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Canadian Ops - North-West EuropeExtracts from War Diaries and Memoranda (Series 10)

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M.P. Johnston(M.P. Johnston),
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for Chief of the General Staff.*L.J.
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30 Oct 44

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1. Further to my 24/AEF/1/2 (Hist), dated 16 Oct 44, attached are additional Extracts from War Diaries and Memoranda dealing with Canadian Operations in North-West Europe.

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

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CANADIAN OPERATIONS IN NORTH-WEST EUROPE

JUNE - SEPTEMBER 1944

EXTRACTS FROM WAR DIARIES AND MEMORANDA

(SERIES 10)

1. OPERATIONS OF 3 CDN INF DIV, SEPTEMBER, 1944
(SUMMARY BY THE HISTORICAL OFFICER)

(This summary is reproduced as being of general interest and as affording background for specific episodes which have been or will be dealt with in greater detail.)

.....

1. The pursuit of the enemy by 3 Cdn Inf Div came to an end on 5 Sep 44 when 7 Cdn Recce Regt, at the head of the divisional advance, found BOULOGNE and CALAIS very strongly held. The regiment at once cut the main route between them and proceeded to contain both cities. 9 Cdn Inf Bde was soon in position near BOULOGNE. The division was then assigned the task of clearing the Channel coast from BOULOGNE to CALAIS. Before an assault could be mounted against this formidable stretch it was necessary to make a thorough study of enemy dispositions and strength.

2. Around BOULOGNE a preliminary grouping on 5/6 Sep 44 placed 8 Cdn Inf Bde east of the city, controlling the approaches from that direction, in the general area of CONTEVILLE-LES-BOULOGNE 7655 and LA CAPELLE 7553. This brigade was cautioned to dispose its troops carefully so as to keep casualties to a minimum. The right flank was entrusted to a squadron of 7 Cdn Recce Regt. 9 Cdn Inf Bde was ordered to deploy on a very wide front across the left flank from the sea at HARDELOT 6844 to COURCOLLETTE 7249. Deceptive measures were to be practised: 9 Cdn Inf Bde was to give the illusion (despite the fact that it had only two battalions up across its considerable front) that its area was no more thinly held than 8 Bde's; 7 Cdn Recce Regt was to appear to be an infantry unit, its characteristic black berets and armoured cars being kept out of sight.

3. Further north, between BOULOGNE and CALAIS, 7 Cdn Inf Bde established itself astride the BOULOGNE - CALAIS highway in the vicinity of BONNINGUES-LES-CALAIS. Sub-units of the recce regiment patrolled east of CALAIS. It was considered on 10 Sep 44 that the initial attack on BOULOGNE would be made by one brigade group (8 Cdn Inf Bde and attached troops) directed against the MONT LAMBERT feature. The area west of the river LIANE (including OUTREAU 6651 and ST ETIENNE 6848) would be subsequently cleared by 9 Cdn Inf Bde.

4. The problem of determining the nature of the enemy's defences was then undertaken. Meanwhile the CALAIS area was definitely set apart from the rest on 9 Sep 44, when Regina Rif occupied the coast town of WISSANT 7371, between CALAIS and CAP GRIS NEZ. Two days later they had captured TARDINGHEN 7069. It was considered advisable at this stage that 7 Cdn Inf Bde should completely reduce the CAP GRIS NEZ rectangle prior to the main assault on BOULOGNE.

5. Orders were subsequently received, however, that BOULOGNE was to receive first consideration; CALAIS was placed second in

order of priority, and CAP GRIS NEZ last. Inasmuch as 7 Cdn Inf Bde was already facing the two latter places the ruling imposed no difficulties on that formation. But the plan for the capture of BOULOGNE was altered so that both 8 and 9 Cdn Inf Bdes should carry out the assault. This necessitated careful regrouping so that the enemy might not determine the projected source of attack. 9 Cdn Inf Bde was withdrawn from the divisional left flank, where it was relieved by CH of 0 and attached troops, who simulated a brigade group. By a show of activity, considerable fire from machine guns, and the use of such deceptive devices as dummy mortars they created the illusion of a concentrated infantry force so convincingly that they were rewarded by a notable volume of enemy shellfire.

6. In preparation for the assault 9 Cdn Inf Bde meanwhile took up a new brigade area due east of BOULOGNE around CONTEVILLE-LES-BOULOGNE and LA CAPELLE, previously occupied by 8 Cdn Inf Bde. On its right flank, 8 Cdn Inf Bde moving somewhat further north, positioned itself in the general area SOUVERAIN MOULIN 7356 - MANINGHEN-HENNE 7258 - WIERRE EFFROY 7758. 7 Cdn Recce Regt still held the extreme right flank.

7. The enemy garrison had by now ordered the evacuation of the civilian population. Some 8000 left the city between 11 and 13 Sep 44 and arrangements for transporting, feeding and housing this host proved most efficient.

