28 Oct 44, Serial 55). Having concluded the task of giving 2 Cdn Inf Div a free right flank, 4 Cdn Armd Div was to drive on to Steenberg.

219. That the first assault over the canal on the northern edge of Bergen Op Zoom by 10 Cdn Inf Bde in the afternoon of 28 Oct failed and had to be tried again was a painful indication of the enemy's continuing ability to control the terms of his withdrawal from North Brabant. The struggle to attain the far bank remained obscure throughout the night, but at first light on 29 Oct A. & S.H. of C. had established a small bridgehead. The enemy still fought stubbornly and for the time being our men could do nothing more than hang on grimly to their foothold. But in the early afternoon a troop of tanks of 28 Cdn Armd Regt was got over to the assistance of the hard pressed infantry.

Alq R. was then ordered to extend our perimeter, and by last light the bridgehead was firm, although the enemy still remaining in the industrial area in the north-east part of the town put up a most bitter fight before being finished off by Linc & Welld R. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div and H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 28, 29 Oct 44.)

220. A flanking attack by 4 Cdn Armd Bde which by dusk on 29 Oct had carried our tanks through meihoeft, Heerle, Hazelarr and Moerstaten, at once threatened to cut off the enemy facing the infantry and promised to enable us to dominate the approaches to Steenberg (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 28, 29 Oct 44). The effect of this bold manoeuvre became apparent when on the following morning the infantry, who had been fighting hard to improve their positions north of Bergen Op Zoom, found that the bulk of the enemy had withdrawn. In the course of a rapid pursuit the brigade made contact in the vicinity of Oudemolen. (Ibid, 30 Oct 44.)

221. It was not immediately possible to chase the enemy any farther than a line extending eastward from the site of the bridge opposite Tholen through Kladdede to the blown bridge over the canal north-east of Klutsdorp and thence to another broken bridge on the secondary road running north from Moerstraten (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 30, 31 Oct 44). The routes towards Steenberg were blocked, mined and well covered by fire, and the Germans once again showed superb skill in the tactics of a controlled withdrawal over country, which, as in Zeeland - Flanders, confined our vehicles to the roads and curtailed the mobility of our fire-power forward.

222. But along the front of 1 Brit Corps as a whole and on that of 12 Brit Corps on our right the enemy was apparently preparing to leave for the more tenable country beyond the rivers. In the words of Field Marshal Montgomery:

In the last days of October 12 Corps was through 's Hertogenbosch and across the canal west of it, had captured Vught and moved on towards Loon-Op-Zand, and Udenhout had been occupied. 15 Div completed clearing Tilburg on 28 October... The final stages of the 1 and 12 Corps Operations were soon completed. 7 Armoured Division struck west towards Oosterhout and made contact with the Poles thrusting from the south on 30 October. Patrols pushed north to Geertruidenberg. The following day hard fighting took place in Raamsdonk, where the enemy was making a stand in order to cover the Pereboom bridge as long as possible.

(Normandy to the Baltic, pp 207, 208.)

Breda had fallen to the Poles on the same day as Tilburg to the Scots and on the morrow (30 Oct) the Americans reached Oudenbosch. Roosendaal fell to 49 (W.R.) Div. (Ibid.)

223. The Mark River had seemed to offer an obstacle behind which the enemy might effect part of his evacuation across the Waal in comparative comfort, but on 31 Oct we were across it, up the main road from Breda to the Moerdijk bridge and at Standdaarbuiten. The news was thus assessed by our Intelligence that evening with reference to spirited counter-attacks at both places:

It may be that the enemy is unwilling to surrender the line of the MARK before all his troops to the WEST are back across it, but the attacks have the more familiar ring of a final effort before a further withdrawal. They are, however, evidence that he has some capable troops left, even if those other streaming back across the MAAS are in a state of confusion.

This evidence is further borne out by the resistance at KLABDE D593 and SOUTH of STEENBERGEN D6337, where men of the Hermann Goering Training Regiment appear to be covering the disengagement of 6 Para Regt...

(AEF/First Cdn Army/L/F, Docket I, Vol II, October 1944:
15-30 Oct 44, Int Summary No 123, 31 Oct 44.)

As for the enemy's intentions in pulling out of our reach on the mainland, these were now much more clear:

Second Army have captured draft documents anticipating a withdrawal to the NORTH bank of the WAAL. This with the Tac/R of several days ago and the penetration of the MARY RIVER line is cogent evidence. Our very success may force him, notwithstanding, to fight SOUTH of the MAAS in order to disengage. The stubborn action of the Paratroops on his right suggests that they are NOT joining in the race for the bridges or - possibly that they do their fighting by day, and moving by night.

(Ibid.)

The drain on the enemy's resources during these weeks of the rearguard action had been most damaging. Since 6 Oct the German Fifteenth Army had given up 18,000 prisoners and over 850,000 square miles of territory to First Cdn Army (Ibid.). The end of both men and acres south of the Waal was well in sight.

224. But the paratroops had still to be driven out of Steenbergen. The attack on the place was launched by 4 Cdn Armd Div on the night of 31 Oct/1 Nov with Alq R. under command of 4 Cdn Armd Bde. Our onslaught was defeated with heavy casualties by well placed infantry supported by mortars and self-propelled guns defending Welberg. (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 31 Oct, 1 Nov 44.) The offensive was taken over by 10 Cdn Inf Bde, Alq R.

reverting to Brigadier Jefferson's command for the purpose. The assault began again at 1900 hours on 2 Nov after a "wrinkling" operation up the two roads leading north into Welberg and Steenberg by a squadron of rocket-firing Typhoons. This time the defenders of Welberg gave ground before a concerted attack by Alq R. on the right and Linc & Welld R. on the left. The fighting went on throughout the night but by 0940 hours on 3 Nov the enemy had been squeezed out. A. & S.H. of C. and 29 Cdn Armd Regt were then ordered to go on to Steenberg. (W.D., H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, 1-3 Nov 44.) There was comparatively little opposition on the way, and none in the town itself, for the Germans, blowing their bridges behind them, had fled in the direction of Dinteloord. But while our troops were held up bridge repairing, 49 (W.R.) Div got into that place first, on the morning of 5 Nov, and the Canadians met the Yorkshiremen in the outskirts before noon. The armour now came up to sweep westward to the sea coast, and it was there on the peninsula of St Philipsland that the division brought its operations to the odd climax of a successful naval engagement with four German craft imprisoned by the fire of two platoons of the Lake Sup R. (Mot) and a troop of 28 Cdn Armd Regt, in the harbour of Zijpe. (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 5-7 Nov 44.)

225. All along the front the pace had quickened as the resistance of the German Fifteenth Army was reduced to a decreasing semi-circle covering Willemstad and the Moerdijk bridges. On the same day (5 Nov), as the Canadians were sinking their gun-boats at Zijpe,

1 Brit Corps reached the Maas at four places and the enemy perimeter south of the river was cut in two, although he continued to make a vigorous stand to cover the withdrawal of his remaining elements to the north bank.

(Lt-Gen Simond's Report, 22 Nov 44.)

Willemstad fell to 49 (W.R.) Div on 7 Nov and Moerdijk succumbed to a converging attack by 104 U.S. and 1 Pol Armd Divs on the following day. By last light the Corps stood up to the line of the rivers and, along with 4 Cdn Armd Div, began what was to prove a long winter's watch on the Maas.

THE ASSAULT ON SOUTH BEVELAND BY 2 CDN INF DIV,

24 OCT 44

226. Long before this 2 Cdn Inf Div, released from embarrassment on the right and an enemy determined to remain immovable in front, had burst the tactical repression on its intrusion into South Beveland. The operations of 4 Cdn Armd Div had initially freed one of the infantry brigades to come into reserve ready to turn westwards along the peninsula; by clearing the country in front to the north-east they had excluded hostile penetrations across the isthmus, and by driving the enemy out of the region between Woensdrecht and Bergen op Zoom had prevented him from covering the entry with his guns at close range. General Simonds had ordered the advance into South Beveland to begin on 23 Oct, three days after the commencement of the offensive by 1 Brit Corps.

227. General Simonds had appreciated that the enemy might form up on the line of the Beveland Canal. In that event, he provided for a ferry crossing to be made from Terneuzen directed on to the peninsula between Hansweert and Borssele, its launching to be timed according to the progress of the leading brigade of 2 Cdn Inf Div advancing from the eastern end of the isthmus. But if on reaching the canal, Brigadier Keebler could not spare one of his brigades, then General Simonds proposed to use 52 (Lowland) Div for the ferrying, if it were free. For this reason, that division was not committed to mopping up in the area of Breskens, since 3 Cdn Inf Div was able to complete the operations there without further aid. (W.D., G.O.C.-in-C. First Cdn Army, October 1944: Appx "A", Directive, 19 Oct 44.)

228. But before 2 Cdn Inf Div could strike westwards it was necessary first to push the enemy away from the neighbourhood of Woensdrecht and Hoogerheide, where he still remained after the earlier battles to release the northern shoulder of the isthmus from his control. The new assault which began as ordered, on 23 Oct, was made, therefore, with two brigades, 6 Cdn Inf Bde being directed from the lateral Heistraat, running east out of Woensdrecht, on to the high ground south of Korteveen, and 5 Cdn Inf Bde on the left making to close off the isthmus between the railway and sea. (AEF/2 Cdn Inf Div/C/F, Docket I, 2 Cdn Inf Div Hist Offr's Reports, Weekly Summary 22-28 Oct 44.) But both formations had only limited success that day. On the right our troops, hampered by mines, and suffering severely from the enemy's small arms, and mortars, were forced to consolidate between Hooghuis and Zandvoort, with Fus M.R. in the centre east of the main road and just south of the Doolstraat. (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 23 Oct 44.) The attack on the left, put in during the afternoon to place us astride the railway along the isthmus for 4 Cdn Inf Bde to assault westwards, similarly ran to ground. Calg Highrs met intense opposition and had to dig in along the embankment for the night (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 23 Oct 44). Nevertheless, the enemy had been sufficiently shaken for 4 Cdn Inf Bde to get into position ready to mount its operation early on the following morning.

229. Operations on 24 Oct went much better. The road to the north of the railway was cleared and the enemy, aware of the danger of being cut off by 4 Cdn Armd Div striking in from the east, hurriedly retired to the north of Korteveen, with 5 Cdn Inf Bde in pursuit. (Ibid, 24 Oct 44.) The north shoulder was now free, 4 Cdn Inf Bde drove into the neck, and 6 Cdn Inf Bde, released in front of Lorteveen, prepared to follow through into South Beveland.

230. The offensive westward was to be led by R. Regt C. Two columns of mounted infantry and attendant armour were then to push on with all speed, by-pass opposition, and seize crossings over the canal. R.H.L.I. was to mop

up behind. (W.D., H.Q., 4 Cdn Inf Bde, 23 Oct 44.) Following half an hour's cannonade by seven field and medium regiments, R. Regt C. moved forward at 0430 hours on 24 Oct, and within the next 90 minutes, after stiff fighting, had overrun the enemy's first line of defence across the narrowest part of the isthmus. As the unit reported that mines and mud made the secondary road on the south side impassable, Brigadier Cabeldu sent Essex Scot to the north along the railway embankment. But the loss of several tanks and reconnaissance cars by shots from a well placed anti-tank gun before the column could get under way caused the plan of getting through with the armoured columns to be abandoned, and the infantry were ordered to march against the enemy on foot.

231. Even this resort had small immediate effect, for the going along the embankment across this flat, wet, and exposed landscape was extremely difficult. Any real progress had to be postponed until nightfall. By that time R.H.L.I. had been brought up and swung away to the south-west towards Bath, which patrols reported clear by 0200 hours on 25 Oct. It was not until several hours later, however, that Essex Scot reported success at the main crossroads north-east of Rilland, which itself was cleared by R.H.L.I. (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde and units, 24, 25 Oct 44.) R. Regt C. then passed through Essex Scot, and in spite of the retreating enemy's many mines carried the line 1000 yards beyond the Eerste Weg by 1600 hours, while R.H.L.I. had enveloped the greater part of the Frederica Polder along the south. (Ibid.)

232. On 26 Oct Brigadier Cabeldu proposed to bring Essex Scot west and north out of the positions held by R.H.L.I. in order to swing them in behind the enemy who were standing immediately in front of R. Regt C. in the vicinity of Krabbendijke and Roelshoek. This attempt to outflank our opponents might well have succeeded and did actually go well until about noon, when Essex Scot found themselves facing an enemy dug in along the dykes in the lower part of the peninsula and could get little further forward. Mines and booby traps

improved the enemy's chances of delaying us along the roads, and across country our men, forced to wade through the saturated fields, were rapidly becoming exhausted. It was therefore with some relief that orders were received for the brigade to hold its positions in readiness for the advance to be carried on by 6 Cdn Inf Bde. (Ibid, 26 Oct 44.)

THE AMPHIBIOUS ASSAULT BY 52 (L.) DIV, 26 OCT 44

233. The enemy was now to be struck both on his front by these newcomers and on his coastal flank by 52 (L.) Div, from across the estuary. While the Canadians pressed him back to the Beveland Canal, the Scots, trained for mountain warfare and now turned amphibious, would take that formidable line in the rear. The enemy would thus be inducted to fall back into his citadel of Walcheren.

234. Of these two blows, the left hook was to come first, and to be dealt by 156 Inf Bde, which Maj Gen E. Hakewell Smith ordered to make the initial descent on South Beveland from Terneuzen harbour. The brigade proposed to establish a bridgehead with two battalions in the quadrilateral between Hoedekenskerke, Molenberg and the coast. The battalions were to make the crossing in some 120 tracked landing vehicles as supplied by 1 Aslt Bde R.E., 4/5 R.S.F. Gp being directed to land on the right and 6 Cameronians on their left, the third battalion to be brought in when required to assist in exploiting to the north-west. (AEF/156 Inf Bde/C/I, Docket III(c), Op Order No. 1, 24 Oct 44.)

235. Mounting such an expedition across eight miles of water was not without its administrative problems. Some of the assault craft had to be brought across the Channel from Portsmouth in a "Landing Ship Dock", and loaded at Ostend on to two trains which carried them to Ghent, where they were lifted into the water by cranes and navigated down the canal to Terneuzen. There a

dam had to be built and special arrangements made to get them out of the canal again. They arrived just in time to take their part in the operation. Again the Naval Liaison Officer at Canadian Army Headquarters, Lt-Comdr Franks, R.N., using the same compass which he had borrowed from the Air Force to lead the assault by 9 Cdn Inf Bde across the Braakman Inlet, was co-opted as honorary navigator for 156 Inf Bde. (AEF/156 Inf Bde/C/D, Account by Lt-Comdr R.D. Franks, R.N.).

236. The expedition put out a 0245 hours on 26 Oct. All went well. In the words of Comdr Franks:

It was an extremely dark night, with no moon and some mist, and visibility was very low. On the run up the coast I was extremely uneasy about finding my way and I was very thankful to see the two red lights which had been arranged to mark the place to cross the river. They gave us an excellent line and landed us up exactly where I wanted, just off the Southern point of SOUTH BEVELAND.

Punctually at 0430 the arty barrage started up and plastered the beaches near us. It was most accurate and heartening. We were very close, not more than 200 yds away, and we could smell the explosive, but no shells fell short and I felt quite safe, although the noise was a bit disturbing.

(Ibid.)

The armada made its landfall unseen. Only a few minutes late, and provided with a further aid to navigation by a line of Bofors tracer fired across the river from the Ossensisse peninsula, the force touched down with mishap. The beach on the right was shelled and there were some casualties to craft. The main hazard on the left was to get the landing vehicles over the steep and

slippery dyke. (Ibid; AEF/21 Army Gp/C/F, Docket III: Clearing of the Scheldt, pp 12 ff, AEF/52 (L.) Div/C/H, Docket III: Message A/G.O.G.-in-C. to General Crerar, 26 Oct 44.) The division thus laconically reported success to Headquarters 2 Cdn Corps:

Successful landing effected 0450 hours. Slight opposition on NORTH beach. None on SOUTH beach. A few PW taken. CB took out 88 mm 3120 and MGs 392208.

(2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 26 Oct 44, Serial 9.)

237. The prisoners belonged to 89 Fortress Depot Regt, formerly part of the garrison of Walcheren, and identification which inspired the following cheerful comment from our Intelligence:

This formation appears to have four battalions at the moment but generally (these) are anything but crack troops, consisting of further contingents of old gentlemen and personnel of low medical category from Russia.

(AEF/First Cdn Army/L/F, Docket I, Vol II, October 1944, 15-31 Oct, Int Summary No 118, 26 Oct 44.)

They fared ill at the hands of the fresh troops from Scotland, and although late in the afternoon they had recovered themselves sufficiently to begin putting up a fight and made several minor counter-attacks, especially from the north along the coast road, the day's operations resulted in our possessing the quadrilateral, with Oudelande captured and entry forced into Molenburg (Ibid.) The enemy reassorted to some spasmodic fire with rifle and machine-gun during the night and did effect some infiltration, but the bridgehead

remained firmly in our hands. (AEF/21 Army Gp/C/F, Docket III, 21 Army Group: Clearing of the Scheldt Estuary, p. 12.)

THE CROSSING OF THE BEVELAND CANAL, 26-27 OCT 44

238. That afternoon 6 Cdn Inf Bde (deprived of the leadership of Brigadier Gauvreau, who was seriously injured when his vehicle ran over a mine) began the frontal attack towards the Beveland Canal from our forward positions running across the peninsula directly south of the tiny haven of Roelshoek. The attack had three prongs. Camerons of C. were to strike on the north towards the coastal town of Yerseke; S. Sask R. took the centre in an effort to get the main road and railway crossing over the canal; Fus M.R. on the left were to go through Waarde and made for the southern end at Hansweert. (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 26 Oct 44.)

239. The going on the route to be taken by Fus M.R. was especially wet and treacherous, but fortunately the enemy had no great will to do battle, and our troops occupied Waarde shortly after midnight, and at dawn were only 400 yards outside of Hansweert. (W.D., Fus M.R., 26, 27 Oct 44.) S. Sask R. met fairly stubborn resistance, however, along the main road south-west of Krabbendijke, and lost a number of vehicles on the enemy's mines. The advance was resumed under cover of darkness and excellent progress made, for by 0400 hours on 27 Oct the battalion had reached the Zand Dijk some 2000 yards short of the bridges. (W.D., S. Sask R., 26, 27 Oct 44.) On the right Camerons of C., after deploying to overcome pockets of the enemy on the way, passed through Yerseke at first light and took up positions to the north of the place. (W.D., Camerons of C., 26, 27 Oct 44.)

240. Patrols of S. Sask R. got up to the canal during the early morning of 27 Oct, but only to discover that both the bridges had been blown. (W.D., S. Sask R., 27 Oct 44.) It was now decided to force the obstacle at speed and

with all three battalions, the principal effort to be made along the main highway as providing the only practical route for heavy vehicles. (W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 27 Oct 44; AEF/2 Cdn Inf Div/C/D, Docket I, folio 4; Account by Brig Keefler.)

241. The resistance met was not well organized, and such fire as came from the enemy's light automatics proved in fact to be a lesser handicap than the extensive flooding which here, as in the polders on the other shore of the estuary, held up our vehicles and made life miserable for the infantry. (AEF/First Cdn Army/L/F, Docket I, Vol II, October 1944, 15-31 Oct, Int Summary No 119, 27 Oct 44.) Fus M.R. record how they reached the lock at Hansweert that evening by wading through water up to the waist. (W.D., Fus M.R., 27 Oct 44.) S. Sask R. completed their crossing of the canal in the centre by midnight, and stayed to hold their lodgement against successive counter-attacks. (AEF/6 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, Docket II(b), Folio 2; Account by Lt-Col Stott; W.D., S. Sask R., 27, 28 Oct 44.) The sappers immediately began work on a bridge, a major task which was to be repeatedly delayed, however, by the enemy's heavy and accurate shelling. (AEF/2 Cdn Inf Div/C/D, Docket I, Folio 4: Account by Brig Keefler.) Fus M.R. at the southern end groped their way across at 0500 hours, took the enemy by surprise, captured Hansweert and deployed on the west bank. (W.D., Fus M.R., 28 Oct 44.) Camerons of C. to the north met with more sinister fortune. An attempt to get over by the footbridge at Yerseke on 27 Oct was frustrated by fire from mortars and an 88 mm gun. An attack by night in assault boats crumpled under mortar and heavy machine-gun fire, all the boats but one being sunk. The failure of a third attempt on the following day and mounting casualties under furious enemy shelling brought orders from Brigade for the battalion to hold its positions and prevent the enemy from damaging the locks. (W.D., Camerons of C., 27, 28 Oct 44.) The work of 6 Cdn Inf Bde in preserving the locks both at the southern as well as the northern end of the canal was of the utmost consequence, for in Brig Keefler's appreciation.

If these locks had been blown the BEVELAND CANAL would have become tidal, and the whole of ZUID BEVELAND in the vicinity of KRUININGEN would have gone under water.

(AEF/2 Cdn Inf Div/C/D, Docket I, Folio 4: Account of Brig Keefler.)

