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55th Division Exercise "ALBERT"
(Divisional Phase): 31 Jul - 2 Aug 41.



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1. A further report is presented. This deals with the final phase of the 55th Division exercise known by the code-name "ALBERT", conducted on 31 Jul - 2 Aug 41.
2. At the present time the 55th (British) Division, commanded by Major-General W.D. MORGAN, D.S.O., M.C., R.A., is under the operational command of Canadian Corps, having exchanged temporarily with 2 Cdn Div. The latter accordingly is now under the operational command of 4 Corps in a beach-defence role on the South Coast.
3. The exercise (really a series of exercises) known as "ALBERT" was in progress during a great part of the month of July and the first days of August. It began with a divisional Signals exercise on 11-12 Jul. This was followed by three brigade group Signals exercises: 165 Inf Bde Gp, 16 Jul; 164 Bde Gp, 17 Jul; 199 Bde Gp, 18-19 Jul. Then came three brigade exercises with troops: 164 Inf Bde, 21 Jul; 165 Inf Bde, 23 Jul; 199 Inf Bde, 25-6 Jul. In each of these a different battalion of 1 Cdn Inf Bde, with certain attached troops, acted as the enemy.
4. Finally came the main phase, conducted over the same ground and dealing with the same assumed situation as the brigade exercises. In this phase the whole Division, practising the counter-attack role long familiar to the Canadian divisions, attacked an enemy

represented by the whole of 1 Cdn Inf Bde (temporarily commanded by Lt.-Col. W.W. SOUTHAM, 48 HIGHRS) in position on the north edge of the SOUTH DOWNS. This "enemy" force, representing a division, was very "thin on the ground". It was laid down that it would act merely by fire from fixed positions; there would be no withdrawal (except from the first to a second fixed position) and no infantry counter-attack.

5. This exercise dealt with the extreme westerly sector of the region in which it has been anticipated that Cdn Corps might have to operate in its mobile counter-attack role - the sector immediately to the west of that covered in Exercise "DOG" (see my Report No. 13). It was assumed that PORTSMOUTH had been captured by the enemy and that considerable seaborne landings had taken place. (On the role of the Corps, and the sectors in which it is considered it may have to act, see my Reports Nos. 11 and 33.)

6. On 30 Jul Major D.K. ROBERTSON (CALG. HIGHRS.), G.S.O.2 (M.I.) at H.Q. Cdn Corps, telephoned me and invited me, on behalf of the B.G.S. Cdn Corps, to be present during the exercise and prepare a brief narrative of it. The G.O.C. Cdn Corps, he explained, was acting as Director.

7. In consequence, I joined Major Robertson at H.Q. Cdn Corps about 1415 hrs on 31 Jul, and drove south with him to UP PARK, a magnificent and historic country house on the DOWNS above SOUTH HARTING (Q25) where Central Control was to be established in the basement, with eating and sleeping accommodation for the skeleton Corps Headquarters required for Control provided in various out-buildings. Here we spent the nights of 31-Jul-- 1 Aug and 1 - 2 Aug.

COURSE OF THE EXERCISE

8. Whereas I had watched previous exercises in the field, seeing as much as possible of the movements of the troops involved, in this case I remained at Control throughout; and it was very profitable for me to have this opportunity of observing procedure at a

Headquarters during operations. Of special interest was the method of dealing with incoming intelligence; the manner in which messages were assigned a serial number, summarized in an operational log, and put in their proper place on the "battle board", while the changes in the situation which they reported were shown by the movement of symbols on the one-inch situation map. In this procedure there is always a necessary time-lag, and General McNAUGHTON said to me in the course of a conversation on the evening of 1 Aug that he is particularly anxious to reduce this to a minimum, and proposes to hold some exercises with this special end in view.

9. The narrative of the exercise which I subsequently prepared and despatched to Brigadier BURNS on 4 Aug is attached to the present report as Appendix "A". At Brigadier Burns' suggestion I kept this narrative brief, in order merely to emphasize the salient points with a view to training value. With this in view I did not mention the names of units. A few additional points follow.

