

360. The enemy had control of further potential flooding around the neck of the Cotentin Peninsula. From La Barquette, the land bordering the upper reaches of the River Douve and its main tributaries was below sea level at high tide. This land can be flooded by opening the locks at La Barquette.\* If the lock was controlled by the invaders, and the bridges over the rivers seized or destroyed, the area thus flooded could funnel enemy forces attempting to reinforce the Cherbourg garrison through two easily defended corridors at the base of the peninsula. Furthermore, this area so flooded would protect the flank of American forces moving on Cherbourg, while drained it would facilitate a breakout to the south.

361. Originally, it was planned to drop 82 A/B Div near La Haye du Puits so as to block enemy movement through the western corridor. Late in May, however, reports of the movement of an additional German division into the area were confirmed, leaving the Army Commander "little choice but to shift the 82d nearer the beach in support of the seaborne landing" (Bradley, op cit, p. 235).

362. With these geographic factors in mind, it will be easier to comprehend the divisional plans and operations on D Day.

363. (v) 101st Airborne Division The D Day  
plan for 101 A/B Div

... was to clear the way for the seaborne assault [on UTAH Beach] by seizing the western exits of the four roads from the beach across the inundated area. At the same time it was to establish defensive areas along the northern and southern edges of the invasion area and establish bridgeheads across the Douve at two points for later exploitation in a southward drive to Carentan to weld VII and V Corps Beachheads.

(Historical Section, Department of the Army, Utah Beach to Cherbourg, 6 June-27 June 1944 (U.S.A. War Office Publication, 1947), p. 10)

364. The landing zones of the division's three parachute regiments\*\* were in an almost straight line

---

\*The Germans had flooded this area for their own purposes before D Day. (Harrison, op cit, p. 287)

\*\*On D Day 101 A/B Div comprised three Parachute Infantry Regiments (which resembled British Parachute Brigades) and one Glider Regiment, together with other supporting sub-units. Only 315 glider troops were to land in support of the division on D Day. (Utah Beach..., op cit, p. 14) The bulk of the division's 327th Glider Infantry landed from the sea on D plus 1. (Ibid, p. 15).

between Carentan and Foucarville behind UTAH Beach. (Ibid; see the maps at the end of this book for a graphic description of the airborne divisions' D Day plans).

365. 502 Prcht Inf was to drop in an area a mile inland from St. Martin-de-Varreville. One battalion was to seize the western exits of the two northern causeways leading from the beaches. The two remaining battalions were to secure the division's northern flank after knocking out certain enemy battery positions at St. Martin-de-Varreville. (Leonard Rapport and Arthur Northwood Jr., Rendezvous With Destiny, A History of the 101st Airborne Division (Washington, 1948), pp 90 ff) The regiment's -- and thus the division's -- D Day objective line in the north ran due east from Beuzeville-au-Plain to the sea.

366. To the south, 506 Prcht Inf (less 3d Bn) was to drop in the area northeast of Hiesville. This regiment was to seize the western exits of the other two causeways leading inland from UTAH Beach. Landing in the same zone would be 3d Bn, 501 Prcht Inf, as divisional reserve. (Ibid)

367. One battalion of 506 Prcht Inf, together with the main body of 501 Prcht Inf, was to drop in an area about one mile south of Vierville, close to the Douve River locks. 506 Prcht Inf's battalion was to seize the locks at La Barquette and hold a small bridgehead across the river at that point. The second was to destroy the railway bridge over the Douve northwest of Carentan and two road bridges a mile to the east. These operations, together with the water obstacles, would secure the southern flank of the divisional area and would complete the establishment of a firm base for the attack on Carentan.

368. The main body of 101 A/B Div was scheduled to start their drop at 0119 hrs, approximately an hour after the "Pathfinders" had landed. (Harrison, op cit, pp 280 ff) Owing to enemy flak and poor visibility, the drop was widely dispersed and, like their British counterparts in 6 Airborne Div, men from various units and sub-units were collected together in groups to accomplish regimental missions.

369. 502 Prcht Inf, widely scattered as it was,\*\*

---

\*The Pathfinders were dropped in advance to mark out the regimental dropping zones with colored lights, etc.

\*\*One battalion of this regiment was so scattered that it did not fight as a unit on D Day. Another (artillery) battalion, dropped in support, lost the great part of its equipment. (Ibid)

was successful in carrying out its main tasks. One group, finding the St. Martin battery had been moved and the position deserted, took possession of the western exit of one of the northern causeways without a struggle. It made contact with the seaborne forces at 1300 hrs after inflicting many casualties on enemy forces retreating inland from the beach defences. Another regimental force, meeting with stiffer opposition, managed to secure the most northern causeway and later, in company with other regimental units, established a defensive line from Foucarville to a point east of Beuzeville-au-Plain by the end of D Day.

370. 506 Prcht Inf, although similarly scattered, was able to assemble more quickly. However one unit, charged with securing the exits of the two southern causeways, was delayed to the extent that seaborne troops had crossed the causeway before the parachutists arrived. The other causeway was not cleared until noon owing to the understrength forces which could be gathered together to attack it. (Ibid)

371. Further south, the third battalion of 506 Prcht Inf made a scattered drop among an alerted enemy. An extremely weak group seized the two bridges over the Douve northeast of Carentan but was unable to hold a bridgehead on the southern bank of the river. Meanwhile, the main body of 501 Prcht Inf set about its tasks. The La Barquette locks were quickly seized with little opposition and a bridgehead over the Douve established. Stubborn enemy resistance prevented the regiment from destroying the railway and road bridges northwest of Carentan, however, and these were still in enemy hands that night.

372. The division's position at the end of the day's action is described as follows:

By the end of D Day the 101st Airborne Division had assembled only about 2,500 of the 6,600 men who had dropped during the early morning hours. They were distributed in mixed units of varying size. But despite the handicaps of scattered landings and heavy losses in both men and equipment the division had carried out the most important of its D-Day tasks. Above all, the paratroopers had succeeded in clearing the way for the move of the seaborne forces inland. This was the task which had been considered so vital to the whole Allied invasion plan as to warrant the extraordinary risk of airborne landings in heavily defended enemy territory. If the division's defensive line north and south was weak, the weakness was for the moment balanced by the enemy's failure to organize concerted counterattacks.\*

(Ibid, pp 288-89)

---

\*"Total D Day casualties [for 101 A/B Div] calculated in August 1944 amounted to 1,240 including 182 known killed and 501 missing and presumed captured or killed" (Harrison, op cit, p. 284).

373. (vi) 82d Airborne Division The D Day  
plan for 82 A/B Div was

... to secure the western edge of the [UTAH] bridgehead, particularly by capture of Ste. Mère-Eglise, a key communication centre, and by establishing deep bridgeheads over the Merderet River, on the two main roads westward from Ste. Mère-Eglise, for a drive toward St. Sauveur-le Vicomte.

(Utah Beach..., op cit, p. 10)

The division, landing further inland than 101 A/B Div, was to drop one regiment east and two regiments west of the Merderet.

374. The 500th Parachute Infantry, landing east of the Merderet, was to

... capture Ste. Mère-Eglise, seize and secure the river crossing near la Fièrre and Chef-du-Pont, and secure a line in the north running through Neuville-au-Plain and tying in with the 101st Airborne Division in the vicinity of Pandienville or Beuzeville-au-Plain.

(Ibid, p. 30)

375. West of the Merderet, landing hard by Gourbesville, 507 Prcht Inf

... was to assist the 505th in securing the la Fièrre bridgehead and then establish a defensive line running southwest from Gourbesville to Renouf.

(Ibid)

It was then "to be prepared to assume the offensive westward and secure the line of the Douve River" (Ibid). Also landing west of the Merderet (in a zone northeast of Pont l'Abbé) was 508 Prcht Inf. It was

... to destroy the crossings of the Douve at Beuzeville-la Bastille and Pont l'Abbé and extend the 507th's defensive line south from Renouf.

(Ibid)

From this it can be seen that this western defensive line would be about three miles west of the Merderet and would have its southern line resting on the flooded portion of that river.

376. H Hour for the division was approximately one hour later than that of 101 A/B Div, i.e., between 0230 and 0300 hrs on D Day.

377. The 505 Precht Inf experienced an exceptionally good drop in its sector which, fortunately, was devoid of enemy (Harrison, op cit, p. 289). One force moved immediately on Ste. Mère-Eglise and occupied the town before dawn. Another force, after setting out to establish the defensive line in the north, was diverted in mid-morning to help defend Ste. Mère-Eglise against enemy counter-attacks from the south. These attacks were successfully contained. A third force proceeded toward the two crossings over the Merderet, but it soon became entangled with elements from 507 and 508 Precht Inf.

