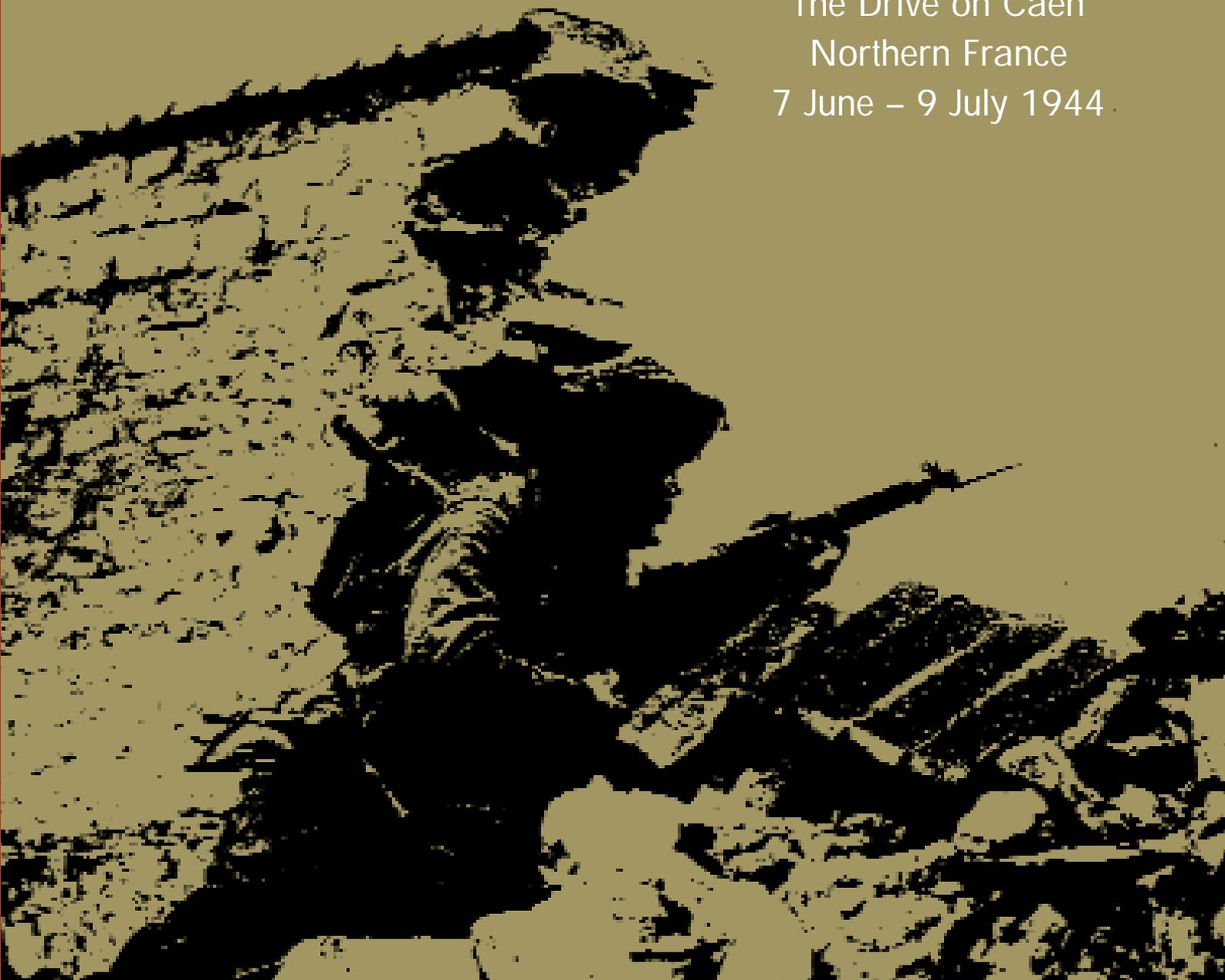


SECOND WORLD WAR

60TH

ANNIVERSARY

The Drive on Caen
Northern France
7 June – 9 July 1944



'Overcoming Hitler's attempt to throw the Allies back into the sea'

No.4

The Drive on Caen

CAEN, LOWER NORMANDY, NORTHERN FRANCE



Cover image: Troops engaging the enemy at Saint-Mauvieu.



Foreword by the Under Secretary of State for Defence and Minister for Veterans, Ivor Caplin MP

In carrying out my responsibilities as Minister for Veterans, I have become aware of the importance of meeting the desire of the British people to find ways of expressing their feelings for those who fought – and in many cases gave their lives – during the Second World War.

These booklets aim not only to remember and commemorate those who served, but also to inform future generations of their efforts and achievements. Their stories can only serve as an inspiration for those growing up now. I want new generations to be aware of the veterans' sacrifices, and of the important contributions they made to our security and to the way of life we enjoy today.

This, the fourth book in the series, commemorates the actions of Operations Perch, Epsom and Charnwood that led to the liberation of Caen on 9 July 1944. Caen, the ancient capital of Normandy, was a vital road and rail junction that the Allies needed to capture before they could advance south through the excellent tank country of the Falaise Plain. Because of its strategic significance Hitler had ordered that Caen be defended to the last man, and the Second (British) Army had to fight doggedly to overcome a well prepared and resolute German defence that included fanatical SS soldiers and the potent 'Hitler Youth' Armoured Division that had been redeployed from the Eastern Front.