OPERATIONS OF 52 (L.) DIV, 27-28 OCT 44

242. The operations of 52 (L.) Div during 27 Oct were carried on under some disabilities of weather. Although the bringing in of reinforcement and supply was at no stage suspended, fog during the night of 26/27 Oct reduced visibility to 50 yards and a number of craft lost their bearings and were unable to land. Recourse had to be made to the firing of tracer in short bursts to guide our people in. Heavy rain all day and continuing into the following night made the vehicle ramps practically impassable. Some 97 L.V.Ts. were withdrawn to take part in the assault on Walcheren. The tides made it impossible for more than one turner round being made each day.

(AEF/21 Army Gp/C/F, Docket III: Clearing of the Scheldt Estuary, pp 13-14; AEF/First Cdn Army/C/H, Docket V, October 1944, L.O.'s Report 271130A.) It was thought improbable, therefore, that 157 Inf Bde would be ready for action before 1400 hours on 28 Oct. (AEF/First Cdn Army/C/H, Docket V, October 1944, L.O.'s Report 271800A). The G.O.C. therefore directed 156 Inf Bde to make every attempt to enlarge the bridgehead north-westwards in order to give 157 Inf Bde more room on the right to strike to the north and north-east. In these circumstances 156 Inf Bde did its best to push on towards the line between Molenburg and Ellewoutsdijk. But with the enemy dug into the dykes and well prepared to defend himself with automatic weapons and largely immune from our artillery fire, progress was slow, and it was not until late on the night of 28/29 Oct that both Ellewoutsdijk and Molenburg were wholly in our

hands. (Ibid, 281130; AEF/21 Army Gp/C/F, Docket III: Clearing of the Scheldt Estuary.)

243. As there had been further delay in getting additional troops across the water, it appeared that 157 Inf Bde would not now be concentrated before noon on 29 Oct. As 2 Cdn Inf Div was now over the canal and had been given the task of linking up with the Lowlanders by directing its advance on 's Gravenpolder, Maj-Gen Hakewell Smith gave orders that while 156 Inf Bde held the bridgehead, the commander of 157 Inf Bde would advance westwards and north-westwards as soon as he was satisfied that he had sufficient troops at his disposal and without waiting for the concentration of the whole brigade. The G.O.C. thus stressed the urgency of speed upon his brigadiers:

It is of paramount importance that the enemy should be given no opportunity to form a hard core of resistance in the SW corner of BEVELAND island. Your adv WEST and NW will consequently be pressed with the greatest possible vigour and will commence at the earliest moment possible tomorrow, 29 Oct.

(AEF/52 (L.) Div/C/I, Docket III(d), Op Instr No. 1.)

244. Brigadier Keefler was equally concerned to preserve the momentum of the Canadian advance beyond the canal and to make the juncture with 52 (L.) Div without loss of time. He decided therefore to bring in 4 Cdn Inf Bde to expand the bridgehead, with 5 Cdn Inf Bde in close attendance on the northern sector directed on the causeway to Walcheren by way of Goes. (W.D., of Brigades, 28 Oct 44.) Accordingly, on 28 Oct R.H.L.I. passed through S. Sask R. and beat up against only moderate opposition to reach Biezelinge and Eversdijk. (W.D., R.H.L.I., 28 Oct 44.) That night the two remaining battalions followed across the canal, R. Regt C. to link up with 156 Inf Bde in the neighbourhood of 's Gravenpolder and Essex Scot given the objective

Kapelle. (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 28 Oct 44, Serial 20; W.D., R. Regt C., 28, 29 Oct 44; W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde, 28 Oct 44.) By first light on 29 Oct both these tasks were completed, and an outflanking movement on Wemeldinge by Essex Scot enabled Camerons of C. to make their deferred crossings at the northern end of the canal. (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 28 Oct 44, Serials 5, 7, 9, 10, 13; W.D., H.Q. 6 Cdn Inf Bde, 29 Oct 44.)

SOUTH BEVELAND CLEARED, 29-31 OCT 44

245. The day's progress on 29 Oct all along the front of 2 Cdn Inf Div was most encouraging. Having made the crossing without mishap, 5 Cdn Inf Bde took Loetinge with R. de Mais, Goes, the capital, (to the great enthusiasm of the citizens) with R.H.C., and Heer Hendrikskinderen and Heer Arendskerke with Calg Highrs. (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 29 Oct 44.) While 156 Inf Bde held the bridgehead and reached out to link up with the Canadians the battalions of 157 Inf Bde engrossed the country between Oudelande, Driewgen and 's Heerenboek. By noon the Lowland Division had taken over 600 prisoners since making the landing. Prospects were further improved by the arrival of two of the divisional field regiments, which were able to drive in by road from Antwerp. A third was on its way. (AEF/21 Army Gp/C/F, Docket III: Clearing of the Scheldt.) As our Intelligence reported during the evening:

On SOUTH BEVELAND, the two forces have linked up and advancing WEST beyond GOES, have had even less opposition than might have been expected from the old men and sickly youngsters of 70 Div and 89 Festungs Stamm. Anti-tank guns put up a bit of a show at GOES and there was some artillery fire, but for the rest it seems to be a scramble for the by now congested NORTH WEST corner of the island. From here they can go either back over the causeway to the watering places at WALCHEREN, or to NORD BEVELAND by ferry with the hope of island hopping to SCHOUWEN and

beyond. They could, of course, make a stand in the manner of 64 Div, but on present form this is unlikely.

(AEF/First Cdn Army/L/F, Docket I, Vol II, October 1944, 15-31 Oct, Int Summary No. 121, 29 Oct 44.)

The dyspeptics had no such intention: their sole aim was to leave Beveland by causeway or by boat.

246. Taking advantage of such dissolution, Brigadier Keefler drove his brigades forward towards Walcheren, 4 Cdn Inf Bde to get on through Heinkenszand to the channel at Niewdorp, 5 Cdn Inf Bde along the main axis of road and rail to the causeway. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, October 1944: Appx 115, Main Ops Log, Serial 15.) Movement was kept up during the night and

By the morning of 30 Oct, 5 Cdn Inf Bde had pushed forward and had one battalion within 3000 yards of the causeway leading to WALCHEREN ISLAND. As yet, however, this formation had not yet opened up a clear route along the main highway west of GOES due to extensive minefields, which had caused some casualties during the previous night.

(AEF/2 Cdn Inf Div/C/D, Docket I, Folio 4: Account by Brig Keefler.)

247. Mines hindered both brigades.

Mines were found in "verges", mostly tellers with a scattering of AP shut mines. Some French type "Loaf" mines were also encountered laid in the pavements. One of the units reported mines laid under the cobble

stones, the stones taken out being replaced and making the mines very difficult to spot.

(W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Inf Bde, 30 Oct 44.)

Yet

4 Cdn Inf Bde had made excellent progress and had one battalion on the WEST shore of ZUID BEVELAND about 2,000 yards SOUTH of the causeway. It was decided to have 4 Cdn Inf Bde clear the eastern end of the causeway, as by this time (30 Oct), 2 Cdn Inf Div had been directed to secure the crossing of the causeway itself. Previously, the divisional objective had been merely to clear the peninsula.

(AEF/2 Cdn Inf Div/C/D, Folio 4: Account by Brig Keebler.)

248. The Division, therefore continued to close in on the causeway until held up at the eastern end by the more determined opposition which now began to reinforce the ubiquitous mines. On the left with 157 Inf Bde taking the lead, also directed on the causeway, 51(L.) Div expanded to the north-west and held the area south of a general line between Hoedekenskerke and 's Heerenhoek.

(AEF/21 Army Gp/C/F, Docket III: Clearing of the Scheldt, p. 13.)

249. It was at this stage that Brigadier Keebler decided that 4 Cdn Inf Bde would take out the enemy still defending the approaches to the causeway and that 5 Cdn Inf Bde could then be brought in to tackle the road itself and force an entry into Walcheren. He recognized that the initial position was more likely to be carried without undue loss if Brigadier Cabeldu were to make his assault under cover of darkness, since the enemy here were fairly strong in dug-out and dyke and unlikely to evacuate without a struggle. (AEF/4 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, Docket I, Folio I: Account by Brig Cabeldu; AEF/2 Cdn Inf

Div/C/D, Folio 4: Account by Brig Keefler.) The assault, carried out during the early hours of 31 Oct, was successful. In the words of Brigadier Cabeldu:

In a "well organized operation", which commenced at 0200 hours 31 Oct, R. Regt C. cleared the eastern end of the causeway, taking 200 P.W. and their guns. The enemy position had been rendered untenable by a skilful infiltration movement from the SOUTH, that took the enemy in the rear at the same time that a frontal attack was made from the south-east. By 0700 hrs, 31 Oct, the last German was out of ZUID BEVELAND.

(AEF/4 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, Docket I, Folio 1: Account by Brig Cabeldu.)

It may be added that:

In Brigadierc Cabeldu's opinion the high-light of all operations by 4 Cdn Inf Bde on ZUID BEVELAND was the movement of Essex Scot from KAPELLE, by way of NISSE, to NIEUWDORP, on the WEST coast of the peninsula. This route covered approximately 12 miles and was done entirely on foot. Throughout the operations on the peninsula the rapidity of the advance seemed to leave the enemy stupefied.

(Ibid.)

250. The enemy's discomfiture was now complete. To cite our Intelligence:

Information is to hand that these troops, who put up the minimum resistance in SOUTH BEVELAND, retired to the island disorganized, depressed and worn out, to concentrate in a general area of ARNEMUIDEN 1830 - NIEUWLAND 1628 - KLEVERSKERKE 1732 with the intention of making a getaway by sea from VEERE 1835 and VROUWENSPOLDER 1438...

(AEF/First Cdn Army/L/F, Docket I, Vol II, October 1944,
15-31 Oct, Int Summary No. 122, 30 Oct 44.)

251. On the afternoon of 31 Oct 5 Cdn Inf Bde took over the end of the causeway with R.H.C., which essayed the passage towards the enemy 1100 yards across it on the island with one company (2 Cdn Corps Ops Log, 31 Oct 44, Serials 23, 25). Their reception was heated in the extreme. They were met with mortars, cross-fire from machine-guns, and shelling, and suffered heavy casualties. The causeway itself was badly cratered and impassable to vehicles. A plan to get amphibians across the channel to the north and south had to be abandoned because there was not a sufficient depth of water for them to swim all the way to the far bank and too great a depth of mud for wheels and tracks. (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 31 Oct 44.)

252. R.H.C. were partially withdrawn that evening to enable an attempt at the causeway to be made by Calg Highrs. One company of the newcomers tried to get along that heavily registered avenue during the night, only to go to ground under another hail of fire. A second company was committed at 0600 hours on 1 Nov and did succeed in getting to the enemy's end. Here obstacles across the road and more intensive fire held our troops again. During the morning, however, Calg Highrs, aided by Spitfires and Typhoons, managed to get a shallow foothold on the island and began to pass their remaining companies over to consolidate their gains. From this lodgement R. de Mais were to pass through to exploit. But at about 1730 hours the enemy put in a determined counter-attack and forced Calg Highrs to withdraw all but a small force back into Beveland. Those left behind had orders to hold their ground until R. de Mais could reinforce the situation on the far side. But only an hour had elapsed after R. de Mais had passed over at 0400 hours, when, in accordance with the decision that the G.O.C. 52 (L.) Div should command the actual operations to capture Walcheren, the order came through for 5 Cdn Inf Bde to give place to 157 Inf Bde. But the situation both on and over the

causeway continued to be so oppressive that Brigadier Megill had to pull the bulk of R. de Mais back to our side, leaving only one depleted company at the western end. The process of relieving that remnant by 1 Glass H. was not an easy one and could not be completed until mid-after-noon on 2 Nov. Even then R. de Mais did not leave the vicinity at once but remained there until late the following morning, in order to gather up its wounded who lay strewn along the causeway, still under fire. (W.D., H.Q. 5 Cdn Inf Bde, 1-3 Nov 44; W.D., G.S. Ops H.Q. First Cdn Army, November 1944: Appx 4, 1 Nov 44, Serials 54, 55, 70, 75, 80, 83, 2 Nov 44; Serials 15, 18; AEF/5 Cdn Inf Bde/C/D, Docket III, Account by Capt J.L. Field.)

THE CAPTURE OF NORTH BEVELAND, 31 OCT - 2 NOV 44

253. By an outstanding example of local initiative North Beveland had also fallen into our hands, although the island was not included in the original objectives of 2 Cdn Inf Div. One of the squadrons of 8 Cdn Recce Regt, motoring along the north shore of the peninsula on 31 Oct, discovered some barges intact opposite Kortgene and requested permission from the Commander of 5 Cdn Inf Bde to investigate the island. A patrol reported that enemy from Veere in Walcheren were getting out in fairly large numbers across North Beveland through Kamperland, Wissekerke and Colijnsplaat to Rotterdam. On the following day a further reconnaissance proved that such movements were taking place and netted over 30 prisoners, a small German hospital ship also falling into our hands. On 2 Nov, with the ready co-operation of the Dutch Resistance, the whole island was overrun, the way of escape closed and the total of prisoners raised to over 450, without loss to ourselves. (AEF/8 Cdn Recce Regt/C/D, Docket I: Account by Maj C.R.H. Porteous.)

WITHDRAWAL OF 2 CDN INF DIV, 2 NOV 44

254. The task completed, 2 Cdn Inf Div, after being continuously engaged since leaving Dieppe on 6 Sep, was withdrawn to rest and reinforcement into the quieter neighbourhood of Antwerp, Malines and Brussels, where it was to remain until 7 Nov. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Inf Div, 2-7 Nov 44.)

The whole operation on the ZUID BEVELAND peninsula was carried out in the face of very difficult road communications. Extremely heavy defensive obstacles, including felled trees, mines, and craters, had been encountered along the route. In Brigadier Keebler's opinion, the undoubted success of the advance made by 2 Cdn Inf Div could be attributed entirely to the enthusiastic effort on the part of the troops, who seemed to be aware of the urgency of the task, and who appreciated that the enemy had been confused. There was never any hesitation to take bold risks in striking deeply into the enemy positions.

In the period from 23 Oct to 3 Nov, covering the capture of ZUID BEVELAND peninsula and the initial attack along the causeway to WALCHEREN ISLAND, 2 Cdn Inf Div captured a total of 14 officers and 2467 O.Rs. During the same period, the casualties of the Division were 64 officers and 932 O.R.s. The preliminary operations, leading up to the advance along the peninsula, had actually commenced on 29 Sep, when 2 Cdn Inf Div crossed the ANTWERP-TURNHOUT CANAL. During the whole period, from that date to 3 Nov, 2 Cdn Inf Div captured more than 5,200 P.W. The divisional casualties during this same period were 207 officers and 3443 O.R.s. These figures gave a clear indication of the severe fighting which the division had encountered.

(AEF/2 Cdn Inf Div/C/D, Docket I, Folio 4: Account by
Brig Keebler.)

255. Our troops had been driven hard and were much in need of a respite, but their morale remained high: the realization that what they might do would have an important effect on the outcome of the war kept their spirits from flagging even under the strain of long periods without rest and some times without food, and through the soaked misery of October nights in the bleak flats of Beveland and Brabant. "Gosh", exclaimed one of them, "it seems a year since I had any sleep. It is about 48 days of action and no rest yet. But I guess we can take it when it means so much to get this thing settled". (Censorship Report - 21 Army Gp - Vol I (1944), 15-31 Oct 44.) Fatigue fell alike on all ranks, as an officer in the division could testify:

I sure am tired ... It is a very good, and quiet day, or night, if you are able to get 2 hours' sleep. In fact I have had only 3 hours' sleep, and 3 meals in the last 96 hours. It is not that we have no food, it is just that we are always running into something that makes it impossible to have a meal, or to take time off even to lie down to rest.

(Ibid.)

256. Emerging from such an ordeal, and elated by success, the individual felt great pride in his formation: he thought of himself as a member of a "wonderful fighting team", and when in rest many of the men intimated their keenness to return to action and "get the job over". Not that there could be any ignorance of what that would mean: the soldier's attitude was realistic enough, but also truculent and aggressive. "You never get hardened to this life," said one infantryman, "Don't let any one say the boys do, but all the same they will never take the worst of a fight if they have a weapon of any

kind in their hand." Confidence abounded. A soldier of the R. de Mais thus expressed it:

As usual the Canadian army had a hard and vital task - I have full confidence that it will go according to plan and there is no doubt that all of us will give it unlimited energy.

The C.-in-C.'s comment gives point to that of the French-Canadian private:

In four weeks' fighting, which was as fierce as any we had yet experienced in north-west Europe, First Canadian Army had taken 12,500 prisoners and accounted for many enemy dead and wounded.

(Normandy to the Baltic, p. 203.)

JOINT PLANNING FOR THE ASSAULT ON WALCHEREN

257. Now that the outworks of Fortress Walcheren had fallen after these slow, strenuous and exhausting weeks of fighting, First Cdn Army's operations to free the port of Antwerp drew towards the spectacular and gallant climax of the final assault. As the descent from the west and south was to be seaborne, it was necessary for a joint plan to be drawn up between the naval and military forces involved, and the military chain of command determined. The relevant decisions were made at a conference held on 7 Oct at Headquarters 4 Brit S.S. Bde and presided over by Maj-Gen Foulkes. The decisions are thus recorded:

The A/GOC in C recognises the need for the coordinated joint planning between the Naval and Military Force Comds. The A/GOC 2 Cdn Corps is the military authority designated to give approval to the joint plan and will info the A/GOC in C First Cdn Army to the degree and extent which

is normal in the conduct of military ops before the execution of this operation. The A/GOC in C is aware of the naval requirement for the submission by Comd Force T, of the joint plan made by the Naval and Military Force Comds, to ANCXF for the latter's approval prior to the execution of the operation.

2 Cdn Corps is responsible for coordinating the necessary arty sp and other relevant matters concerning the ground forces. HQ First Cdn Army/84 Gp RAF is responsible for coordinating the arrangements for air sp both prior to and during the assault. It is to be noted that G/C Clelland, RAF, now att to Force T/4 Brit SS Bde, is there in an advisory capacity only. the control of air effort during the operation will be by normal means.

To sum up the military chain of comd:

- (a) Military Force Comd will be Brig B.W. Leicester, Comd 4 Brit SS Bde.
- (b) 4 Brit SS Bde is under comd of 2 Cdn Corps, a fan within First Cdn Army.

(W.D., "G" Plans, H.Q. First Cdn Army, October 1944:
Appx 20, Folio 161, Op "INFATURATE", Minutes of Conference,
8 Oct 44; Cf Folio 165, Notes of Discussion, paras 6-9.)

258. It is an interesting commentary on the international composition of the Canadian Army that of the Commando Brigade, 41, 47 and 48 Commandos were Royal Marines, 4 Commando was half English, half French, and one troop of 10 Commando was Norwegian and the other Belgian. (Rapport sur L'Operation Amphibie de L'Ile de Walcheren: H.Q. First Cdn Army: Mission Francaise de

Liaison: a document in the custody of H.Q. Royal Marines, Admiralty, London.)
Appropriately enough, a section of Dutch troops was also included.
(AEF/21 Army Gp/C/F, Docket III: Clearing of the Scheldt, p. 18.)

WEATHER AND TIMING

259. Planning was complicated not only by the necessities of co-ordination between the land, sea and air forces to be committed, but by variables of weather and tide which admitted of only partial and tentative forecasting. The considerations governing the timing of the operation, apart from the completion of our efforts to finish off the Germans in the Breskens pocket and in Beveland, have been thus succinctly stated by those who had the best of reasons for appreciating them:

Weather played a dominant part in planning. Local opinion considered that in late autumn on only one day in three would a landing be possible on the most sheltered coast, the South-west. On the North-west coast, where the exists from the beaches were better, the swell to be too heavy for landing on five days out of six. Strong tides run round the Western tip of the island, while off-shore, sandbanks further complicate the approach. Calm days were likely to be overcast or foggy which would hamper the air support, while a wind sufficient to disperse the clouds usually raised an unpleasant sea.

In order to force the obstacles, it was necessary to land before the sea had risen to half tide; but the assault craft could not cross the sandbanks until one and a half hours after low water.

For a seaborne assault it was considered necessary to deploy the assaulting craft and supporting ships in day long and out of range of coastal defence guns.

At the time planning was taking place, the bulk of the naval forces were training in ENGLAND while the military forces were on the continent. Lack of port accommodation and extensive sea mining round the coast made it impossible to base and train the naval forces on the continent and made a rehearsal very difficult. A rehearsal was considered essential but to hold it would cut down the tonnage of ammunition and stores passing through OSTEND to a negligible amount while it was in progress. Such an interference would delay the build up of the great ammunition reserves required by the supporting artillery, which were being accumulated on the SOUTH bank of the SCHELDT.

These were the major considerations which led to the conclusions that 1st to 4th November and 14th to 17th November were the two earliest periods when the operating could be attempted. If the earlier period was adopted a rehearsal would not be possible.