378. The 507th and 508th Parachute Infantry suffered a very wide dispersal. Many dropped in the Merderet swamps and, in order to survive, had to abandon equipment sorely needed later in the day. West of the river, scattered sub-units of both regiments, out of contact with the division and each other, were engaged in a number of actions throughout the day. Some of the larger groups were unable to link up with the remainder of the division for several days.

379. The major part of the fighting took place along the eastern part of the Merderet. Many parachutists from 507 Precht Inf, dropping in the marshy area east of their planned DZ, made for the high railway embankment running east of the Merderet. Assembling in La Fièrre, the river came between them and their objective. Attempts to seize the La Fièrre and Chef-du-Pont crossings were made throughout the day but were unsuccessful. At one point a small bridgehead was established on the western exit of the La Fièrre causeway, but since it was not reinforced, the group holding it was dispersed by enemy action shortly thereafter. A quick enemy counter-attack across the bridge gained him a temporary foothold on the eastern bank. Poor communications (made worse by the obstacles offered by the hedgerow country), strong enemy resistance coupled with his armour and artillery support, and the failure of expected glider and seaborne reinforcements to arrive by the end of D Day, made impossible the attainment of a divisional bridgehead west of the Merderet. (Ibid)

380. The division's position at the end of the day has been summarized as follows:

At the end of D Day, the division was strongly ensconced in the vicinity of Ste. Mère-Eglise but was precariously situated outside the main VII Corps beachhead. It had no contact with the 101st Airborne or 4th Infantry Divisions. It had assembled only a fraction of its own men. Planned seaborne reinforcements had not arrived. The bulk of the glider reinforcements (the 325 Glider Infantry) were not due until the next morning. At the end of the day, the division reported that it controlled only 40 per cent of its combat infantry and 10 per cent of its artillery. The first estimate sent on to VII

Corps indicated total casualties of about four thousand. The bulk of these, however, were the missing paratroopers scattered far and wide in enemy territory. Revised calculations in August 1944 showed D Day losses of 1,259 including 156 known killed and 756 missing, presumed captured or killed.

(Ibid, p. 300)

.....

381. There are many interesting comparisons one can draw between the planned employment and actual operations of the British and American airborne forces. Both lacked the support of heavy weapons, and thus planned to make use of existing water obstacles, whether rivers or marshes, to defend themselves against enemy armoured counter-attacks. Each operation counted upon -- and achieved -- surprise, an essential factor to paratroopers dropped in enemy territory. The drop of the airborne divisions was widely scattered, with the result that objectives had to be seized by groups whose strength in men and equipment was much less than planned, a disadvantage which could only be made up, at least in part, by the initiative and speed of both officers and men.

382. It is difficult, if not impossible, to contrast the success of one airborne division against another. The wide dispersion alone prevents such a contrast even if other factors were not taken into consideration. What is more to the point is the success achieved by the three divisions in spite of their dispersal. That, if anything, should be the real measure of their success and contribution to the assault. Using this measurement, their operations achieved a degree of success greater than even the most optimistic could have planned.

383. (vii) 4th Infantry Division The sea-borne attack on UTAH Beach was to be made by VII Corps with the 4th Division in the assault. H Hour was at 0630 hrs. At H minus 2,

... a detachment of the 4th Cavalry Group was to land on the Iles St. Marcouf [lying four miles off UTAH Beach] to capture and destroy any installations there capable of hindering the landing operations. \*

(Utah Beach..., op cit, p. 10)

384. After an air and naval bombardment similar to that preceding the other assault forces, the division planned its assault in the following manner:

... the 4th Division ... planned to land in column of regiments on a two battalion front of about 2,200 yards. The 8th Infantry ... with the 3d Battalion of the 22d Infantry attached, would

---

\*After the attack the islands were found to be mined but unoccupied.

make the initial assault. It would first occupy the high ground along the road between Ste. Marie-du-Mont and les Forges and would be prepared to move with the bulk of its force thereafter westward across the Merderet River in the zone of the 82d Airborne Division. One battalion would be left in the area west of St. Martin to protect the division's north flank until the arrival of the 22d Infantry. The 22d Infantry..., next infantry unit to land, beginning at H plus 85 minutes, would turn north from the beaches to seize the causeway across the inundations at les Dunes de Varreville. Continuing the push northwest, the regiment would capture Quinéville and occupy the high ground at Quinéville and Fontenay-sur-Mer. In the centre of the beachhead the 12th Infantry ..., landing after H plus 4 hours, would advance with two battalions abreast to seize the high ground between Emondeville and the Merderet River [and the le Port Bréhay bridge across the Merderet].

.....  
One regiment (the 359th Infantry) of the 90th Division, the first follow-up division, was attached to the 4th Division to begin landing on D Day. It would assemble in reserve near Foucarville.

(Harrison, op cit, pp 302-04)

385. 4 Div encountered less opposition from enemy beach defences during the assault than any other assault force. Although the sea was comparatively calm and the landing made on time, the first assault waves were landed over a mile to the south of their planned sectors.\* Fortunately, enemy underwater obstacles and defences were fewer here than in the planned area. Within a short time, "... company size forces ... reduced the very lightly defended field fortifications covering the two middle beach exits..." (Harrison, op cit, p. 304). D.D. tanks, landing 15 minutes after the infantry had touched down, played a minor role in these and subsequent operations. Underwater obstacles were cleared in about an hour, and "well before H plus 3 hours the beach area had been cleared and landings were virtually routine, harassed only by sporadic enemy artillery fire" (Ibid).

386. The 8th Infantry had little trouble crossing the causeways and moving inland once the beach defences were subdued. Two battalions of the regiment reached the Les Forges crossroads and consolidated there during the evening. Another battalion reached the outskirts of Turqueville by nightfall. Thrust into the Les Forges - Turqueville - Ste. Mère-Eglise triangle, however, was a strong enemy pocket which acted as a barrier between 505 Pcht Inf and 8 Inf. Glider reinforcements for 82d Pcht Div, landing very close to this pocket late on D Day, suffered severe casualties from enemy ground fire.

---

\*Smoke and dust thrown up by the air and naval bombardment obscured landmarks from the sea; a strong current also contributed to this mislanding.

387. Operations of the other regiments of 4 Div can be summarized as follows:

In the northern portion of the 4th Division zone neither the 12th nor the 22d Infantry Regiment reached its D Day objective. Delays were caused not by enemy opposition but by the difficulty of moving up through the marshes. The 22d was halted in the general area from Hamel de Cruttes on the coast to St. Germain-de-Varreville. The 12th came up on the left of the 502d Parachute Infantry which was holding the 101st Division north flank near Beuzeville-au-Plain.

(Ibid, p. 329)

.....

388. The following sums up the position of VII Corps at the end of the day's operations:

General Bradley's right corps on UTAH Beach had its weaknesses at the end of D Day, but on the whole it was in a sound position, smaller than planned but better organized and stronger than might have been expected. The beach, though still under intermittent enemy artillery fire, was cleared and prepared for the orderly reception of reinforcements. The 4th Division was present in the beachhead virtually intact, organized and equipped for offensive action. Its casualties for the day were less than 200.\* If the position of the 82d Airborne Division caused some concern, the force was at hand to consolidate it.

(Ibid)

389. (viii) 1st Infantry Division Leading the assault of V Corps landing on OMAHA Beach was the 1st Infantry Division. This division was also faced with the problem of exits from the beach because of the 100-170 foot bluffs behind the beaches. However,

At four points along Omaha Beach small wooded valleys slope back inland and provide natural corridors for exit from the beach flat.

.....

These corridors were, inevitably, key areas both in the plan of attack and in the arrangement of defenses. The advance inland of assaulting units would depend on opening exit roads for traffic and supply from the beach, and armor used in the attack could only get up to the high ground through the draws.

(Historical Division, U.S. War Department, Omaha Beachhead (6 June-13 June 1944) (Washington, 1945), p. 16)

---

\*General Eisenhower states that it was on UTAH Beach, "... we had expected our greatest losses" (Eisenhower, Report..., p. 24). It is remarkable that the D Day casualties of Force "U" were less than half the casualties this force lost while training at Sleafton Sands (Supra, para 99).



390. Another major feature of the enemy's defence system received special attention from the planners. About three miles west of OMAHA Beach,

... at Pointe du Hoe ... there was a battery believed to consist of six 155-mm howitzers (French make), mounted partly in casemates. This position was regarded as the most dangerous in the American zone, for guns of that calibre could cover not only the V and VII Corps landing beaches but also both transport areas.