The Royal Air Force played a crucial part in the Drive on Caen with more than 1250 aircraft, operating from bases in Normandy and Britain, destroying numerous tanks and armoured vehicles as well as attacking railway traffic bringing reinforcements into the area. Operation Charnwood was the first operation in Normandy where British strategic bombers directly supported a ground offensive.

Following D-Day, these operations saw fierce fighting and considerable sacrifices. As we pass on the baton of remembrance to future generations, we will always remember what these brave men of our country did to liberate Europe from Nazi tyranny.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ivor Caplin'.

The Background to the Drive on Caen

IWM C 4846



The 'Mulberry' artificial harbour off the French coast, mid June 1944

As dawn broke on Wednesday 7 June 1944, the Allies felt satisfied with the progress achieved over the previous 24 hours in Normandy during the D-Day invasion of Nazi-occupied France. The Allies now had four beachheads established on enemy-controlled soil. Although much had been accomplished, the Allies still faced a daunting task – advancing deeper into Normandy. The Allies wished to gain territory so that the beachhead could be defended against German counter-attacks. They also aspired to gain the space required to establish airfields in France. This expanded territory was also required to establish the supply networks the Allied Forces would need to fight the Germans effectively. Over the next three weeks, vessels towed massive prefabricated concrete structures across the Channel. From these components the Allies constructed the 'Mulberry' artificial harbour at Arromanches.

This facility enabled them to offload supplies more rapidly than would otherwise have been possible. While the American First Army aimed to seize the port of Cherbourg, Lieutenant-General Dempsey's Second (British) Army sought to capture the Norman capital, Caen. This city was a vital road and rail junction, which the Allies needed to capture before they could continue their advance south. Bisected by the River Orne, the town represented the last major geographical obstacle before the excellent tank country of the Falaise Plain. Consequently, the British forces had to secure Caen in a timely fashion. General Montgomery had hoped it might be reached on D-Day itself, but subsequent events ensured that northern Caen did not fall until 9 July 1944, one month later than planned.

Operation "Perch" (9–14 June 1944)

IWM CL 672

Tiger I and Panzer IV disabled in the bombed out ruins of Villers-Bocage, June 1944



In the days immediately following D-Day, Second (British) Army units found themselves locked in a series of fierce actions against determined enemy resistance. Thus, they managed to push the front line only a few miles further south while incurring heavy casualties. Then, on 12 June, intelligence received by Lieutenant-General Bucknall's XXX Corps indicated that there was a weak spot in the German line eight kilometres (five miles) SSW of Bayeux. Bucknall ordered the 7th Armoured Division – the famous 'Desert Rats' – to swing west around the resilient German defensive line at Tilly-sur-Seulles. The Division was then to advance through this gap and audaciously thrust west to seize the high ground around Villers-Bocage. In so doing, Operation Perch would threaten the rear of the firm defensive line established by the elite German 'Panzer Lehr' (Armoured Demonstration) Division

and the 12th SS 'Hitler Youth' Armoured Division. During the night 12–13 June, the 'Desert Rats' advanced eight kilometres (five miles) through this gap to reach Livry. Next, during the hazy summer morning of the 13th, a mixed battle group of armour from the 22nd Brigade and lorried infantry from the 131st Brigade thrust a further eight kilometres (five miles) SSE to capture the town of Villers-Bocage. A Sherman tank squadron from the 4th County of London Yeomanry, plus a company from the divisional motor battalion, then continued uphill to reach Hill 213.

Unfortunately, this advance had been detected by SS-Obersturmführer (Lieutenant) Michael Wittmann, commander of the 2nd Company, SS Heavy Tank Battalion 101, and one of Germany's leading tank aces. In response to this dangerous British thrust, Wittmann's potent force of 13 Tiger heavy tanks, supported by infantry, launched a series of rapid counter-attacks. These ripostes caught the British forces located near Hill 213 and in Villers-Bocage by surprise. Within two hours, Wittmann's Tigers had mauled this British brigade group, destroying 53 armoured vehicles in the process. However, thanks to the bravery of the defending British forces, the price Wittmann paid for this victory was high – no less than four of his precious Tigers were knocked out.