8. The operation began at 0855 hrs on the morning of 17 Sep 44 when heavy bombers attacked the MONT LAMBERT area. One hour later the assaulting companies of 9 Cdn Inf Bde moved forward in Kangaroos. Nth NS Highrs on the left attacked MONT LAMBERT and SD&G Highrs on the right advanced into ST MARTIN-BOULOGNE. North of the BOULOGNE-LA CAPELLE highway N Shore R at the same time began an attack on LA TRESORERIE 7058. This strongpoint, while not part of the city's defence system, had to be eliminated to prevent its interfering with the main assault. Half an hour later R de Chaud on the right commenced their attack on the BON SECOURS area 6955, through RUPEMBERT 7155, and QOR of C attacked WICARDENNE 7054.

9. The operation, which had the advantage of skilfully co-ordinated air support and an exceptionally strong artillery component, went well. With so many guns available (the roster included two AGRAs) it was possible to allot to every potential source of opposition a series of concentrations and stonks which could be had on call. This carefully prepared programme gave most satisfying results.

10. Nth NS Highrs early experienced difficulty on MONT LAMBERT, whose garrison had taken refuge in the impregnable casemates and could only be persuaded with difficulty to come out. By 18 Sep 44 nevertheless, that garrison had surrendered, SD&G Highrs and QOR of C had cleared BOULOGNE to the east bank of the LIANE, R de Chaud had taken BON SECOURS, and N Shore R had captured the coastal battery at LA TRESORERIE. The advance of the infantry into the city had been preceded by three special armoured teams of 31 Tk Bde.

11. By dark, 19 Sep 44, SD&G Highrs, passing through the bridgehead earlier formed by HLI of C, had captured OUTREAU and its surrounding area. CH of 0 had occupied HERQUELINGUE 7049, a hill south of MONT LAMBERT. N Shore R were attacking WIMILLE 7057.

12. The bulk of the defences had been cracked; it was now only necessary to reduce scattered strongpoints. This was

finally accomplished on 22 Sep 44 on which day Generalleutnant Heim, the garrison commander, surrendered. On that day too the capture of WIMEREUX 6858 was completed by N Shore R. Nearly 10,000 PW were taken in BOULOGNE.

13. The division now turned its attention to CALAIS, whose defences had been under inspection during this time by 7 Cdn Inf Bde and 7 Cdn Recce Regt. The CAP GRIS NEZ posts had been contained by carrier-borne forces while the remainder of the brigade moved to an area south of the city. Its eastern perimeter had been picqueted by Tor Scot R (MG) of 2 Cdn Inf Div.

14. By 24 Sep 44 all units concerned were in their new localities. 9 Cdn Inf Bde assumed responsibility for CAP GRIS NEZ, and disposed its units south and southeast of the area. 8 Cdn Inf Bde prepared to assault the strongpoints in the area of ESCALLES 7774 and NOIRES MOTTES 7875, and positioned itself along a front running due north from NOIRE BERNES 7466 through AUDEMBERT 7568 to the channel coast, just west of WISSANT. 7 Cdn Inf Bde, most familiar with the situation in CALAIS itself, was given the task of assaulting the city, which it was proposed to carry out along an axis parallel to the BOULOGNE - CALAIS highway via COQUELLES 8376. CH of O, relieving Tor Scot R, once more performed the function of mock brigade along the eastern sector of the CALAIS defence perimeter.

15. The CALAIS operation began the next day, 25 Sep 44, with the familiar prelude of heavy bombing attacks on selected targets. Both 7 and 8 Cdn Inf Bdes attacked with two battalions up, with Flails, Crocodiles and AVsRE available to deal with particularly stubborn strongpoints. For 8 Cdn Inf Bde progress was swift: by nightfall R de Chaud held all their objectives except the heavy guns at CAP BLANC NEZ 7675 and N Shore R were on the high ground at NOIRES MOTTES. Their Crocodiles and Flails had bogged down. Next day both battalions completed their tasks, and the brigade soon after was concentrated south of CALAIS.

16. Last light of 25 Sep 44 saw R Wpg Rif established in COQUELLES and Regina Rif, on their left, north of BELLEVUE, in square 8076. 1 C Scot R was already infiltrating towards the coast road SANGATTE - CALAIS. Beyond lay low flooded country, which necessitated a road-bound operation, and made mines a special problem. Consequently the rate of advance was much slower. By the following morning the battalion had one company in SANGATTE 7977 and two others working eastward along the coast road. Tank support was slow in coming up, owing to the state of the roads.

17. This slow and persistent pressure was continued over several days as more and more of the western and southwestern strongpoints fell. Late on 27 Sep 44 1 C Scot R had captured FORT LAPIN 8478 and R Wpg R had taken FORT NIEULAY 8477. During this period many air sorties were flown and numerous targets were engaged effectively.

18. On 28 Sep 44 QOR of C were withdrawn from 8 Cdn Inf Bde area and moved in TCVs to the east side of CALAIS to join CH of O on their right flank. 1 C Scot R now had elements of two companies in the citadel 8678 and had captured the main signal station for the PAS DE CALAIS area. That night the garrison commander asked for a parley with GOC 3 Cdn Inf Div on the following morning. Although over 2000 PW had been taken, the enemy was still on the whole resisting fiercely.

