

24/AEF/1/2 (Hist)

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CANADIAN MILITARY HEADQUARTERS

16 Oct 44

CANADIAN OPERATIONS - NORTH-WEST EUROPE

Extracts from War Diaries and Memoranda (Series 9)

1. Further to my 24/AEF/1/2 (Hist), dated 11 Oct 44, attached are additional Extracts from War Diaries and Memoranda dealing with Canadian Operations in North-West Europe.

2. These Extracts are circulated for general information only, and opinions stated are not to be considered as necessarily expressions of official doctrine.

(K. Stuart) Lieut-General,
Chief of Staff,

CANADIAN MILITARY HEADQUARTERS.

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CANADIAN OPERATIONS IN NORTH-WEST EUROPE

JULY - SEPTEMBER, 1944

EXTRACTS FROM WAR DIARIES AND MEMORANDA

(SERIES 9)

1. TWO MACHINE-GUN PLATOONS IN THE "FALAISE GAP", 20 AUG 44:
ACCOUNT BY LIEUT. V.L. LEATHERDALE, C.H. of O. (M.G.).
GIVEN TO HIST OFFR, 3 CDN INF DIV, 22 AUG.

(The desperate situation in which large forces of the German Seventh Army found themselves in the TRUN-CHAMBOIS area is reflected in the following account, which depicts a mere fraction of the monumental disorganization resulting from their encirclement. To what degree this disaster was consequent upon the enemy's decision to hold firm the CAEN - FALAISE sector, which was in effect a pivot for the major Allied operation, cannot yet be stated with authority. But it seems that he largely accomplished his own ruin by refusing to relax his pressure on that front until he was no longer capable of effecting an orderly withdrawal. There were, it is true, several routes along which elements of the trapped army did escape, for the gap was not wholly sealed until after several days. But their confusion was such that many of the enemy believed the road through TRUN to be still open, long after it had been in fact blocked by our troops. - Note by Hist Offr.)

1. At 0100 hrs, 20 Aug 44, Lt Leatherdale moved his MG platoon into TRUN, in support of SD&G Highrs, and took up a temporary position in the town, since it was too dark to choose a more suitable site. At first light they moved on, proceeding Southeastwards towards CHAMBOIS. Already they could see large numbers of the enemy, who for days had been crowding towards this area where there was a slim chance of escape.....
2. A good site was found on the high ground just NORTH of the TRUN - CHAMBOIS highway, near the track and road junction 322287, overlooking the valley of the R DIVES. It was, however, a somewhat isolated position. Lt Leatherdale placed his guns along the crest and Lt H B Jackson sited 10 Pl in a hedgerow on the lower ground to the right front. There was no enemy shelling throughout the day, but during the afternoon the detachments fired frequently on various enemy targets which appeared.
3. Lt Leatherdale was on watch from 2300 hrs to 0100 hrs, 21 Aug 44, and then retired. Rain fell during the night and about 0500 hrs, thoroughly wet, he rose and decided to visit his men, who were sitting just EAST of the road. Around 0530 hrs he could distinguish the sound of a tank rumbling somewhere in the valley to his front.....
4. Waking Lt Jackson, he held a short council with him and the two officers at once ordered a stand-to of their platoons. Within a few minutes a terrific din broke loose in MAGNY, 3128, a village in the valley, held by B Coy SD&G Highrs, Heavy firing could be heard, and loud shouting. The enemy

seemed to be yelling, which was unusual for him, and Canadians were calling to rouse and warn one another.

5. Lt Leatherdale sent out PIATS to each flank, while Lt Jackson prepared to move his MG to the crest at the rear, siting two to cover the rear arc, and two the front. This made a total of six MG facing the front, where a counterattack was obviously in progress. The two platoons now merely sat and listened. No call came for DF tasks and they could not open fire for fear of hitting their own troops.

6. The first definite word as to what was happening came from two runners from B Coy SD&S Highrs, on their way to Bn HQ in TRUN, who told of a counterattack comprising four enemy tanks and a coy of infantry. This proved later to be an understatement.

7. The two officers now took charge of a party of our infantry who had withdrawn from the vicinity of MAGNY. These men were spaced throughout the MG platoon positions and a minor fortress thus formed.