(Operation "INFATUATE", 4 S.S. Brigade's Assault on Walcheren, 1 Nov 44, p. 3. A document in the custody of H.Q. Royal Marines, Admiralty, London.)

260. As the assault required the closest co-operation between the naval and military authorities, it was essential that their responsibilities be mutually understood and that the intentions of the Army Commander as to priorities and timings be known to Admiral Ramsay, the ten Naval Commander in Chief Expeditionary Force, to enable him to make his own plans and dispositions for the naval component.

Tentative plans already formulated gave the following order of priority:

- a. A direct advance from Breskens to Flushing to be made by one Command in L.C.As. followed by a reserve brigade.

b. The landing at Westkapelle as already planned.

It was intended that these two operations would be launched either concurrently or alternatively. In any event neither plan would be put into effect until, in the former case, the southern part of South Beveland had been secured, or, in the latter, only on confirmation by reconnaissance parties that 48 hours' all-out bombing had softened up the defences sufficiently. Now there only remained the question of timing the assaults, for which the requisite number of landing craft must be available as well as a sufficient supply of ammunition. There was the additional governing factor of suitability of tides. All this pointed towards a considerable delay in the opening of the Port of Antwerp, and Admiral Ramsay (who had been disturbed by a report that it might not be possible to deliver the Westkapelle assault before 14 Nov) expressed his concern in a message to the Acting Army Commander on 22 Oct. In it he stressed the fact that it was "absolutely vital" to open the Scheldt as soon as possible and requested confirmation of the earliest practicable date for the assault on Westkapelle, "which in my view may still be necessary despite the very encouraging reports of flooding recently". (G.O.C.-in-C. 1-0-7-7, Operation "INFATURATE", Folio 154.) General Simonds sent the following answer:

TO PSEC. your INFATUATE msg received 22 Oct. FIRST. tentative timings ops in SCHELDE estuary as follows. (A) 2 Cdn Inf Div start adv along BEVELAND isthmus 23 Oct. (B) 52 (L) Inf Div aslt SUID BEVELAND by earliest 25 Oct by latest 27 Oct. (C) softening air action against WALCHEREN 29, 30, 31 Oct. (D) 4 SS Bde aslt WALCHEREN 1 Nov. SECOND. amn and LVTs will NOT repeat NOT be limiting factors and though tidal conditions primarily naval responsibility to assess I understand substantially same on 1 Nov as on 14 Nov. THIRD. I have ordered 2 Cdn Corps to work to above timings and though you will appreciate weather

conditions may cause variations of two or three days in target dates I intend to take WALCHEREN and SUID BEVELAND by 1 Nov.

(Ibid, Folio 155).

In reply Admiral Ramsy sent the following personal message to General Simonds:

YOUR 221225 RED HOT, BEST OF LUCK

(Ibid, Folio 157.)

On this heartening earnest of help and good will the plans went forward.

OPERATION "INFATURATE", GENERAL PLAN OF ATTACK

261. As has been shown (paras 64-67 and 83-90 above), the plan for assault on Walcheren required that the island should be inundated by breaching the sea dyke and dunes in several places by bombing from the air. It may be added by way of recapitulation that:

The decision to flood the island was only taken after the most careful consideration of all possible alternatives. The advantages flooding would give the attackers were that:

- a. the island would be divided into three parts - the North-west strip of dunes and woods, the South-west strip of dunes, and the FLUSHING area which includes the higher land on the South-east of the island;
- b. movement of enemy reserves would be greatly hampered;

- c. many field batteries would be submerged; and
- d. the strong seaward defences on the dunes could be attacked by amphibians from the rear.

(Operation "INFATUATE", 4 S.S. Bde's Assault on Walcheren,
1 Nov 44, p. 4.)

262. But these effects would be crippling rather than decisive in view of the vulnerability of lightly armed forces committed to making a landing on a heavily defended coast. During the planning therefore,

It was emphasized ... that the softening of the defs by bombing and other forms of air attack forms a necessary prelude to this operation and that it is not intended to launch the seaborne part of the operation until it is estimated that the softening process has been accomplished to the pt where the task of the 4 Brit SS Bde can be undertaken with confidence having regard to the facts that:

- a. It will be able to work with inf weapons only.
- b. It will be supported by a very considerable weight of arty with FOOs accompanying the SS Bde.
- c. The full resources of the Tactical Air Force will be available.

(W.D., "G" Plans, H.Q. First Cdn Army, October 1944: Appx 20,
Folios 163, 164: Minutes of Conference, 8 Oct 44.)

These were most important conditions and provisions. Unfortunately, circumstances and necessities of war beyond the scope or control of the

planners, or of the Acting Army Commander, were not to allow them to be fulfilled to the extent which was then thought possible.⁹

263. That part of the plan covering the actual assault provided:

(iii) That there commandos, in amphibians, should assault through the gap at WESTKAPELLE, and one commando assault FLUSHING. One follow up Brigade from 52 (Lowland) Division was to land behind either the FLUSHING Commando, or the remainder of the force in WESTKAPELLE area.

The main factor governing the decision as to which alternative should be taken was that if the FLUSHING area was not found to be "soft" enough for an assault here to succeed, then the assault should not be continued and the follow up Brigade would then be switched to reinforce the Western landing.

(iv) The South-west coast to be cleared as the first consideration and after the link had been made with the FLUSHING assault force, then the North-west coast would be cleared.

(v) At the same time, the attack from SOUTH BEVELAND to continue and come in to WELCHEREN from the EAST thus cutting off any escape route the enemy might consider.

(Operation "INFATUATE", 4 S.S. Brigade's Assault on Walcheren, 1 Nov 44, pp 5, 6.)

⁹ Cf. Statement in Report by 4 S.S. Bde, p.4: "It was agreed that the operation should not take place until, in the opinion of the Army Commander, the desired degree of "softening-up" had been attained."

Of these operations the attack on Flushing was to be known as "INFATUATE I", that on Westkapelle as "INFATUATE II". The first would be mounted from the area of Breskens, the second from Ostend.

THE AIR ASSAULT OF WALCHEREN

264. As we have seen (para 67), the R.A.F. had already begun to attack the defences of the island during the last fortnight of September, although the first three attempts on the batteries guarding the approaches at Domburg had been frustrated by the weather, which throughout the whole period of operations at this late season of the year was to be a factor of the utmost concern and of the least certain predictability. A fourth attack on Domburg was actually carried out on 23 Sep, 49 of the 50 aircraft despatched by Bomber Command engaging targets with 174.4 tons of high explosive and 10.2 tons of incendiary bombs. (AEF/First Cdn Army/S/F, Folio 18: Bomber Command Attacks, September 1944.)

265. It is noteworthy, however, that these attacks on the gun emplacements on Walcheren

... were on a much lighter scale than was usually demanded for the preparation of military targets. Comparative targets were attacked by Bomber Command during September preparatory to the seizure of Le Havre. Between Sep 5th and Sep 11th 2508 aircraft dropped a total of 9614.8 tons of high explosive and 174.6 tons of incendiaries on objectives in this area. Of this weight 6929.8 tons of high explosive was directed specifically against "Coastal Batteries, Guns, Pill-boxes and Strong Points". The remainder was directed against "Troop Concentrations" (first attack) and "Defended Area" (Final attack). On September 17th, the same day that Bomber Command despatched 100 aircraft to attack three objectives on Walcheren Island, 762 aircraft were despatched to attack Boulogne in support of Army Operation WELLHIT, and

delivered 3347.2 tons of high explosive and 44.0 tons of incendiaries on that area.

(Ibid.)

266. It must be observed, however, that the allocation of forces and the weight of such attacks were matters beyond the competence of an Army Headquarters. There the prescription of targets and the indication of their tactical importance were worked out by the methods of discussion and request with the Air Staff officers of the associated Tactical Group, for reference to Headquarters 2 Tactical Air Force. Alternatively, requests from the Operations (Air) Staff at Army Headquarters were made direct to Headquarters 21 Army Group for joint consideration by representatives of the Group and the Tactical Air Force. Where the success of the operation depended to so large an extent on the reduction of the coastal defences from the air, the strongest case was naturally put forward by the staff at Headquarters First Cdn Army for the maximum destructive power to be brought to bear against the enemy's gun emplacements for the optimum period necessary to put them out of commission. The availability of aircraft, method of attack, and uncertainties of the weather were factors determined by other agencies, influenced as might be by petition or prayer, but otherwise omnipotent within their respective jurisdictions.

267. The Air Plan issued by Headquarters 84 Tactical Group on 27 Oct makes the Army's concern in the matter perfectly clear.

Assuming that flooding would be successful, the Army have listed the defences which would be unaffected by flooding and which would require to be put out of action to enable seaborne assaults to be likely to succeed. The light scale of equipment of the forces used and their vulnerability to shore defences coupled with the need to capture the

island quickly makes the thorough destruction of these defences a necessity.

(AEF/84 Group RAF/C/I, Operation "INFATUATE", Air Plan, reproduced as Appx "G" to the present Report.)

Again:

We have to rely therefore on air bombardment for the necessary destruction of the defences before D Day. Some of this bombardment is being undertaken by aircraft of 84 Group. Many of the defences , however, are concrete gun emplacements and heavy pillboxes which cannot be put out of action by the weight of attack this Group is able to deliver.

(Ibid.)

Further

It can hardly be expected that all the defences attacked by Bomber Command will be completely destroyed and some may be effective or be repaired after bombardment but before the Assaults. Some of these defences that have come to life again may vitally jeopardize the Assault, particularly the guns near FLUSHING and near WESTKAPELLE. Should this happen, it is most desirable that Bomber Command should be requested to attack these individual targets again when possible, up to the agreed times of last bombing for each Assault.

(Ibid.)

Even though the guns of 2 Cdn and 9 Brit Army Groups Royal Artillery might be concentrated behind Breskens, it was realized that only heavy and super heavy cannon could fire far enough across the estuary to bring the targets within range (Cf. para 65 above), while the effectiveness of the naval guns which were to support the landing at Westkapelle was also dependent on the weather. There can be no doubt that the necessity of overwhelming the German batteries sited on the dunes was fully appreciated from the military point of view, nor that such appreciation was passed on with appropriate recommendations and all due emphasis for the consideration and implementation of the R.A.F. higher command.

268. Further attacks were carried out on ten days during the month of October in accordance with the air plan and schedule of targets drawn up at Army Headquarters.¹⁰ (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, October 1944: Appendices "Y"- "Z", "AA"- "PP", Folio 99 et s eq, and Folio 120 et seq: Pre-Planned Air Targets, (Revised) 22 Oct 44, reproduced as Appx "K" to the present Report). The bombing of the dykes, so long debated and so tensely awaited by everyone concerned with the chances of those who were to face the risks of the assault, was a brilliant success, "an operation of truly magnificent accuracy", as Field Marshal Montgomery has described it. (Normally to the Baltic, p. 204.) The first raid was made on 3 Oct, the point chosen being a Westkapelle.

... The target was a small section of sea-wall approximately 330 ft x 200 ft in area. A total of 237 4,000 pound bombs and 1742 1,000 pound bombs were used in the attack, as well as a smaller number of

¹⁰ Between 11-31 Oct, Bomber Command flew 941 sorties, and dropped 4871 tons of bombs. This was in addition to the effort against the dykes. Between 2831 Oct, 654 Spitfire sorties and 150 Typhoon sorties were flown against pre-selected targets, gun positions, dual purpose A.A. guns and Radar sites (21 Army Gp Report, Clearing of the Scheldt Estuary, October - November 1944, p. 17 para 71).

500 pounders. The sea-wall was successfully breached, four gun emplacements were drowned, and seven other batteries were surrounded by flood waters as the sea spread inland during the next three or four days. The sea-wall was again successfully breached near Flushing on October 7th and again near Veere on October 11th. A final attack on the wall at Westkapelle on October 17th deepened the breach in that area and completed as far as possible the flooding of the island.

(AEF/First Cdn Army/S/F, Folio 19, Bomber Command Attacks.)

By the end of October the island "resembled a saucer filled with water".
(Normandy to the Baltic, p. 204.)

269. Subsequent investigation indicated that

Flooding had accounted for the following 4-gun batteries covering the WESTKAPELLE water area.

150 mm	(5.9 in)	W20
		W24
120 mm	(4.7 in)	W23
105 mm	(4.1 in)	W10
		W12
		W14
		W21
94 mm	(3.7 in)	W25
75 mm	(3 in)	W22

This left only W17, a 4-gun 220 mm (8.7 in) bty, W19, 1 4-gun 105 mm (4.1 in) bty on the northern tip of the island, and three batteries W11, W13, W15 all thought to be 150 mm (5.9 in).

(AEF/21 Army Gp/C/F, Docket III, Folio 3, p. 12: Report No. 299,
The Westkapelle Assault on Walcheren.)

A substantial reduction in the enemy's gun strength had thus been effected by the flooding, to say nothing of the attendant dislocation, alarm and despondency wrought among the wretched garrison, evidence of which soon became apparent when the Commandos got ashore (see para 305 below).

270. Attacks on the German positions were continued during the month of October by Bomber Command and were not confined to the estuary's northern shore, some useful assistance being given our troops in the fighting to clear the Breskens pocket.

Gun emplacements still above water at Flushing were heavily bombed on October 11th, but an attack on the batteries at Fort Frederick Hendrik on the left bank of the Scheldt near Breskens, scheduled for the same day, had to be abandoned because of unfavourable weather. The batteries at Breskens were successfully attacked on October 12th.

Between October 21st and October 30th some 4,000 tons of bombs were dropped by Bomber Command on the remaining centres of resistance on the islands, and in addition a considerable weight of explosive was delivered on these targets by the tactical air force.

(AEF/First Cdn Army/S/F, Folio 19, Bomber Command Attacks.)

271. The main effort actually took place on 28, 29 and 30 Oct. A subsequent survey, by No. 2 Operational Research Section, of the resulting damage produced the following comments:

There is nothing remarkable in the results. In view of the fact that the majority of the principal guns were in casemates, only direct hits or very near misses could have been expected to have any effect, and this provide to be the case... The density of craters around the targets are in accordance with the weight of attack. The total damage done to the principal defences was:

2 guns out of action out of a total of 26

1 casemate destroyed (but unfortunately empty)

1 command post destroyed

1 radio location set destroyed.

Within the limits of error occasioned by such a small sample, the rate of destruction accords well with what would be expected from the crater densities that were measured.

Photographic interpretation by A.P.I.S., 21 Army Group, of the damage was largely correct, but was optimistic as to the extent of probable damage by near misses. The interpretation left no ground for supporting that the principal defences were not substantially intact.

Damage to line communications was considerable, but in some cases there had been time to improvise new lines and there was evidence that advantage had been taken of the time.

Weather conditions did not permit any bombing on either 31 Oct or 1 Nov or more damage could have been inflicted. It is considered that only a very large effort (at least 1000 Heavy Bombers) as soon before H-hour as

possible could have produced a really substantial success. Such an effort could materially have increased the destruction of view of morale. The evidence of P.W. showed that they had been upset by the attacks that did take place, but had time to recover sufficiently to man their guns. It may well be impracticable with the methods available, to put on so great a weight in one attack on a precision target: the possibility of sending in successive smaller attacks is likely to depend on flak conditions.

(AEF/First Cdn Army/C/F, Docket III, Folio 1: No. 2 Op Res Sect, Report No. 25, Effect of Fire Support on Defences of Walcheren, 24 Dec 44.)

272. On the other hand, it has also been remarked that since in the bombing of the coastal batteries the density of craters at the target averaged 9 to 10 an acre for every 1000 bombs dropped:

The average density achieved in the WESTKAPELLE attacks was therefore twice what would be expected on experience up to that time and approaching the best any bomber force had achieved.

(AEF/21 Army Gp/C/F, Docket III, A.O.R.G. Report No. 299, p. 64.)

The same investigation confirmed, however, that:

In our case targets containing 26 guns in all were attacked with average loads of 390 bombs per target. We should therefore expect 2.17 guns to be hit. Two actually were hit. Thus the number destroyed is in accordance with what would be expected from the weights of attack.

(Ibid, p. 65.)

The conclusion had been put forward that as the bomb load averaged 13 bombs for each aircraft, to obtain one chance in two of destroying the six guns in a single casemated battery, about 720 aircraft would have had to attack, and probably about 790 despatched, for that one task alone.

... Such an effort on the remaining day before D-day was possible for Bomber Command had the weather been good, but was not in fact intended. It is also unlikely that the high density of craters obtained in the WALCHEREN attacks could have been sustained with such a large number of plans on one target. Any effort which could deal with other batteries as well, or could give an appreciably greater chance of destruction even of one battery was outside the power of Bomber Command to produce.

(Ibid, pp 65, 66.)

273. It would thus appear from the evidence of detailed, scientific scrutiny that the plan to reduce the enemy's coastal defences by bombing could not succeed because resources were not available to carry out a task requiring so large and sustained a commitment. That bad flying weather added a further restriction both on the day preceding the assault and on the actual day itself darkened the background of technical limitation and climatic hazard against which the amphibious operations were prepared during the month of October.

274. Events on a wider front, affecting both 21 and 12 Army Groups, placed further limitations on our capacity to deal with the German coastal defences as decisively as we had expected to be able to do. The following notes written by Brigadier Mann, Chief of Staff at Army Headquarters, are suggestive.

While we were busy clearing the Scheldt prior to assaulting Walcheren, Second British Army had to deal with a counter thrust in the Meuse

pocket to the west of Venlo. While this operation was done successfully, and did not unbalance us, it had the effect of diverting a proportion of our air effort and other resources. Farther to the South the thrust of the left wing of 12 US Army Group, directed on Cologne, was NOT being developed with the power which was desirable owing to the long front over which that Army Group now stretched, and due also to the fact that certain US formations had to be allotted temporarily to 21 Army Group.

The assault on Walcheren took place on 1 November as planned but for the reasons just mentioned, very much less preliminary bombing of the heavy batteries had actually been carried out than was intended, and although there was no question that it was essential to proceed with the operation, the result was that the Royal Navy's losses in landing craft, and their crews, largely Royal Marines, were very heavy indeed.

(AEF 45/First Cdn Army/C/F: The Campaign in N.W. Europe from 7/8 Aug to 31 Dec 44.)

AIR AND FIRE SUPPORT FOR D DAY

275. It cannot be supposed, however, that had an air attack prior to D Day been possible on the scale and intensity which General Simonds had originally intended, the prospects would not have been materially improved; nor did the air and fire support planned for D Day look anything but adequate, given fair weather. It was to begin with

... a pre H-hour programme on the WESTKAPELLE area, including W15 and the Radar station W154, intended for "destruction of morale", together with an H-hour bombing of W11, W13, W17, the bombing of W17 to include the neighbouring AA Bty W5.

At H-70 mins the time programme of 9 AGRA and 2 Cdn AGRA from the BRESKENS area started. W11 was to receive the attention of 32 guns of 7.2-in calibre and 32 of 5.5-in calibre, W13 was the target for 4 super heavy guns of 240 mm calibre and 2 of 8-in calibre, and W15 was to be engaged by 8 155 mm guns. Twelve other 155 mm guns were to engage either W17 or the strong points W282, W283 nearby. Strongpoints W283, W284, W285, W286 were also included in the artillery programme, and also the mortars and MGs at W265, and the gun positions W266, W267 on the SOUTH and NORTH shoulders of the gap respectively.

At H-50 mins Typhoon fighter bombers of 84 Group RAF were to attack for "blast effect" the gun positions W266, W267 on the shoulders of the gap, the dyke north of the gap, WESTKAPELLE village, WESTKAPELLE bty W15, the Radar station W154, and the Strongpoint W285.

The landing beach was to be concealed from the OPs of W5, W17 and W19 by smoke laid from H-15 to H-30 by Bostons and from H-30 to Hp-80 by LCT(R).¹¹

(AEF/21 Army Gp/C/F, Docket III, A.O.R.G. Report No. 299, p. 12.)

276. The gun and rocket support afloat as provided by the Royal Navy was similarly impressive, as the following summary indicates:

The Naval bombarding force consisted of the battleship WARSPITE and the monitors EREBUS and ROBERTS. Cruisers and destroyers were not employed. WARSPITE was to engage W5, W17 and W19, EREBUS was to engage W15 up to H-10 minutes and W11 subsequently, while ROBERTS was to engage W154 and W285 until H-10 minutes and W13 subsequently.

¹¹ See Appx "J".

(Ibid, p. 12.)

The naval support squadron consisted of 6 LCG(L), 6 LCF, 5 LCT(R), 6 LCS(L) and 2 LCG(N), and was divided into a Northern and a Southern Group, the odd (LCT(R) going with the northern group its fire to be directed on to the village of WESTKAPELLE. The remaining rocket fire was to be divided on to positions on the dunes and dyke from the gap to as far NORTH as W15 and as far SOUTH as strongpoint W288. One LCG(M) was to beach at H-5 minutes opposite the pillbox at the NORTH edge of the gap and the other at H hour opposite the pillbox on the SOUTH edge. After these pillboxes were silenced, adjacent pillboxes along the coast were to be engaged. While engaging the initial pillboxes, each LCG(M), was to be covered from those adjacent by the fire of a LCS(L), and they in turn were to be covered by a LCF and a LCG(L). The fire of all the other support craft was to be directed into the same areas as that covered by the rockets, starting at H-30 minutes with fire from LCG(L).