19. At 1000 hrs, 29 Sep 44, the German envoys met the GOC's party at LE PONT SANS PAREIL 9470, while Typhoon rocket-bombers circled overhead. They brought a request from their commander that CALAIS be declared an open city. This was manifestly

absurd, since the enemy was now entirely contained within its limits and no other battle-ground remained to him. On this preposterous suggestion being refused, they then asked that a truce be granted, during which time the 20,000 civilian inhabitants could be evacuated. A 24-hour armistice was agreed to. Before the conference dispersed the GOC offered to accept the surrender of the whole CALAIS garrison provided this were offered before 1200 hours the following day. This was not acceptable to the garrison, it appeared, and the offer was declined. The envoys now returned and the exodus of the populace commenced shortly. The abnormal silence contained around CALAIS.

20. It had earlier been decided that the eventual operation against CAP GRIS NEZ would be carried out either by the reserve battalion of 8 Cdn Inf Bde (QOR of C) or by 9 Cdn Inf Bde. The inclusion of QOR of C in the CALAIS sector determined the choice. 9 Cdn Inf Bde accordingly commenced its assault on the morning of 29 Sep 44. Nth NS Highrs and HLI of C, attacking from the east and south, respectively, carried out the operation with despatch. The supporting Flails, Crocodiles and AVsRE performed excellent work and the garrison was not long in surrendering.

21. In the meantime no regrouping of forward troops around CALAIS was of course possible during the armistice, but plans were laid down for a decisive final assault at its expiration. QOR of C, already in position east of the city, were to attack from that direction at 1200 hours, 30 Sep 44. Subsequently 7 Cdn Inf Bde would resume its advance from the west and southwest. During the morning, prior to the resumption of hostilities, German negotiators came out of CALAIS again, saying that the garrison now proposed to surrender at 1500 hours, and asking that our troops march in at that time. They were told that their opportunity to surrender in that fashion was already past (see para 19 above); they were therefore advised to hoist white flags and come out of the city with hands raised. Soon the truce expired and the operation began.

22. QOR of C met little opposition, for the beleaguered garrison had by now quite lost heart. Large bodies surrendered quickly. The three battalions of 7 Cdn Inf Bde also pushed into the city. In the evening the garrison commander gave himself up to the CH of O. The last mopping-up was done on 1 Oct 44.

23. In these operations in the PAS DE CALAIS 3 Cdn Inf Div took nearly 20,000 PW.

2.

OPERATIONS AGAINST LA TRESORERIE, WIMILLE AND WIMEREUX
(NORTH OF BOULOGNE), 14-22 SEP 44: ACCOUNT BY LT.-
COL. J.E. ANDERSON, O.C., N. SHORE R., GIVEN TO HIST
OFFR, 3 CDN INF DIV, 27 SEP.

I

1. It had been appreciated from the first that the assault on the BOULOGNE fortress would have to do more than destroy the main belt of defences. Situated as they were in a semicircle on the high ground around BOULOGNE, these defences certainly represented the chief obstacles, but any attack on them would be seriously prejudiced by the presence of equally strong positions north of BOULOGNE -- especially at LA TRESORERIE 7058. This village was the site of a three-gun coastal battery of 305 mm guns and was of course heavily fortified. The strongpoint, while not part of the BOULOGNE fortress, could effectively intervene in its defence by reason of its powerful armament and its favourable position.

on commanding ground. It offered particularly strong support to FORT DE LA CRECHE 6756, the northernmost anchor of the defensive system. It is doubtful in fact if the fort could have been captured so quickly had not LA TRESORERIE been previously eliminated.

2. N Shore R was therefore committed to an attack on this strongpoint before the main assault was launched against the BOULOGNE defences proper. It was understood also that the battalion would continue its more or less independent action to remove all opposition from the rectangle roughly enclosed by LA TRESORERIE, WIMILLE 7057 and WIMEREUX 6858.

3. The battalion, located in the vicinity of MANINGHEN-HENNE 7358, due east of its objectives, prepared to study the situation some days prior to the operation. Owing to the skillful manner in which all enemy positions had been made mutually supporting, a further complication came to light. LA TRESORERIE was itself supported by enemy positions on a feature just to the north, the PAS DE GAY 7160. This hill overlooked the approaches to LA TRESORERIE and its capture was rightly interpreted by the CO as being the key to a successful attack.

4. When therefore on 14 Sep 44 a patrol worked itself onto the PAS DE GAY the CO at once ordered the position reinforced and consolidated. It was touch and go for one night but ultimately the hill was successfully taken. The PAS DE GAY was found to form part of the extensive system of observation posts throughout the area and was an excellent vantage point. It contained a junction box of 210 wires, linking all the posts, and in enemy hands it might well have disrupted an attack on LA TRESORERIE.

5. Other patrols set about cleaning up all enemy positions outside the wire which encircled the principal fortification, so as to leave no troublesome outposts. The wire itself was carefully studied, the scout platoon commander even taking bearings on its depth.

6. At 0930 hours, 17 Sep 44, the attack on LA TRESORERIE was begun, after 30 minutes of artillery preparation. The heavy bombing programme which preceded the main assault on BOULOGNE was still in progress. A Coy on the right and B Coy on the left crossed the road between WACQUINGHEN and MANINGHEN-HENNE, which was the start line, and advanced westward, crossing the BOULOGNE - CALAIS highway. (See sketch-map.) The ground beyond the highway was heavily mined and wired. The wire was breached by bangalore torpedoes, but the anti-personnel mines caused fairly heavy losses. Two platoons of D Coy on the PAS DE GAY had dug in on the south slope to give fire support to the assaulting companies. The remainder of D Coy was in WACQUINGHEN: C Coy was in MANINGHEN-HENNE.