8. 10 Pl, withdrawing one detachment at a time to the more favourable ground in the rear, had still one MG in position in the hedgerow when a small group of enemy appeared, moving up the track from the village to the highway. At very short range this group was engaged by the single MG with most successful results and the first small attack was completely stopped. The detachment was then withdrawn to join the others on the crest. Sgt J J McGale very coolly had covered the withdrawal.

9. Soon a tank was heard moving through the field on the left front. It had proceeded up the narrow track from the village and had swung half-right into the field. Although an early morning haze lay over the ground it was possible to see soldiers marching beside and behind it. They were allowed to move even closer to the highway.

10. Sgt Price fired four PIAT bombs at the tank, scoring a hit on its rear. The tank then wheeled and made off down the slope to the left. The Vickers gun now opened fire on the enemy infantry, inflicting a dreadful toll. Caught on rising ground, there was no cover at hand for them. Those who were not hit ran towards the dead ground in the cove to their right, through which a stream runs. The attack was completely disrupted.

11. During that brief engagement the gun numbers had been presented with just such a target as they had often wished for. All available rifles and Brens had also been in use.

12. Until about 0800 hrs the machine-gunners fired at whatever they could see. During this time, a host of white flags appeared and hundreds of the enemy crowded in to surrender. Many others were unable to give up, for every move towards our lines brought bursts of fire from certain SS troops patrolling the low ground behind them in an armoured half-track.

13. The artillery later laid down fire on the orchard, around 327283, where many German soldiers had concealed themselves. Driven out by the shelling into the open, they were again fired upon by Vickers guns.

14. When the situation had been restored Lt Jackson

moved his guns forward to their former position in the hedgerow. MAGNY was firmly in our hands again and it was soon possible to collect the many German wounded from the field in front. Lt Leatherdale remarked that the search revealed relatively few enemy weapons: there was a quantity of pistols, some automatic rifles, and three or four MG.42. 10 and 11 Platoons had suffered only one minor casualty.

15. Only a small portion of the enemy later chose to surrender by approaching the MG positions: the incident early in the day had no doubt decided them against that route. Most of them entered our lines at some distance to the Southeast. It was considered that the effective stand made by those two platoons of MMG prevented a break-through by the enemy in one of the more thinly-held localities.

2. A RECONNAISSANCE REGIMENT IN THE ADVANCE FROM FALAISE TO CALAIS, 22 AUG - 5 SEP 44 (EXTRACT FROM REPORT ON OPERATIONS OF 7 CDN RECCE REGT).

(The advance of 7 Cdn Recce Regt in the van of the rapid drive of 3 Cdn Inf Div. towards CALAIS fell into three distinct phases:

(a) The advance to ROUEN, which was conducted cautiously as the Germans were fighting a rear guard action in strength;

(b) ROUEN to ABBEVILLE where orders called for pursuit to the coast at all speed, by-passing any major opposition, and

(c) From ABBEVILLE to CALAIS, when the advance was speeded up on a wide front for the purpose of seizing bridge sites before they could be destroyed and thus trapping as many of the enemy as possible in a coastal area up to and including CALAIS.

In each phase, the main task was reconnaissance in front of the division, reporting enemy strong points, seizing river crossings where possible "and generally destroying any opposition encountered".)

COMMENTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

(a) The tac methods used in this op roughly fall into two main classes. First, during close recce when opposition is known to exist and to be well organized, sqns operated from a firm sqn base, each tp in turn est a firm base in its own area of responsibility and sending small offr led patrols in by cars to do slow and careful recce until contact was made. In this type of action, well concealed A tk guns and well concealed mines are the greatest danger and a great deal of the progress will be on foot and in very slow time if cas are to be avoided. Similarly, therefore, if work has to be done on foot, wireless comm is lost and HQs must accept long periods of silence from fwd patrols.

Experience has proved that offr led patrols are essential and that a high rate of offr cas must be accepted. The standard of leadership and courage must be high as patrols must work completely on their own miles from any form of sp - and the

standard of initiative and steadiness on the part of dvrs and gnr ops must be high if hy armd cars are to manoeuvre on narrow mined rds and important infm passed over RT when vehs are disabled or under A tk fire.

The most important single item in this type of work is the rapid passage of infm from top to bottom, e.g., the knowledge that a flanking fm has succeeded in reaching a point 10 miles to our right front will let patrol comds know that opposition on that flank is likely to be weak and therefore certain measures of caution can be dispensed with.