(Ibid, p. 25)

391. The 1st Division was to make its assault on OMAHA Beach with

... two regiments abreast, the 116th Infantry (attached from the 29th Division) on the right, the 16th Infantry on the left. Each regiment was to land two battalion landing teams at H Hour [0630 hours] with initial missions to clear the beach defences and seize and secure that portion of the beachhead maintenance line in their respective zones. The beachhead maintenance line roughly followed the ridge of high ground parallel to the main coastal road and was in most places from two to three miles inland. From this line the assault regiments, supported by 18th Infantry landing after H plus 3 hours and the 26th Infantry landing on order of the Commanding General, V Corps, would punch out toward the D Day phase line. Occupation of that phase line would mean securing a coastal strip five or six miles deep astride the Bayeux highway.

(Harrison, op cit, pp 307-308)

392. Capture of the Pointe du Hoe battery was to be effected as follows:

The 116th Infantry was responsible for capturing the Pointe du Hoe coastal battery. On the assumption that the six partially casemated 115-mm. guns would not have been destroyed by pre-D Day bombardment and the heavy naval fire directed on them just before H Hour, two Ranger battalions were attached to the 116th Infantry with the special H Hour mission of taking out the guns. Three companies of Rangers from the 2d Ranger Battalion were to land at the foot of the cliff which the fortified battery surmounted, scale the cliff by means of rope ladders, and attack the German position. Another company, landing on the 116th Infantry main beaches to the east, would attack the fortifications at Pointe et Raz de la Percée and then continue westward to cover the flank of the Ranger force at Pointe du Hoe, provided the initial landings succeeded; otherwise they would come in on the 116th beaches and assist the right battalion of the 116th in attacking westward.

(Ibid, p. 308)

393. The D Day operations on OMAHA Beach are so confused that they can be treated only very broadly here. In all, the 1st Division's assault presents a panorama of misfortune and miscalculation which together almost resulted in complete failure.

394. H Hour was at 0630 hrs. Before that time, owing to weather conditions, the heavy bombers assigned to hit the coastal fortifications in the OMAHA area overshot their targets, leaving them unscathed. Naval fire preceding the assault was also not as effective as it was hoped. During the run-in, high seas took a heavy toll of landing craft. Of 32 D.D. tanks launched, only five reached shore; the remainder of the division's tanks were landed dryshod. Craft carrying guns also suffered severely, so much so that "the artillery that was planned to support the infantry particularly in the advance inland did not reach the shore" (Ibid, p. 313).

395. Major errors in landing the engineer and infantry units, coupled with withering enemy fire directed at the assault troops even before their craft touched down, led to an indescribable state of confusion on the beach itself. Units and sub-units were intermingled and most of them suffered heavy casualties while crossing the beach. Officer casualties were high and the "mislanding of command groups had left many units leaderless..." (Ibid, p. 319). Confusion was compounded by the lack of communication owing to the loss and destruction of radios, and enemy fire further isolated those groups who had reached the safety of the sea-wall.

396. "The heavy losses and disorganization of the first wave had repercussions on each succeeding wave through the morning of D Day" (Ibid, p. 315). The inability of the engineers to clear sufficient lanes through beach obstacles\* for the succeeding waves added to these difficulties. One of the major features which led to the crisis\*\* on the beach was the unexpectedly strong enemy resistance. This has been explained as follows:

Deprived of the expected air support by accident of weather and preceded by a generally ineffective beach drenching, the 1st Division had gone in against the one sector of the Normandy coast that had anything like the kind of cordon

---

\*Those assigned to clear the beach of obstacles faced the same problem of tide and rough seas as encountered on the British beaches. Moreover, losses in men and equipment, together with many parties being mislanded, caused additional delay.

\*\*General Bradley writes: "When V Corps reported at noon that the situation was 'still critical' on all four beach exits, I reluctantly contemplated the diversion of Omaha follow-up forces to Utah and the British beaches" (Bradley, op cit, p. 271).

defense which Field Marshal Rommel counted on to hold and smash the Allies on the beaches. Instead of attacking in the sector of one regiment of an overextended static division as expected, General Huebner's troops hit on the front of a full attack infantry division, the 352d, whose presence in the coastal zone had been missed by Allied intelligence even though it had been in place for almost three months.

(Ibid, p. 319; see also Bradley, op cit, p. 272)

397. Although the crisis on OMAHA Beach in the first hours of the assault was grave, it was not overwhelming. By mid-morning, small mixed groups of men were making their way inland by scaling the bluffs and avoiding where possible strongly defended enemy strongpoints. Without the aid of armour and heavy support weapons, however, these forces were unable to make much headway.\* Indecisive and confused fighting continued throughout the day and the area immediately behind the beaches was cleared.

398. Further westward, at the Pointe du Hoc, the Ranger companies landed late but, with the aid of naval fire, managed to reach and destroy the enemy guns which were found further inland than expected and the sites unmanned. The real difficulties for this group "began later in the day with the first of a series of counterattacks ... that would keep them in a state of siege for two days, and reduce their combat effectiveness to about ninety" (Ibid, p. 322; see also Historical Division, U.S. War Department, Small Unit Actions (Washington, 1946)).

399. The situation in the OMAHA area at the end of D Day was as follows:

The main V Corps position at the end of the day was the narrow sector between St. Laurent and Colleville, a toehold on the enemy shore nowhere more than a mile and a half deep. The right flank at Vierville-sur-Mer, held by elements of the 116th Infantry and the Rangers, was isolated from the main body although the beach exit was open and reinforcements thus could be brought in. All units were lacking vehicles, supplies, ammunition, artillery, and armored support necessary for further advance inland.

---

\*"Conditions at OMAHA resemble[d] in some respects those at DIEPPE during the Canadian raid of Aug 19, 1942. In both cases troops on the beaches were enfiladed by fire from strong natural positions, and in both cases there were few tanks available to support the infantry in the early stages of the assault" ((HS) 952.013 (D37): A.O.R.G. Report No. 292, "Comparison of British and American Areas in Normandy in terms of Fire Support and Effects"). "Here DD tanks were unable to reach the shore, and they had no flails or AVRE" (Ibid).

No artillery could be landed during the morning. The elements of five battalions which beached in the afternoon all suffered heavy losses of equipment, including a total of twenty-six guns. Two anti-aircraft gun battalions scheduled to arrive on D Day could not come in until the following day. Only one artillery mission was fired on 6 June. The V Corps losses for the day were about 2,000 killed, wounded and missing.

(Omaha Beachhead..., pp 329-30)

.....

400. General Montgomery reviews the situation in the "NEPTUNE" area at the end of D Day as follows:

As a result of our D Day operations we had gained a foothold on the Continent of Europe.

We had achieved surprise, the troops had fought magnificently, and our losses had been much lower than had ever seemed possible. We had breached the Atlantic Wall along the whole Neptune frontage, and all assaulting divisions were ashore. In spite of the bad weather the sea passage across the Channel had been successfully accomplished, and following this the Allied Naval Forces had given valuable support by fire from warships and craft; the Allied Air Forces had laid the foundation of success by winning the air battle before the invasion was launched, and by applying their whole collective striking power, with magnificent results, to assist the landings.

In spite of the enemy's intentions to defeat us on the beaches, we found no surprises awaiting us in Normandy. Our measures designed to overcome the defences proved successful. But not all D Day objectives had been achieved and, in particular, the situation on Omaha Beach was far from secure; in fact we had only hung on there as a result of the dogged fighting of the American infantry and its associated naval forces. Gaps remained between Second British Army and V United States Corps and also between V and VII United States Corps; in all the beachhead areas pockets of enemy resistance remained and a very considerable amount of mopping-up remained to be done. In particular, a strong and dangerous enemy salient remained with its apex at Douvres.

It was early to appreciate the exact shape of

---

\*General Eisenhower states that "... the resistance encountered on Omaha Beach was at about the level we had feared all along the line" (Eisenhower, Crusade in Europe, p. 253).

the German reaction to our landings. The only armoured intervention on D Day was by 21 Panzer Division astride the Orne, north of Caen. Air reconnaissance, however, showed that columns of 12 SS Division, quartered in the area Lisieux-Laigle-Bernay, were moving west.

To sum up, the results of D Day were extremely encouraging, although the weather remained a great anxiety. I ordered the armies to proceed with the plan; First United States Army was to complete the capture of its D Day objectives, secure Carentan and Isigny so as to link up its beachheads, and then to thrust across the base of the peninsula to isolate Cherbourg as a prelude to its reduction. Second British Army was to continue the battle for Caen, develop the bridgehead southwards across the Bayeux-Caen road and link up with V United States Corps at Port-en-Bessin.