KEY FACTS

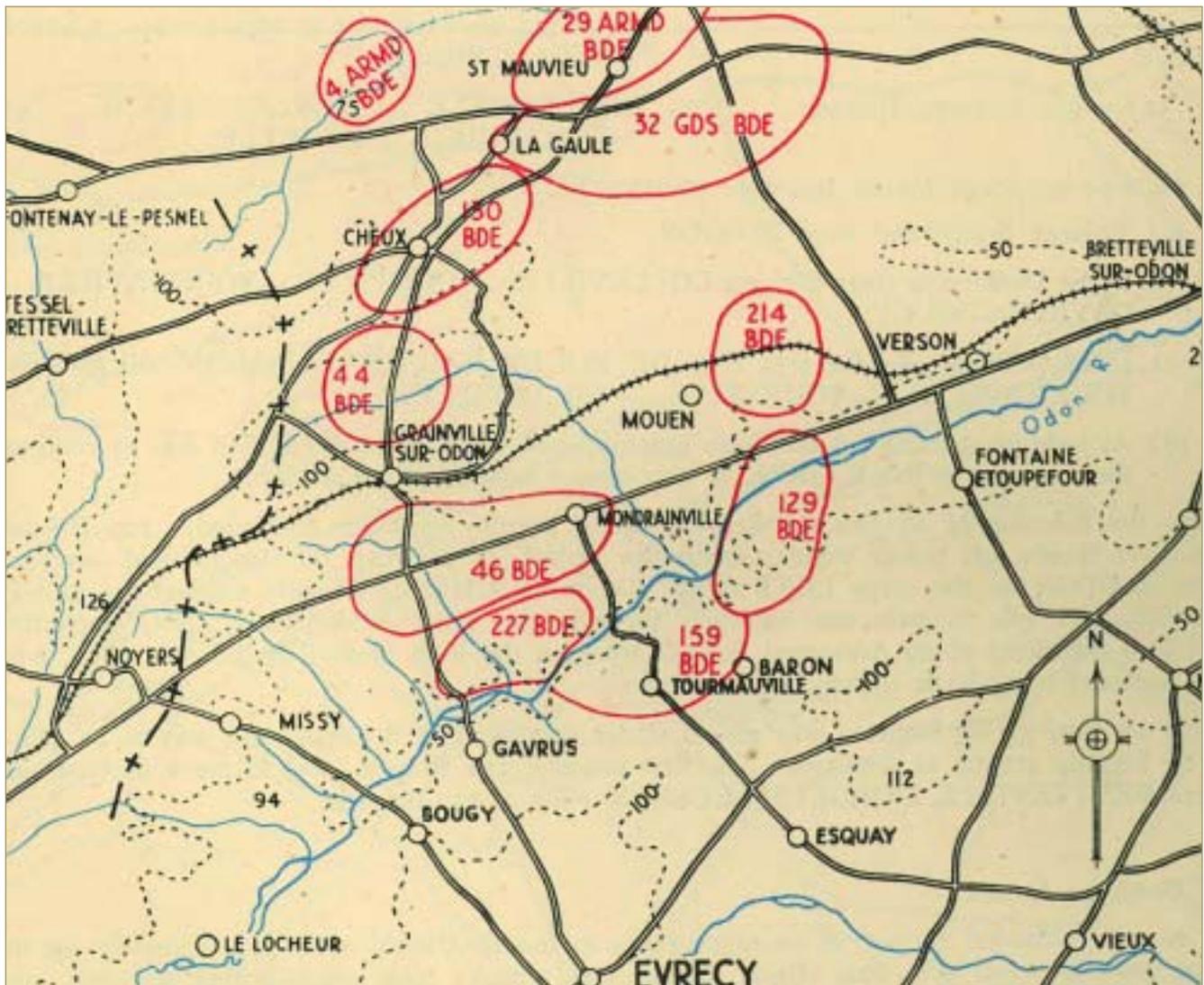
List of commanders:

21st Army Group Commander-in-Chief
General Bernard Montgomery

Second Army
Lieutenant-General Miles Dempsey

I Corps
Lieutenant-General John Crocker

Operation "Epsom" (25–30 June 1944)



Operation Epsom, situation on 30 June 1944

In the aftermath of the setback experienced at Villers-Bocage, Second (British) Army mounted small-scale attacks that would compel the Germans to commit their newly arriving armoured reserves to shoring up their hard-pressed front line. In the meantime, British forces began preparing for another major offensive against Caen, code-named Epsom. Although Montgomery had hoped to capture Caen not long after D-Day, he accepted the delay by arguing that his continuing thrusts towards the city were fulfilling his original intention of aiding the American advance towards Cherbourg by tying down German resources in the east.

The aim of Operation Epsom was for VIII Corps, commanded by Lieutenant-General O'Connor, to cross the River Odon in the close *bocage* countryside to the west of Caen. His forces would then push on beyond the River Orne and, eventually, seize the high ground of Bretteville-sur-Laize that commanded the southern approaches to the city. If successful, this advance would compel the Germans to withdraw from Caen. For Epsom, O'Connor had 60,000 troops, 600 tanks and over 700 guns at his disposal. His forces included the 15th (Scottish) and 43rd (Wessex) Divisions, the 11th Armoured Division, plus the 4th Armoured and 31st Tank Brigades. The majority

of these formations, however, had little combat experience. Waiting in well prepared defensive positions against VIII Corps was the potent German 12th SS 'Hitler Youth' Armoured Division. Moreover, the 2nd SS Armoured Division would soon arrive to reinforce the German front line in Normandy. Finally, the powerful II-SS Armoured Corps was moving to the area, having redeployed from the Eastern Front. Its mission was to launch a major counter-offensive against Bayeux that would throw the Allies back into the sea.