In the second type of recce (the pursuit) caution must and will be thrown to the winds and sqns will adv on a broad front with all speed, by-passing minor opposition, reporting its locn and endeavouring to get as deep as possible into the enemy rear areas. By so doing, they are able to wreck comns, catch up to and destroy colns of wheeled vehs and marching tps. In this regard, Sqn HQs travelled right on the heels of the leading tps and held in hand their A tk guns and M.10s with the result that Sqn Comds were able to manoeuvre these sp weapons into posn so quickly that colns trapped by scout tps were shot up like sitting pigeons. Opposition which did halt the adv of scout tps in any one point was dealt with by displaying the max fire power and parade of str available.

The following are two examples of excellent results:

On 4 Sep 44 at INCHEVILLE, after very bitter fighting, an aslt tp succeeded in securing a brhead and members of the scout tp, working under fire, rebuilt the br to carry a class 40 load. Realizing the urgency of speed and that the opposition could be no more than an inf coy with lt A tk wpns, and that morale must be low - the Sqn Comd, Maj Allen, lined up his entire sqn, hy cars, M.10s, scout Cs and carriers and at a sig the entire sqn charged over the br and up the hill in line ahead, blazing away every MG, A tk wpn, mortar and 37mm as they went. When the smoke cleared the enemy was either dead, captured or well on his way home; the only cas were two cars entangled in each others mud gds.

On 5 Sep 44 at SAMER, a determined force with two A tk guns were delaying the adv by sniping from the centre of the town. Maj W.C. Bowen, comd A sqn, led his armd cars full tilt into the market square and sprayed the streets and houses with Besa and 37mm fire to cover the arrival of the 6 pdrs and M.10s who quickly demolished the bldgs from which fire was coming and put out of action the two A tk wpns.

The tactics emp in both these instances are NOT in the book and are NOT recommended under normal circumstances but the Sqn Comds, appreciating the enemy morale, his state of disorg and the urgency of getting to the coast, took a legitimate risk and by displaying courage and terrific fire power and utilizing the psychological effect of armd vehs racing into action, swept opposition aside quickly whereas normal action would have called for the deployment of part of the leading inf bde.

- (b) The wpns, eqpt and org of a recce regt are a problem that has been fought over since a recce regt was organized. Rather than belabour the point needlessly, the following recommendation is made. Armd Cs carry practically no fire power of importance against A tk wpns despite their size, weight and height and cumbersomeness. Scout Cs carry nothing but a bren and a wireless set, and although of some use - usually are a nuisance. The M.10s and 6 pdr A tk guns were used with effect but are NOT

the proper answer.

The best requirement is that each tp have one scout C for use when mortar fire is hy, but that all recce be done in jeeps with wireless set and .30 or .50 Browning mounted on the hood. This gives low silhouette, manoeuvrability, cross country performance, speed, essential comms and the protection lost by lack of armour is gained by every one of the other pts. Five of these, backed up by an assault gun - say a light recce tk mounting a 75mm or 95mm gun - will destroy any opposition likely to be met and a veh of this type is manoeuvrable, has speed and builds up own tps morale, at the same time lowering enemy morale.

An org based on this underlying principle would provide quicker recce, quicker destruction of enemy strong pts and at the same time decrease the number of personnel, vehs and types of eqpt in a recce regt.

- (c) Adm is the vital business in the functioning of the regt, and all the courage, initiative and energy of the fwd tps is useless unless the ech is on time all the time. Our experience is that in static or slow adv, with B ech moving in bounds, the double ech system works well - but in fast moving warfare the A ech must draw solely from fwd pts and must travel right behind RHQ, clear of the leading bde because, once it drops behind, every offr in the div and corps makes it his personal business to push it off the rd or down minor lanes. This requires that A ech stay on wheels at all times, move forward quickly from bound to bound as the battle progresses or the leading bde catches up. To this end, a wireless set on regt freq is essential and the Comd of A ech must be completely in the tac picture at all times and clearly understand the battle picture and the traffic problem.

Personnel must be org for def and offensive action, and the success of this trg is evidenced in that, when 5 men were captured by enemy patrols SOUTH of BOLOGNE at dawn on 5 Sep 44, in short order a force was despatched which rescued the men and trapped 3 offr, 93 ORs and 3 vehs of a German arty bty.