10. 1 Cdn Inf Bde operated in this exercise less the carrier platoons of the ROYAL CANADIAN REGT and the HASTINGS AND PRINCE EDWARD REGT. The carrier platoon of the 48TH HIGHLANDERS carried out the tank counter-attack described in Appendix "A", para. 5. No actual machine-gun units were present with the Canadian force; the M.G. units were represented by infantry detachments with L.M.G.'s. The reconnaissance screen was provided by a company of 4 Cdn Recce Bn (4 P.L.D.G.). Artillery support was represented by detachments of 1 Cdn Fd Regt sufficient to man three O.P.'s in each battalion area, and by umpire personnel on motorcycles who placed thunderflashes in areas under fire.

11. The infantry units of 55 Div are as follows:

164 Inf Bde: 9 King's; 1/4 South Lancashire Regt; 2/4 South Lancashire Regt.

165 Inf Bde: 5 King's; 1 Liverpool Scottish; 2 Liverpool Scottish.

199 Inf Bde: 2/8 Lancashire Fusiliers; 6 Manchester; 7 Manchester.

12. The left forward bn of 1 Cdn Inf Bde (Appendix "A", para. 4) was the 48TH HIGHRS. The right forward bn was the HAST. & P.E.R. The reserve bn was the R.C.R.

13. With respect to the attacking force, the battalion of 199 Inf Bde attacking in the initial phase on 2 Aug (Appendix "A", paras. 7 and 8) was 2/8 L.F. The attacking (former reserve) bn of 164 Inf Bde was 9 King's; the bn supporting by mortar fire was 2/4 S.L.R. The latter was cut up at 0430 hrs by "A" Coy, 48TH HIGHRS. The two last companies of the "enemy" to hold out were "C" and "D" Coys, R.C.R. "C" Coy held the northern sector on BOW HILL.

14. In the same conversation referred to above (para. 8) General McNaughton remarked that he was very desirous of introducing greater realism into exercises. In this advanced stage of training it was desirable to continue exercises after the point of contact with the "enemy", whereas at an earlier stage they had terminated when that point was reached; but realism after that point was hard to maintain. Umpiring was a difficult problem, but he believed that as a result of this exercise he saw the nature of the problem and the way of dealing with it more clearly than before.

15. The General was not satisfied with the information reaching Control on the course of the operations; it came, he said, too slowly and there was not enough of it.

16. He was disappointed with the breakdown of the air element of the exercise. He remarked in passing that as 400 Sqn R.C.A.F. was at present in Armament Training Camp it had been able to supply only a few pilots, and in consequence 239 Sqn had been asked for from 8 Armd Div. He added that a second Army Co-Operation Squadron, R.C.A.F. was now being organized in the United Kingdom for 5 Cdn (Armd) Div, and might be numbered 401. His original desire had been that it should be organized in Canada and work with the Armoured Division there, but he was now of the opinion that the arrangement adopted was for the best.

17. The General mentioned that his observation during this exercise led him to believe that the troops were becoming more conscious of the importance of air co-operation and the value of the means provided for communicating with friendly aircraft.

C.S.

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NARRATIVE

of

EXERCISE "ALBERT"

(Divisional Phase)

31 Jul - 2 Aug 1941

GENERAL

1. This two-sided divisional exercise followed a series of brigade exercises conducted over the same ground and dealing with the same assumed situation. The G.O.C. Cdn Corps acted as Director. 1 Cdn Inf Bde played the part of the enemy, representing a division of an invading force established on the SOUTH DOWNS. The primary object was to practise 55 Div in the approach march (using troop carrying transport), deployment, and attack. It was assumed that 1 Cdn Div was operating on 55 Div's left and 3 Corps on its right.

APPROACH MARCH AND DEPLOYMENT

2. The G.O.C. 55 Div issued his orders at ALDERSHOT at 1800 hrs on 31 Jul. These called for a movement southward into the ROTHER valley by two roads, 164 Inf Bde being on the right and 165 Inf Bde on the left, with 199 Inf Bde in reserve. The divisional recce bn was to cross the ROTHER at 0700 hrs and the leading infantry at 0900 hrs.