Preparations for Epsom were upset by a great storm that lashed Normandy during 19–22 June, but VIII Corps' assembly was just completed on time. On 25 June, elements from XXX Corps tried to deny the Germans the high ground of the Rauray spur on VIII Corps' right flank. Sadly, this preparatory attack failed. Bad weather also undermined the power of Epsom, for, although the RAF flew 525 sorties to prevent Luftwaffe operations over the battlefield, they were unable to provide O'Connor with a

KEY FACTS

List of commanders (continued):

VIII Corps

Lieutenant-General Richard O'Connor

XXX Corps

Lieutenant-General Gerard Bucknall

3rd Canadian Infantry Division

Major-General Rod Keller

planned preliminary aerial bombing raid on the German positions or with close air support. As a consequence, in spite of massive artillery support, when the 15th (Scottish) Division and the armour of the 31st Tank Brigade advanced at 0730 hours on 26 June, enemy fire poured into them from three sides. The Germans – the SS troops especially – fought with determination, particularly in the village of Cheux, and the British quickly fell behind schedule. Nevertheless, the tanks of the 11th Armoured Division were unleashed early that afternoon in an attempt to push down to the River Odon. The armour

IWM B 7407



VIII Corps Commander Lt-Gen O'Connor and Second Army Commander Lt-Gen Dempsey with General Montgomery

IWM B 6000



A piper leads the 7th Seaforth Highlanders into battle through the mist at the start of Operation Epsom on the morning of 26 June 1944

struggled to get south of Cheux and then ran into blocking German tanks. Later that afternoon, the 227th Brigade of the 15th (Scottish) Division attacked to clear the Odon Valley. This thrust was also stopped by forces from the 12th SS Division and rapidly arriving reinforcements, including SS Tiger tanks.

During the night 26–27 June, the 43rd (Wessex) Division began to relieve the 15th (Scottish) Division. Then, at dawn, the 227th Brigade and the 29th Armoured Brigade attacked. Although the attack on Grainville stalled, the 2nd Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders (2 ASH), supported by the tanks of the 23rd Hussars, moved forward swiftly to seize Colleville. Meanwhile, the 3rd Royal Tank Regiment captured Mouen. The Allies continued to make slow progress, this being aided by the capture of Rauray that afternoon. Finally, the 2 ASH seized the Tourmauville bridge over the Odon and established a bridgehead south of the river. The battalion was later joined in this bridgehead by the 23rd Hussars, the 8th Battalion, the Rifle Brigade (8 RB), and the entire

159th Infantry Brigade. These ground operations were supported by some 349 air sorties, which struck gun and mortar positions, tanks and motor vehicles, and bridges over the River Orne.

On 28 June, the newly arrived II-SS Armoured Corps received orders to attack the British on the Odon the following day. Meanwhile, the German Battle Groups Weidinger and Frey (parts of the 2nd and 1st SS Armoured Divisions respectively) assembled around Noyers and Verson ready to strike at the exposed British flanks. As the Germans prepared their counter-moves, Grainville and Le Valtru fell into British hands while the 2 ASH seized the bridges at Gavrus. Simultaneously, the 23rd Hussars and the 8 RB took the important high ground of Hill 112 immediately south of the Odon. Improved weather allowed the RAF to fly more than 650 sorties over the battle area, and additional support was provided by the US 9th Air Force. The 29th Armoured Brigade, however, was pushed back onto the river's northern slopes again that evening. Meanwhile, the counter-attacks mounted by Weidinger and Frey failed

in their attempt to meet up at Colleville. Nevertheless, these counter-strikes did narrow the British-controlled corridor slightly and disrupted British plans to continue the offensive.

On the morning of 29 June, the 43rd (Wessex) Division advanced to take over the defence on the east side of the corridor, leaving the 15th (Scottish) Division to deal with the west side. The armour then endeavoured to enlarge the Odon bridgehead by taking Hill 113 and retaking Hill 112. Initially, these forces successfully advanced towards Hill 113, but then they ran straight into units of II-SS Armoured Corps preparing for their counter-attack in the opposite direction. The SS forces soon forced the British back into their bridgehead. One British armoured regiment did manage to retake the crest of Hill 112 that morning. However, with intelligence reaching Dempsey and O'Connor that suggested that the II-SS Armoured Corps counter-attack was imminent, the commanders withdrew the 29th and 4th Armoured Brigades back across the Odon and into defensive

positions. Meanwhile, the II-SS Armoured Corps, with its 400 tanks and armoured vehicles, was having an awful time at the hands of Allied aircraft as it assembled around Noyers for its push against VIII Corps. More than 1250 aircraft, operating from bases in Normandy and Britain, destroyed numerous motor vehicles and tanks, as well as attacking railway traffic bringing German reinforcements into the area and preventing the Luftwaffe from intervening in the ground battle. That afternoon, the 9th SS Armoured Division attacked north of the river valley with Battle Group Weidinger on its left. In parallel, the 10th SS Armoured Division attacked to the south of the river with Frey advancing from the east. Their aim was to cut the corridor and destroy the British forces deployed south of Cheux. The 9th SS Armoured Division's main effort, an infantry attack along the Noyers–Cheux road supported by a company of Panther tanks, was stopped by dug-in British infantry with anti-tank weapons, plus supporting artillery. This thrust succeeded only in creating a small German salient between Rauray and Grainville.

IWM B 6142



Sherman tank of 23rd Hussars moving up through Secqueville en Bassin, 26 June 1944

IWM B 6008



Wounded German prisoners being escorted back to the rear during Operation Epsom, 28 June 1944

Meanwhile, the 10th SS Armoured Division attacked from Bougy against Gavrus and Tourmauville, but tenacious British defence and accurate artillery fire fragmented the attacks. Eventually, these German attacks, along with that mounted by Frey in the east, were all beaten off.