Full second line amn must be carried and a composite sec of RCASC att, carrying pet, various types of amn and also derv if M.10s are under comd. Sqns can NOT afford to send back for sups as normally at the end of a days work all vehs are in need of maint, crews have NOT eaten all day and are usually dead tired from strain. Therefore, dvr must be completely briefed as to where they are to deliver sups, routes that are safe and have a gen idea of the tac picture.

The LAD of a recce regt is NOT suitable or nearly large enough to take care of the 260 vehs plus att tps - particularly as these vehs are almost always under fire and therefore the mech faults and defects so high that after one or two days action the LAD is immobile. An AWD must be placed under comd during a move and as the LAD bogs down with work, passes it to AWD as they themselves leapfrog fwd. Experience has proved that this is a "must", or the LAD becomes lost in rear areas and scout tps become so low in vehs they can no longer op.

(d) Intercomm

This phase has been good within the WE of the regt but again changes are recommended. RHQ cannot op efficiently on the move with its fwd and rear link in separate vehs. An LCV is essential and when provided in Phase III of our adv materially assisted in the speed of operating the regt.

Lateral amplifiers are needed in each sqn rear link due to distance to be covered. One wireless set per carrier gp (7 carriers) is NOT sufficient, as this being an offr's veh, it usually becomes the first cas. Require two more l9 sets per tp for efficient work.

A junior "Z" lorry is another must in enlarging the LAD. With over a hundred l9 sets on the air all day, the problem of keeping up with repairs is colossal and it is useless to suggest wksp when they are sixty to seventy miles behind the lines.

Gen the standard of operating was found to be excellent due to great care in selection and trg of ops. A wireless op in this business must be intelligent and quick witted and able to understand the tac sense of a question or order, as very often his offr is engaged in foot recce or fighting a battle and can NOT be tied to his wireless headphones.

GEN

It is essential that the comd of the recce regt during an adv knows the gen plan for at least a day ahead.

The rft situation should be re-studied, as the need is for a high proportion of offr's and tradesmen and very few gen duty.

A recce regt can NOT see well enough to do its job at first lt and must start ops at first "recce" lt which is usually 45 mins later. Otherwise, there is a danger of cas or the day starting off on the wrong foot, which is difficult to rectify.

Similarly it has been found advisable to try to harbour the sqns before dark so that reorg, meals and maint can be started before visibility is nil. This was seldom possible in recent advs as tp comds lost all sense of time and in their enthusiasm often did NOT return to harbour until 2 or 3 in the morning resulting in slower reaction to danger on the following day.

The cast iron policy of everyone shaving and washing before a days work regardless of the hour or pressure of circumstances proved to be a good one in the long run and developed a pride in appearance which often carried a man along when that scruffy unshaven feeling would have lowered the will to keep on going.

3. A 17-POUNDER IN A SNIPING ROLE, ST ANDRE-SUR-ORNE, 21 Jul 44: REPORT BY O.C., 2 A.TK REGT, R.C.A., 28 Jul (APPENDIX TO WAR DIARY, 2 A.TK REGT, R.C.A.).

On 21 Jul 44 at 0900 hrs, I started out to check the A tk gun positions in St Andre Sur-Orne area held by the Camerons of Canada. Major A.C. Lennon, OC 23 A Tk Bty accompanied me. Major Lennon warned me that the enemy had the rd between the high ground at MR 020628 and the Camerons of C area in orchard to approx 023615 under fire and would not allow vehs or personnel to use this rd. I went to the high ground at 024627 in order to observe where the enemy fire was coming from. From this point I observed three enemy tks identified at the time as "Panthers". It was then decided to proceed to the Camerons of C area to confirm my observation from that location. Entrance to the Camerons area was gained by crawling along the rd in the ditch except for intermittent short patches of open ground. Arrived there at approx 1030 hrs. From the Cameron area, I could see seven enemy tanks which all appeared to be Panthers. I contacted Lt-Col Ross, C.O. Camerons of C and he informed me they had been there for some time and he was worried about them as enemy personnel could be seen moving around the tks which gave the impression that they may be forming up to put in