(Montgomery, Normandy to the Baltic, pp 48-49)

(1) Enemy Reaction to the Invasion

401. It is not intended here to treat fully the German reaction to the Allied invasion of Normandy. This has been done in detail in another Report. The following sections, therefore, are intended only as a sketch or outline which paraphrases the contents of the more detailed Reports so as to present a picture of the pre-D Day situation in Occupied France and a summary of the main events on D Day itself.

402. (i) The Atlantic Wall The "Atlantic Wall", which loomed so large in the minds of Allied planners prior to D Day, was found to have been less an obstacle than was feared. We know now that on 8 Dec 41, Hitler admitted the German army had been forced on the defensive in the East. Moreover, at that time coast defence in the West was becoming a major concern of the German High Command, and Hitler revealed that he was thinking of a new 'West Wall' to ensure that any attempted Allied landing would be repelled by a relatively small force of permanently assigned field troops. (A.H.Q. Report No. 36, pp 11-12) But whilst the troops were continuing with the preparations of field fortifications in the coastal area, and preliminary planning and reconnoitring was carried on at high levels, it was not until the Führer Conference of 13 Aug 42 that Hitler formally and unequivocally committed himself to the execution of the gigantic project which became known as the "Atlantic Wall". (Ibid, pp 31-32)

403. During 1943, as Allied air reconnaissance was quick to note, work upon the Atlantic Wall was intensified. The mounting German casualties on the Eastern front and in Africa, together with the growing strength of the Allies, combined to further the enemy's apprehension of invasion in the not far distant future.

404. By the spring of 1944, however, Field Marshal von Rundstedt was well aware of the unsatisfactory condition of the 'Wall', and also of the immensity, if not impossibility, of his task of defending some 3,000 miles of coastline with about "58 or 59 German formations... of many types and grades of quality" (A.H.Q. Report No. 40, p. 37).

405. The construction of an Atlantic Wall as ordered by Hitler was beyond the capabilities of the German industrial economy. Although a great deal was done to improve the coastal defences by Field Marshal Rommel during the first half of 1944, it remained true that there was "not enough to go around of anything but propaganda" (Hist Sec, A.H.Q., Report No. 41, The German Defences in the Courseulles-St. Aubin Area of the Normandy Coast). Thus

With the fortifications along the channel so inadequate and with manpower almost unavailable, measures had to be taken to impress the Allies that there was a sufficient force to meet an invasion should it occur. A huge deception programme was undertaken designed to build up the strength of Germany's western forces in the minds of her enemy. Intensive propaganda about the invincibility of the Atlantic Wall was carried on. This was aided by the laying of dummy minefields and by the circulation of maps and legends showing formidable concrete defences and minefields. These latter were passed to the Allies by means of German agents in Paris and Switzerland.

((H.S.) 981.023 (D6): Special Interrogation Report - Field Marshal von Rundstedt)

406. Since it was obviously impossible to construct an Atlantic Wall on the scale and strength desired, it was planned that the 'Wall' would be strongest and thickest at those places along the coast where it was estimated the Allies would assault.

Rundstedt appreciated that the most likely area for invasion was the Pas de Calais. There were a number of reasons for this choice. In the first place the attack from Dover against Calais would be using the shortest sea route to the continent. Secondly, the V-1 and V-2 sites were located in this area. Thirdly, this was the shortest route to the Rhur and the heart of industrial Germany.

(Ibid)

Consequently in June 1944, the defences of the Pas de Calais area more closely approximated the planned Atlantic Wall than any other portion of the French coast. Since it was also appreciated that a major port, such as Le Havre or Cherbourg, would be essential to an Allied build-up, the ports and the areas around them received attention only second to the Pas de Calais.

407. Although the strategically tempting sectors of the northern coast of France was given priority, the Normandy beaches were not forgotten. Preliminary work in the form of mine fields, road blocks, field defences, etc., had begun in the "NEPTUNE" area as early as 1942 and continued throughout 1943 and 1944. (See A.H.Q. Report No. 41 for further details regarding the construction of these defences) As men and material became available, elaborate strongpoints, artillery positions and other fortifications made of reinforced concrete and surrounded by barbed wire and mine-fields, were constructed. Moreover, as we have seen (Supra, para 70), beach obstacles were added in 1944 and greater use was made of flooded areas. Nevertheless, because major landings in this

area were thought improbable by German naval experts,\* "... the 'invasion' sector was the least developed of all sectors along the channel coast, which were endangered by large-scale landings" (Ibid, p. 6).

408. (ii) Disposition of Enemy Forces in France  
During 1943, while work was being rushed on the Atlantic Wall, the quality and quantity of German formations in France was being drained to meet the demands of other, more active, fronts. This weakening of his forces became so serious during the autumn of that year that von Rundstedt warned his superiors:

In England alone the enemy has at his disposal today just as many divisions for an attack against this Continent as we have in our own forces in the entire West. Because we are unable to obtain reliable information the enemy is in a position to ensure full surprise....

(A.H.Q. Report No. 40, p. 15)

He cautioned further:

Fixed fortifications are indispensable and valuable for battle as well as for propaganda. But it must not be imagined that this wall cannot be overcome when the enemy attacks it from the sea, from the air and from the rear ....

(Ibid, p. 16)

He concluded with a demand for additional forces to strengthen the coastal divisions and to create a mobile, hard-hitting army reserve. Rundstedt's warning did not go unheeded, and in November Hitler directed that the West should "... henceforth ... be strengthened and not weakened as before" (Ibid, p. 19; see also supra, para 69). At the same time, Field Marshal Rommel was sent to France for special employment. (Supra, para 69)

409. On 1 Jan 44, Rommel was given command of Army Group "B", which consisted of the Netherlands Command and the Fifteenth and Seventh Armies. (A.H.Q. Report No. 40, p. 21) This, in effect, placed Rommel in command of the 'invasion' coast of France.

410. During the following months, and in the Spring

---

\*On 25 Dec 43 however, von Rundstedt warned: "Special attention is again to be paid to just those coastal sectors which are rated as 'not threatened by a landing.' Today this is no longer so. At precisely such places the enemy will attempt to penetrate our coastal defence with specially trained troops..." (A.H.Q. Report No. 41, Appx "B").

when the strength of the German army in France was increased (in quantity if not in quality), the Pas de Calais area continued to be the primary concern of the German commanders. Consequently, those sectors where the Atlantic Wall was strongest were further reinforced by the movement of additional troops into these areas. Other coastal sectors, such as Normandy, were also reinforced, but on a lower priority basis.

411. From time to time, apprehension was expressed over the possibility that the weaker sectors of the coast might be the targets for invasion. For example, "on 4 Mar the Führer called Normandy and Brittany the most endangered sectors" (Ibid, p. 24).\* The German strategists, however, faced with the same problem regarding the disposition of their forces as they were with the Atlantic Wall, continued to regard the area of the Fifteenth Army as the most likely to be invaded. The last weekly situation report issued by Field Marshal von Rundstedt before the invasion read in part as follows:

The systematic continuance and noticeable intensification of the enemy air attacks indicate the progress made in his preparations for the take-off. The centre of gravity between the Scheldt and Normandy is still the most probable focal point for the attack. The possibility of extension up to the North of Brittany, including Brest, is not excluded. Where within this entire sector the enemy will attempt a landing is still obscure. Concentration of the enemy air effort on the coastal fortifications between Dunkirk and Dieppe, and on the Seine-Oise bridges, in conjunction with the paralysing of the southern flank from Rouen to and including Paris, might be indicative of the focal point of an intended enemy major landing. Elimination of traffic across the Seine would have an identical effect on troop movements in the event of a possible attack on the western part of the Seine estuary, Normandy and the northern coast of Brittany. As yet there is no immediate prospect of the 'invasion'.

(Ibid, pp 41-42)

412. (iii) Enemy Tactical Planning The best method of employing German ground forces to defeat an Allied invasion was a problem which received the greatest attention by those charged with the task of defending Germany's western front. As late as January 1944, von Rundstedt's plan to defeat such a landing was accepted in

---

\*Hitler's demands that the forces in the Cotentin and Normandy be strengthened could only be met in part by von Rundstedt. (Ibid, pp 28 ff)



the highest quarters. General Jodl, Chief of the Armed Forces Operations Staff, reported at that time to Hitler:

... I therefore concur with the plans of O.B. West, who, -- while proceeding with the construction work on the coast with all available means -- intends to place the panzer divisions which he has at his disposal, as well as a number of fully mobile infantry divisions, in groups as O.B. West reserve behind the most threatened sectors, in such a way that they can intervene without any delay in the battle for the coast, and, by counter-attacking, throw any enemy troops which may have landed back into the sea.