KEY FACTS

Authorised strength, British 31st Tank Brigade, June 1944

Personnel:

- 3400 officers, NCOs and men

Armoured vehicles:

- 160 x Churchill tanks
- 33 x Stuart tanks
- 6 x Churchill forward observation tanks
- 6 x Churchill variants (95mm howitzers)
- 20 x anti-aircraft tanks
- 3 x Churchill bridge-laying vehicles

That night it did not seem possible to O'Connor that he had just witnessed the main II-SS Armoured Corps counter-attack. Prompted by renewed (but ultimately unsuccessful) SS attacks, he remained cautious and held his forces on the defensive. Epsom was brought to a premature end on 30 June, while a force of some 232 heavy bombers from Bomber Command attacked II-SS Armoured Corps as it tried to assemble around Villers-Bocage, causing considerable damage. The next day, while the Germans reorganised their forces, VIII Corps tidied up the corridor. During 1–2 July, the II-SS Armoured Corps continued to probe and bombard the Odon Valley and the British tried to improve their own positions, but neither side launched major attacks. Indeed, such lower intensity fighting continued for the next nine days. Montgomery stated that Epsom had fulfilled his intention of drawing the German armour away from the Americans and had thwarted the II-SS Armoured Corps counter-attack against Bayeux. Nevertheless, Epsom did not make Caen an

untenable position for the Germans and many more lives were to be lost before it, and Hill 112, were safely in Allied hands. Operation Epsom had cost VIII Corps some 4020 casualties, with 15th (Scottish) Division suffering 2331 (58 per cent) of these losses.

IWM CL 344



Over 200 Lancaster heavy bombers, with a fighter escort, bomb SS units assembling in Villers-Bocage on the evening of 30 June 1944

IWM B 6124



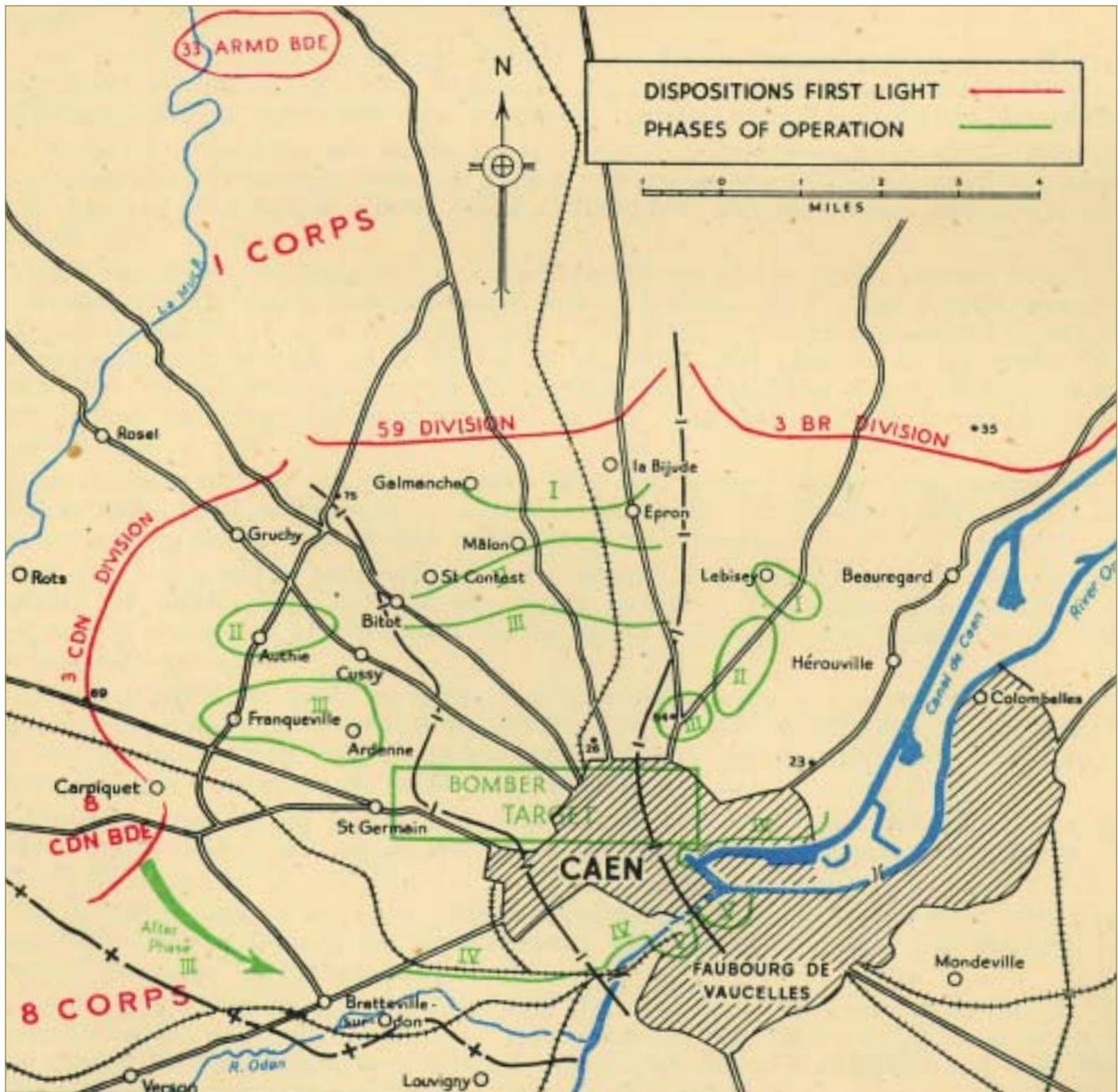
Men of the 8th Royal Scots with a Churchill tank from the 7th Royal Tank Regiment advance through typical Normandy *bocage*, 26 June 1944