an attack on the Camerons which would have seriously affected our right flank posn. A tp of 6 pr Arty guns were in posn along the hedge about one hundred yds in front of the orchard but in my opinion the enemy tks were out of range of the 6 prs so I decided to bring a 17 pr gun in along the rd Fleury-Sur-Orne--St Andre-Sur-Orne and snipe the enemy tks from a posn at the base of the high ground approx 022624. For the task, I picked a gun det from 20 Cdn A tk Bty and briefed the No.1, L/Sjt Johnson, giving him orders to bring his gun to a point on the rd out of view where he was to unlimber and reverse the gun tower preparatory to getting the gun out in a hurry if possible and to manhandle the gun to a posn which I would show him on arrival. I proceeded ahead to confirm that the tks were still in the same posns. After verifying this, I decided to change my plan and make an all out effort to destroy all seven tks if possible and therefore ordered the gun to be manhandled down the rd which was in view of the enemy to MR 021619 and immediately go into action on the rd beside one of our own tanks which had previously been put out of action. It was felt that the enemy would suspect the initial rds at least were coming from the tank and not our gun. This deception was successful for the first few moments of action as several enemy rds were directed at the tank setting it ablaze but in spite of the blazing fire on their immediate right, extremely heavy MMG fire on their gun as well as A Tk fire, the det performed their tasks gallantly and kept on firing until the 17 pr gun was finally put out of action by a direct hit which jammed the breech. As soon as Sjt Ford reported to me he could not fire any more rds I personally checked the gun and saw that the breech was jammed. I then ordered the det to withdraw by crawling out alongside the rd as very heavy MMG fire was coming down all along the rd. During the action, B131356 Bdr. Callaghan, JG, was killed and L/Sgt Johnson, IL, was severely wounded. When B/Sjt Johnson, No.1 who directed the fire was wounded, Tp. Sjt Ford, HD, took over and finished the action by firing the gun single handed. Sjt Ford and Cnr Simmens were wounded by machine gun fire. Three enemy "Panther" tanks were totally destroyed during this action.

Later Bdr. Grassick of the 6 pr tp which was sited in front of the orchard crawled over to the 17 pr gun and by breaking the semi-automatic gear was able to fire the gun, which he did single handed; totally destroying another "Panther" tank, making a total of four enemy tanks destroyed by the 17 pr gun ...

4. EXPERIENCE OF A CONSTRUCTION SECTION, R.C. SIGS (EXTRACTS FROM WAR DIARY, 5 CONSTR SEC, 1 CDN L OF C. SIGS, JULY, 1944)

Summary ...

The men have worked well as they now realize that all lines built are for a definite and important job. The Section has been split into Section H.Q., A and B detachments; each Det is complete in itself with personnel, vehicles, cookhouse, and stores. In this way each Det can carry out separate commitments. So far the Section has been employed on buried cable, quad cable, multi air line, permanent lines and permanent railway communications ... There are always many things found which could be improved after a Section is actually in the theatre of war, some are listed below.

1. More training on permanent line work. This to include full understanding of transposition scheme.
2. Improved type of clothing for linemen to provide protection in inclement weather.

3. Increased scale of issue for lineman's body and safety belts (Bell S.) Climbers Bell System with various sizes lineman's gloves, permanent line tools and equipment.
 4. Mounting for machine gun on Jeeps to provide air protection and ready availability for emergencies.
 5. All personnel should be fully familiar with mine clearing.
 6. Improved cookers with oven provided similar to the American pattern.
5. THE ATTACK ON ROCQUANCOURT, 8 AUG 44 (ACCOUNT BY MAJOR COURTENAY, "A" COY, S. SASK R., GIVEN TO HIST OFFR, 2 CDN INF DIV, 10 AUG 44).

(In this operation ("TOTALIZE") S. Sask R. was one of the marching infantry units detailed to capture the enemy centres of resistance by-passed by the armoured columns.)

.....

Our SL was the EAST-WEST rd at TROTEVAL FARM. We moved back from VERRIERES where we were holding a posn in order to be behind the bomb line. We crossed the SL at 2330 hrs 7 Aug with "A" Coy right, "D" Coy left, "C" Coy in follow-up, and "B" Coy in res. We advanced past VERRIERES, by-passed it on the EAST and deployed in front of it on the SOUTH side. The objective ROCQUANCOURT was to be taken in two phases. "A" Coy was to take the area of the orchard and inclusive the rd; "D" Coy the EAST of the village up to the EAST-WEST rd and including two large buildings SOUTH of the rd. They were to consolidate. The second phase would bring "C" Coy into the church and the area in the SW of the town, and "B" Coy would go through "D" Coy to take out the remainder of the town, that is the SE corner. To sp the attack an arty barrage lifting 200 yds every two mins was laid down beginning just in front of VERRIERES at 2345 hrs.