Furthermore, I concur with the plans of O.B. West to prepare for the movement, according to [predetermined] time-tables, of as many coastal defence divisions as possible -- with the exception of the fortress troops -- to the frontal sectors under attack.

In the event of an enemy landing, and accepting all attached risks, at first everything must be committed at one place and the situation fully cleaned up at that place. Should the enemy subsequently land elsewhere, operations must then be concentrated at that place.

The prerequisite for this is that the Air Force be in a position to give adequate air protection (which it said it could do; and which General Jodl at the time believed possible).

(A.H.Q. Report No. 40, pp 33-34)

It can be seen, therefore, that Field Marshal von Rundstedt

...believed that the enemy naval and aerial supremacy and the enemy technical and material resources would make the attempt to get ashore a success. Subsequent events of the drama would be a matter of mobile operations.\*

(Ibid)

Von Rundstedt, however,

---

\*To meet this coming threat [of invasion] Rundstedt felt he had to have adequate mobile reserves. According to him each division should have a regiment in reserve, each corps a division in reserve, and each army two or three mobile divisions in reserve. In addition to this, the Commander-in-Chief himself needed a pool of armoured and motorized divisions which would be under his direct control ready to be sent to whatever area was threatened. 'With such a force I could operate properly,' the Field Marshal said" (Special Interrogation Report - Field Marshal Von Rundstedt, p. 7)

...was Commander-in-Chief only in name. He was hobbled by limitations of authority and by encroachments on his rights by lesser men. His influence on the forces on the sea and in the air was limited to applications for co-operation. His influence on the well manned and well equipped S.S. formations was confined to operations and supply. His operational plans were frustrated from above by Hitler, from below by Rommel.

(Ibid)

413. Commanding the armies which would ultimately meet the invasion, Rommel had other ideas regarding the disposition of the armoured forces - ideas which conflicted also with those of Gen Pz von Schweppenburg, who counselled von Rundstedt on all questions pertaining to armoured operations. Rommel

...argued that the bulk of the mobile reserves must be as close to the threatened coastal areas as possible, so that they could immediately affect the battle before the Allies had gained a serious foothold. Up to a point, Rundstedt agreed with these principles, but since he did not know where the main invasion effort would be, he did not want to spread his armour too thin along the ground, where most of it would be useless once the assault began.

(Special Interrogation Report-  
Field Marshal Von Rundstedt)

414. The result as shown on the 6 Jun 44 German High Command Situation Map 'West' ((HS) 981.004 (D2)), appears to be a compromise between the theories of the two Field Marshals. To account for this situation, it should be remembered that

... Rommel in common with all German field marshals enjoyed at all times the right of appeal directly to Hitler. That privilege was especially important for the west because of the personalities involved. The evidence indicates that Rommel had an energy and strength of conviction that often enabled him to secure Hitler's backing, whereas Rundstedt, who was disposed whenever possible to compromise and allow arguments to go by default, seems to have relaxed command prerogatives that undoubtedly remained formally his. It is possible, of course, that he too came under Rommel's influence and failed to press acceptance of his own ideas because he was content to allow Rommel to assume the main burden of responsibility. In any case the clear fact is that after January 1944 Rommel was the dominant personality in the west with an influence disproportionate to his formal command authority.

(Harrison, op cit, p. 247)

415. On 6 Jun 44, the disposition of the armoured divisions were as follows: of the panzer divisions directly under Rommel's command (2, 116 and 21 Pz Divs), two were placed in locations immediately behind the infantry divisions manning the coastal defences while the third was situated some forty miles inland between Rouen and Paris. Three other armoured divisions were in the area of the Seventh and Fifteenth Armies. These were 1 and 12 SS Pz Divs and Pz Lehr Div, all of which had been designated as Armed Forces High Command reserves\*and, consequently, could be tactically employed only with its permission. (A.H.Q. Report No. 40, p. 37) One of these reserve divisions was stationed close to Antwerp; the other two (12 SS Pz Div and Pz Lehr) were southwest of Paris in the Rouen-Orleans-Le Mans triangle. (See Appendix "I")

416. The dispositions of the armoured divisions are an indication, perhaps, of the success of Rommel's representations to Hitler in March that he be granted greater influence over the mobile formations. (A.H.Q. Report No. 40, p. 32) His success at that time, however, was not complete, since on von Schweppenburg's protest four panzer divisions (i.e., those in OKW Reserve) were still beyond his control ((HS) 981SOM (D122): Panzer Group West-Report of the Commander, Gen Frhr Geyr von Schweppenburg, (MS #B-466)). This 'solution', based as it was on the fundamental problem of there being insufficient armoured forces in the west to satisfy the requirements of Rommel or von Rundstedt, even if their opinions regarding the best tactical employment of armour were similar, added to the confusion of command and purpose when the Allies struck on 6 Jun.

417. On the eve of the invasion, Allied Intelligence estimates of the type and strength of German formations likely to be encountered on D Day were not very dissimilar from the actual state of these formations. (Supra, paras 114-126) An important gap in the knowledge of Allied Intelligence, however, was the disposition of these forces in the "NEPTUNE" area. In the British Second Army area, 716 Inf Div was plotted as manning the coastal defences while 352 Inf Div was thought to be a 'layback infantry division.' 21 Pz Div, located in the Caen area, would support 716 Inf Div in a counter-attack role. (21 Army Group, Weekly Neptune Review, op cit, 21 May 44) Nevertheless, it was known that

... in other areas coastal divisions have been narrowing their sectors while divisions, the role

---

\*Also in Armed Forces High Command Reserve was 17 SS Pz Gren Div. This division, located in the Poitiers-Tours-Loudun area, was situated within the German First Army zone, over a hundred miles from the "NEPTUNE" area. (Situation Map 'West', op cit; see also the map showing the disposition of German divisions in the West at Appendix "I")

of which had hitherto been read as layback, have nosed forward into the gap provided by the reduced responsibility of the coastal divisions.

(Ibid, 4 Jun 44)

It was believed not unlikely, therefore, that this might be the case in the Normandy area also. (Ibid)

418. Indeed, this is precisely what did happen in the Normandy sector some months prior to D Day. (Supra, para 396) 716 Inf Div became responsible for the coastal sector stretching from Franceville Plage to Asnelles sur Mer, while 352 Inf Div held the sector west from Asnelles to the Viré Estuary. ((HS) 981A7.(Ds) (a): Seventh Army Situation Map, 6 Jun 44) 21 Pz Div was also closer to the coast than was expected. Moreover, certain elements of this division -- two Panzer Grenadier battalions, an artillery battalion and the greater part of an anti-tank battalion -- were placed under command of 716 Inf Div. (A.H.Q. Report No. 41, Appx "G"; see also Appx "J" to this present Report)

419. The disposition of the regiments and supporting units of 716 Inf Div are described in detail in A.H.Q. Report No. 41. Contrary to expectations, 736 Regiment of this division, defending the area assaulted by 1 Brit Corps, had placed all three battalions forward on the coast. (Ibid)

420. (iv) The Assault The surprise achieved by the Allied assault on the "NEPTUNE" beaches has already been mentioned. (Supra, para 245) At 0140 hrs, while parachutists were still dropping on the flanks of the "NEPTUNE" area, Seventh Army ordered the highest form of alert. (A.H.Q. Report No. 50, para 10) Fifteenth Army was alerted at approximately the same time. For some hours the extent of the airborne attack was unknown.

Indeed, with the German air and sea forces at bay, German Intelligence checked and defeated and little operational information coming to hand, O.B. West \* was not in a position to tell immediately whether he was confronted by a big raid, a major diversion or the strategical main effort.

(Ibid, para 14)

421. Indecision also reigned at OKW\*\* Thus at

---

\*O.B. West - Oberbefehlshaber West: Commander-in-Chief West (von Rundstedt)

\*\*O K W - Oberkommando der Wehrmacht - Armed Forces High Command, Berlin.

0445 hrs when a request was made that the armoured divisions in OKW Reserve be employed by O.B. West if the situation warranted, it was refused on the grounds that it was still uncertain whether this was the beginning of the invasion or merely a feint.

422. Early in the morning, while 716 Inf Div was being pounded by the drum-fire from Allied naval forces, elements of 21 Pz Div prepared to attack the airborne troops on either side of the Orne. However, in mid-morning "the Calvados coast emerg[ed] as the focal area of the Allied effort..." (Ibid, para 31). It was decided, therefore, to commit the bulk of 21 Pz Div to a counter-attack west of the Orne in the general direction of Lion-sur-Mer. The division struck northward late that afternoon. "The attack virtually reached the coast..." (Ibid). Evidently the losses this armoured spearhead suffered from the armour and guns of 3 Brit Inf Div (supra, para 347), but especially the sight of 6 Airborne Div's Airlanding Brigade descending in their rear later in the day, led to the withdrawal of 21 Pz Div to defensive positions a few miles north of Caen.