The soldiers' experience

Major Ronnie Holden, Officer Commanding, C Squadron, 9th Royal Tank Regiment, recalled the first day of Epsom, 26 June:

H-Hour arrived, and I gave the order to advance. At this point all hell was let loose – enemy artillery, Nebelwerfers, anti-tank guns, tanks, the lot. Now immediately to our left after our start line was a 100-ring contour of high ground; according to our original information this was to have been held by 15th Recce [Regiment]... in fact it was held by German Panzers Marks III and IV. This caused heavy casualties on the Gordons and five of our tanks were put out of action. The original advance came to a temporary halt while a running battle was fought out between the squadron's left flank troops and these Panzers. I fired off smoke to off-centre right in order to reform... Daylight was fading fast and fuel and ammunition were getting low... There remained only nine operational tanks of the squadron, with many wounded crews. This was the end of our first day in battle.

Operation "Charnwood" (7–9 July 1944)



Operation Charnwood, situation on 8 July

The failure of the II-SS Armoured Corps' riposte against Operation Epsom demonstrated to the Germans that the Allied beachhead in Normandy had become permanent. Subsequently, they adopted a new strategy. They aimed to mount an unyielding defence that would contain the Allies in a narrow bridgehead. This would deny the Allies the room and favourable terrain they required for successful mobile operations. To gain this space, Montgomery aimed to resume the attack on Caen

as soon as possible. In the aftermath of Epsom, however, it took the Second (British) Army a week to make good the heavy losses sustained during the offensive. This period was also required for the army to organise the substantial air support efforts required for this new offensive against Caen. Thus it was not until 8 July that this attack, code-named Charnwood, was launched. The plan called for Lieutenant-General Crocker's I (British) Corps to strike south directly towards the

city with three divisions. On the right flank, the 3rd (British) Division was to strike SSW from Biéville towards the north-eastern part of Caen. Simultaneously, in Crocker's centre, the 59th Division was to thrust due south from Cambes. Finally, on the western flank, the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division was to strike south-east from Carpiquet towards the River Odon, located south-east of the city.

To soften up the German defences prior to the attack, as well as to limit the enemy's ability to resupply their forces, Montgomery requested a massive aerial strike. During the late evening of 7 July, therefore, 443 British Lancaster and Halifax heavy bombers dropped 2276 tons of munitions on Caen. Because of concerns about the risk of friendly-fire casualties, however, Montgomery's staff asked Bomber Command to strike the rear portion of the German defensive zone, located along the northern fringe of the city. This area was six kilometres (four miles) behind the front line. The unfortunate result of this request was that the bombing inflicted heavy losses on French

civilians, but caused only modest casualties to the enemy. The bombing also left the battle area severely cratered, which hampered the subsequent Allied ground operations. Finally, the Allies left a five-hour gap between the bombing and the ground assault, which allowed the enemy time to recover. These factors rendered the bombing less effective than it might have been, and put a premium on the bravery of the forces mounting the ground attacks. The bombing raid's most significant, if unintentional, contribution to the fall of Caen, however, was that stray bombs destroyed several of the city's bridges, thus hampering the enemy's ability to resupply their forces in the northern part of the city.

Then, at 2300 hours, massed Allied artillery initiated a powerful bombardment that continued until the ground attack commenced at 0420 hours on 8 July. With the Germans temporarily stunned by this devastating weight of firepower, the initial Allied attacks went well. By dawn, the British 3rd and 59th Divisions had successfully completed the first phase of

IWM CL 387A



Northern Caen smoulders after attacks by Allied bombers on 7 July 1944

SHEET 3 ORIGINAL

Instructions regarding War Diaries and Intelligence Summaries are contained in F.S. Regs. Vol. 1. Monthly War Diaries will be enclosed in A.F. 6.210. If this is not available, and the Intelligence Summary, the cover will be prepared in manuscript.

WAR DIARY
or
INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY
(Delete heading not required)

Unit: 1 KOSB
Commanding Officer: Lt-Col. G. D. Renny

Month and Year: July 1944

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	References to Appendices
	9		The attack on CAEN. The plan. The Canadians were to attack from the West. The RUR's in the centre from the North and 1 KOSB from the East. The Bn moved off at about 0930 hrs over ring contour "60", which was under shell fire, to FUP on the Eastern outskirts of CAEN. The ghostlike houses slowly came to life as civilians began to realize we were entering the town. They came running out with glasses and bottles of wine. As the Bn was forming up on the start line and trying to re-establish wireless contact with companies and Bde, four Boche were seen to withdraw towards the centre of the town. Soon afterwards out HQ was mortared leaving 1 killed and 1 wound wounded. The Bn then proceeded to clear the town. Little opposition was met. Progress was slowed down by snipers and an occasional MG. Much assistance and information was offered by eager civilians. Debris and cratered streets also made progress extremely difficult. We eventually reached the RV in the Old Town and established contact with the RUR and pushed forward patrols to the river. Patrols met quite heavy fire from across the river and a number of casualties were sustained.	