The HQ ship was the frigate HMS KINGSMILL and there were 3 LCH for D/SOAG and commanders of the groups of the support squadron. There were also 12 LCP(L) for smoke-laying to be on call after H hour, and 4 MLs as navigation leaders.

(Ibid, pp 12, 13; a glossary of abbreviations is attached as Appx "K" to the present Report.)

277. In addition it was announced at a conference called by General Simonds at his Headquarters on 26 Oct that pre-arranged heavy bombing would be carried out by Bomber Command on Flushing town to destroy defences, disrupt communications, and demoralize the enemy. The last bomb was to fall not later than 0530 hours on D Day, although the task was acceptable earlier if weather necessitated. Bomber Command would also advise five hours in advance if the

weather were favourable or not. General Simonds stated, however, that even if conditions made it necessary to call off the air support, the operation would in any case go forward. (W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, October 1944: Appces "Y"- "Z", "AA"- "PP", folio 14: Minutes of Conference, para 10.) On the same occasion the support to be provided on D Day by 84 Group was thus defined:

- (i) H-minus 40 to minus 20. Fighter/bombing with instantaneous-fused 500 lb and 250 lb bombs on enemy defences between targets W 15 and W 154. Object, to kill personnel and keep down the heads of those that remain alive.
- (ii) H minus 5 to H plus 10. "Cab rank" of four squadrons of RP Typhoons on call for Fighter Direction Ship for attack on preselected beach defences after LCT(R) rockets have been fired and before assaulting troops get ashore.
- (iii) H plus 10 onwards. Continuous flightier cab rank on patrol. At first these aircraft will attack any guns seen by pilots to be firing or any enemy seen by pilots. When ASSU tentacle opens up on shore and is in touch with FCP, the cab rank can be directed on to targets by FCP control.
- (iv) From first light onwards. Remainder of 84 Group fighter and fighter/bomber aircraft NOT engaged on other First Canadian Army fronts to be available for cover or support as required.

(Ibid, para 5.)

FINAL ARRANGEMENTS, INTENTIONS AND TASKS

278. Reviewing the final arrangements for the assault at this conference, General Simonds contrasted various aspects of the situation as it now stood with the much less eligible circumstances which had shown themselves originally. The garrison, he reminded his hearers, had then consisted of about 10,000 troops of 70 Inf Div. The question of flooding was doubtful. Now the picture was entirely different. The garrison had been depleted. The breaching of the dykes hampered its mobility. Air action had reduced the number of the batteries. The assaults on the island would therefore be made under much more favourable conditions than had at first been anticipated. But the weather remained a vital factor affecting the programme of bombing for both the preparatory treatment and for D Day. The preliminary onslaught was required over the shortest period and as late as possible. It was up to the R.A.F., said General Simonds, to decide when to begin the programme in order to ensure its completion. It might also be necessary because of the weather, he added, to engage certain of the targets for D Day beforehand. In case air support were to be impossible, an alternative plan to launch the operation under artillery support alone would be used. (Ibid, paras 1,7, 11.)

279. On the question of mounting the operation - a particularly ticklish one in view of the uncertainties of getting the desired support from the air - and because of the vagaries of wind and sea, the Acting Army Commander gave the ruling thus records in the minutes of the conference:

- a. 'INFATUTE I' will be mounted 1 Nov weather permitting, regardless of availability of air sp on D Day and regardless of whether 'INFATURATE II' is postponed.
- b. 'INFATUATE II' will also be mounted 1 Nov weather permitting, regardless of whether air support is available on D Day.

- c. He will decide later, on the latest available intelligence information, whether the operation will be mounted as planned in the event that it is impossible to complete the pre D Day bombing programme.

(Ibid, para 3.)

280. The crucial issue of confirmation or postponement received further definition in point of authority, time and form on 30 Oct. It was then laid down that for the assault on Flushing, the decision would be made jointly by the Acting Army Commander and the Commander of Force "T" as early as the available facts and forecasts warranted. For the assault at Westkapelle, General Simonds would decide jointly with the Allied Naval Commander in Chief Expeditionary Force and on the advice also of the Air Officer Commanding 84 Group R.A.F., whether the troops would embark or postpone embarkation for 24 hours, this decision to be communicated by noon on 31 Oct. Confirmation or postponement of sailing again would be determined by both the Acting G.O.C.-in-C. and A.N.C.X.F. together, who would let their decision be known by 2200 hours on the date of embarkation. (W.D., "G" Plans, H.Q. First Cdn Army, October 1944: Appx 21, Folios 148-153, Operation Instruction No. 41, 30 Oct, and Schedule at Appx "A"; Cf Folio 154, Memorandum, 31 Oct 44.)

281. On 31 Oct Admiral Ramsay and General Foulkes, as the Acting Corps Commander, met General Simonds at the Combined Headquarters at Bruges, where the decision was taken that 4 S.S. Bde should embark and sail if the weather, though it was then overcast, did not further deteriorate. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, 31 Oct 44). On the same afternoon a further meeting took place on board H.M.S. "Kingsmill", the Headquarters ship for the expedition against Westkapelle, then lying ready at Ostend. There General Simonds and Admiral Ramsay empowered the naval and military force commanders up to the point of release to postpone the assault and return to port if in their

opinion on all available information (with particular reference to the probabilities of air support, air smoke and spotting aircraft for the bombardment ships) at the time of taking such decision the assault was unlikely to succeed. This direction extending the powers of the force commanders to postpone the assault was re-affirmed jointly by General Simonds and Admiral Ramsay over the telephone that evening at 2115 hours, at which time they agreed that the force should be ordered to sail. (W.D., "G" Plans, H.Q. First Cdn Army, October 1944: Appx 21, Folio 154: Memorandum, 31 Oct 44.) On the following morning it was apparent that in all probability the weather would be unfavourable for air operations. The Chief of Staff at Army Headquarters therefore sent the following message at 0600 hours to the Chief of Staff at Headquarters 2 Cdn Corps for transmission to Admiral Ramsay:

Extremely unlikely any air sp air spotting or air smoke possible owing to airfield conditions and forecast.

(W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, October 1944: Appx 4, Ops Log, 1 Nov 44, Serial 10.)

Despite this most discouraging intelligence which seemed likely to deny the troops and the ships any further assistance in dealing with the enemy's guns from the air, and also to deprive the naval gunners of any aerial observation and report of their shooting, thus partially blinding their efforts against the shore batteries, the expedition set sail, and according to the discretion delegated to Captain Pugsley and Brigadier Leicester, was ordered to approach the shore of Walcheren and carry out the assault. History must record this decision as one of the most gallant of the war.

282. Our specific intentions as expressed in the final operation order issued from Brigadier Leicester's Headquarters were that 4 S.S. Bde Gp would assault the island of Walcheren with the object of clearing.

- a. the dune area from incl WESTKAPELLE to VLISSINGEN¹² and destroying the btys contained therein; and
- b. the dune area from incl WESTKAPELLE to BREEZLAND 1340 and destroying all btys in this area.

NOTE: Sub para a. above is the primary task. The second task is subordinate to the first task. It will NOT be carried out until the first object is attained.

(Operation "INFATUATE": 4 S.S. Brigade's Assault on Walcheren: Appx "C", 0.0. No. 6, 24 Oct 44.)

283. The attack at Westkapelle was to begin with the seizure of the shoulders of the gap in the dyke by parties of 41 and 48 Cdo which would be ready to provide the necessary cover to enable the assaulting troops to pass through in their amphibians. Then 48 Cdo would get a footing to the south of the gap, destroy battery W13, sited at the road junction some 2000 yards north-west of Zoutelande, clear the village and, if possible, exploit. North of the gap 41 Cdo would capture Westkapelle, and then strike inland to silence the enemy's guns W14 and W22 in their positions along the abandoned railway to Poppekerke. Thereafter 41 Cdo was to be withdrawn into reserve preparatory to attacking the heavy battery W17, emplaced just west of Domburg. While this was being done, 10 (IA) Cdo would protect the Brigade's left flank. Beyond Zoutelande 47 Cdo, striking south-east over the dunes, would knock out the positions at W11, sited along the road some 800 yards west of Westhoek, and also, if necessary, deal with the battery at Werendijke. Mechanical equipment

¹² Flushing.

consisting of flails, bulldozers and A.Vs.R.E. was to be supplied by four assault teams of 30 Armd Bde of 79 Armd Div. (Ibid.)¹³

284. The initial assault on Flushing was to be carried out by 4 Cdo with the object of seizing a bridgehead to allow 155 Bde of 52 (L.) Div to pass through, then to clear the town. The second phase provided for another waterborne descent by 4 Cdo to the north of the sector at Westkapelle, where it would pass through 47 Cdo and destroy the guns W10 and W4, sited on the south-west of Westhoek. (Ibid.) The troops were to be carried across from Breskens to Flushing in 40 L.C.A., 20 each for 4 Cdo and 4 K.O.S.B. who were to follow in; and there were also available 20 L.Vs.T. and 26 weasels (M-29C). The timings were:

- | | | |
|----|--|---------------|
| a. | Bombing of FLUSHING to case | 0530 hrs |
| b. | Artillery barrage on FLUSHING water-front | 0530-0540 hrs |
| c. | TARERUSH and one LCA 4 Commando, land on
UNCLE (main beach) | 0545 hrs |
| d. | 5 LCAs, 4 Commando land | 0550-0555 hrs |
| e. | 4 Commando landing completed | 0635 hrs |
| f. | 4 KOSB landing completed | 0725 hrs |
| g. | Platoon 241 Field Company RE and two
bulldozers land | 0755 hrs |

¹³ See Appces "B", "C", "D", "E".

h. Platoon 'A' Company 7 MANCH land 0800 hrs

j. 452 Mountain Battery RA land 0805 hrs

(AEF/21 Army Gp/C/F, Docket III: Clearing of the Scheldt,
p. 18.)

THE ASSAULT ON FLUSHING, 1 NOV 44

285. The strength of Flushing as a fortified port had at first seemed to preclude the possibility of a head-on assault from the sea without the virtual razing of the defences by air and artillery bombardment beforehand. As the expected weight of attack from the air proved to be impossible, the success of the amphibious operation is the more remarkable, and can only be assessed as one of the most brilliant and fortunate of the war. As 4 Cdo was afterwards to report:

... Conditions were imposed upon the operation, which, if they had been observed, would have prevented its performance. It was first laid down that FLUSHING must have had at least one very heavy attack from the full might of Bomber Command before an assault could be contemplated. Next, it was stipulated that the assaulting Commando be preceded by a small recce party from the Special Boat Section and that this party should be responsible for getting ashore and calling in the Commando if there was no opposition. As at first envisaged, therefore, the landing at FLUSHING was to be carried out only after the heaviest bombardment had reduced the garrison to the point of surrender, and, if it was found that the garrison, in spite of the bombing was still capable of resistance, it was proposed to call the landing off rather than risk the annihilation of the assault force. Finally, it was decided that the landing should definitely take the form of an assault, and that the

rece party should be retained to assist in the resolution of some of the difficulties in finding a landing point. Heavy aerial bombardment was promised, certainly once prior to D Day, and also immediately prior to H Hour if weather conditions permitted. Artillery support from the mainland was on a vast scale, and consisted of a Basic Fire Plan supplied by five field Regiments and three Medium Regiments - of which one was on call to No. 4 Commando through an F.O.O. - with increments from Heavy and Super Heavy Regiments. All targets along the waterfront were to be subject to bombardment and four additional Medium Regiments were to be held available for counter-battery work. Every known or potential target area was carefully registered and allotted code numbers, and it proved that the Artillery Fire Plan was equal to every situation that arose throughout the battle for FLUSHING.

(AEF/4 CDO/C/D, Docket II: Attack on Flushing by 4 Cdo, 1 Nov 44, p. 8.)

To this testimony may be added that of Lt-Gen Daser, the German commander, who claimed that all the coastal artillery guns on the south shore were destroyed either by flooding or bombing or counter-battery fire, and that there were only machine guns and a few of his Czech land defence guns available to deal with the landing force. (AEF: 45/First Cdn Army/L/F, Docket III, Special Interrogation Report, Lt-Gen Wilhelm Daser.)

286. Canadian experience in the combined operation at Dieppe, another fortified port, had sufficiently indicated the necessity of preparing the way for the assaulting troops by heavy bombardment, and as has been seen, everything possible had been done in this case to ensure that those committed to the hazards of such a landing would receive all possible support. But 24 hours before the operation was due to begin, political considerations were added to the many other complications in the matter, and General Simonds was

informed that the carpet bombing required as a matter of military necessity could not be carried out. With his forces concentrated and everything ready, General Simonds had been faced with a serious situation. He decided, however, that the operation could not be called off, and although the German positions were attacked from the air, they were more leniently treated than he had intended them to be. (Personal Diary, Major W.E.C. Harrison, 1 Nov 44.) During the night of 31 Oct/1 Nov, as 2 Tactical Air Force reported;

35 out of 37 Mosquitoes attacked defensive posns on WALCHEREN throughout the night. Poor visibility prevented observation of results but 1 gun posn was silenced and a large explosion seen in the FLUSHING area.

(W.D., "G" Air Branch, H.Q. First Cdn Army, 1 Nov 44.)

287. To the Commandos, who from their concentration area in Breskens could see Flushing and its forest of cranes clearly visible across the water, there seemed very little hope that the one element on which they must now rely, that of achieving surprise, could be realized. Their report affords an impression of their own somewhat dismal assessment of their chances.

There seemed very little hope of obtaining surprise in this operation anyway. The strategic situation made it plainer than a pikestaff that the freeing of the great port of ANTWERP must be the dominant consideration for the Allied Supreme Command at this time, and it was clear that an assault on WALCHEREN was an essential prerequisite to the use of the SCHELDT.

The clearing of the BRESKENS area must have suggested the direction of the coming attack to the Germans on the island, and it seemed impossible that the concentration of artillery and, latterly, of L.C.A., in and around this little town should have passed altogether unobserved. The

main hopes of achieving a modicum of surprise lay in the chance that the enemy might appreciate that our attack on WALCEREREN was coming only from across the SOUTH BEVELAND CAUSEWAY. In any event, it was anticipated that the opening of a sudden artillery barrage on FLUSHING, more violent and concentrated by far than anything hitherto experienced in this town, would show the enemy pretty clearly what was to be expected. This danger was provided for in the planning by asking for the heavy bombers to continue to make dummy runs over FLUSHING after the actual bombing was over and while the artillery barrage was opening up. It was calculated that to a man cowering in a deep shelter and already much shaken by the bombing attack, all explosions would sound very much alike, particularly if aircraft were still overhead. By the time the Germans had realised that they were under shell fire only, and had drawn the logical conclusions from this, we hoped to be well ashore.

As it turned out, the heavy bombers were unable to come over at all and consequently an increased artillery barrage was put down on FLUSHING, and was opened at H - 60 instead of at H - 15. So far from forfeiting surprise this concentration gained almost complete surprise for us. The whole affair was an excellent example of how very different the enemy's appreciation of a situation is from what we think it must be. To anybody on the British side it seemed that the enemy must have been expecting an attack at the time and place we had chosen, but the FLUSHING garrison Commander was later to confess that the preparatory artillery bombardment was the first real indication he had that the town was about to be assaulted, and that by then it was too late to take any special measures.

(AEF/4 CDO/C/D, Docket II: Attack on Flushing by 4 Cdo, 1 Nov 44, pp 11, 12.)

288. The full strength of the Commando Group committed to this daring and apparently suicidal attack amounted to only 550 all ranks, among whose complement of attached troops and units was a light section of 6 Cdn F.D.S. (List of attachments appears as Appx "C" to the present Report.) These were embarked at Breskens on 20 L.C.A. in the early hours of 1 Nov. The dreary circumstances of their setting out and the more hopeful opening of the assault are thus described by their Intelligence Officer:

... It was cold, and very wet, with a steady drizzle which limited visibility very considerably, and heavy low cloud. We knew by now that the bombing programme had to be called off and that the increased artillery fire plan was to take its place. As we filed down to the harbour a Mosquito was circling overhead, and swooping over FLUSHING to strafe at regular intervals.

Loading was completed by 0415 hrs, and at about 0440 hrs the landing craft slipped and passed the harbour mouth. At almost the same moment the artillery barrage commenced, and the mainland was from now on silhouetted against the flickering muzzle flashes of three hundred guns. We gazed anxiously over to FLUSHING, straining our eyes for the answering flashes of the German artillery, but all that we could see were the sudden bright pin points of light all along the waterfront which were our own shells exploding, and one glow somewhere in the town where the Mosquitoes had started a fire. Sometimes our shells struck the steel anti-landing stakes, and then there was a shower of red sparks reminiscent of a firework display. But the German guns remained silent.

... Gradually the fire in the town was gaining hold, and suddenly the unmistakable silhouette of the windmill - the ORANJE MOLEN - was thrown into relief against the glare. We could have had no clearer indication of our chosen landing point.

(Ibid, p. 14.)

At 0545 hours the reconnaissance detachment closed the beach, the barrage having lifted in that place just before they did so, and "a landing was effected", without casualties.

289. The actual landing place had only been decided upon after a searching study of air photographs and a thorough interrogation of Dutch civilians and river pilots who knew the port well, and among whom the former Chief of Police at Flushing under the Germans gave most valuable information. The most prominent feature of the waterfront, the Oranje Molen, is a huge brick windmill, marking the promontory to the east of which lies a bay, the relic of a small harbour of earlier days, called the Ooster of Dokhaven. It was decided that the first landing must be attempted on the promontory itself, and that the Ooster of Dockhaven would be the main landing beach for stores and follow-up troops. The Commandos' objectives were obvious from the start - the defile between the promenade and the Spuit of Binnenboezem, and the gap between the inland side of that basin and the ship-yards where a large liner lay building on the stocks. The first objective was given the code name "DOVER", the second "BEXHILL". Once seized, they would place the main part of the town within our control, for there no enemy could either enter or leave without our mandate. (Ibid, p. 7.)

290. The plan to get in was a simple one. When the landing place had been reconsolidated by No. 1 Troop, the main force was to pass through and go for "DOVER" with No. 3 Troop, followed by No. 5 Troop, and for "BEXHILL" with No. 6. The beachhead force would then debouch into the town, and clear the Arsenal Barracks and the area directly to the west of the harbour along the Engelsche Kaai. No. 2 Troop would then attack the enemy's positions eastward on the spit enclosing the Verbreed Canal and the inner harbour. The streets west of the Engelsche Kaai were to be left to No. 3 Troop on completion of its

primary task. For the reinforcement by 155 (L.) Bde, the first battalion (4 K.O.S.B.) was on 40 minutes' call, with one of its companies ready to come in earlier if need arose. (Ibid, p. 13.)

291. The first troop got secretly and safely ashore, the whole promontory was cleared, and

... it was not until the RN Beach Group was rounding the mole that the enemy opened fire. The defences soon came to life and there was 20 mm and MG fire on the main body of LCAs as they came in, but none were stopped. One LCA, carrying 3-inch mortars and W/T sets, ran on to an anti-landing stake and sank, but it was close enough to the shore to enable the occupants to salvage the contents ... The main body landed without many casualties, and the Commando cleared the immediate waterfront, including the Arsenal Barracks.

(AEF/21 Army Gp/C/F, Docket III: Clearing of the Scheldt, p. 21.)

On the left, No. 6 Troop, led to its objective by the Dutch Chief of Police, "made splendid haste to BEXHILL, and were in position there at an extremely early hour... They kept a firm hold on this important bottle-neck throughout the battle". (AEF/4 CDO/C/D, Docket II: Attack on Flushing by 4 Cdo, 1 Nov 44.) The support of a captured 37 mm gun helped No. 2 Troop on the right to make the area between the dry dock and the marine sluice by 0930 hours, while No. 3 Troop pushed on and fought its way to Bellamy Park. Reinforced by 4 K.O.S.B., the invaders had consolidated on the near end of the spit, in the town immediately north-west of the landing beach, and at "BEXHILL" by 1000 hours. (AEF/21 Army Gp/C/F, Docket III: Clearing of the Scheldt). Though casualties so far had been surprisingly moderate, the battle was now being heavily engaged on both the flanks by an enemy who had become aware of the assault too late to do anything but seek desperately to

retrieve the lost advantage of a strongly defended sea front. So far as we were concerned, the worst was over. Tactical surprise, seemingly unattainable, had been gained.

292. Having now got our grip on the town, we spent the rest of the day in tightening it, building up our strength, and slowly expanding the bridgehead, though not without some hard fighting, particularly at the western corner of the town. "The situation by nightfall was that the main town area was firmly in our hands, and that the possibility of reinforcement by the enemy was stopped, though some strong points still remained to be mopped up."