7. The enemy had been surprised by the cross-country direction of the attack, which he had evidently expected to come in along the main highway. The two forward companies were able to rush the outer defences on the northeast side before coming under fire. The 20 mm flak guns on the perimeter were not even manned.

8. When they had got onto the east side of the objective A and B Coys were discovered and subjected to a storm of airburst -- 20 mm flak from LA TRESORERIE itself and 75 mm from WIMILLE. The 20 mm fire Lt Col Anderson described as most effective against infantry, invariably pinning them down. The advance was stopped, all movement being impossible. Enemy

defensive fire tasks were brought down over the main road, with such accuracy as it was hard not to admire. WACQUINGHEN, in which advanced Bn HQ was located, was also shelled during the afternoon.

9. To assist the forward companies an effort was made to bring up the Flails and Crocodiles. But such profuse armour-piercing shot met them that they were unable to move up the hill and had to remain back behind its cover. Thus no lanes could be beaten through the minefields. The Wasps were not used and two were lost by mine explosions. A troop of M10s, however, firing by observation at about 1800 yards' range from MANNINGHEN-HENNE, gave excellent direct support, taking on the 20 mm flak pillboxes which ringed the objective.

10. At dusk A Coy pushed forward to the northermost gun-casemate and after much grenade-throwing succeeding in capturing about half of it. In the other half was the power plant, which the enemy continued to operate, so that the attackers had the luxury of electric light and radio. Coy HQ had established itself in a house nearby but had to vacate it during the night when it was set afire by German tracer shells. B Coy in the darkness dug in and improved its positions; strong patrols reconnoitred the casemates and captured the battery hospital. The enemy evidently had no stomach for night patrols and was easily panicked by them.

11. During the night carrying parties crawled up to A and B Coys to bring them food and ammunition. Wireless communication with them had ceased, until extra batteries arrived with the relief parties. 18-set communication had been very spotty. All in all it was a very unpleasant night.

12. The next morning, 18 Sep 44, A Coy completed the capture of its casemate and cleaned out a smaller gun position with PIATs. B Coy on the left pushed ahead again, making use of phosphorus bombs, and the second large gun position surrendered. The third fell a little later.

13. The final task was the clearing of the fortified observation posts northwest of the hilltops. This was carried out by B Coy. During the afternoon the position was shelled from three sides -- from WIMILLE, WIMEREUX and CAP GRIS NEZ. But there was no further trouble with mines.

14. The cost had not been light. Both companies had gone into the attack at strength; at its conclusion A Coy numbered about 70 men and B 60 men. They had taken around 450 PW. Throughout the rest of the operation these two companies remained on LA TRESORERIE hill.

15. Stronger fortifications could hardly have existed. The casemates had been unshaken by heavy bombing. Each one contained a complete electric plant and diesel engine, which were kept in running order by a few prisoners who were retained for that purpose. The quarters, well heated and lit, were most comfortable. The garrison was nearly all German; most of them marines. Perhaps because of the superior facilities of their quarters they looked cleaner and more soldierly than the usual prisoners. Their ammunition supply was in no way depleted. There was an ample stock of food, which might have lasted three months. The battery also possessed a dug-in, well-equipped hospital.

III

16. The next phase was the capture of WIMILLE, which was

undertaken the following day, 19 Sep 44. C Coy, leaving MANINGHEN-HENNE, advanced westwards along the road running parallel to the WIMEREUX River. Meeting heavy opposition from the eastern side of WIMILLE the company circled left to the south and remained there for the night. Next morning, with the assistance of supporting fire by M1Os, the town was attacked and captured. Then AUVRINGHEN was cleared of enemy. From this whole area about 465 PW were taken.

IV

17. There remained only now the coast town of WIMEREUX. In preparation for the attack Bn HQ was moved to WIMILLE. WIMEREUX was understood to be empty of civilians, but the CO believed many still remained there. He was therefore loath to employ the two AGRAs made available to him, and accepted instead only one field regiment for support. C and D Coys were to be directed on the town and an early start was hoped for. This was impossible, however, since D Coy had to move into position from its location on the PAS DE GAY and zero hour could thus be set no earlier than 1200 hours, 21 Sep 44.

18. As the attack began, A and B Coys manned the western flak positions on LA TRESORERIE hill and fired these light German weapons into WIMEREUX. They made a terrific noise and served to bolster the slight artillery support, without, however, smashing the town so extensively.

19. D Coy moved from the PAS DE GAY parallel to the railway, crossing it at a point north of WIMEREUX, and then proceeded south towards WIMEREUX Farm. Here they were pinned down in the valley by machine-gun fire from the high railway embankment along the eastern edge of the town. But on the left C Coy was advancing from AUVRINGHEN through GAZEMETZ and soon took out the fire, capturing about 100 PW. Heavier fire came also from FORT DE LA CRECHE, to the southwest, but did not hold up the advance, for C Coy entered WIMEREUX near the railway station. D Coy, now released, crossed the river further east and came into the town near the railway bridge. Effective close support was given again by M1Os positioned in AUBENGUE 6859.