The bn pushed off from the SL at 2330 hrs, the posn being taped to the bomb line. Thus the bn caught up with the barrage at its first lift. "A" Coy hit the village right on the nose toughing at the NW corner of the orchard (055089) which left room for manoeuvre. A lot of PW were taken inside the orchard along the centre wall. "D" Coy passed through and we consolidated on our posn waiting until the moon rose later on to do the final mopping up. Digging continued and by dawn everyone was tied into a close-knit defence. The A tk guns were up. Meanwhile the armour of 4 Bde streamed by us on the WEST. One tk unfortunately engaged some of our pns who were busy blowing a gap in the wall thinking they were enemy. We found the church a complete rubble pile when we arrived and the village quiet. A few PW were taken who said that the enemy had pulled out to the SOUTH. The orchard had been used as a mortar posn and the mortars and crews were captured complete. The attack was extremely successful in that the bn stayed so close behind the barrage that enemy heads were still under ground when we arrived. This permitted the bn to get into town and be consolidated and reasonably well organized at 0045 hrs. Once we were settled the enemy at once opened up on us with mortars, moaning minnies, 88mm and so forth, but this caused few cas.

About 0430 hrs an enemy patrol apparently returning to its base stumbled into one of our pl posns near a gap in the orchard wall. One of our tps was killed with Schmeisser fire; but the enemy usually surrendered quietly... Most of our PW were from the orchard where 6 mortars had been set up and where much amm and SA were obtained. The resistance we met was not as hy as had been expected.

The reason for the success of this attack lay in the barrage which was very closely followed. One must ignore MG fire unless it is very close and must hug one's own arty shells. Many of our cas came from 4 MGs on the right flank, and 4 MGs on the left flank ahead of ROCQUANCOURT which fired on us enfiladed during our adv. We had very few cas coming through the village itself. One man was killed en route and another on the posn. On the whole the attack went through according to plan just like a well rehearsed exercise. Fair liaison was kept with rear coys and wireless worked very well. A slight flurry developed at first light when it was reported that tks had been heard, but they turned out to be our own tks coming back for repositioning.

Artificial moonlight worked well until dust and smoke obliterated its effect. The tracer worked extremely well for direction. By keeping one line of tracer over the centre of a coy and one on each side, "A" Coy hit the edge of the orchard which was its objective. The normal pace for a night attack is 100 yds in three mins. The barrage pace of 100 yds a min was extremely fast for night work. Visibility was not good until about 0230 hours when the moon rose but by 0530 hrs fog arrived and decreased it once again. So close were we to our barrage that when we hit the bottom of the village shells were still dropping on the top of it. This wall of fire ahead plus armd flank protection made the men feel extremely secure. They were right in feeling thus for less than 50 were killed, wounded, or missing from the bn.

Obstacles to the adv included the thick wheat which had MG pits and shell holes some of which held snipers and had to be dealt with by grenades or Bren gun fire. We knew from experience that there were MG posts on the rd to the objective around Pt 57 (053593) which had been discovered by fighting patrols a few days previously. Night fighting in the village offered few extra difficulties. Where visibility was extremely bad mopping up was delayed until extra vision could be obtained. Then grenades or bursts of MG fire into corners and into buildings were sufficient to quieten most of the enemy who seemed still absolutely dizzy and stunned from the barrage. Our infm indicated that there were about 500 enemy in the village. These were fresh tps only a few days arrived. Few were left when we came in.

Moaning minnies do not bother the tps because they are warned of their coming and have time to duck if they judge them to be coming close. They can soon judge direction pretty exactly and then take their own chances. With 88mm this is not possible. Their swish is followed immediately by the crack right on you. In his shelling certain patterns are normally followed by Jerry which permit the tps to exercise considerable freedom. Occasionally, however, these patterns are changed which results in cas unless the tps are near the slit trenches.

6. CROCODILES IN CO-OPERATION WITH INFANTRY: THE ATTACK ON MAY-SUR-ORNE, 8 AUG 44 (ACCOUNT BY MAJOR BROCHU AND CAPT. LAMOTHE, FUS M.R., GIVEN TO HIST OFFR, 2 CDN INF DIV, 12 AUG).

(The first attempt of Fus M.R. to capture MAY-SUR-ORNE, in the early hours of 8 Aug, was defeated with heavy casualties. This account deals with the successful renewal of the attack on the same afternoon.)