9 July 1944

The attack on CAEN. The plan. The Canadians were to attack from the West. The RUR's in the centre from the North and 1 KOSB from the East. The Bn moved off at about 0930 hrs over ring contour "60", which was under shell fire, to FUP on the Eastern outskirts of CAEN. The ghostlike houses slowly came to life as civilians began to realize we were entering the town. They came running out with glasses and bottles of wine. As the Bn was forming up on the start line and trying to re-establish wireless contact with companies and Bde, four Boche were seen to withdraw towards the centre of the town. Soon afterwards out [our] HQ was mortared leaving 1 killed and 1 wounded. The Bn then proceeded to clear the town. Little opposition was met. Progress was slowed down by snipers and an occasional MG. Much assistance and information was offered by eager civilians. Debris and cratered streets also made progress extremely difficult. We eventually reached the RV in the Old Town and established contact with the RUR and pushed forward patrols to the river. Patrols met quite heavy fire from across the river and a number of casualties were sustained.

Extract from 1st Battalion King's Own Scottish Borderers war diary, 9 July

the operation. They had advanced up to two kilometres (one and a quarter miles) deep into the German position to capture Leбіsey. As dawn gave way to a fair, though cloudy, morning, British fighter bombers from the 2nd Tactical Air Force struck dozens of enemy positions. Next, from 0700 hours, 250 American medium bombers began softening up the enemy ready for phase two of the offensive.

From the participant's perspective

Referring to Hitler's orders that Caen be defended to the last man, SS-Oberführer (Colonel) Kurt Meyer, commander of the 12th SS 'Hitler Youth' Armoured Division, commented that, during Charnwood,

'We were supposed to die in Caen'.

IWM B 6794



A British soldier assists an old lady in the ruins of Caen, 10 July 1944

At 0730 hours on 8 July, the second phase of Charnwood commenced. Fresh brigades resumed the advance south, but soon faced toughening resistance from the interlocking German village strongpoints. On the eastern flank, the 3rd (British) Division battled forward to secure the key terrain of Hill 64. In the Allied centre, the 59th Division pressed forward two kilometres (one and a quarter miles) to capture Saint-Contest, but fierce enemy resistance halted their advance short of Epron. Further west, the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division battled all day to overcome the fanatical resistance offered by SS 'Hitler Youth' soldiers at Buron. That the spearhead Canadian Infantry Division lost a staggering 262 casualties that day attests to the ferocity of this encounter. Nearby, a single Canadian 17-pounder anti-tank gun accounted for no less than 13 enemy tanks. Despite the battle still raging in Buron, the Canadians nevertheless fought their way forward to

capture Authie that afternoon and Cussy by dusk. By nightfall, therefore, these three concentric divisional thrusts had reached a line less than one kilometre (950 yards) north of the city.

IWM B 6869



Sherman tanks assemble by the roadside at La Bijude, north of Caen, 10 July 1944

During the night, the Germans began withdrawing their heavy weapons and some of their now exhausted troops from the northern half of the city. By dawn, just a token screening force remained in the ruined northern areas of Caen, with orders to conduct a delaying defence. This defied Hitler's express order that Caen be held to the last man. On the morning of 9 July, Allied forces fought their way painfully through the rubble morass that had once been Caen, their progress slowed by German snipers, booby traps and mines. By 1800 hours, the spearheads had advanced through the city to the River Orne, where they halted. The bridges over the river were all destroyed, blocked by rubble, or else covered by resolute enemy defensive fire. Charnwood had achieved its objective. By then, Royal Engineer teams were already at work within the ruined city removing booby traps and clearing debris. Sapper Arthur Wilkes recalled the scene of devastation: 'Mountains of debris towered 20 or 30 foot high... the dead lay everywhere.' During Charnwood, British and Canadian troops had to fight doggedly to overcome a well prepared and resolute German defence that included fanatical SS soldiers. In two days of savage fighting I (British) Corps incurred 3500 casualties. In the process of securing Caen, however, I (British) Corps mauled the 16th German Air Force Field Division. Thus, the victory at Caen had been a hard-won affair that owed much to the resolution of the ordinary Allied soldier.

By 9 July 1944, therefore, the Second (British) Army had captured northern Caen one month later than Montgomery had originally intended.

This opened up to the Allies the prospect of capturing the dominant terrain of the Bourguebus Ridge to the south of the city. Beyond this, moreover, lay the Falaise Plain, terrain suitable for Allied airfields. But in the last phases of Charnwood, Crocker's forces had become so depleted that they were unable to capitalise on the success of the operation by advancing south across the easily defended line of the River Orne. Thus, to capture the open terrain beyond, Montgomery would have to launch another major offensive, subsequently code-named Goodwood. That the Germans now held a shorter, more defensible front behind the Orne, backed by excellent observation from the Bourguebus Ridge, however, suggested that this offensive might prove a very difficult mission.