20. The capture of WIMEREUX was completed on 22 Sep 44. The garrison commander, a colonel, had escaped by making his way along the beach to FORT DE LA CRECHE, where he was soon taken prisoner anyway. The rest surrendered. The town's principal defences faced seawards and were so extensive that Lt Col Anderson considered them impregnable. The armament was of various sorts: in addition to the numerous 20 mm flak guns, N Shore R even came on an aged French "75" with wooden wheels, and several huge mortars of the spigot type. The usual well-equipped hospital, which even contained a radio station, was also there.

21. The town was thronged with civilians, which confirmed the COs belief and made him glad that they had been able to capture it without the devastating effect of so much artillery. The troops were warmly greeted

22. Lt Col Anderson was of the opinion that the prime factor contributing to the success of the operation was the fact that adequate time had been given to the battalion to acquaint itself thoroughly with the nature of the task before it.

3. A PARACHUTE BATTALION ON D-DAY (EXTRACTS FROM WAR DIARY,
1 CDN PARA BN, JUNE, 1944).

- 1 Jun 44 All briefing tents and models were ready for the briefing which began today.
- 2 Jun 44 Briefing continued. Brigade Commander commended the Intelligence Section on their Briefing preparations, said "They were the best in the Division."
- 3 Jun 44 Briefing continues. All Ranks showing a keen and intelligent interest. A violent storm threatened to destroy models and enlargements in the briefing tents. Battalion proceeded to DOWN AMPNEY Airfield where they saw their aircraft for the first time and drew and fitted their parachutes.
- 4 Jun 44 Church Parade in the morning. Aircraft crews came to the Camp where they were introduced to the sticks their planes were to carry. These R.A.F. crews came from every country in the Empire. Their calm certainty of dropping their sticks at the right time greatly reassured the men. Major-General Gale, G.O.C. 6th Airborne Division, spoke to the Battalion of its approaching tasks and wished it God-Speed and good hunting.
- 5 Jun 44 Weather was cloudy with a light wind. All Ranks ordered on enforced rest during the morning and the afternoon. Battalion was paraded at 1930 hours in full kit. All Ranks checked and inspected.... "C" Company then left for their airport. Remainder of the Battalion proceeded to Down Ampney Airport where each stick reported to its respective Aircraft. Parachutes were put on and a short prayer was offered for the success of the mission. Battalion emplaned at 2245 hours and were Airborne at 2300 hours in C-47 Aircraft. "C" Company had emplaned at 2230 hours in Albermarles.
- 6 Jun 44 The initial stages of operation OVERLORD insofar as the 1st Cdn Parachute Battalion was concerned, were divided into three tasks. The protection of the left flank of the 9th Para Battalion in its approach march and attack on the MERVILLE battery 1577 was assigned to "A" Company. The blowing of two bridges over the RIVER DIVES at 1872 and 1972 and the holding of feature ROBEHOMME 1873 was assigned to "B" Company with under command one section of 3 Para Sqn Engineers. The destruction of a German Signal Exchange 1675 and the destruction of bridge 186759 plus neutralization of enemy positions at VARRAVILLE 1875 was assigned to "C" Company.

The Battalion was to drop on a DZ 1775 in the early hours of D Day, "C" Company dropping thirty minutes before the remainder of the Battalion to neutralize any opposition on the DZ. The Battalion emplaned at Down Ampney Airfield at 2250 hours on the 5th June, 1944. The flight was uneventful until reaching the French Coast when a certain amount of A.A. fire was encountered.

6 Jun 44

Upon crossing the coastline numerous fires could be seen which had been started by the R.A.F. bombers. Unfortunately the Battalion was dropped over a wide area, some sticks landing several miles from their appointed R.V. This factor complicated matters but did not deter the Battalion from securing its first objectives.

Protection of Left Flank of 9 Para Bn - "A" Company

"A" Company was dropped at approximately 0100 hours on the morning of 6th June, 1944. Lieut. Clancy, upon reaching the Company R.V. found only two or three men of the Company present. After waiting fruitlessly for further members of the Company to appear, he decided to recce the village of GONNEVILLE SUR-MERVILLE 1676. Taking two men he proceeded and penetrated the village but could find no sign of the enemy. He then returned to the Company R.V. which he reached at approximately 0600 hours and found one other officer and twenty Other Ranks of the Battalion and several men from other Brigade Units waiting. The entire body then moved off along the pre-arranged route to the MERVILLE battery, encountering no other opposition enroute other than heavy R.A.F. Bombardment at GONNEVILLE SUR-MERVILLE. Upon completion of the 9th Battalion task the Canadian party acted first as a recce patrol to clear a chateau 1576 from which a German M.G. had been firing and then as a rear guard for the 9th Battalion withdrawal toward LE PLEIN 1375. The party left the battalion area (9th Battalion) at LE PLEIN at 0900 hours and reached the 1st Cdn Para Bn position at LE MESNIL BAVENT cross roads 139729 at 1530 hours on the 6th June, 1944.