3. This movement took place according to plan, and by 0600 hrs 1 Aug the forward bns had passed through their dispersal points and were debussing and assembling for the advance. By 0850 hrs the enemy recce cars disposed as a screen immediately south of the ROTHER had been driven back on to the road blocks in rear, and the leading infantry of both forward bdes crossed the ROTHER shortly after 0900 hrs.

ATTACK ON 1 AUG

4. 1 Cdn Inf Bde was disposed on the DOWNS with two bns holding the escarpment between BURITON and COCKING and one in reserve. Its supporting artillery was reported in action at 0910 hrs. By 1030 hrs the reece screen in front of this position had been withdrawn and at 1115 hrs the forward infantry of 55 Div were approaching the escarpment. After heavy fighting the position was overrun by 1430 hrs. Two companies of the left forward bn of 1 Cdn Inf Bde, with three M.G. sections, withdrew successfully to a position on the left of the reserve bn, and one platoon of the right forward bn fell back into a position on the right of the reserve bn. The new enemy position was on the forward slope of the high ground TELEGRAPH HILL - CHILGROVE HILL - BOW HILL, its general line being 223353 - 267355 - 254306. During the late afternoon a tendency on the part of units of the attacking force to thrust forward prematurely against this strong position was checked by the threats of umpires to impose heavy casualties.

5. TANK COUNTER-ATTACK. During the progress of the attack, 55 Div had been warned of the presence of enemy tanks in the vicinity of its right flank. An Anti-Panzer Force including eight A.Tk guns and a detachment of R.E. with torpedo mines was organized to act defensively in this area. At approximately 1830 hrs a tank force, represented by the carrier platoon of a bn of 1 Cdn Inf Bde, attacked at three points on the right flank of 55 Div. The Anti-Panzer Force was not yet fully in position in the northerly and middle sectors, and here the tanks had successes against infantry and R.E. and shot up A.Tk guns caught on the move. In the southern sector, where the A.Tk guns were in position, two tanks were knocked out.

6. AIR CO-OPERATION. 239 Sqn R.A.F. and 400 Sqn R.C.A.F. were co-operating in this exercise and were to call for identifications, practise the use of the T panel code, and drop messages reporting positions and needs of forward troops at bn and bde H.Qs. This programme was disrupted in the morning by the failure of a W/T set at H.Q. 55 Div and by unsuitable weather; but a number of flights were undertaken during the afternoon.

PLAN FOR 2 AUG. To clear the new enemy position the G.O.C. 55 Div decided upon a dawn attack supported by a careful fire-plan. He planned to employ his reserve bde (199 Inf Bde) on the left; here, where the enemy position was deep, the attack was to be in two phases, one battalion attacking in the initial phase and two being held back for the attack on the final objective. On the right the reserve bn of 164 Inf Bde delivered the attack, with another bn providing mortar support. In both sectors comprehensive support by artillery, M.G. and mortar fire was provided for. Zero was fixed for 0530 hrs.

ATTACK ON 2 AUG

8. Owing to the fact that the 55 Div start line in the APPLE DOWN - TELEGRAPH HILL area was so far forward as to run through the enemy's company localities, the supporting bn of 164 Inf Bde was cut up at 0430 hrs during forming-up, two companies being reported put out of action. After zero, however, the attack developed rapidly. Control had cautioned umpires against permitting advance in the absence of fire-plans producing effective concentrations on enemy positions, but darkness made the umpires' task difficult at this stage. Heavy M.G. casualties were assessed against the attacking force in 55 Div's right sector. APPLE DOWN was captured at 0630 hrs and TELEGRAPH HILL and CHILGROVE HILL about the same time. Thereafter the only sector of the enemy position not yet overrun was the BOW HILL area, held by two companies of the original reserve bn of 1 Cdn Inf Bde in the localities GOOSEHILL CAMP 255322 and TURULI 253306.

9. The reserve bns of 199 Inf Bde now attacked this sector according to plan. By 0855 hrs the enemy company holding the northern end of BOW HILL had been overrun, and the company at the southern end was threatened on both flanks. By 0925 hrs the guns in this company area were reported to have fired their last round and been destroyed. Resistance finally ceased at 0930 hrs.

10. Exercise "ALBERT" was terminated by a message sent out from Control at 1010 hrs.

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