423. While elements of 21 Pz Div had been committed at once, a 'Tug-of-War' had been in progress over the employment of the armoured divisions in OKW Reserve. During the early morning hours, Fifteenth Army (on behalf of 81 Corps whose 711 Inf Div\* was under airborne attack) made repeated requests to O.B. West to move up 12 SS Pz Div. Shortly before 0600 hrs, O.B. West placed 12 SS Pz Div under Army Group "B"\*\*, and ordered it to the Lisieux area so it would be able to intervene on behalf of 711 Inf Div. By so doing, O.B. West overstepped his authority, and attempted in vain for the rest of the morning to secure OKW's permission to countenance this move. 716 Inf Div, feeling the main force of the airborne drop, requested aid from 711 Inf Div to deal with those troops which landed between the Orne and the army boundary. 711 Inf Div, unable to comply, suggested the commitment of elements of 12 SS Pz Div to clear the area. It was not until 1615 hrs, however, that Fifteenth Army was informed that 12 SS Pz Div was required for clearing the Calvados bridgehead in the combination with 21 Pz Div and Pz Lehr under 1 SS Corps. (Ibid, para 24)

---

\*711 Inf Div hoped to have 12 SS Pz Div clear the area east of the Orne of airborne troops. The scattered drop made it impossible for it to know that the main airborne objectives were within 716 Inf Div's area.

\*\*The Army Group Commander, Field Marshal Rommel, "...left by car for his home at Herrlingen, near Ulm [on 5 Jun]. It was his intention to report to the Führer at Berchtesgaden on 6 Jun" (A.H.Q. Report No. 40, p. 44).

424. The absence of Rommel, the delay at OKW\*, the uncertainty of the situation at O.B. West, the Allied air power which hampered road movements by enemy armoured divisions, the perplexity felt by the higher commanders as to the possibility of the Allies striking elsewhere, the conflicting orders given to the panzer divisions -- all this led to a state of confusion among the enemy which greatly favored the Allies at a decisive time. Elements of 21 Pz Div were the only enemy armoured force with which the British assault troops had to contend on D Day. On D plus 1, however, the Canadians were to run into the leading elements of 12 SS Pz Div.

425. During this time, 716 Inf Div was being ground down by the Allied seaborne forces and its defences overrun. The following exemplifies the impact of 1 Brit Corps on this coastal division:

On the eve of the assault the personnel of 716 Inf Div was within 1% of authorized strength. The formation lacked tanks and assault guns, but the lack of guns had been counterbalanced by placing elements of G.H.Q. and 21 Pz Div artillery under command of the Division. By last light on D Day the Division had been wrecked. Of a total of four German and two Eastern battalions, there remained only one German battalion (less 20% casualties); all other battalions were mere remnants. The artillery suffered to the same degree; by evening it had been reduced to 1/5 of its initial strength, there were six guns left west of the Orne, and five or six on the east bank. Anti-tank elements had lost 75% of their initial strength, anti-aircraft elements about 2/3 and others about 1/3.

(Ibid, para 30)

.....

426. As D Day drew to a close and the reports of the progress of the battle came to General Montgomery's headquarters, he formulated his plans for the coming struggle for the bridgehead. He writes of this period as follows:

It was clear to me that we should now have to deal with three immediate problems, the solution of which was vital in order to start the campaign on a proper footing.

First it was necessary to join the individual beachheads into one continuous bridgehead. This was a task of considerable magnitude since the two Armies had assaulted on a front of about fifty miles, and in particular the American assaults

---

\*Hitler did not hear about the invasion until midday, 6 Jun, and it was not until after the usual daily conference that Hitler gave permission to von Rundstedt to employ the armoured divisions in OKW Reserve. (A.H.Q. Report No. 50, para 37)

were separated by the deep Carentan estuary and the system of water lines and floods associated with it. The second essential was to retain the initiative during the early stage when we were concentrating on forming a secure bridgehead; we had started with the initiative and we had to retain it in order that the battle should be swung our way. The third problem was to guard against any setback or reverse. During the initial days the Allied forces were relatively thin on the ground and time was necessary to get the whole organization sorted out and working smoothly; while this was happening there was a danger of the enemy catching us off balance. A reverse would have had very serious repercussions....

(Montgomery, Normandy to the Baltic, p. 50)

#### THE BATTLE FOR THE BRIDGEHEAD

##### (a) Phase III, 7 Jun\*

427. (i) 7 Cdn Inf Bde on the Final Objective. At 0130 hrs, 7 Jun the commander of 7 Cdn Inf Bde held an Orders Group at his headquarters. The advance was to be resumed at 0600 hrs, led by R. Wpg Rif and Regina Rif, with 1 C. Scot R. remaining temporarily in position to provide a firm base. The depleted state of 6 Cdn Armd Regt and its consequent regrouping into two squadrons necessarily altered the plans for armoured support during Phase III (cf para 146 above). At 0500 hrs the tank commander informed the brigadier that "C" Squadron would be available in two hours' time. The other (composite) squadron required refuelling and would be ready only somewhat later. But as luck would have it, no tanks were required during the final advance, for groups of snipers constituted almost the sole opposition. At 0855 hrs, when it had become evident that no effective resistance was being offered, all three infantry battalions were directed "to go flat out for their final objectives" (Message Log, H.Q. 7 Cdn Inf Bde, 7 Jun 44).

428. R. Wpg Rif commenced to move forward on the right flank at 0615 hrs, encountering only scattered and ineffective resistance. At 1150 hrs their leading troops, proceeding astride the axis Lantheuil-Le Grand Vey - Putot-en-Bessin, were just short of the line "OAK"\*\*,

---

\*A map showing the advance of 3 Cdn Inf Div on 7 Jun is attached as Appendix "M".

\*\*An entry at 1020 hrs in the Brigade Message Log ("Wpgs on OAK") is not substantiated by other evidence. (Serial 210, Message Log, H.Q. 7 Cdn Inf Bde, 7 Jun 44) References to this report in divisional documents are merely repetitious. (W.D. and Message Log, G.S., H.Q. 3 Cdn Inf Div, 7 Jun 44, Serial 18) The brigade commander, however, credited R. Wpg Rif with being the first unit to reach its final objective (Brigadier Foster, op cit) Also claiming the honour of "having been the first battalion in 21 Army Group to reach [the] final objective..." is Regina Rif. (W.D., Regina Rif, June 1944: Appx "A").

and by 1205 hrs the whole battalion had entered Putot. (Ibid) The advanced guard, which had lost its way, was the last to arrive. (W.D., R. Wpg Rif, 7 Jun 44)

429. Regina Rif, advancing in two columns on either side of the River Chiromme, set forth at 0715 hrs. At 1030 hrs "C" Company, proceeding by road through Camilly and Bray, entered Bretteville-l'Orgueilleuse and found it clear of enemy. The company then pushed forward across the Bayeux-Caen railway line to Norrey-en-Bessin. Here the company consolidated its position and prepared for the inevitable counter-attacks. ((HS) 145.2R11011 (D7): Personal Account of C.S.T. Tubb re Attacks on Norrey-en-Bessin, June 1944) "B" Company, at the head of the second column, followed a route through Thaon, Cairon and Rots, where the advance was more heavily contested than on the right. The remaining companies on arriving took up positions in and near Bretteville; one sub-unit guarding the railway bridge over the River Mue (947703). (Lt-Col Matheson; W.D., Regina Rif, 7 Jun 44) So swift was their progress that "C" Squadron of 6 Cdn Armd Regt, having completed its refuelling, was unable to find the battalion; and the composite squadron was despatched instead, arriving just in time to share in the unopposed entry into Bretteville. (W.D., 6 Cdn Armd Regt, 7 Jun 44)

430. When these two units were well on their way, 1 C. Scot R. was ordered to advance at 0850 hrs. (W.D., 1 C. Scot R., June 1944: Appx 3, Message Log, 7 Jun 44) At 1225 hrs, the Brigade's capture of the objective "OAK" was brought to completion by the arrival of this battalion in the area between Secqueville-en-Bessin and La Bergerie Farm. Battalion headquarters was established in a farmhouse at Secqueville by 1250 hrs (923745). (Message Log, H.Q. 7 Cdn Inf Bde; W.D., 1 C. Scot R., 7 Jun 44) During this advance, one company had operated independently on the left flank. (Ibid: Appx 23, "B" Coy Diary.) It may be observed that the course of action taken by 1 C. Scot R. (as confirmed by the Orders Group of the night 6/7 Jun) does not agree with the original intention whereby that battalion should first secure an intermediate position on the high ground west of Camilly "prior to a general advance by the brigade" (cf para 146). In the absence of information on this point it may be assumed that three factors dictated alteration of the plan: (a) the lack of firm opposition, (b) the already advanced location of the battalion on D Day and (c) the reduced scale of available armour, which made it impossible to allot a squadron in support of a preliminary attack.