ROBEHOMME - "B" Company

Two platoons of "B" Company were dropped in the marshy ground south and west of ROBEHOMME. Elements of these platoons under Sgt. OUTHWAITE then proceeded toward the Company objective. En route they encountered Lieut. TOSELAND with other members of "B" Company making a total of thirty All Ranks. They were guided through the marshes and enemy minefields to the ROBEHOMME bridge by a French Woman. On arriving at the bridge they met Capt. D. GRIFFIN and a further thirty men from various sub-units of the Battalion, including mortars and Vickers Platoons. MAJOR FULLER who had been there for some time had left in an attempt to locate Battalion Headquarters. Capt. GRIFFIN waited until 0630 hours for the R.Es who were to blow the bridge. As they failed to arrive explosives were collected from the men and the bridge successfully demolished.

A guard was left on the bridge and the main body withdrawn to the ROBEHOMME hill. Although there were no enemy in the village there were several skirmishes with enemy patrols who were attempting to infiltrate through the village and some casualties were suffered by the Company. An O.P. was set up in the church spire. An excellent view was obtained of the road from PONT

6 Jun 44

DE VACAVILLE 2176 to VARRAVILLE. Artillery and infantry could be seen moving for many hours along this road from the EAST. It was particularly unfortunate that wireless communication could not be established with Bn H.Q. as the subsequent fighting of the Battalion was carried out in such close country that observation of enemy movement was almost impossible.

At 1200 hours on the 7th June, 1944, it was decided to recce the route to Bn H.Q. Upon the route being reported clear orders were issued for the party to prepare to join Bn H.Q. Lieut I. WILSON, Bn I.O. came from LE MESNIL to guide the party back. The move was made at 2230 hours, the strength of the party by this time being 150 All Ranks, the addition having been made by stragglers of various units who had reported in. The wounded were carried in a civilian car given by the cure, and a horse and cart given by a farmer. The route was BRIQUEVILLE 1872 to BAVENT road 169729, through the BOIS DE BAVENT and on to LE MESNIL cross roads. Near BRIQUEVILLE the lead platoon was challenged by the enemy sentries. The Platoon opened fire killing seven and taking one prisoner. Shortly afterwards this same platoon was fortunate enough to ambush a German car which was proceeding along the road from BAVENT. Four German Officers were killed. Bn Headquarters was reached at 0330 hours on the 8th June, 1944.

VARRAVILLE - "C" Company

The majority of "C" Company was dropped west of the RIVER DIVES, although some sticks were dropped a considerable distance away including one which landed west of the RIVER ORNE. Due to this confusion the Company did not meet at the R.V. as pre-arranged but went into the assault on the Chateau and VARRAVILLE in separate parties. MAJOR McLEOD collected a Sgt and seven O.Rs and proceeded towards VARRAVILLE. En route they were joined by a party under Lieut. WALKER. One of the Sgts was ordered to take his platoon to take up defensive positions around the bridge that the R.E. sections were preparing to blow. This was done and the bridge was successfully demolished.

MAJOR McLEOD and Lieut. WALKER with the balance of the party then cleared the chateau and at the same time other personnel of "C" Company arrived from the DZ and cleared the gatehouse of the chateau. The gatehouse then came under enemy M.G. and mortar fire from the pill box situated in the grounds of the chateau. The pill-box also had a 75-mm A/Tk Gun. The whole position was surrounded by wire, mines and weapon pits. MAJOR McLEOD, Lieut. WALKER and five O.Rs went to the top floor of the gatehouse to fire on the pillbox with a P.I.A.T. The enemy 75-mm A/Tk Gun returned the fire and the shot detonated the P.I.A.T. ammunition. Lieut. WALKER, CPL. OIKLE, PTES. JOWETT AND NUFIELD were killed and MAJOR McLEOD and PTE. BISMUKA fatally wounded. PTES. DOCKER and SYLVESTER evacuated these casualties under heavy fire.

6 Jun 44 CAPT. HANSON, 2 i/c of "C" Company, was slightly wounded and his batman killed while proceeding to report to the Brigade Commander who had arrived in the village from the area in which he dropped. "C" Company, together with elements of Brigade H.Q. and the R.E's took up defensive positions around the village and a further party encircled the pill-box in order to contain the enemy. A further party of "C" Company under Lieut. McGOWAN who had been dropped some distance from the DZ arrived in VARAVILLE in time to catch two German Infantry Sections who were attempting to enter the town. Lieut. McGOWAN's platoon opened fire causing casualties and the remainder of the enemy surrendered. This platoon took up firing positions firing on the enemy pill-box. "C" Company H.Q. which was located in the church yard pinned an enemy section attempting to advance in a bomb crater, killing at least three. The chateau was evacuated by our troops and left as a dressing station. An enemy patrol re-entered the chateau and captured the wounded including Capt. BREBNER, the Unit M.O., and C.S.M. Blair of "B" Company. This patrol although attacked by our own troops managed to escape with their prisoners.