(C.O.H.Q./Y/3: C.O.H.Q. Bulletin Y/47, April 1945: Combined Operations against Walcheren). The landfall and ferrying cost us about eight L.C.A. and three L.Vs.T., sunk or damaged by gunfire and mines. Most and heartening assistance was given by the R.A.F., for with the weather still poor but improving, aircraft flew in, despite all difficulties, and attacked the enemy throughout the day. In addition to the Mosquitoes which were busy before first light, 104 sorties were made by Typhoons in immediate support and 48 by Spitfires on pre-arranged targets, a great contribution to the success of the enterprise. (AEF/21 Army Gp/C/F, Docket III: Clearing of the Scheldt, p. 23.)

THE ASSAULT AT WESTKAPELLE, 1 NOV 44

293. The assault on the island's west coast went in some three and a half hours later (The Times, 16 Nov 44, Report to the House of Commons by the First Lord of the Admiralty). Although

... at dawn, on 1 November, weather conditions at the aerodromes prevented the aircraft from leaving the ground ... off WALCHEREN, conditions were fair. The sky was overcast but appeared to be clearing, and later the sun shone in the gaps which appeared in the clouds... Sea

conditions were favourable and so in the hope that air conditions would improve, the expedition closed the island and the big naval guns opened fire... At H-hr, the first Typhoons appeared and from that moment the air programme went ahead.

(Operation "INFATUATE", 4 S.S. Brigade's Assault on Walcheren,
1 Nov 44, p. 7.)

Actually, though the "cabrank" rocket-firing Typhoons flew over on time,

... as it was apparent that the touchdown was to be behind schedule, they were held up for a few minutes until the LCT(R)s had discharged their rockets. When these had been fired the Group Captain, Air Controller, on HQ ship, gave them the "all clear", and the Typhoons pressed home a determined attack just as the LCTs were about to land. There is no doubt, that the determined action of the Typhoons had a profound effect on the operation at a time when the support squadron was not only suffering severe casualties from the still active batteries, but had also received some involuntary discharges from the rocket craft.¹⁴

(AEF/21 Army Gp/C/F, Docket III: Clearing of the Scheldt, p. 22.)

Commander K.A. Sellar, R.N., of the Support Squadron had a word to say later in appreciation:

I have no doubt that the landing was materially assisted by Rocket-firing Typhoons, which plastered the strong-points close to the Radar Station on the southern shoulder of the Gap about H-5.

¹⁴ See Appx "J".

(AEF/R.N./C/D, Docket I, Report: Operation "INFATUATE", Naval
Commander, Force "T".)

The importance of the intervention of the Typhoons was thus signalled from the control ship:

Timely and well instituted sp by RP Typhoons undoubtedly vital factor in turning scale to our advantage at a time when 80 per cent sp craft out of action due to enemy fire.

(W.D., "G" Air Branch, H.Q. First Cdn Army, 1 Nov 44.)

294. These severe losses suffered by the support craft were due in part to the very courageous manner in which the Royal Navy met the obligation to wage a separate battle with the shore batteries while the landing craft slipped into shore with comparative immunity from the shattering cannonade opened up by the still capable and very active enemy gunners. The Support Squadron led the advance, sailing on a final course set due east to arrive off shore at H-20 minutes, the leading groups of landing craft being astern of them. Firing from the shore was first observed at 0715 hours, coming from the batteries at Domburg, which appeared, however, to be firing at Flushing. HMS WARSPITE and HMS ROBERTS opened fire at 0820 hours, but without benefit of spotting aircraft. At 0848 hours the Squadron passed a point five miles off the beach and deployed. Two minutes later the battle was joined. All our craft were now being heavily fired on by every German battery from the north of Westkapelle to that at WII, about five miles south of the gap. The ensuing action is briefly outlined in the Naval Force Commander's report:

From this time until 1230, the craft of the Support Squadron were continuously engaged with the enemy batteries, firstly in support of the Commandos advance to the south. Their losses were heavy but they stuck

to their job of engaging the enemy, thereby drawing the enemy's fire and enabling the landings to proceed...

A number of direct shoots were carried out by all ships both before and after H-Hour, both at pre-arranged and opportunity targets. Spotting aircraft could NOT take off from their airfields in the United Kingdom until NOON. Air O.P. were sent but proved ineffective due to poor communications. Immediately that air spotting and F.O.B. became available p.m., some effective shoots were carried out.

Bombarding ships withdrew to the southward at dusk, HMS WARSPITE returning to the United Kingdom.

It may be remarked that:

HMS EREBUS and HMS ROBERTS returned to the area at 0700 on D-1. A number of shoots in answer to call for fire were carried out. Good visibility and air spotting enabled effective shooting to be carried out. They were sailed for the United Kingdom at 1730, after receipt of signals from C.C.R.A., 2nd Canadian Corps and Commander 4th S.S. Brigade, that they would NOT be required the following day.

(AEF/R.N./C/D, Docket I: Report Operation "INFATUATE II", Naval Commander, Force "T", Section One, pp 2 and 4.)

295. As testimony of the devotion with which the crews of the support craft sailed in to meet almost certain annihilation the following passage in the Force Commander's report is worthy of record:

Meanwhile L.C.G.(M)s 101 and 102 with their supporting L.C.S.(L)s had been ordered in to beach at previously specified points in to beach at

previously specified points on the northern and southern shoulders of the Gap respectively. Each had their pre-selected targets of pillboxes close to and commanding the approaches of the positions on which L.C.I.(S)s and L.C.T.s were later to beach to unload. Keeping well up tide which was known to be extremely strong (possibly up to 6 knots on the beam of their approach course) these two craft and their attendant L.C.S.(L)s went in at maximum speed against heavy opposition. Though it was not known in the case of the L.C.G.(M) 102 what damage was sustained before beaching, both craft were seen to beach in their correct position at H Hour, continuing to fire at their target. L.C.G.(M) 102 was soon to be on fire though this was apparently got under control only to break out again later. She was last seen burning apparently on the beach or possibly broached to near it. L.C.G.(M) 101 remained beached and firing until 1003 when she unbeached and came out at best speed and under fire, only to sink by the stern abeam of L.C.H. 269 some minutes later. I cannot speak highly enough of the courage, determination and devotion to duty of L.C.G.(M)s 101 and 102 and their supporting L.C.S.(L)s particularly Lieutenant S.N. Orum, R.N.V.R. who led in the southern there L.C.S.(L)s at point-blank and what proved to be suicidal range of the strong-points on the southern shoulder of the Gap. All three L.C.S.(L)s on the southern side were seen to be on fire, beached or close to the beach. An L.C.P.(L) was sent to make smoke and to pick up all the survivors she could. At the time of writing this Report no survivors have been contacted from L.C.G.(M) 102 and L.C.S.(L) 252. One survivor has been reported from L.C.S.(L) 258, but no report is yet available. That these craft accomplished their mission is I think reflected in the fact that shortly after landing, the Colonel Commanding 41 Commando made a signal saying he was ashore and casualties had been very light.

(Ibid: Appx "E", p. 6.)

296. The decision to maintain close action under such adverse conditions was a deliberate one, made by Commander Sellar, with the intention of attracting the fire of the German guns away from the Commandos on to his Support Squadron for as long as he could sustain the resultant losses to his craft and still continue to give effective support to our troops ashore. The following extract from his report is of great interest:

It was early realised that we were up against formidable opposition and that losses and damage were to be expected in craft engaging shore batteries at close range. The test of whether the maintenance of close action was justified was considered to be the progress of the Commando landings. It was evident from signals received that progress of landing and uploading was continuing satisfactorily and it was known that casualties in what may be termed the "Trade" forces were light. I, therefore, considered that so long as the Germans made the mistake of concentrating their fire at the Support Squadron, close action was justified and losses acceptable. In fact, I decided that if there were signs of batteries selecting incoming loaded L.C.T.s as their primary target even closer action would be ordered so as to force the Germans to fire at the Support Squadron. Accordingly, no withdrawal was envisaged until about noon by which time the advancing Commandos were reported to have captured (W286) adjacent to (W13). It then became difficult under the prevailing conditions to fire accurately at (W13) without fear of hitting our own troops next door in strong-point (W286). By about 1230, it was known that only L.C.G.(L)s 9 and 10 and L.C.S.(L)s 254 and 259 remained fit for action and it was clear that the Support Squadron was no longer able to close to the desired range for continued support to the advance of the 48 Commando, (W11) and (W13) being still most active and apparently unfired at. I, therefore, considered that further support must come from the heavy ships, at all events until the two

heavy batteries had been engaged, neutralized or knocked out by heavier metal than we had at our disposal.

(Ibid, p. 8.)

297. Commander Sellar's comments on the significance of this battle of batteries versus craft gives further illustration of the nature of this problem as it was originally posed at Headquarters First Cdn Army:

It was again evident that the old historical principle established after experience in action between a well sited fort and an attacking ship, the odds are bound to be on the fort. This Operation proved no exception. It is submitted that although in this instance the battle was ultimately won - at a cost - losses and casualties would have been lighter in the Support Squadron if the active batteries could have been successfully bombed or shelled during the assault and throughout the forenoon. Even then, this bombing or shelling would not necessarily have had the effect of knocking the batteries out as it was once again proved that only a direct hit on a strongly emplaced gun will knock it out, but it would probably have had a disturbing effect on the accuracy and rate of fire. In fact an observer just returned has stated that no large gun in either (W13) or (W11) had received a direct hit from a heavy gun though there were many near misses. It is gratifying that this Officer reports, however, that he found one of the emplaced guns in (W13) where a 4.5" shell - presumably from an L.C.G.(L) - had entered through the slit and burst on the rear concrete wall. This observer also stated that in his opinion, these defences of WALCHEREN were "much stronger than those at DEN HAAN."

(Ibid, pp 9, 10.)

It may be added that they have also been described with authority as "some of the strongest defences in the world". (C.O.H.Q./Y/3: Bulletin Y-47, Apr 45: Combined Operations against Walcheren).

298. The approach, the bombardment, and the successful landing which the sacrifice of the Royal Navy made possible, were thus described to the House of Commons by the First Lord of the Admiralty:

... in daylight, the time of assault being dependent on tidal conditions, the Westkapelle force approached the coast and when close inshore was heavily engaged by the coast defences, all known batteries going into action against them. The gun support squadron composed of converted landing-craft of various types manned by Bluejackets and Marines, under command of Commander K.A. Sellar, Royal Navy, stood close inshore and engaged these batteries at pointblank range, while tank-landing craft carrying the Royal Marine Commandos beached in succession and discharged their vehicles.

This process was slow as they could only beach two at a time in the gap in the dyke previously breached by the R.A.F. By their determination and gallantry the landing-craft support squadron drew most of the enemy's fire, and the Marine Commandos were landed successfully without heavy casualties. Once ashore, however, Commandos came up against tough opposition at nearly all the enemy batteries and strong points, which they cleared in succession with utmost resolution. As the weather improved during the forenoon close air support was afforded by the R.A.F. in increasing degree and air spotting became available to the bombarding squadron during the afternoon.

The gallantry and determination of landing craft crews and of the Royal Marine Commandos were equalled by that of the naval beach party, which

had to work under gun and mortar fire throughout D Day, and for a large proportion of D-plus one, during which enemy fire could still be brought to bear on the gap in the dyke. Difficulties were experienced in landing stores for the force because of this, and later the weather worsened and prevented supply by sea. Stores were dropped by air on D-plus four and these and rations captured from the enemy enabled the Commandos to complete the clearance of the western half of the island...

The great success of these operations, which had perforce to be undertaken under difficult and somewhat unfavourable conditions against a desperate enemy, was not achieved without relatively heavy casualties to craft and personnel. Of the total of 25 support craft engaged, nine were sunk and eight damaged, and of their crews 172 officers and men were killed and 200 wounded. Of 47 other major landing craft engaged, four were sunk and others damaged. The casualties in these craft and in the attack on Flushing were 21 officers and men killed and missing, 81 wounded. The Royal Marine Commandos suffered 37 officers and men killed, 77 missing, 201 wounded.

(The Times, 16 Nov 44.)

THE ISLAND OVERRUN, 2-8 NOV 44

299. Once ashore, the Commandos were not slow in exacting toll for toll. Though the covering party touched down 27 minutes late, at 1012 hours, owing to the oppression of the enemy's fire, the remainder of 41 Cdo landed in quick order, hurled themselves against the battery and village of Westkkapelle, and by 1056 hours had captured both. On the south side of the gap, 48 Cdo, finding the dunes unoccupied, pushed on to the radar station, by 1115 hours captured it, and was then directed on the battery at W13, north-west of Zoutelande. The opposition here was heavier, but not so stubborn as to stand

up to an attack opened by the artillery and by rocket-firing aircraft. By 1830 that position, too, had fallen. By last light 41 Cdo, after a fairly easy passage so far, lay on the outskirts of Domburg. 48 Cdo, somewhat battered and depleted, was consolidating on the dunes half-way to Zoutelande, and behind it, 47 Cdo, reasonably intact, was being held in readiness to go forward on the morrow. (4 S.S. Bde's Assault on Walcheren, document in the custody of H.Q. Royal Marines, Admiralty, London.)

300. Zoutelande succumbed at about 1115 hours on 2 Nov with a yield of some 300 prisoners, but beyond it, 47 Cdo ran into a stiff fight with the strongpoints protecting the approaches to W11, the big battery south of the pumping station, and had to call down heavy fire from our artillery. As this was the last battery capable of shelling the beach-head, we had good reason for silencing it as quickly as possible. But by 2200 hours, after persistent, costly effort, our troops reported that although they had the guns covered, they were much reduced in numbers. We had therefore to wait until the following day before closing in for the coup de grace and clearing the coast to Flushing. (Ibid.)

301. There the enemy was putting up a desperate resistance from strongpoints and pill-boxes, though gradually being worn down by the combined efforts of 4 Cdo and 155 Inf Bde.

In the dock area, suicide squads lodged themselves in cranes and gantries, and from these points of vantage were able to pin the attackers. In such cases, the 3.7 Mountain Battery proved of great assistance. Some of these guns had been taken across the SCHELDT in pieces and put together on the far side; other had been feared across on Class 9 rafts. On more than one occasion, a dismantled gun was taken up to one of the upper floors of a house, and re-assembled there. It then engaged suitable targets at point blank range with surprising effect.

On the WEST of the town, 4 Commando advanced on DOVER area over roofs and through back gardens, under cover of a mortar and PIAT barrage from the top of a nearby cinema. RP Typhoons attacked the area about midday and when the Commando were about to storm it, the enemy surrendered.

(AEF/21 Army Gp/C/F, Docket III: Clearing of the Scheldt, p. 24.)

302. The morning of 3 Nov saw the silencing of the battery at W11, but again on the next bound south-eastward towards the gap in the dyke west of Flushing, the presence of more of the enemy's emplacements, well manned and guarded by minefields, meant that the hard fighting must still go on before the dunes were finally ours. The rough sea frustrated the plan to sail 4 Cdo, its task in Flushing now virtually completed, around to the north of the gap, but Brigadier Leicester was able to reinforce his drive by bringing 41 Cdo away from Domburg where 10 (1A) Cdo took over. The day's hunting carried us to the edge of the gap, gave us Domburg, and brought another 400 prisoners into the bag, including the port and garrison commanders of Flushing. (4 S.S. Brigade's Assault on Walcheren, 1 Nov 44; W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, November 1944: Appx 3, Ops Log, 3 Nov 44, Serials 45, 90.)

303. The situation on the east of the island had also taken a very favourable turn during the preceding 24 hours. As the Canadian, and after them, the Lowlanders, had reason to know, the direct passage into Walcheren across the causeway afforded the defenders too good an opportunity of concentrating their fire for it to be forced without crippling loss. The alternative of making a silent crossing across the Slooe Channel was therefore tried during the night of 2/3 Nov. This meant setting out from a small harbour about two miles west of Nieuwdorp, swimming across the navigable part of the channel in assault boats, and then wading for some 1100 to 1200 yards across a treacherous salt marsh. The feat was accomplished by 6 Cameronians of 156 Bde.

The salt marsh was a formidable obstacle, and at times the troops were well over their waists in liquid mud. Attempts to use Weasels were unavailing; they dug their prows into the far bank of the runnels and slewed round.

(AEF/21 Army Gp/C/F, Docket III: Clearing of the Schedldt, p. 24.)

But neither water, mud, nor the enemy's fire, prevented the Cameronians from reaching the farther shore nor from establishing themselves 1000 yards inland by nightfall. During the following night 5 H.L.I. were got across by the same method and on 4 Nov the whole brigade, including 1 Glas H., who, it will be recalled, had taken over from R. de Mais at the eastern end of the causeway, began slowly to loosen the enemy's hold. At the end of the day the bridgehead was about 2000 yards deep and two miles wide. (Ibid, p. 25.) That morning 155 Bde reported Flushing to be completely in our hands (First Cdn Army Ops Log, 4 Nov 44, Serial 27). The end soon came. On 5 Nov the Division claimed all the dry land with the exception of Veere and Middelburg (Personal Diary, Major W.E.C. Harrison, 5 Nov 44).

It was decided to capture MIDDELBURG by a surprise "left flanking" attack from FLUSHING across the inundations in LVTs. On the afternoon of 6 November a company of 7/9 RS in eight BUFFALOES reached the town without being fired on. All roads out of the main square were covered, while a subaltern went in search of the German Commander. Lt-Gen DASER was reluctant to surrender to so junior an officer, but the immediate assumption of "local and temporary Lieutenant-Colonel" by the infantry Company Commander solved the problem, and the garrison was rounded up with the assistance of 5 HLI, who arrived later that night.

(AEF/21 Army Gp/C/F, Docket III: Clearing of the Scheldt, p. 25.)

304. The Germans still showed fight on the difficult stretch of dunes north-east of Domburg, where 10 (IA) and 41 Cdo, the latter having made its way back in L.Vs.T., were fully engaged. Nevertheless, they made slow but steady progress, and even had some support from the remnants of the armour which conditions at the landing and on the island had rendered only partially effective.¹⁵ Thus

...In spite of great difficulties of ground, the two SHERMAN gun tanks and two AVsRE, which now alone survived, succeeded in joining the two Commandos. The BESAS of the AVsRE and guns of the SHERMANS were fully used, and materially assisted the Commandos who captured W18 on 7 November. One AVRE, however, was lost on a minefield.

(Ibid.)

Thereafter

The NORTH coast of the island alone remained. Although VEERE occupied on 7 Nov showed some hesitancy at first, the majority of the Germans were most anxious to be rescued from the appalling floods which they later declared had damped their spirits more than anything else. 4 SS Brigade, (4 and 41 Commandos), came along the coast to VROUWENPOLDER, collecting PW, and when they put in an attack at first light on 8 November, and enemy deputation approached to make arrangements for all resistance to cease...

¹⁵

The tanks were of great assistance to 41 Commando. By hard work and determination not to be daunted by the terrain they were able to get forward and give close support in almost impossible tank country. On the other hand, they were of no assistance at all to 48 Commando. In spite of previous training and planning, the idea of tanks supporting infantry at ranges of 2,000 or 3,000 yards was a complete fiasco.

(COHQ/Y/3, COHQ Bulletin Y/47: Combined Operations Against Walcheren Island, p. 18, para 91.)

(Ibid.)

Both 4 and 41 Cdos, first ashore, thus had the satisfaction of being in at the kill, although actually and most appropriately, it was to the Commanding Officer of 4 Cdo, whose men had fared so well at Flushing, that the German Commander made formal surrender of his troops. (AEF/4 CDO/C/D, Docket II: Attack on Flushing by 4 Cdo, pp 46, 47.) By the afternoon of 8 Nov all enemy resistance on Walcheren had ceased, with the exception of two small enemy pockets marooned by flooding at Gapinge and St Laurens, between Middelburg and Veere. (First Cdn Army Sitrep, GO 131, 090600 Nov 44.) In all the island's yield of prisoners amounted to some 8000. (AEF/21 Army Gp/C/F, Docket III: Clearing of the Scheldt, p. 25.)

AMENDMENT NO. 1

PARTICIPATION IN THE ASSAULT ON WALCHEREN BY TROOPS OF 10
(INTER-ALLIED) COMMANDO

304a. Four nationalities were represented in 10 (IA) Cdo for the operation against Walcheren (see para 258). These were: H.Q. (IA) Cdo (British); No. 4 Tp (Belgian); No. 5 Tp (Norwegian); No. 3 Tp (Dutch). The Headquarters and Nos. 4 and 5 Tps were under command 41 Cdo for the attack on Westkapelle. Of No. 3 Tp only two sections were employed, one under command 47 Cdo, the other under command 4 Cdo for the attack on Flushing. (Hist Sec File, 952.013(D29), Army Operational Research Group Report No. 299. The Westkapelle Assault on Walcheren, p. 17; see also Appx "B" to Report No. 188: 4 S.S. Bde Gp OO No. 6, Op INFATUATE, 24 Oct 44.)