....The bn was now seriously depleted and when in the afternoon a new attack was arranged, additional sp was provided. This consisted of four tps of crocodiles, Churchill tks equipped with flame throwers. The bn itself was completely committed with the exception of the carrier pl which remained in res in the area about the mine with one tp of flame throwing tks. "C" and "D" Coys, with about 60 men, were to attack on the right hand side of the rd with one tp of tks in sp. "A" and "B" Coys, with a total of 90 men, were to attack on the left of the rd with two tps of tks. H hour was set for 1545 hrs. The SL was the fwd or southern edge of the mine area and its imaginary extension on the right of the rd 021603. The tk crews were assured that very few A tk guns and mines existed in the area and throughout the action they performed very aggressively. The set-up on the SL was excellent. No enemy shelling interfered and the attack began very well. On the right flank the tp of Churchills moved fwd down the rd followed immediately, that is within a few yds, by the inf. As they advanced they opened fire on the houses in the village with 75mm and with MGs. The procedure was that the guns on the tks should break down holes in the buildings and then the flame throwers should be directed to these openings so that the interior of the building would be ignited. Once the tks approached the town they did not keep on the main street nor did they continue in single file. Instead they moved right, one going down a line directly behind the houses, and the other two keeping further to the right ready to give covering fire.

The inf moved in very close co-operation with the tks. The general plan was that behind each tk would move two secs following very closely on the trailer behind the tk. As the tk approached a house it would fire, knock a hole in the house, then squirt the liquid flame into the opening thus created. Immediately the sec directly behind the tk would dash for the doorway and clear the house as quickly as possible. This sounds very dangerous but the fire once ignited is not dangerous. The thing to beware of is getting in the path of the flame thrower itself for everything touched by the liquid is ignited. The tk meanwhile moves fwd down the line to a second house and turns its turret against it. Gun and flame thrower repeat their actions and the second sec of inf following the tk is available for clearing this house. These two secs thus alternate in entering the buildings set ablaze by the tk and the secs of the res pl following further in rear occupy the buildings already searched. The leading sec follows two yds behind the trailer and the other two secs about 20 yds in rear.

This process took the right coys up to the church, and house clearing continued along the rd leading SW from the church until the whole area of MAY-SUR-ORNE was searched. It soon became obvious that the enemy were no longer in the village so that after the church was reached the flame throwers were no longer employed to set buildings ablaze. Consolidation took place in the area directly SOUTH of the church 020594.

During the adv any likely hedges or ditches known to

contain machine gunners or snipers previously were seared with flame. The fires started in the buildings blazed all night and some buildings continued to burn all the next day.