431. (ii) 9 Cdn Inf Bde In the eastern sector, the night 6/7 Jun was marked by minor patrol actions, rather more vigorous than those experienced by 7 Cdn Inf Bde. Such enemy efforts were particularly strong in the rear, where small groups found themselves cut off and attempted to fight their way through 8 Cdn Inf Bde's area. At 2130



hrs 6 Jun a prisoner taken in Anguerny was identified as a member of 21 Pz Div, and a warning was promptly issued to be on the alert for enemy tanks. (Message Log, H.Q. 8 Cdn Inf Bde, 6-7 Jun 44) A whole platoon of R. de Chaud was taken prisoner when attacked at about 0200 hrs by a company of infantry mounted on half-tracks. (W.D., R. de Chaud, 7 Jun 44) There were also disturbances on the front of Nth N.S. Highrs at approximately the same time. Prisoners taken in these skirmishes were discovered to be Panzer Grenadiers (infantry components of an armoured division). (W.D., Nth N.S. Highrs, 7 Jun 44) In the morning, Q.O.R. of C. identified a prisoner as belonging to 192 Panzer Regiment of 21 Pz Div. (Message Log, H.Q. 8 Cdn Inf Bde, 7 Jun 44) As we have seen, two Panzer Grenadier battalions of 21 Pz Div had been placed under command 716 Inf Div. The axis of advance of 8 and 9 Cdn Inf Bdes lay right through the positions of 192 Pz Gren Bn which had companies in Plumetot, Epron, Buron, Anisy and Cairon. (A.H.Q. Report No. 41, Appx "C") It is quite possible that those companies which had been situated in the area between 3 Cdn and 3 Brit Inf Divs -- an area still in enemy hands -- made these night attacks. The other Panzer Grenadier battalion under command 716 Inf Div (125 Pz Gren Bn) was located east of the Orne. (See Appx "J" to this Report)

432. The warning order to prepare to resume the advance was received by Nth N.S. Highrs at 0645 hrs. One hour later the battalion was on the march, adopting the same tactical order as used on the previous day. Just at this time "several enemy gliders" were seen to land south of Basly (9978) (W.D., Nth N.S. Highrs, 7 Jun 44). Oddly enough, it is not possible to determine what these "gliders" actually were; references to them appear in various message logs but no further explanation is offered.\*

433. For reasons which will become apparent, the experiences of the advanced guard on 7 Jun were not at first fully known. The contemporary accounts appearing in the War Diaries of Nth N.S. Highrs and 27 Cdn Armd Regt supplied a framework on which a fuller report could be formed. The first effort to piece together a connected narrative was made in June 1944 by the Historical Officer, 3 Cdn Inf Div, in two interviews with regimental officers. ((HS) 145.2N2011 (D3): Memorandum of Interviews with Capt (A/Major) A.J. Wilson, and Capt (A/Major) E.S. Gray.) These

---

\*An oblique reference appears in a brigade log: "2 Armd Bde confirms report gliders landed...and have dealt with same" (Message Log, H.Q. 7 Cdn Inf Bde, 7 Jun 44, Serial 179). It is possible that the rumour arose from an earlier report of a Spitfire crashing near l C. Scot R. at 995775. (Ibid, Serial 168). In any event, the likelihood of enemy gliders being used can be ruled out. It is interesting to speculate on how they were dealt with; the War Diary of 2 Cdn Armd Bde does not refer to the matter.

collated the facts as known by two participants who had seen quite different phases of the action; they were then verified by other officers, among them the Second in command.\* Subsequently, the escape of the vanguard commander (who had been taken prisoner in the engagement) made it possible to augment the body of evidence. ((HS) 145.2N2011 (D4): Account of the Experiences of Major J.D. Learment.) From these sources, supplemented by later intelligence revelations, emerged the complete story.

434. The initial stage of the advance of Nth N.S. Highrs was characterized by only light opposition. "A" Company on the right flank successfully cleared the enemy from the woods near Les Buissons. The vanguard soon met firmer resistance near the area and was successful in knocking out an 88-millimetre gun, three half-tracks, and an astonishing contrivance-- a 16-barrelled mortar mounted on a half-track (Reihenwerfer). (W.D., Nth N.S. Highrs, 7 Jun 44) By 0930 hrs Les Buissons was virtually cleared and the advance continued. The vanguard proceeded along the axis to enter Buron, destroying another 88-millimetre gun at its outskirts by a direct hit from a tank gun. Mortar fire from St. Contest on the left was now proving troublesome, but Buron was in our hands at 1150 hrs. (Ibid)

435. While "C" Company was searching the town, "B" Company arrived with its Sherman squadron and commenced to advance on Authie. Before very long the tanks deployed around the cross roads (987718) in order to engage targets in Authie, the infantry company remaining in Buron. "C" Company was soon under way again and two platoons in carriers passed through "B" Company along the axis and after a sharp skirmish were successful in taking Authie. They then proceeded to dig in south of the town. Mortaring and shelling of Authie were growing to such intensity that neutralizing fire on St. Contest was urgently requested. But the field artillery was now out of range (Buron being its extreme limit) and communications were too faulty to produce early cruiser fire. By this time, "A" Company, passing around the western side of Buron, was also nearing Authie. Owing to the heavy fire on the village, the platoon dismounted from their tanks around the same cross-roads (987718) while the tanks proceeded ahead alone leaving the infantry unsupported. (Capt Wilson and Capt Gray, op cit)

436. It was considered impossible to advance beyond Authie, for the open ground beyond Buron was under devastating fire. The sudden stiffening of enemy opposition had produced a serious situation, the whole advanced guard being isolated on its flanks and rear. It was therefore decided to withdraw the elements of the vanguard from Authie, which it was seen might become untenable, and form a battalion fortress on the rising ground to the north of the village. "A" Company on the right accordingly

---

\*The Second in command (then Major, now Colonel D.F. Forbes) read this present account of the battle and in a conversation with the present writer, (June 1952), gave further valuable information which helped clarify the extant confused accounts.

dug in near the road (985718). "B" Company, which was directed to join it on the left, found itself unable to leave Buron, owing to the severity of the fire. The two platoons of "C" Company meanwhile prepared to evacuate Authie. (W.D., Nth N.S. Highrs, 7 Jun 44; Capt Wilson and Capt Gray, op cit)

437. It was now about 1400 hrs. Before "C" Company could make its withdrawal, that which had been feared at last occurred. Enemy tanks and infantry suddenly appeared from the direction of Cussy and Ardenne and proceeded to launch a strong counter-attack on Authie. This abrupt turn of events forced the vanguard to make a stand in the village itself. In the course of the ensuing battle the two platoons of "C" Company suffered severe casualties. Major Learment, the vanguard commander, who had not reached Authie, returned to Buron to discuss with the commanding officer the question of rescuing the troops of "A" and "C" Companies in and near Authie. (Major Learment; Capt Wilson and Capt Gray, op cit) But the force despatched to relieve them came under such heavy fire south of Buron that it could not accomplish its object and was therefore instructed to withdraw to a position behind that village. (Ibid).

438. Meanwhile, as enemy tanks broke through and around Authie, all available Shermans were rushed to meet them. Thus developed the first armoured engagement of the operation; it was fought savagely with heavy losses to both sides. In Authie itself the situation deteriorated rapidly and the Canadian troops there were overrun, only a few escaping. (Capt Wilson and Capt Gray, op cit)

439. Between Buron and Authie, the bulk of "A" Company, which had remained in position, was likewise overcome and most of its personnel captured. (Ibid) Then, after two hours of continuous shelling and mortaring Buron itself was attacked about 1830 hrs. In spite of the very heavy fire brought to bear on them, two waves of German infantry followed by tanks pressed forward with determination, at last penetrating the forward positions north of the town and assailing the defenders with bayonets. Fire was brought to bear on the enemy as he debouched from Buron and the attack was not pressed. Meanwhile, desultory fire was kept up on "D" Company which remained immediately north of Buron for some time.