304b. The task of the Belgian and Norwegian troops of 10 (IA) Cdo was to assume responsibility for the left flank of the brigade from Westkapelle eastward when 41 Cdo advanced east to take on Battery W 17 (955376), which is

situated on the western outskirts of Domburg (0637). Landing Serials Nos. 16 and 17, which carried the Inter-Allied troops, landed on the north shoulder of the Westapelle gap at 1035 and 1045 hours 1 Nov 44, respectively. At 1245 hours 10 Cdo established itself on the northern approaches to Westkapelle and remained there with "A" and "S" Tps of 41 Cdo, while the balance of that unit advanced eastward along the shoreline. The next definite move came on D-1 (2 Nov 44), when orders were received to take over the town of Domburg from 41 Cdo. The Norwegian troop followed the Belgian troop into the place, arriving there at 1600 hours. To bolster up the garrison, "B" and "X" Tps of 41 Cdo were left under command 10 (IA) Cdo. On the following day (D-2, 3 Nov 44) 10 Cdo asked permission to advance beyond the Domburg perimeter. This request, however, was not granted immediately, but during the day a small move forward was made, which resulted in the capture of 211 prisoners, for the loss of one commando soldier killed and four wounded.

304c. On D-3 (4 Nov 44) there was more action. At 1500 hours 10 Cdo launched an attack eastward supported by A.Vs.R.E. and Sherman tanks; they advanced another 800 yards and took 60 prisoners. By this time 41 Cdo had returned to the fight on the northern flank and on D-4 (5 Nov 44), together with 10 Cdo on its right, moved forward against battery W19 (104403) and the wooded rising ground to the south of the battery (104403). Progress was very slow due to mines and bad going, but another battery (W18, west of W19) and 300 prisoners were taken. The operation continued apace on 6 Nov (D-5). Minefields again prevented 41 Cdo from making headway, and on the right 10 Cdo, having entered the higher wooded area to the south, had to contend with so many resolute snipers that little gain could be made. By persistent effort, however, the Belgian and Norwegian troops were able to report consolidation of the wooded feature by midnight 6/7 Nov.

304d. This in effect ended the action for the Inter-Allied Commando; a coordinated effort was now mounted by 41 Cdo and 4 Cdo, which had recently

arrived from the Flushing Sector, to take out the remaining opposition in the northern part of Walcheren Island. All enemy troops surrendered unconditionally at 1315 hours 8 Nov 44. (A.O.R.G. Report No. 299, op cit.)

THE FLOODING JUSTIFIED

305. The island had been completely subdued within eight days after the invading forces, against great hazard and not without severe loss, effected landings its coasts. That the ability of the garrison to defend themselves had been reduced, their morale sapped, and our own troops saved from the effects of a resistance at once more spirited than coherent there could not be any doubt, both on the evidence of the Commandos themselves and of the discomfited enemy. No statement on the issue could be more convincing than the following taken from the report of 4 Cdo:

The whole situation was governed by the flooding of the island. Apart from the original gap at WESTKAPELLE the Royal Air Force had blasted further breaches in the sea walls North-West of FLUSHING town, East of FLUSHING harbour, and just North of VEERE, and the inundations had got so completely out of control that by the end of October there was only a strip of high dunes around the Western and Northern coasts and an area around NIEUWLAND to the South-West of the causeway to SOUTH BEVELAND that remained above water. There was even water into the streets of MIDDELBURG and FLUSHING. It was frequently debated whether this violent and extensive flooding might not be playing into the enemy's hands by limiting the possible avenues of advance to narrow strips upon which a considerable volume of fire could be concentrated with ease. In the event, however, the Germans never seem to have considered the water as a potential ally. The fantastic flooding mesmerized them into a fatal inactivity, destroyed their communications, and sapped their morale to an incredible extent. Prisoners, and particularly the more senior

officers, repeatedly cried "The water - without that terrible water you would never have beaten us" in accents of despair and frustration, and there could have been no better or more eloquent tribute to the higher planning of the operation than that paid to it by the Germans themselves.

(AEF/4 CDO/C/D, Docket II: Attack on Flushing by 4 Cdo, 1 Nov 44, p. 2.)

It is comforting to conclude that neither General Simonds planned nor the stricken Dutch civilians suffered in vain, for, as the following glimpse of the beaten Germans at Flushing shows dramatically, the common enemy had been utterly undone.

The Garrison Commander, Colonel REINHARDT, together with the Naval Commander and their respective staffs had been captured early the same morning in the Royal Scots attack. At about 1000 hours a long line of dishevelled and badly shaken German officers was standing miserably on the parade ground outside the ARSENAL BARRACKS. Colonel REINHARDT was brought into a shelter for interrogation, but was far too much upset by his recent experiences to be coherent about anything. He was obviously very much the worse for the bombardments he had endured, and was also greatly distressed because he had surrendered his command. During the interview he both wept and urinated freely. His Adjutant, who was subjected to a much more exhaustive examination, proved equally uninformative but by no means uninteresting. He gave the impression of being a somnambulist, so utterly dazed was he after the bombardment and the trials the floods had brought in their train. Throughout his interrogation he was shaking violently and uncontrollably, and when he did speak, he poured out hysterical curses at the destruction wrought by water everywhere on the island. All the officers testified to the havoc

the water had played with all forms of communications and to the appalling effect it had on morale. To anyone who spoke with these officers there could be no question but that the flooding policy had been a decisive success.

(Ibid, pp 39, 40.)

THE PORT OF ANTWERP OPENED, 8 NOV 44

306. "Antwerp", said General Simonds, "can now be used as a base for a knock-out blow against Germany". (AEF/2 Cdn Inf Div/C/D: Lecture by Lt-Gen Simonds, 6 Nov 44.) Minesweepers were already at work, and some three weeks later (28 Nov) a convoy entered the fairway, the first ship to tie up at the quayside being the Canadian-built "Fort Cataracqui". (AEF 45/First Cdn Army/C/E: General Crerar's Despatch, 31 Jan 45.)

Some part of the huge total of Britain and American imports pouring into France and Belgium and taxing the capacity of road and railway, truck and barge, from distant base to forward maintenance area, could now enter at a point within two hundred and fifty miles of Nijmegen or Aschen - that first great German city to fall into our hands before the onslaught of First U.S. Army on 28 Oct. Hitherto the pressure upon the extended line of our communications had been measured by the arrival every week by sea of some 48,000 men between 9,000 and 10,000 tons of vehicles, more than 40,000 tons of petrol, and over 275,000 tons of supplies. (Hist Sec file C.O.S. Resume/44/4: War Cabinet: Chiefs of Staff Committee Weekly Resume (No. 274) 23-30 Nov 44.) Three days after the arrival of the convoy, on 1 Dec, 10,000 tons of stores were unloaded on to the docks at Antwerp. (21 Army Gp Report.) This world port, by volume of seaborne freight comparable to Hamburg and considerably larger

than Montreal, had now become a vent through which a vast tonnage was soon to flow in for the winter offensive.

([Report No. 154](#), Historical Section, C.M.H.Q., para 57.)

CONCLUSION

307. In a message to General Simonds, dated 3 Nov 44, Field Marshal Montgomery said:

The operations were conducted under the most appalling conditions of ground - and water - and the advantage in these respects favoured the enemy. But in spite of great difficulties you slowly and relentlessly wore down the enemy resistance, drove him back, and captured great numbers of prisoners.

It has been a fine performance, and one that could have been carried out only by first class troops.

The Canadian Army is composed of troops from many different nations and countries. But the way in which you have all pulled together, and operated as one fighting machine, has been an inspiration to us all.

I congratulate you personally.

And I also congratulate all commanders and troops serving under your command. Please tell all your formations and units how very pleased I am with the splendid work they have done.

(W.D., G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army, November 1944: Appx "A".)

In the view of the Supreme Commander when the war was over, in these operations First Cdn Army produced its greatest climax. "The end of Naziism", he said, "was in clear view when the first ship moved unmolested up the Scheldt." (Address by General Eisenhower to Canadian Club, Ottawa, 10 Jan 46, quoted in Report No. 154, Historical Section, C.M.H.Q., para 58.)

308. The number of prisoners taken on First Cdn Army's varied and extended fronts during the phase of its operations treated in the present report from 1 Oct to 8 Nov was 38,820. A further 2223 were evacuated through medical channels. These additions brought the grand total of prisoners taken from 23 Jul through 8 Nov to 112,521. The enemy's losses in killed and wounded were correspondingly heavy. Our own casualties, including British and Allied, were reported by General Simonds as 703 officers and 12,170 other ranks, killed, wounded and missing. Of these 355 officers and 6012 other ranks were Canadians. (AEF 45/First Cdn Army/C/E: Report by Lt-Gen Simonds, 22 Nov 44.)

309. As General Simonds observed in reporting on his stewardship to General Crerar:

The Army's operations had been carried to a successful conclusion under the most difficult conditions of ground and weather, and against an enemy who exploited every defensive opportunity that offered. By flooding or saturating the areas in front of his positions, he was able to deny us all the advantages which we would normally possess in the offensive. He could concentrate his fire power on narrow fronts, keep his own positions concealed and dispersed, and make the most effective use of mines and obstacles. In the Breskens bridgehead, as in South Beveland and Walcheren, the approaches had to be made along single strips of road bordered by impassable fields and fully covered by the enemy's fire. Hence, by distracting the enemy's attention and drawing off his forces, the assault landings were of decisive importance in

bringing this phase to an earlier conclusion than would otherwise have been possible. The invaluable support provided by the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force gave further demonstration of the effectiveness of combined operations. The persistence and determination of all troops under command in wearing down the enemy were worthy of the high commendation bestowed on them by the C.-in-C.

(Ibid, as quoted in [Report No. 154](#), para 60.)

310. General Crerar had expressed his view of the conduct of these operations in a message sent to General Simonds on 4 Nov, and which may here be quoted:

My sincere congratulations to you on the great ability and drive with which you have carried out your recent very difficult responsibilities to a most successful conclusion. As a result, the battle reputation of First Cdn Army has never stood higher.

(Ibid, Covering Letter to Minister of National Defence, 22 Nov 44.)

311. The C.-in-C. 21 Army Group, already busy with the project of regrouping his forces for the next major battle which would precede the capture of the Ruhr, intended "to have the Second British Army facing east along the Meuse with its left about Middelaar, whilst First Cdn Army faced east and north from the river at that point through the Nijmegen bridgehead to the sea at Walcheren". (Ibid, General Crerar's Despatch, 31 Jan 45.) These new responsibilities in the salient and along the Maas were taken over on 9 Nov. At noon on the same day General Crerar, now fully restored to health, resuming command of the Army.

312. "I hope" says Maj-Gen de Guingand, Chief of Staff at 21 Army Group, in his book, Operation Victory, "the full tale of these operations will soon be told. It will then be appreciated what an extremely difficult and complex task General Crerar and the troops under his command were saddled with -- and how ably they saw the thing through". (Op cit, p. 421.) This report is an attempt to tell the tale. It has been prepared by Lt-Col W.E.C. Harrison, O.B.E., General List, who was a member of the Army Commander's personal staff during the course of the operations. In completing the work he had the part-time assistance of Capt F.N. Fergusson, R.C.A., who served with 19 Cdn Fd Regt (S.P.) and particularly of Capt P.A. Mayer, who fought as a company commander with Alq R.

(C.P. Stacey) Colonel
Director Historical Section.

ORDERS OF BATTLE - "SWITCHBACK"

3 CDN INF DIV

6 OCT 44

Under Command

6 Cdn Armd Regt
56 (S.P.) Cdn A. Tk Bty
"C" Flt, 660 Air O.P. Sqn

and In Support

2 Cdn A.G.R.A.
9 A.G.R.A.
30 Armd Bde
R.C.A. 4 Cdn Armd Div
13 Cdn Fd Regt, R.C.A.
14 Cdn Fd Regt, R.C.A.

Resources

79 Brit Armd Div Available.

ORDER OF BATTLE

6 Oct 44

) Regina Rif
7 Cdn Inf Bde Gp) 1 C. Scot R.
) R. Wpg Rif

with (a) Under Command

¹⁶ N. Shore r.
"A" Coy, C.H. of O. (M.G.)
Det, 6 Cdn Fd Coy
One Coy, 14 Cdn Fd Amb

(b) In Support

"B" Coy, C.H. of O. (M.G.)
"D" Coy, C.H. of O. (M.G.) less one platoon
12 Cdn Fd Regt, R.C.A.
23 Cdn Fd Regt (S.P.), R.C.A.
107 Med Regt, R.A.

(c) Additional Support

4 Cdn Armd Bde from present F.D.Ls.

¹⁶ N. Shore R. to revert to command if and when 8 Cdn Inf Bde was committed.

) N. Shore R.
8 Cdn Inf Bde Gp) R. de Chaud
) Q.O.R. of C.

(a) With Under Command

"B" Coy, C.H. of O. (M.G.)
One platoon "D" Coy, C.H. of O. (M.G.)
Det 16 Cdn Fd Coy
One company, 22 Cdn Fd Amb

(b) In Support

Two field regiments)
) See 7 Cdn Inf Bde artillery
One Medium regiment)

) H.L.I. of C.
9 Cdn Inf Bde Gp) Nth N.S. Highrs
) S.D. & G. Highrs

(a) With Under Command

"C" Coy, C.H. of O. (M.G.)
One platoon "D" Coy, C.H. of O. (M.G.)
One section 18 Cdn Fd Coy
One company 23 Cdn Fd Amb
One platoon, R.C.A.S.C.

(b) In Support

15 Cdn Fd Regt, R.C.A.

19 Cdn Army Fd Regt (S.P.), R.C.A.

10 Med Regt with u/c 20 Bty of 59 Hy Regt (155 mm guns)

342 H.A.A. Bty and C.T.P. 557 S.L. Bty

5 Aslt Regt, R.E. of 1 Aslt Bde

Elements 149 Aslt Bde

Phase Grouping 9 Cdn Inf Bde Gp, 9 Oct 44

(i) Assault Group

(a) Nth N.S. Highrs

(b) H.L.I. of C.

(c) Tactical Brigade Headquarters

(ii) Follow-up Group

(a) S.D. & G. Highrs

(b) Platoon, "D" Coy, C.H. of O. (4.2" Mortar)

(c) "C" Coy, C.H. of O. (M.G.)

(d) Main Brigade Headquarters.

(iii) Build-up Group

(a) Company, 23 Cdn Fd Amb

(b) Jeeps, carriers, anti-tank guns not included above.

(iv) Residue Group.

APPENDIX "B"

INFATUATE

304/19/G

4 SS Bde Gp OO No. 6

Copy No. 63

Op INFATUATE

24 Oct 44

Ref maps: 1:100,000 Sheets 1 and 2
1:25,000 Def Overprints Sheets 13 NE, 14 NW, 14 SW (EAST) 14 SW
(WEST)
1:5,000 HOLLAND (CA.15) Sheets 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5
1:10,000 HOLLAND (CA.21) Sheets 1 and 2 Air photos

INFO

1. Enemy

See 4 SS Bde Gp Int Summary No. 1 Att at Appx "A" and ISUMS as issued daily.

2. Own Tps

(a) See 4 SS Bde Gp SITREPS as issued daily

(b) 155 (L) Bde to be follow up bde landing either

(i) in VLISSINGEN 1023 area behind 4 Cdo

or

(ii) in WESTKAPELLE 0134 area behind remainder of Force.

(c) Additional tps: See 4 SS Bde Gp Order of Battle No. 2 att at Appx "B"¹

3. Naval

HQ Naval Force "T" (Capt PUGSLEY DSO RN) controlling:

- (a) Bombarding vessels
 - HMS "WARSPITE"
 - HMS "EREBUS") Monitors
 - HMS "ROBERTS") "

- (b) Sp craft
 - LCF.....6
 - LCG(L).....6
 - LCS(L) MK I.Q....6
 - LCT(R).....5

- (c) Landing craft
 - LCT(Mk IV).....25
 - LCT(Mk III)..... 5
 - LCA.....40
 - LCI(S)..... 6

- (d) Misc craft
 - HQ Frigate (HMS KINGSMILL)... 1
 - LCP(L) for smoke laying.....12
 - MLs as navigational ldrs..... 4
 - LCH for D/SOAG and SSEF..... 3

- (e) Six FOB parties MBCU

¹ Appx "C" to this report.

(f) Dets RN Beach Cdos and RN Beach Sigs

(g) Three LCOCU parties

4. Air

(a) RAF Bomber Comd sp op by prelim bombardment

(b) 84 Gp RAF in sp throughout op

5. Topographical

See 4 SS Bde Gp Int Summary att at App "A"²

6. Tide Tables

See 4 SS Bde Gp Int Summary att at Appx "A"³

INTENTION

7. 4 SS Bde Gp will assault the island of WALCHEREN with the object of clearing

(a) the dune area from incl WESTKAPELLE to VLISSINGEN and destroy the btys contained therein; and

² Not included.

³ Not included.

- (b) the dune area from incl WESTKAPELLE to BREEZAND 1340 and destroy all btys in this area.

NOTE: Subpara (a) above is the primary task. The second task is subordinate to the first task. It will NOT be carried out until the first object is attained.

METHOD

8. Gen

- (a) The asslt to be carried out in two phases:

(INFAT: I - one cdo (No. 4) to land in VLISSINGEN area with one inf bde (155 (L) Inf Bde) as follow up, if prelim recce shows that the area is "soft" enough for such an asslt to succeed. If the area is NOT considered "soft" enough, then the asslt will NOT be launched, and the Force will be directed to join in Phase II.

NOTE: 4 Cdo put under comd 155 (L) Inf Bde for Phase I.

INFAT: II - 4 SS Bde Gp, less 4 Cdo initially, to land in the WESTKAPELLE area.

- (b) Phase I to be mounted for BRESKENS 0919
Phase II to be mounted from OSTEND 6303.

9. Allotment of Tps

- (a) Covering parties to land on foot from LCI(S) and/or LCT:

- (i) Two Tps and "S" Tp 41 Cdo with
- under comd - one sec Tps RE
 - under comd for mov - Naval Beach Sigs (3)
 - Naval Beach Party (3)
- (ii) One to 48 Cdo with
- under comd for mov - Naval Beach Sigs (3)
 - Naval Beach Party (3)
- (b) 48 Cdo less covering party mounted in LVTs and Weasels landed from LCTs with
- under comd - one pl 59 GHQ Tps RE
 - under comd for mov - one sec 17 Cdn Lt Fd Amb
 - Naval Beach Sigs (13)
 - Naval Beach Party (11)
 - One FOO party (3)
 - One FOB party (8)
 - Recce Party 59 GHQ Tps RE (3)
 - in sp - One sqn amphibious asslt regt
 - RE/RAC
- (c) 41 Cdo, less covering party, mounted in LVTs and Weasals landed from LCTs with
- under comd - two tps 10 (IA) Cdo
 - one pl 59 GHQ Tps RE
 - under comd for mov - one sec 17 Cdn Lt Fd Amb
 - Naval Beach Sigs (13)
 - Naval Beach Party (11)

One FOO party (3)
Two FOB parties (8)
LCOCU

in sp - four asslt teams 30 Armd Bde
one sqn amphibious asslt regt
RE/RAC

(d) 47 Cdo mounted in LVTs and Weasels landed from LCTs with

under comd - one sec Dutch Tp 10 (IA) Cdo
one pl 59 GHQ Tps RE
FOO (3)
FOB (4)

under comd for mov - Lt Sec 10 Cdn FDS

in sp - one sqn amphibious asslt regt
RE/RAC

(c) 4 Cdo carried in LCAs with

under com - one sec Dutch Tp 10 (IA) Cdo
one TARBRUSH party KEEPFORCE
one pl 59 GHQ Tps RE
one sec 144 Pnr Coy
FOO party (3)

under comd for mov - Lt Sec 6 Cdn FDS LCOCU (13)

in sp - one sqn amphibious asslt
RE/RAC

(f) 4 SS Bde HQ mounted LVTs and Weasels landed from LCTs with

under comd - HQ and one pl 59 GHQ Tps RE
Rep 30 Armd Bde
CCRAs Rep
Two ASSU Tcls
Phantom Patrols

under comd for mov - 10 Cdn FDS less lt sec
8 Cdn FSU
9 Cdn FSU
5 Cdn FTU
LCOCU (10)

in sp - two sqns amphibious aslt regt
RE/RAC

10. Tasks

(a) Covering parties will seize the shoulder of the gap and be prepared to give covering fire.

RIGHT - from 48 Cdo

LEFT - from 41 Cdo

(b) 48 Cdo to pass through gap in amphibians and

Task 1 Secure a footing on the dune SOUTH of the gap

Task 2 Capture and destroy bty No. W13 (034318)

Task 3 Exploit and clear the dune area SOUTH to excl
ZOUTELANDE 0530, or further if possible

(c) 41 Cdo to pass through the gap in amphibians and

Task 1 Secure WESTKAPELLE

Task 2 Capture and destroy btys Nos. W22 (036343) and W14
(031338), if active

Task 3 Come into res. Probable subsequent task to be
prepared to move NORTH to capture and destroy bty
No. W17 (055376) leaving 10 (IA) Cdo to give left
flank protection to bde.