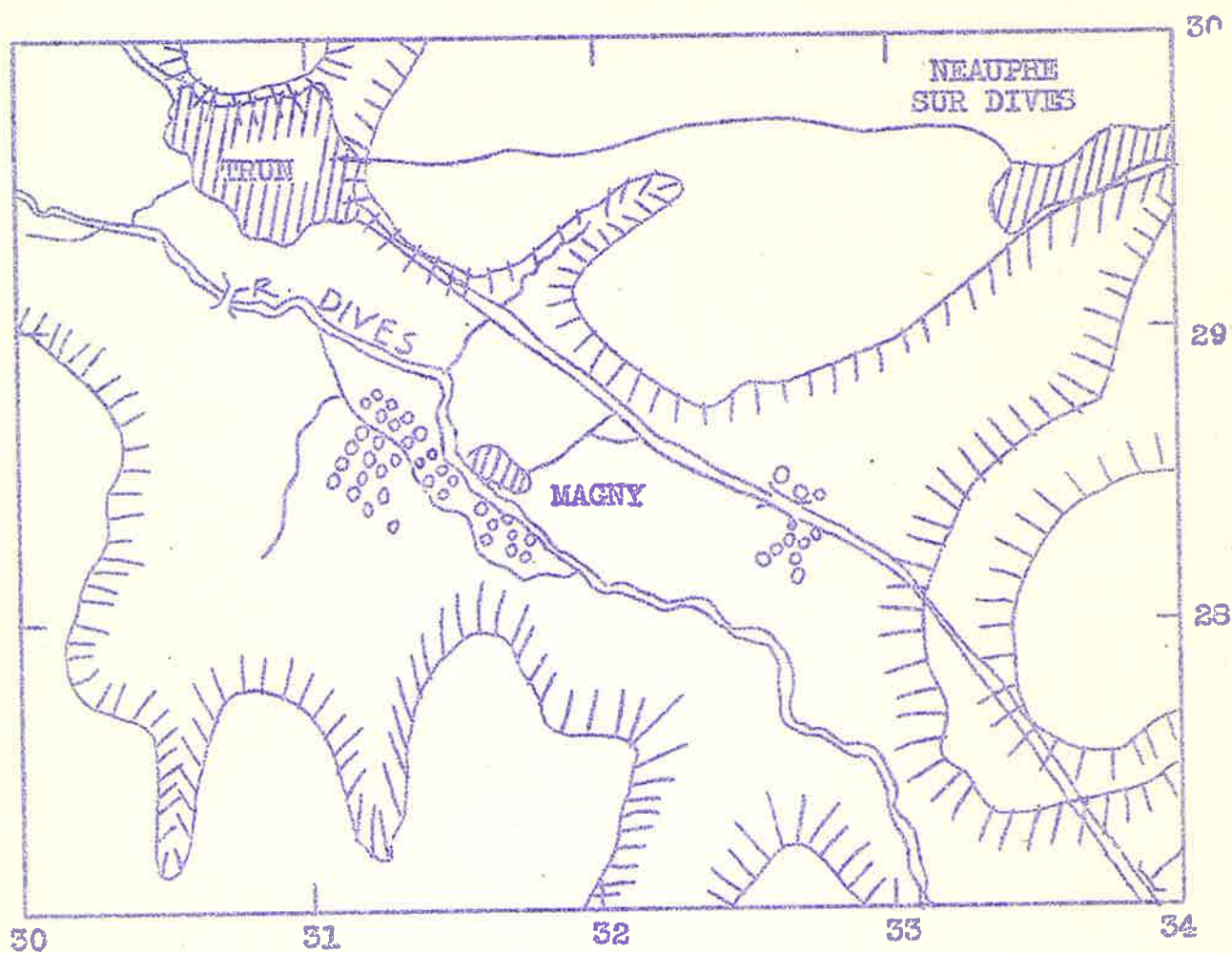
On the left of the rd one tp of tks moved along the track circling SE from the NE corner of the mine area 024604 to track junc 028595 and on the way set aflame all the bushes along this track which lies part way up the rise to the EAST. This tp then went to the EAST edge of MAY-SUR-ORNE around the area 025594 and from there fired on the SOUTH end of MAY-SUR-ORNE. The second tp on the left of the rd moved parallel to the rd and about 50 yds in from it. They fired with MGs and 75mm all the way and as they reached the town they began to set fire to the few trees remaining in the battle-scarred orchards and to move along the rear of the buildings in the eastern sec of town and to set them ablaze. They then remained in res, ready to fire when required. "A" Coy followed this tp and remained somewhat further behind the tks. The general plan was that one pl of the coy cleared the buildings along the rd running SOUTH as far as the X rds near the church, the second pl clearing the buildings along the rd running SE from the X rds near the church while the res pl stood by. When this clearing was completed the res pl crossed the rd and cleared the buildings in the SE sector of the town and then turned left to clear out the two quarries and the block houses between them 025590. On this flank all buildings NORTH of the rd between the church and the quarry at 025592 were set ablaze as were the orchards NORTH of them. The buildings SOUTH of this rd and the block house or kiln were not set on fire.

The effect on the enemy was shown by the eqpt he left behind. Five mortars, telephones, one 88mm, and at least one fd gun were left behind by the enemy. This indicates a hurried evacuation. After the determined stand during the night and early morning this rapid withdrawal may be attributed to a view of the tks approaching and to the fact that tks were being used at this same time on the FONTENAY-LE-MARMION attack.

The inf had nothing but the highest praise for the flame throwing tks used during this attack. They were impressed greatly by the aggressive and bold attitude displayed by the tk crews who rarely, if ever, hesitated before taking on any job asked of them. The inf were not disturbed by the problem of having to clear houses ablaze, but were very glad to have such effective sp even at the cost of a lot of extra sweat.

The attack also indicated that the enemy posns were very accurately pin-pointed by air phs. The def over-prints indicated every posn exactly as it was found to be on the ground with the single exception that a small cemetery to the NORTH of rd junc 024592 was incorrectly labelled as an entrance to the quarry directly SOUTH of it.

SKETCH MAP OF TRUN AREA



SCALE



(See Serial I)