440. Later in the evening, some of the remaining tanks of 27 Cdn Armd Regt advanced on Buron. The enemy had not secured Buron, although his fire and attacks had prevented our own forces from occupying the town. The armoured advance enabled "D" Company to withdraw from its position and to rejoin the rest of the battalion. The battalion had been ordered to withdraw into the brigade fortress on the high ground at Les Buissons when it had become apparent that Authie was beyond reach and that an

enemy counter-attack was underway. The move to Les Buisson was completed by approximately 2145 hrs. (W.D., H.L.I. of C., June 1944: Appx 9, Message Log, 7 Jun 44)

441. The remaining two battalions of the brigade had spent an anxious day, continuously receiving messages telling of bitter fighting, while unable themselves to advance and participate in it. When the first enemy armoured counter-attack took shape early in the afternoon, S.D. & G. Highrs, who had reached Les Buissons, proceeded to consolidate there. (W.D., S.D. & G. Highrs, 7 Jun 44) By mid-afternoon, H.L.I. of C. had moved up to Villons-les-Buissons. (W.D., H.L.I. of C., 7 Jun 44) As German armour swept northward, Les Buissons became a forward locality and S.D. & G. Highrs were able to add to the heavy fire directed against the attackers. The sight of the first withdrawals into their line impressed them as "a bloody mess indeed" (W.D., S.D. & G. Highrs, 7 Jun 44). Amazed, they witnessed our armoured advance and braced themselves for what must have seemed the inevitable onslaught against their own perimeter. But it did not come.\* At 2205 hrs, noted the unit diarist, "the firing seems to be dying down now" (Ibid).

442. The advance guard group, caught off balance by a forceful counter-attack before it could consolidate and offer co-ordinated resistance, had suffered severe loss. Of the twenty rifle company officers of the Nth N.S. Highrs only eight remained. By the end of the day, the unit had suffered a total of 242 casualties: 84 fatal, 30 non-fatal and 128 prisoners-of-war ((H.S.) 133,065 (D594), (D570) & (D593): Fatal, Non-fatal, and Prisoners-of-War Casualties, North-West Europe, June 1944-May 1945). 27 Cdn Armd Regt sustained 60 casualties: 26 fatal, 26 non-fatal and 8 prisoners-of-war (Ibid). Most of these were caused by 88-millimeter guns. (W.D., 27 Cdn Armd Regt, 7 Jun 44) But the wisdom of allotting an entire armoured regiment to the leading battalion had been amply demonstrated: the same enemy counter-attack might have inflicted more terrible loss and reached critical proportions had only a small force been available to meet it. The ferocity of the tank battle may be judged from the tank losses: 27 Cdn Armd Regt reported 21 of their tanks were knocked out and another seven damaged, 41 enemy tanks were claimed to have been destroyed. (Ibid) (It may be noted here that

---

\*The War Diary of brigade headquarters tells of a further enemy attack being launched from Buron and repelled by S.D. & G. Highrs; a similar statement reappears in an account by the G.S.O. 1 (Liaison). (W.D., H.Q. 9 Cdn Inf Bde, 7 Jun 44; (HS) 235C3.013 (D11): Assault of the 3 Cdn Inf Div) It is, however, quite certain that such an attack did not take place, for it could not have escaped notice of the three units in Villons-les-Buissons whose diaries fail to mention it. (W.Ds., Nth N.S. Highrs, S.D. & G. Highrs and 27 Cdn Armd Regt, 7 Jun 44)

the enemy tank losses are given as 31 in the brigade War Diary (W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Armd Bde, 8 Jun 44); this figure is also implied in a later statement that "the score was about 2 to 1 in favor of the 27 Cdn Armd Regt" (2 Cdn Armd Bde Report on Operation "OVERLORD"). Large numbers of German infantry were run down by our tanks, especially in the evening attack on Buron. (W.D., Nth N.S. Highrs, 7 Jun 44) These tanks had ranged over a considerable area during the day: "C" Squadron had reached the outskirts of St. Contest in order to engage approaching enemy armour, and "A" Squadron had even penetrated to the edge of Franqueville, in sight of Carpiquet airfield. (W.D., 27 Cdn Armd Regt, June 1944: Appx 3, Personal Accounts of Participants, and trace of movements of 27 Cdn Armd Regt)

443. The full story of events on the enemy's front during 7 Jun, insofar as it has been possible to reconstruct them from available German documents, is given in A.H.Q. Report No. 50.\* A brief summary of these events as it concerned the Canadians will suffice here to round out the picture of the Buron-Authie engagement.

444. The main opposition met by the Nth N.S. Highrs and 27 Cdn Armd Regt in the Buron-Authie engagement was provided by elements of 12 SS Pz Div "Hitlerjugend".

While many other German divisions will be remembered with the respect accorded a worthy and defeated foe, the name of 12 SS Pz Div stands forever sullied by the murders committed by its young savages on defenceless captured Canadians. When the division launched its counter-attacks against the Canadians, it was over-strength, well equipped, well trained and a typical produce of Nazi ideology applied to the military sphere. The officers were either ardent Nazis who had shown military prowess in Russia, or professional army officers not devoid of some affinity to the Nazi way of doing things. In part at least the NCOs were selected young veterans of the war of extermination as practiced in the East; the rank and file were largely recent conscripts, fruits of the brutalizing ideology under which they were born and failed to reach maturity in years and spirit.

(A.H.Q. Report No. 50, para 56)

An examination of the records of one of the units of this division reveals that two thirds of the men were in the 18-year-old age group, while three quarters of the unit were in or under the 19-year-old age group. (Ibid)

---

\*In General Eisenhower's Report ..., this German armoured thrust is reported incorrectly as having "penetrated to the coast ..." (p. 25).

445. We have already noted the enemy's decision to move 12 SS Pz Div and Pz Lehr Div to the Calvados bridgehead late in the afternoon of D Day (Supra, para 422). These divisions, in conjunction with 21 Pz Div (already on the scene north of Caen), were under command 1 SS Pz Corps. It was the intention of the Corps Commander, General Josef ("Sepp") Dietrich, to use this armoured force to drive the Allies back into the sea. "Due to casualties and delays from air attacks it had not been possible on 7 Jun to commit 12 SS Pz Div as a compact force" (Ibid, para 64). However, swinging into a position on the left of 21 Pz Div for a drive to the sea, and thus facing the line of the Canadian advance, "the leading elements of the division had reached the area SW Caen - Villers-Bocage" by about 1000 hrs (Ibid). In the afternoon these elements -- 3 Bn, 25 SS Pz Gren Regt\* and one of the division's two tank battalions -- launched their attack against the Canadians in Authie\*\* and suffered considerable casualties. (Ibid, paras 56 ff) Canadian estimates of the type of German tanks met in this engagement are conflicting. Approximately half of those hit were claimed to be Tigers (Mk VI's), a quarter Panthers (Mk V's) and the remainder Mk IV's or Mk III's. (W.D., 27 Cdn Armd Regt, June 1944: Appx "A") However, 12 SS Pz Div documents show no record of having any Mark VI (Tiger) tanks on strength at this time. (A.H.Q. Report No. 50, para 60) Moreover, the enemy 'mocked up' both Mark IV and Panther tanks to give them the appearance of Tigers. (W.D., 27 Cdn Armd Regt, June 1944: Appx 3, "2 Cdn Armd Bde Intelligence Summary No. 3" and "3 Cdn Inf Div Intelligence Summary No. 6") A review of the available evidence indicates that the tanks were probably for the most part Mark IV's with six or more S.P. guns giving additional fire.\*\*\*

---

\*This regiment was commanded by Obersturmbannführer Kurt Meyer; who was later to command the division. Although the whole regiment was in this advance-guard, only 3 Bn was employed against the Canadians as far as is known.

\*\*In his book Cross Channel Attack, Mr. Harrison speaks of the German force which took part in this engagement as a "reconnaissance unit" which "tangled with the 3d Canadian Division near Authie and an engagement resulted heavy enough to give the Canadians the impression of an enemy counter-attack..." (p. 348). A United States military pamphlet describes a counter-attack as "An attack by a part or all of the defending force against a hostile attacking force for the purpose of regaining lost ground or destroying hostile elements" (United States War Department, Handbook on the British Army.... (Washington, 1943), para 171). Using this definition in conjunction with the events, it would appear that the enemy did counter-attack.

\*\*\*The commander of this battle group, General Meyer, states that he fought this battle with a battalion of Mark IV tanks. ((HS) 981.023 (D6): Special Interrogation Report, Brigadeführer Kurt Meyer) The commander of 21 Pz Div, Generalleutnant Feuchtinger, states that the Panther battalion was used. ((HS) 981.023(D6): Special Interrogation Report, Generalleutnant Edgar Feuchtinger) If the Canadians inflicted as many casualties on the attacking tanks as claimed (31, see para 442 above), it is doubtful, providing it was a Panther battalion, that the same unit could make such a strong attack as it did on 7 Cdn Inf Bde the following day. (Infra, paras 458 ff)