(d) 47 Cdo to pass through gap in amphibians and

Task 1 Clear the dunes SOUTH from incl ZOUTELANDE 0530 to
incl bty No. W11 (071278)

Task 2 Destroy bty No. W12 (063315), if found necessary

(e) 4 Cdo

Phase I To land in the VLISSINGEN area and

Task 1 Seize a brhd to allow the follow up bde to
pass through

Task 2 Clear up VLISSINGEN in conjunction with
155(L) Inf Bde.

NOTE: Detailed tasks of 4 Cdo for Phase I to be decided by 155(L)
Inf Bde.

Phase II To land in the WESTKAPELLE area in res prepared to

Task 1 Pass through 47 Cdo to capture and destroy
btys Nos. W10 (089273) and W4 (082262)

11. Beaches

(a) The WESTKAPELLE are to be known as TARE Sector, and the VLISSINGEN
area to be known as UNCLE Sector.

(b) Sec Trace "P" att⁴ for details of btys etc.

(c) Beaches will be known by code names:

UNCLE	-	VLISSINGEN area
TARE GREEN	-	SOUTH of gap
TARE WHITE	-	inside of gap
TARE RED	-	Dyke NORTH of WESTKAPELLE

(d) The following ONLY will be opened up as maint beaches:

(i) UNCLE

⁴ Not included.

(ii) TARE GREEN

TARE RED

12. Naval sp

(a) FOB parties att to cdos:

48 Cdo - one party for bombarding vessels
one party for sp craft

41 Cdo - - do -

47 Cdo - - do -

(b) Detailed naval gunnery programme shown at Appx "C" att⁵

13. Air Sp

(a) Direct air sp from 84 Gp RAF available on call through Bde HQ.

(b) A time lag of at least 20 mins must be accepted from the time demand is passed through ASSU channels from Bde HQ until aircraft are over target.

(c) YELLOW smoke will be used to indicate line of fwd tps.

(d) Appx "G" gives

(i) Hy Bomber Programme - Pre "D" Day

⁵ Not included.

(ii) Hy Bomber Programme - "D" Day

14. RAC

- (a) Four asslt teams 30 Armd Bde in sp 41 Cdo initially but on call for 48 Cdo.
- (b) One sec 10 (IA) Cdo to land with asslt teams to provide local protection.
- (c) LO with 19 set from 1 LOTHIAN att to each 41 Cdo, 48 Cdo and 47 Cdo as FOO.
- (d) Comp asslt teams:

FLAIL	FLAIL	FLAIL	FLAIL
FLAIL	FLAIL	FLAIL	FLAIL
AVRE	FLAIL	AVRE	FLAIL
AVRE	AVRE	AVRE	AVRE
BULLDOZER	AVRE	BULLDOZER	AVRE

NOTE: This comp is NOT firm and is liable to alteration.

15. Arty

- (a) FOO party to each Cdo
- (b) Detailed programme to be issued later as Appx "D".⁶

⁶ Not included.

16. Amphibious Asslt Reqt

(a) See para 10 above for allotment of tps.

(b) Comp of sqn:

Two LVT(2)s - vehs

Eighteen LVT(4)s - Tp carrying or stores

(c) 4 Cdo's LVTs for Phase I to conc at BRESKENS and swim across R SCHEDULE when called for. CCsL (WEASELS) to be landed from one LCT at WESTKAPELLE.

(d) For Phase II 4 Cdo will NOT use the LVTs allotted to them as they cannot be transported from BRESKENS to OSTEND. They will use LVTs made available to them from bde resources.

17. RE

(a) SEE para 10 above for allotment of tps.

(b) RE stores will be available in the BMA.

18. Landing Table

See Appx "E" att.⁷

19. Smoke

⁷ Not included.

(a) Programme as follows:

Serial No	Time	Source	Target	Remarks
1	H-15 to H-30	Aircraft (SC1)	Gen area of dunes from DOMBERG NW	To screen the beaches from DOMBURG btys
2	H-30 to H-180	LCT(R)	As for Serial 1	As for Serial 1
3	H-hr and on call	LCP(L)s - 12	As asked for by units	(a) Smoke only possible if wind is between WEST and SOUTH (b) Call for smoke through FOBS sp gp
4	D-1 0800 hrs to 0900 hrs	Aircraft (SC1)	ZOUTELANDE area	To screen ZOUTELANDE from DOMBERG btys
				(On call at Bde Comds discretion)

(b) Units may use own smoke resources for local screens providing the smoke will NOT interfere with beaching or craft.

(c) NO arty smoke available until adv SOUTH along dunes has reached own arty 25 pr range. Then on call through FOO.

20. Timings

(a) For times of embarkation see Mov Instr No. 1, dated 25 Oct 44.

(b) Phase I

As issued by 155 (L) Inf Bde.

(c) Phase II

See 4 SS Bde Gp Landing Table No. 1 att at Appx "E".⁸

(d) "D" day

1 Nov 44.

(e) H-hr

0945 hrs NOTE: If op NOT mounted 1 Nov: H hour retards 45 mins
per day: i.e., - 2 Nov - 1030 hrs and so no.

ADM

21. See 4 SS Bde Gp Adm Order No. 1.

INTERCOMN

22. HQ

(a) Combined Naval, Mil and Air HQ in HMS "KINGSMILL".

(b) Tac Bde HQ in LCT lands with 47 Cdo about H-90 mins.

(c) Main Bde HQ in LCT landing at H-120 mins. Subsequent move to be notified.

⁸ Not included.

(d) Rear Bde HQ - carried in 1 LCT to be est in BMA after landing.
See Appx "E"⁹for exact times of landing.

23. Sigs

See 4 SS Bde Gp Sigs Instr No. 1 issued separately.

24. ASSU

(a) one tcl with each Tac Bde HQ and Main Bde HQ;

(b) one controller aboard each HMS WARSPITE and HMS KINGSMILL.

25. Wireless Silence

INFAT: I

(a) 4 Cdo to act on orders issued by 155 (L) Inf Bde.

INFAT: II

(a) Wireless silence will be relaxed H-70 mins when all sets will come up on listening watch.

(b) Wireless silence breaks at H-15, or when surprise is lost.

26. Codes and Ciphers

See 4 SS Bde Gp Sigs Instr No. 1.

⁹ Not included.

27. Codewords

As shown at Appx "F" att¹⁰

28. Synchroisation

By Ship's time

ACK

(signed) B.G. Pugh

Method of issue - SDR

(B.G. Pugh)

Time of signature 25/0945A

Maj

Time of issued to Sigs

BM 4 SS Bde

¹⁰ Not included.

INFATUATE

Appx "B" to 4 SS Bde Gp OO No. 6

Dated 23 Oct 44

4 SS Bde Gp

Order of Battle No. 2

Serial

Unit

HQ Unit

1 HQ 4 SS Bde Gp

ARMD CORPS

2 HQ 30 Armd Bde

3 1 Lothians (Less two Sqns)

4 Dets 11 R Tks

5 HQ 4 SS Bde Patrol GHQ Liaison Regt

6

ARMY

7 2 Cdn AGRA

8 9 AGRA

9 3 Super Hy Regt

10 Two HAA Regts from 76 AA Bde

11 Two Div Artys

12

13

ENG

14

HQ 59 GHQ Tps RE

15

509 Fd Coy RE

16

510 Fed Coy RE

17

511 Fd Pk Coy RE

18

87 Aslt Sqn RE

19

Dets 5 Aslt Sqn RE

20

2 Sec 1 Tp RM Eng Cdo

SIGS

21

HQ 4 SS Bde Sigs

INF

22

4 Cdo

23

10 (IA) Cdo

24

41 RM Cdo

25

47 RM Cdo

26

48 RM Cdo

27

KEEPFORCE

28

HQ 155 (L) Inf Bde

29

HQ 155 (L) Bde Ground Def Pl

30

7/9 RS

31

4 KOSB

32

5 KOSB

33

34

35

MEDS

36 17 Cdn Lt Fd Amb

37 10 Cdn FDS

38 Lt Sec 6 Cdn FDS

39 5 Cdn FTU

40 8 Cdn FTU

41 9 Cdn FSU

42

43

44

REME

45 HQ 4 SS Bde LAD

46 3 Cdn AWD

47

POSTAL

48 Det SS Gp Postal Unit

LAB

49 144 Pnr Coy

50

This supersedes 4 SS Bde Order of Battle No. 1 which should be destroyed.

NOTES SUR L'ORGANIZATION THEORIQUE- D'UN COMMANDO -

Le Commando est une unité légère spécialement entraînée en vue des opérations de débarquement et des coups de main sur les côtes ennemies.

Il se compose en principe de 461 hommes, dont 24 officiers. Au début, il était formé avec des volontaires venus de toutes les armes; à l'heure actuelle, les effectifs en sont essentiellement fournis par les "Royal Marines", bien qu'il existe encore des commandos formés entièrement avec des contingents provenant de l'Armée de terre.

Le commando se divise en un groupe de commandement (headquarters) et six troupes (troops) dont une troupe d'accompagnement (heavy weapons troop) dotée de deux mortiers de 3 pounces (75 m/m) et deux mitrailleuses moyennes (Vickers cal.:303). La troupe normale comprend 3 officiers et 62 sous-officiers et soldats. Elle se divise en deux sections (sections) dont chacune se subdivise en deux sous-sections (sub sections). Chaque sous-section comprend un groupe d'assaut (assault group) et un groupe du fusil mitrailleur (Bren group).

Le tableau schématique ci-joint représente graphiquement l'organisation d'un commando. L'effectif de chaque sous-unité y est indiqué au-dessus du carré correspondant, le nombre d'officiers étant placé à gauche du trait, le nombre de sous-officiers et hommes de troupe se trouvant à droite du trait.

(Repport sur L'Operation Amphibie
de L'Ile de Walcheren: H.Q.
First Cdn Army: Mission Francaise
de Liaison: a document in the
custody of H.Q. Royal Marines,
Admiralty, London)

TROOPS AND UNITS ATTACHED TO NO. 4 COMMANDO FOR THE
INITIAL STAGES OF OPERATION "INFATUATE" I"

One Section Dutch Troop No. 10 (I.A.) Commando.
One Platoon 59 GHQ Troops, RE.
One Section 144 Pioneer Company.
Deachment Naval Beach Commandos.
Detachment Naval Beach Signals.
L.C.O.C.U.
Light Section 6 Canadian F.D.S.
"KEEPFORCE" recce party of Special Service Group.
One Squadron Assault R.E./R.A.C. (L.V.T. for stores).
F.O.O. and R.A. Rep parties.

(AEF/4 CDO/C/D, Docket II,
Attack on Flushing by
4 Cdo, 1 Nov 44, p. 10)

Main HQ First Cdn Army/84 Gp RAF
17/1/9/Ops (First Cdn Army)
84G/TS 76/3/Ops (84 Gp RAF)

22 Oct 44

REVISED EDITION NO. 3

Copy No. Spare

FIRST CDN ARMY/84 GP RAF

OP "INFATUATE"

PRE-PLANNED AIR TARGETS PRIOR TO D-DAY

GENERAL

1. This document supersedes First Cdn Army TOP SECRET 17/1/9/Ops dated 2 Oct 44 and Appendices which is hereby cancelled. Recipients are requested to destroy their copies.

TARGET SCHEDULES

2. Revised schedules of targets for engagement for resources OUTSIDE 84 Gp RAF prior to D-Day of Op "INFATUATE", asre attached as Appx "A".

3. These have been revised to date, on the basis of latest available intelligence. Targets which have been destroyed or neutralized by flooding or otherwise have been deleted. Targets W1, W6 and W7 have been attacked on

21 Oct 44 by Bomber Comd RAF and should be considered in the light of bomb assessment reports NOT at present available.

4. The targets are segregated in categories as follows:

Page 1 Batteries affecting minesweeping and/or deployment of naval bombardment ships.

Page 2 Fixed coastal, medium and field batteries capable of firing onto SOUTH bank of WEST SCHEDULE.

Page 3 AA batteries limiting operations of 84 Gp RAF.

Page 4 Remaining batteries.

Page 5 Strong points and concrete emplacements.

REQUEST FOR AIR SUPPORT

5. It is requested that these targets may be appropriately engaged on a programme of bombing to be completed by 312359A Oct 44. Insofar as may be practicable, it would be desirable for this programme to be compressed into the period 290001A to 312359A Oct 44. Targets are NOT listed in a rigid order of priority but are listed in a general sequence which may be taken as a guide to what is operationally desirable.

TIME LIMIT

6. D-day is now set for 1 Nov 44 and therefore it is essential that this programme be affected fully by 312359A Oct 44. In the event of any postponement of D-day, recipients will be informed at once.

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

7. A requirement for the demolition of certain minefields by bombing on D-1 day, will be submitted separately.

8. Revised schedules of targets to be engaged from sources WITHIN 84 Gp RAF will be issued to addressees concerned.

9. Please acknowledge through normal channels on receipt attached.

Sgd (T.N. McEvoy) Air Cde
SASO - Ext 32
for AOC

Sgd (C.C. Mann) Brig
Chief of Staff - Ext 61
for GOC in C

Time of signature 1827 A hrs

Time of signature 1828 A hrs

Originator's No. G0310 (.) TOP SEC (.) Ref First Cdn Army 17/1/9 Ops and 84 G/TS 76/3/Ops dated 22 Oct 44 PREPLANNED AIR TARGETS OP "INFATUATE". The following additional targets are to be added immediately.

1 Appendix A:

- Special Targets

W 260 - Type	- defended area
Description	- FLUSHING
Map reference	- D103242
	- D107246
	- D116244
	- D117237

Photo reference R4/1-43 Prints 4027/8/9

Remarks and Results - May be taken on anytime prior to
H hour. Last bomb NOT later
than 010530A Nov 44. Cratering
accepted object - to breakdown
defence positions, dislocate
communications and demoralize
the enemy.

NOTE: It is understood that cancellation
can be made on five (5) hours
notice.

(W.D., "G" Plans, H.Q. First Cdn Army October 1944: Appx 21, folios
124-131.)

REVISED EDITION NUMBER 3
 (replacing target list
 issued as Appx A to Revised
 Edition No. 2 dated 2 Oct 44)

Appx A to
 17/1/9/Ops (First Cdn Army)
 84G/TS 76/3/Ops (84 Gp RAF)
 22 Oct 44

FIRST CDN ARMY/84 GP RAF

Copy Number

Op "INFATUATE"

TARGET SCHEDULE

for Pre-Planned Air Targets
 prior to D-Day. OUTSIDE
 Resources of 84 Gp RAF

Btys affecting minesweeping and/or
 deployment of naval bombardment ships

Target No	Type of Target	Description	Map Reference	Photo Reference	Results and Remarks
W11	Gun posn LCB	Bty 16. 4 gun 150 mm LCB 4 casemates 50' x 55' spaced about 85 yds apart 2 more casemates now under construction. Seem to be RADAR and OP sites. About 12 huts to SE, 1 SL nearby to NORTH. Sec armament; 2 20 mm AA guns Estimated max range 24000 yds	DO71278	R16/1145 Print 3017 R4/788 Print 3106/7 NOT annotated R4/860 Print 3080	NO definite damage to casemate visible from bombing attack. NOT affected by flooding. (APIS 21 A Gp 16 Oct.) Casemates on dunes NOT flooded - No bomb damage. (1 Cdn APIS - 24 Oct 44) ¹

¹ Annotations added to original schedule for information of the Chief of Staff.

Target No	Type of Target	Description	Map Reference	Photo Reference	Results and Remarks
W13	Gun posn MCB	Bty 12. 4 gun 150 mm MCB 4 casemates newly constructed 35' x 41'. Remainder open emplacements 35' diameter seem to be shelters. About 10 huts and shelters in shelters in rear. Sec armament; 1 on each flank. Estimate max range 24000 yds.	D034318	R16/1145 Print 3012 R4/788 Print 4106 Not annotated R4/860 Print 4102	Attacked by Bomber Comd RAF on 17 Sep No. 1 casemates hit on front. Nos. 2 and 3 casemates possibly hit No. 4 undamaged huts on posn damaged. NOT affected by floods. (APIS 21 A GP 16 Oct) NO change (1 Cdn APIS 24 Oct 44) ²
W17	Gun posn HCB	Bty 5. 4 gun 220 mm HCB emplacements open concrete octagonal 30' across 2-3000 rounds amn stored at each site. Arc of fire 360 degrees. Concrete magazines on either side of emplacement ramp below ground level and with roofs 16' thick. Str believed between 200-250 men. Sec Armament 2 150 mm guns 1 47 mm A tk, 4 20 mm AA guns. Estimated max range 25000 yds.	D055376	R16/1145 Print 4025 R4/860 Print 3211	Bty cratered by bombs. No. 3 gun probably damaged by near misses. No. 1 emplacement NO damage. No. 2 emplacement damaged by two near misses. No. 3 NO damage. No. 4 emplacement two near misses. (APIS 21 A Gp 16 Oct.) NO change (1 Cdn APIS 24 Oct 44) ³
W15	Gun posn MED ARTY	Bty 15. 4 gun 150 mm gun posn. Established max range 24000 yds.	D018349	R16/1145 Print 3174 3008	Attacked by Bomber Comd RAF 17 Sep. NOT damaged. NOT affected by floods. (APIS 21 A Gp 16 Oct.) NO change (1 Cdn APIS 24 Oct 44.)

² Annotations added to original schedule for information of the Chief of Staff.

³ Same as #2.

REVISED EDITION NUMBER 3
(replacing target list
issued as Appx A to Revised
Edition No. 2 dated 2 Oct 44)

Appx A to
17/1/9/Ops (First Cdn Army)
84G/TS 76/3/Ops (84 Gp RAF)
22 Oct 44

FIRST CDN ARMY/84 GP RAF

Op "INFATUATE"

TARGET SCHEDULE

for Pre-Planned Air Targets
prior to D-Day. OUTSIDE
Resources of 84 Gp RAF

Fixed coastal, med and fd btys capable of
firing onto SOUTH bank of WEST SCHEDULE

Target No	Type of Target	Description	Map Reference	Photo Reference	Results and Remarks
W6	Gun posn LCB	Bty 23. 4 gun 105 mm LCB Guns in casemates 45' x 38' on dyke WEST of fort. Casemates face WEST. Estimated max range 19000 yds.	D130239	R4/860 Print 3062	Attacked by hy bombers Bomber Comd RAF 11 Oct No. 1 casemate undamaged. No. 2 badly damaged. No. 3 near misses. No. 4 undermined by five near misses. Comms damaged Bty 50% effective. (1 Cdn APIS 15 Oct.) NO change (1 Cdn APIS 24 Oct 44) ¹

¹ Annotations added to original schedule for information of the Chief of Staff.

Target No	Type of Target	Description	Map Reference	Photo Reference	Results and Remarks
W7	Gun posn LCB	Bty 24. 3 or 4 gun LCB, 2 casemates 125238, 1 at 122238 and 1 at 123237. Casemates are 30' x 35'. 8 new bldgs at 123239. Amn 2 large cam mounds at 125238.	D125237	R16/1145 Print 4014 R4/860 Print 3040	Now considered to be a normal strong pt and NOT at it coastal bty (LCB) (APIS 21 A Gp 12 Oct) Reported active however by CBO 2 Cdn Corps 19 Oct. Casemates here possibly hold lt gun firing on beach immediately to WEST. LAA (37 mm) posn on top of casemates probably firing in dual LCB role. NO bomb damage or flooding (1 Cdn APIS 24 Oct 44.) ²
W16	Gun posn CD	3 lt guns estimated max range 13000 yds. New lt bty in open emplacements.	D048372	R16/1145 Print 4025	NO flooding NO bomb damage. 2 emplacements of 4 gun posn are seen to be occupied (1 Cdn APIS 24 Oct 44.) ³
W19	Gun posn CD	4 gun 105 mm posn. Estimated max range 19000 yds. In casemates. RADAR strong pt at 110406.	D104404	R4/788 Print 4184/5/6	NOT affected by floods. (APIS 21 A Gp 16 Oct 44.) NO change (1 Cdn APIS 24 Oct 44.) ⁴
W21	Gun posn CD	Bty 14. 4 gun 105 mm gun howitzers. Deep crescent layouts. Open emplacements 35' diameter spaced 35-98 yds apart. Estimated max range 13000 yds.	D075301	R4/860 Print 4113	No. 2 emplacement destroyed. Damage to Nos. 1, 3, 4 emplacements 23 Sep. NOT flooded. (1 Cdn APIS 15 Oct.) (Now completely flooded - 1 Cdn APIS 24 Oct 44.) ⁵
W26	Gun posn CD	4 gun 150 mm howitzers. Open emplacements. Estimated max range 14500 yds.	D227291	R4/854 Print 4177/4178	On ZUID BEVELAND ISLAND. NOTE: there are 10 dummy btys on these islands and this target may be a dummy. ⁶ (NO activity, probably dummy posn - 1 Cdn APIS 24 Oct 44.) ⁷
W27	Gun posn CD	4 lt guns in open emplacements. Estimated max range 13000 yds.	D428243	R16/1155 Print 4093/4	On ZUID BEVELAND ISL NOTE: there are 10 dummy btys on these islands and this target may be a dummy (Cancelled by Op "VITALITY".) ⁸

² Annotations added to original schedule for information of the Chief of Staff.