Heavy enemy mortar fire and sniping was brought to bear on our positions from the woods surrounding VARAVILLE. During this time the local inhabitants were of great assistance, the women dressing wounds and the men offering assistance in any way. One Frenchman in particular distinguished himself. Upon being given a red beret and a rifle he killed three German Snipers. This man subsequently guided the Brigade Commander and his party towards LE MESNIL. It is believed however that he was a casualty of the bombing attack that caught this party en route to LE MESNIL.

At approximately 1030 hours the enemy pill-box surrendered. Forty-two (42) prisoners were taken and four of our own men who had been captured were released. From 1230 hours on artillery fire was brought to bear on VARAVILLE from the high ground east of the RIVER DIVES. At 1500 hours cycle troops of the 6th Commando arrived and at 1730 hours on 6 June, 1944, "C" Company proceeded to the Bn area at LE MESNIL....

VICKERS PLATOON - Initial Stages

The Vickers platoon was dropped in four sticks of ten or eleven each, being a total of forty-one (41) All Ranks. For the first time their M.Gs were carried in Kit Bags, a number of which tore away and were lost.

The Platoon was dropped over a wide area, a part of them joining "C" Company's attack on VARAVILLE, part joining "B" Company at ROBEHOMME and part joining Bn H.Q. Casualties on the drop totalled twelve missing and three wounded After the initial Company tasks had been accomplished the platoon was deployed to the Companies as single gun detachments or as Sections.

6 Jun 44 MORTAR PLATOON - Initial Stages

The Mortar Platoon was dropped over a wide area and suffered very heavy loss in equipment due to kit bags breaking away and a great majority of the men landing in marshy ground. As the platoon dropped they attached themselves to the nearest company they could find and assisted in the capture of the objectives. One Detachment commander landed on top of the German pill-box at VARAVILLE. He was made prisoner and spent the rest of the time in the pill-box until the Germans surrendered to "C" Company. A point of interest was that the P.I.A.T. Bombs did definite damage to the interior of the pill-box and had a very lowering effect upon the morale of the defenders.

Some of the Mortar Platoon which joined "B" Company at ROBEHOMME were detailed to guard the approaches to the destroyed bridge. Three enemy lorries full of infantry appeared on the other side of the bridge. The guard opened fire knocking out one truck killing most of its occupants. The other two lorries were able to withdraw. One of our own men who was a prisoner in the lorry was able to make good his escape.

Upon the detachments arriving at LE MESNIL they were re-grouped as a platoon and given three mortars which had arrived by sea. These mortars were set up in position in the brickworks where they engaged the enemy.

BATTALION HEADQUARTERS - Initial Stages

The Commanding Officer, 2 I/c, Signals Officer and the Intelligence Officer and a small portion of the Battalion Headquarters together with elements of 224 Para Fd Ambulance and other Brigade Units met at the Battalion R.V. in the early hours of the morning of 6th June, 1944. The Signals Officer was detailed to look after the Enemy Signal Exchange near the R.V. He went into the house and found a certain amount of Signals equipment which he destroyed but he found no Germans. The Intelligence Officer set out with two men to recce VARAVILLE and bring back a report on the situation. In the Battalion Headquarters meantime the party moved off to LE MESNIL taking with them many scattered elements including a 6 Pdr A/Tk Gun and crew. Upon reaching the Chateau 1574 they encountered part of the Brigade Headquarters. The party there upon split up into unit parties and continued until they reached the orchards 141729 where they came under heavy sniping fire from nearby houses. This fire caused several casualties including one officer. The enemy were forced to withdraw from the buildings after an attack by the party. The party reached the Battalion area at approximately 1100 hours on 6th June 1944.

7 Jun 44 In the early hours of the morning German infantry of the 857 and 858 Grenadier Regiments supported by S.P. Guns and a number of Mk. IV Tanks attacked "B" and "C" Companies' positions. Our mortars in the brickworks were given an ideal target as

7 Jun 44 the German infantry formed up in close groups along a road in the apparent belief that we possessed no mortars. Heavy casualties were inflicted on the enemy and the main force of the attack broken, however casualties were inflicted on our own Battalion by the S.P. guns and tanks. One tank penetrated to within one hundred yards of the "C" Company position but withdrew before the P.I.A.T.'s could fire effectively on it. Some of the enemy infantry also attempted to assault our forward positions but were driven off. It was learned later from P.W.'s that the object of the German attack was to secure the brick-works and crossroads at LE MESNIL. The rest of the day was quiet save for activity by enemy snipers.

8 Jun 44 "B" Company party returned from ROBEHOMME at 0230 hours and were a welcome addition to the Battalion strength. It was decided to clear the enemy from buildings at 144730 to neutralize the harassing fire from that position. Recce patrols went out from "C" Company early in the morning and confirmed the presence of the enemy in the buildings. At 0900 hours CAPT. P. GRIFFIN with Company Headquarters and 2 platoons from "B" Company, strength of seventy-five (75), went into the assault on the position with the support of a naval bombardment.