³ Same as #2.

⁴ Same as #2.

⁵ Same as #2.

⁶ Same as #2.

⁷ Same as #2.

⁸ Same as #2.

REVISED EDITION NUMBER 3
(replacing target list
issued as Appx A to Revised
Edition No. 2 dated 2 Oct 44)

Appx A to
17/1/9/Ops (First Cdn Army)
84G/TS 76/3/Ops (84 Gp RAF)

FIRST CDN ARMY/84 GP RAF

Copy Number

Op "INFATUATE"

TARGET SCHEDULE

for Pre-Planned Air Targets
prior to D-Day. OUTSIDE
Resources of 84 Gp RAF

AA Btys limiting operation of 84 Gp RAF

Target No	Type of Target	Description	Map Reference	Photo Reference	Results and Remarks
W1	Gun posn HAA	Bty 26. 4 gun 105 mm HAA bty. Deep crescent layout. Open emplacements 31-35 yds apart. 3 concrete shelters to WEST. Cam. CP centrally located. 2 SLs one off each flank. Sec Armament: 3 20 mm AA guns. A large RED CROSS is seen in centre of bty posn. May be in cupolas. Estimated max range 19000 yds.	D133237	R4/860 Print 3062	Attacked by hy bombers. Bomber Comd RAF 11 Oct Nos 2 and 3 posns hit. Activity at No. 1 posn. Robable damage to Nos. 2 and 3 guns and range finder. NOT affected by floods. (APIS 21 A Gp 16 Oct.) Nos. 2 and 3 emplacements hit - other installations damaged by large conc of craters fwd of Nos. 2 and 3 guns. NOT flooded. (1 Cdn APIS 24 Oct 44.) ¹

¹ Annotations added to original schedule for information of the
Chief of Staff.

Target No	Type of Target	Description	Map Reference	Photo Reference	Results and Remarks
W2	Gun posn HAA	Bty 18. 4 gun 105 mm HAA bty crescent layout. Guns in turrets set in sunken concrete emplacements 35 yds apart. Several large shelters in rear. Cam. CP central in rear connects to FREYA RADAR at 112278. 1 SL SOUTH of bty, another at 111278. Sec armament; 2 20 mm AA guns. Estimated max range 19000 yds.	D119272	R16/1145 Print 3005 R4/788 Print 3102 R4/860 Print 4032	NOT affected by flooding. Radar operating. (1 Cdn APIS 15 Oct.) All round bty flooded, but bty probably active a duckwalk path over saturated area connects to dyke rd. NO bomb damage (1 Cdn APIS 24 Oct 44.) ²
W3	Gun posn HAA	Bty 21. 4 gun 105 mm HAA bty crescent layout. Open rivetted emplacements 25' diameter spaced 20 yds apart. Cam. CP centrally located. May be in cupolas. Estimated max range 19000 yds.	D090252	R16/1145 Print 4167 R4/798 Print 3002	No 4 gun destroyed by attack 6/7 Oct. Flooding near bty but does NOT affect firing. (APIS 21 A Gp 16 Oct.) Bty on dyke NOT affected by flooding. Crew quarters in rear probably flooded. (1 Cdn APIS 24 Oct 44.) ³
W4	Gun posn HAA	Bty 19. 3 gun 75 mm HAA bty. Crescent layout. Open emplacements 30' diameter, spaced 83 yds apart, 2 concrete shelters to EAST. Further construction at 084257. Hy cam.	D082262	R4/788 Print 3104 and 3106 R4/860 Print 3077	Three gun bty may possibly be LAA NOT affect by floods. (1 Cdn APIS 24 Oct 44.) ⁴
W5	Gun posn AA	Bty 6. 4 gun 94 mm AA bty. Open emplacements 25' apart on top of buried shelters. Several shelters to NE. Sec armament; one 20 mm AA gun at 054370 Estimated max range 17000 yds.	D053374	R16/1145 Print 4025 R4/860 Print 3211	2 emplacements occupied-2 unoccupied. Gun from unoccupied emplacements probably moved to EAST of W16. (1 Cdn APIS 24 Oct 44.)
W33	Gun posn HAA	6 gun HAA bty in deep crescent layout	D128249	R4/860 Print 3027/8	NOT flooded. Some bombs nearby after hy bomber attack 11 Oct. (1 Cdn APIS 15 Oct.) 3 posns damaged. Now probably 3 LAA NOT 6 HAA. (1 Cdn APIS 24 Oct 44.) ⁵

² Annotations added to original schedule for information of the Chief of Staff.

³ Same as #2.

⁴ Same as #2.

⁵ Same as #2

Target No	Type of Target	Description	Map Reference	Photo Reference	Results and Remarks
W34	Gun posn HAA	4 x 105 mm HAA bty. Estimated range 19000 yds.	D175352	Phs to follow	Has been moved up above water level.
(Does not affect operation.) ⁶					

⁶ Annotations added to original schedule for information of the Chief of Staff.

REVISED EDITION NUMBER 3
 (replacing target list
 issued as Appx A to Revised
 Edition No. 2 dated 2 Oct 44)

Appx A to
 17/1/9/Ops (First Cdn Army)
 84G/TS 76/3/Ops (84 Gp RAF)
 22 Oct 44

FIRST CDN ARMY/84 GP RAF

Copy Number

Op "INFATUATE"

TARGET SCHEDULE

for Pre-Planned Air Targets
 prior to D-Day. OUTSIDE
 Resources of 84 GP RAF

Remaining btys

Target No	Type of Target	Description	Map Reference	Photo Reference	Results and Remarks
W20	Gun posn CD	Bty 15. 4 x 76.2 mm gun tp. Irregular line layout. About 2640 yds inland. Open emplacement 35' sq spaced 16-42 yds apart. OP centrally located. Shelter in rear.	D078300	R/161145 Print 3185	Weight of attack fell on dummy posn nearby. NOT flooded. (1 Cdn APIS 15 Oct)
(Bty well saturated) ¹					
W18	Gun posn CD	Thought to be a strong pt with possibly 2 lt guns in casemates	D076388	R4/788 Print 3195/6	Probable strong pt with small casemates for two lt guns. NOT flooded NO damage. (1 Cdn APIS 24 Oct 44.)
W24	Gun posn CD	4 gun 150 mm howitzer posn. Estimated max range 14500 yds. Open emplacements.	D094364	R16/1145 Print 4069	

¹ Annotations added to original schedule for information of the Chief of Staff.

Target No	Type of Target	Description	Map Reference	Photo Reference	Results and Remarks
(Bty completed flooded.) ²					
W36	Gun posn FD	4 gun posn (fd). Occupied.	D083299	Photo to follow	
(Bty area well saturated) ³					
W37	Gun posn CD	1 x 150 mm gun.	D059379	R4/997 Print 4020/1/12	NO change (1 Cdn APIS 24 Oct 44). ⁴
W38	Gun posn CD	4 x 75 mm gun howitzers. In open emplacements. Occupied. Estimated max range 13000 yds.	D036342	Photo to follow	
(Bty area saturated.) ⁵					

² Same as #1.

³ Annotations added to original schedule for information of the Chief of Staff.

⁴ Same as #3.

⁵ Same as #3.

REVISED EDITION NUMBER 3
 (replacing target list
 issued as Appx A to Revised
 Edition No. 2 dated 2 Oct 44)

Appx A to
 17/1/9/Ops (First Cdn Army)
 84G/TS 76/3/Ops (84 Gp RAF)
 22 Oct 44

FIRST CDN ARMY/84 GP RAF

Copy Number

Op "INFATUATE"

TARGET SCHEDULE

for Pre-Planned Air Targets
 prior to D-Day. OUTSIDE
 Resources of 84 GP RAF

Strong pts and concrete emplacements.

Target No	Type of Target	Description	Map Reference	Photo Reference	Results and Remarks
W281	Defs	Strong pt, concrete shelters and emplacements.	D043368	R4/997 Prints 3151/2	NOT flooded - active 20 Oct. (1 Cdn APIS 20 Oct.) NO change. (1 Cdn APIS 24 Oct 44.) ¹
W282	Defs	Strong pt, concrete shelters and emplacements.	D036364	R4/997 Print 3152/3	NOT flooded - active 20 Oct. (1 Cdn APIS 20 Oct.) NO change. (1 Cdn APIS 24 Oct 44.) ²
W283	Defs	Strong pt, concrete shelters and emplacements.	D030361	R4/997 Print 3153/4	NOT flooded - active 20 Oct. (1 Cdn APIS 20 Oct.) NO change. (1 Cdn APIS 24 Oct 44.) ³

¹ Annotations added to original scheudle for information of the Chief of Staff.

² Same as #1.

³ Same as #1.

Target No	Type of Target	Description	Map Reference	Photo Reference	Results and Remarks
W284	Defs	Strong pt, concrete shelters and emplacements.	D022357	R4/997 Print 3155/6	NOT flooded - active 20 Oct. (1 Cdn APIS 20 Oct.) NO change. (1 Cdn APIS 24 Oct 44.) ⁴
W285	Defs	Strong pt, concrete emplacements dominating landing beach at short range.	D026331	R4/997 Prints 4015/6	NOT flooded - active 20 Oct. (1 Cdn APIS 20 Oct.) NO change. (1 Cdn APIS 24 Oct 44.) ⁵
W286	Defs	Strong pt with concrete emplacements.	D029325	R4/997 Print 4016/7	NOT flooded - active 20 Oct. (1 Cdn APIS 20 Oct.) NO change. (1 Cdn APIS 24 Oct 44.) ⁶
W287	Defs	Strong pt with concrete emplacements.	D042312	R4/997 Print 3020/1	NOT flooded - active 20 Oct. (1 Cdn APIS 20 Oct.) NO change. (1 Cdn APIS 24 Oct 44.) ⁷
W288	Defs	Strong pt with concrete emplacements and trenches.	D055304	R4/997 Print 4034/5	NOT flooded - active 20 Oct. (1 Cdn APIS 20 Oct.) NO change. (1 Cdn APIS 24 Oct 44.) ⁸
W289	Strong pts	Two hy casemates and pillboxes on shoulder of gap.	D019336	R4/1139 Prints 4029/30	

(W.D., "G" Plans, H.Q. First Cdn Army, October 1944: Appx 21, folios 124-131.)

⁴ Annotations added to original schedule for information of the Chief of Staff.

⁵ Same as #4.

⁶ Same as #4.

⁷ Same as #4.

⁸ Same as #4.

OPERATION "INFATUATE"

AIR PLAN

Appendix "A" - Summary of target allocation.

Appendix "B" - Cover and close support - D-Day.

Aim of Operation

1. The aim of Operation "Infatuate" is to capture the island of WALCHEREN as part of the plan for clearing the mouth of the SCHEDULE to enable ANTWERP to be used as a port.

Plan for Assault

2. The First Canadian Army propose to launch two seaborned assaults on the island of WALCEREN as follows:

- a. Infatuate I - an assault by elements of 52 Div on FLUSHING.
- b. Infatuate II - an assault by "Force T" carrying 4th S.S. Bde to land on the breach made by Bomber Command in the dyke at WESTKAPELLE.

Flooding

3. Flooding was a preliminary part of the plan, for the purpose of:
- a. enabling coastal defences to be taken in rear by water-borne forces;

- b. to submerge some of the defences or render them unserviceable; and
- c. to drive out or limit the movement of the garrison.

Preparation of the island for the Assault

4. Assuming that flooding would be successful, the Army have listed the defences which would be unaffected by flooding and which would require to be put out of action to enable seaborne assaults to be likely to succeed. The light scale of equipment of the forces used and their vulnerability to shore defences coupled with the need to capture the island quickly makes the thorough destruction of these defences a necessity.

Destruction of defences before D-Day

5. There are three means by which the WALCHEREN defences might be put out of action before D-Day.

- a. air bombardment;
- b. naval bombardment; and
- c. bombardment by artillery based in the BRESKENS area.

Naval bombardment is being used to cover the Assault itself and all ammunition carried in the ships will be required for this purpose. If these ships were used for pre D-Day bombardment, they would have to return to U.K. to rearm before the Assault. Result and rearm takes three days. Their lack of effect (compared with air bombardment) and this gap of three days rules out naval bombardment as a preparatory measure.

6. Shore-based artillery is being moved up towards BRESKENS but cannot be mounted in any strength until the BRESKENS bridgehead has been cleared of the enemy. Moreover, ammunition supply difficulties for the heavy and super heavy guns limits their use before D-Day.

7. We have to rely therefore on air bombardment for the necessary destruction of the defences before D-Day. Some of this bombardment is being undertaken by aircraft of 84 Group. Many of the defences, however, are concrete gun emplacements and heavy pillboxes which cannot be put out of action by the weight of attack this Group is able to deliver.

Schedule of Targets

8. A schedule of the targets which are considered outside the resources of this Group has been forwarded under cover of this Headquarters letter 84G/TS.76/3/Ops dated 22nd October 1944 as "Revised Edition No. 3" of the schedule of pre-planned air targets prior to D-Day.

9. Some of these targets have already been partly put out of action by previous attacks and since the first issue of the schedule others have been put out of action by further flooding.

10. Certain targets listed as "Outside the resources of 84 Group" are nevertheless being taken by this Group up to last light 29 Oct (but see para 11) where there is any likelihood of our attacks being effective. These targets are listed as Appendix "A".¹ If our attack on any target proves effective we have undertaken to notify Bomber Command in order that they may be relieved of the task of attacking it.

¹ Appendix "H" to this report.

Attacks by 84 Group after 29 Oct

11. In order that Bomber Command's commitments can be reduced as much as possible, 84 Group will continue attacks on the "B" Targets after 29 Oct whenever Bomber Command inform 84 Group that the targets are not being attacked by heavies. This clearance will be given by the code words "Infatuate. Field clear (times)".

e.g. "Infatuate. Field clear 300700A - 301900A."

Notification of attacks and assessments

12. It is requested that H.Q. Bomber Command may inform H.Q. 84 Group direct of damage assessments as soon as they are known.

D-Day Air Support

Infatuate I

13. The force assaulting FLUSHING requires preliminary heavy bombardment of the defences and a small area in the town and waterfront as late as possible before their landing, beyond what artillery can give. Since the landing is at dawn, it follows that bombardment immediately before it would be in the dark and weather may prevent it. In view of the likelihood of weather unfavourable for air bombardment, the assaulting force will accept air bombardment at any time before the assault when weather is suitable. Artillery based in the BRESKENS area will be used in any event to support the Assault, which will NOT be dependent on any form of air support other than the preparatory bombing requested above.

Infatuate II

14. The air support required on D-Day for the landing at WESTKAPELLE is entirely within the resources of 84 Group. The means by which it is proposed that this support should be given are described at Appendix "B".²

TIMINGS

Infatuate I

15. The G.O.C.-in-C. First Canadian Army intends to launch Infatuate I on 1st November 1944.

H Hour 0630 A hours

Time after which no bombs
are to be dropped 0530 A hours

Infatuate II

16. The G.O.C.-IN-C. First Canadian Army hopes to launch Infatuate II also on 1st November, but he may postpone D-Day if the air bombardment programme has not been completed. If pre D-Day air bombardment can be carried out according to plan, the provisional time of last bomb for Infatuate II is the same as that for Infatuate I i.e., 0530 A 1st November, but may be postponed for certain targets in accordance with para 19.

² Appendix "J" to this report.

Notification of Postponement

17. H.Q. 84 Group undertake to notify all air force formations concerned of any postponement necessitated by military or naval reasons. It has been agreed that a minimum of six hours notice of postponement will be given.

18. It is requested that H.Q. Bomber Command may notify H.Q 84 Group as early as possible of their intentions in order that G.O.C.-in-C. First Canadian Army may have earliest information on which to base his decisions when to launch the Assaults.

Destruction of Vital Targets

19. It can hardly be expected that all the defences attacked by Bomber Command will be completely destroyed and some may be effective or be repaired after bombardment but before the Assaults. Some of these defences that have come to life again may vitally jeopardize the Assault, particularly the guns near FLUSHING and near WESTKAPELLE. Should this happen, it is most desirable that Bomber Command should be requested to attack these individual targets again when possible, up to the agreed times of last bombing for each Assault.

HQ 84 Group RAF
85G/TS.76/3/Ops/Main
27 Oct 44

Sgd (T.N. McEVOY)
for Air Vice-Marshal,
Commanding,
No. 84 Group
ROYAL AIR FORCE.

DISTRIBUTION

Headquarters 2nd T.A.F. (Main) (4 copies)

Copies to: 84 G.C.C.

H.Q. 1st Cdn Army

G/Capt. Cleland, Force "T"

Naval Commander Force "T"

Includes copies for onward Transmission to H.Q. S.H.A.E.F. (Air)
& Bomber Command if approved.

(Distribution List in original document may be corrupt)

(AEF/84 Gp RAF/C/I, Operation "INFATUATE" Air Plan)

COPY

APPENDIX "A" TO
AIR PLAN FOR
OPERATION "INFATUATE"

SUMMARY OF TARGET ALLOCATION

1. "A" Targets are those outside the resources of 84 Group.
2. "B" Targets are those hitherto classed as outside the resources of 84 Group but which are being initially taken on by 84 Group to reduce Bomber Command's commitments as far as possible.
3. References are to "First Canadian Army/84 Group R.A.F. Operation "Infatuate" Target schedule (Revised Edition No. 3)" reference 84 G/TS.76/3/Ops/Main dated 22 Oct 44.

"A" TARGETS

"B" TARGETS

W11

W16

W13

W1

W17

W2

W15

W3

W6

W4

W7

W33

W19

W37

W5

W18

W281

W282

W283

W284

W285

W286

W287

W288

W289

W260

4. Method by which the attacks on the "B" Targets are to be coordinated as between Bomber Command and 84 Group are described at paragraph 11 of the Air Plan.

(AEF/84 Gp RAF/C/I, Operation "INFATUATE" Air Plan).

APPENDIX "J"

COPY

APPENDIX "B" TO
OPERATION "INFATUATE"
AIR PLAN

INFATUATE II

COVER AND CLOSE SUPPORT - D-DAY

Cover.

1. Fighter Cover will be provided for the naval assault and bombardment forces from first light on D-Day throughout the operation. The scale of cover given will depend on the scale of enemy air opposition expected at the time but is unlikely to exceed an escort of two fighter sections, and fighter watch.

Close Support

2. Pre-arranged support.

- a. H-40 to H-20. Fighter/bombing with instantaneous-fused 500 lb and 250 lb bombs on enemy defences between targets W15 and W154. Object, to kill personnel and keep down the heads of those that remain alive.
- b. H-5 to H-10. "Cab rank" of four squadrons of R.P. Typhoons on call for Fighter Direction Ship for attack on preselected beach

defences after L.C.G.(R) rockets have been fired and before assaulting troops get ashore.

- c. H-10 onwards. Continuous fighter cab rank on patrol. At first these aircraft will attack any guns seen by pilots to be firing or any enemy seen by pilots. When A.S.S.U. tentacle opens up on shore and is in touch with F.C.P. the cab rank can be directed on to targets by F.C.P. control.

- d. From first light onwards. Remainder of 84 Group fighter and fighter/bomber aircraft not engaged on other First Canadian Army fronts to be available for cover or support as required.

- e. H-15 to H-30. Arrangements have been made by H.Q. 2nd T.A.F. for Bostons to lay smoke screens NORTH and SOUTH of the landing to screen the assaulting troops from observation by enemy positions. Smoke will also be laid on D - 1 day under arrangements made by H.Q. 2nd T.A.F.

3. Full details of the Assault for "Infatuate II" will be given in the 84 Group Operation Order.

H.Q. 84 Group RAF

84g/ts.76/3/Ops/Main

27th OCT 44

(AEF/84 Gp RAF/C/I, Operational "INFATUATE" Air Plan)

The following abbreviations are used in the reports on which the present account of the assaults on Walcheren is based, and are listed for convenience here.

NCFT	Naval Commander, Force "T" (the naval force concerned)
DSOAG	Deputy Senior Officer Assault Group
PBM	Principal Beach Master
FOB	Forward Officer Bombardment
FOO	Forward Observation Officer
ORS	Operational Research Section
LCI(S)	Landing Craft, Infantry (Small)
LCT	Landing Craft, Tank
LCT(R)	Landing Craft, Tank (Rocket)
LCG(L)	Landing Craft, Gun (Large)
LCG(M)	Landing Craft, Gun (Medium)
LCF	Landing Craft, Flak
LCS	Landing Craft, Support
LCH	Landing Craft, Headquarters
ML	Motor Launch
LVT	Landing Vehicles, Tracked ("Alligator" or "Buffalo")
LCP(L)	Landing Craft, Personnel (Large)

(AEF/21 Army Gp/F, Docket III: A.O.R.G. Report No. 299, p.2)

The following maps in the G.S.G.S. series on the scale 1:500,000 have been used:

- G.S.G.S. 4083 - Belgium and Holland
- Sheet Nos 42, 43, 44, 47, 48, 49, 50

- G.S.G.S. 4040 - Belgium and Holland
- Sheet Nos 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34.