The party was split into two sections, the main body consisting of Capt. P. GRIFFIN and one and one-half platoons assaulting the position from the front. The balance of the Company Headquarters and the remainder were to go to the BAVENT road east of the objective to protect the flank. There were six to eight enemy M.G.'s in the hedge in front of the objective. These positions were abandoned as the assault party went in. The crews withdrawing to positions behind the house. A small number of the enemy were found in the house and adequately dealt with. The enemy launched an immediate counter-attack and were caught in the cross fire of the assault party that had withdrawn to the hedge in front of the houses and the flank protection party was still moving along the edge of the orchard 145727 toward the BAVENT road. PTES, GEDDES and NAVAL with a Bren gun and a sniper's rifle killed approximately twenty-five Germans. Total enemy casualties for this engagement were reckoned as approximately fifty dead and an unknown number wounded. "B" Company then withdrew to a hedgerow 141726 that continued to form a forward line of their position.

Later in the afternoon an enemy attack was launched against our left but was driven off by mortar and small arms fire. However they left snipers in the trees and hedgerows who were a nuisance factor until winkled out in the course of the next few days.

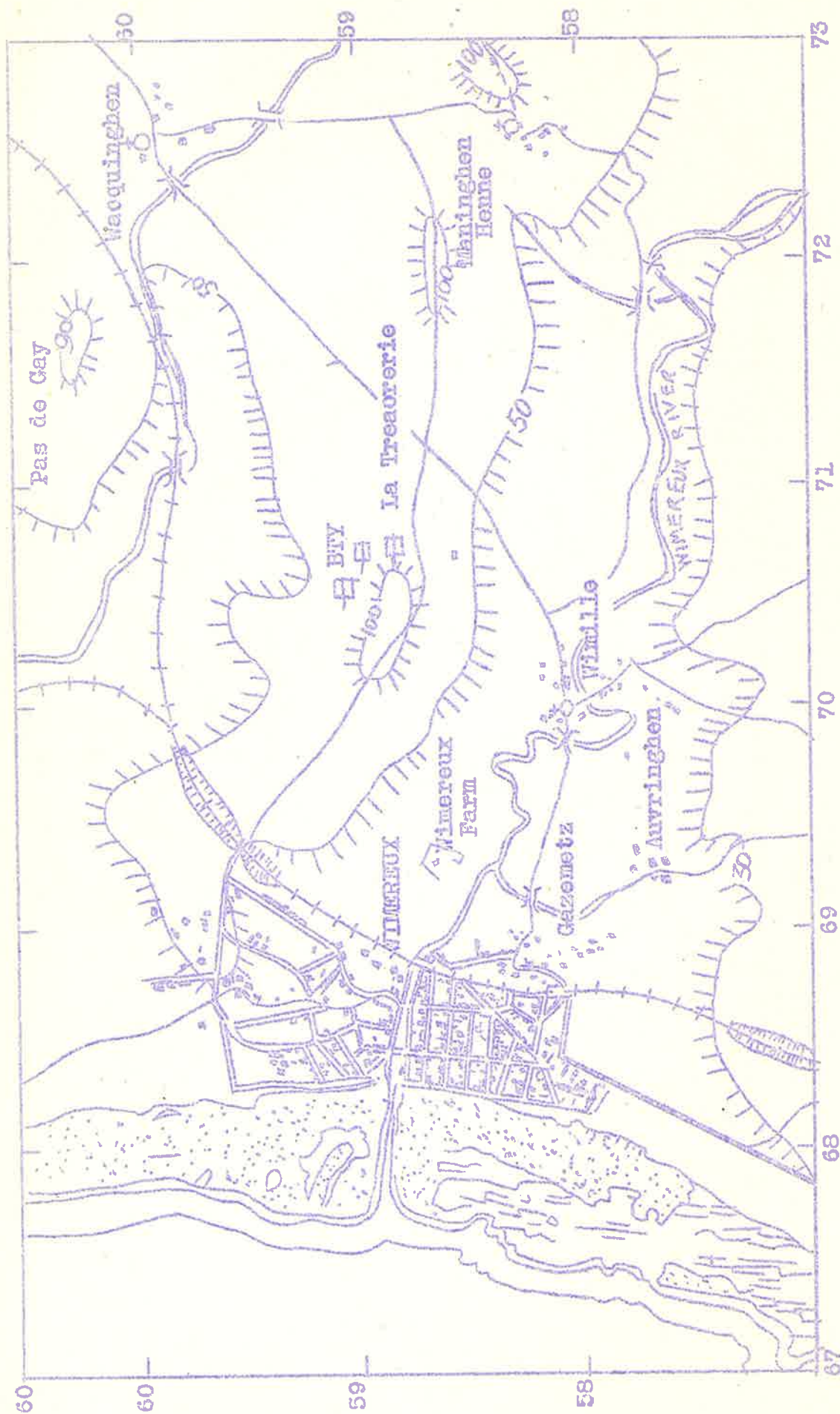
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9 Jun 44 Enemy patrols were active along the Battalion front. Snipers who had infiltrated into the woods near our positions continued to be a nuisance factor. The Battalion sent out patrols both to recce the enemy positions and to deal with these snipers. The bulk of the Battalion had their first opportunity to secure some rest.

10 Jun 44 Weather continued to be fine and constant patrolling was maintained by the Battalion. During the day the enemy formed up on the glider field for an attack against the Brigade area but this attack was broken up by our artillery and M.M.G's before it got under way. Battalion position was shelled and machine gunned by the enemy at intervals during the day.

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Sketch Map of Area North of Boulogne

(See Serial 2)