KEY FACTS

Authorised strength, British Army Infantry Battalion, June 1944

Personnel:

- 36 officers
- 809 men

Equipment:

- 34 x .380 revolvers
- 32 x Sten guns
- 695 x No.4 Lee Enfield rifles
- 63 x Bren guns (light machine guns)
- 26 x 2-inch mortars
- 6 x 3-inch mortars
- 23 x PIAT anti-tank launchers
- 6 x 6-pounder anti-tank guns

The battlefield today

CWGC



Brouay War Cemetery

The Epsom battlefield has changed little since 1944, although new building and roads have altered certain areas. At the northern end, the open fields south of the start line at Le-Mesnil-Patry and Norrey-en-Bessin remain undeveloped, but the line of villages – Saint-Mauvieu (today spelt Manvieu), La Gaule, Cheux, Le Haut du Bosq – have merged into one long line of farms and houses. Orchards and strong stone farmhouses still abound and continue to look like mini fortresses. Up on the high ground on the British right flank, the villages of Rauray and Bretteville have grown, but the view over the northern part of the battlefield has not been hindered by this. Indeed, the British start line can still be clearly seen. The railway line to the north of Grainville and Mouen has

been replaced with a fast highway and the villages in the area are no longer separated fully by open countryside, but the *bocage* remains intact and increases in density as the steep Odon Valley is reached.

There is a memorial to the 15th (Scottish) Division on the road leading down to the Odon bridge at Tourmauville. The Odon itself is not very deep or wide, but the surrounding countryside is marshy and its banks are densely wooded and steep. On the northern side of the river, the valley leads up to Hill 112 and its slopes in every direction are largely free from hedges and give way to large, open fields. On the crest of the hill there is a memorial, while a monument to the 53rd (Welsh) Division stands close by, next to

a battle-scarred Calvary. A small wood has been planted just to the south, opposite the original (and now far more sparse) wood that was there in 1944. The new wood is now a peaceful memorial park. The observation from the top of Hill 112 is magnificent, with views down into Esquay, across to Hill 113, down into the Odon Valley and across the entire southern area of the battlefield. What is noticeable about this area of Normandy is the undulating nature of the terrain, the commanding views that extend across the battlefield from its many areas of high ground, the density of the *bocage*, the steepness of the Odon Valley and, perhaps above all, why Hill 112 was such a prize.

Parts of the Charnwood battlefield have altered more dramatically, thanks to the post-war spread north of the suburbs of Caen, which have swallowed up some small hamlets that were once separate from the city. The basic geography of the town remains the same as it was in 1944, however, with the River Orne bisecting it, and the (now widened) Canal de Caen running alongside the river towards the sea. Not much remained intact in Caen on

10 July 1944, and thus much of the city has been rebuilt in the post-war era. Prominent modern features such as the ring road, moreover, have further disrupted the look of the battlefield today, while the mighty towers of the Colombelles steelworks – a key German observation post during Operation Charnwood – have now been demolished. Beyond these changes, however, many of the rural parts of the Charnwood area remain broadly similar to how they were back in 1944, save for the inevitable post-war housing that has sprung up on the fringes of many Norman villages. Moreover, the large expanse of Carpiquet airfield remains broadly as it was back in 1944 – indeed it remains a working airstrip today.

More than 22,000 servicemen are buried in 18 Commonwealth war cemeteries in Normandy. Those buried in Brouay war cemetery died in the heavy fighting during the encirclement of Caen. Finally, in the city centre itself, the recently opened Caen Memorial Museum now presents visitors with stimulating insights into the Normandy battles.

CWGC



Memorial to the 15th (Scottish) Division

KEY FACTS

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission maintains over 1,179,000 war graves at 23,203 burial sites in 148 countries around the world. It also commemorates a further 760,193 Commonwealth war dead on memorials to the missing.

Commonwealth governments share the cost of maintenance in proportion to the number of graves of their war dead: UK – 79%; Canada – 10%; Australia – 6%; New Zealand – 2%; South Africa – 2%; India – 1%.

British regiments that fought in the Drive on Caen

OPERATION PERCH (9–14 JUNE 1944)

4th/7th Royal Dragoon Guards
 5th Royal Inniskilling Dragoon Guards
 11th Hussars
 8th Kings Royal Irish Hussars
 24th Lancers
 Royal Tank Regiment
 61st Reconnaissance Regiment
 Nottinghamshire Yeomanry (Sherwood Rangers)
 4th County of London Yeomanry (Sharpshooters)

Queen's Royal Regiment
 Devonshire Regiment
 East Yorkshire Regiment
 Green Howards
 Cheshire Regiment
 South Wales Borderers
 Hampshire Regiment
 Dorsetshire Regiment
 Gloucestershire Regiment
 Essex Regiment
 Durham Light Infantry
 King's Royal Rifle Corps
 Rifle Brigade

OPERATION EPSOM (25–30 JUNE 1944)

2nd Household Cavalry Regiment
 4th/7th Royal Dragoon Guards
 Royal Scots Greys
 11th Hussars
 22nd Dragoons
 23rd Hussars
 24th Lancers
 Royal Tank Regiment
 15th, 43rd, 49th and 53rd Reconnaissance
 Regiments
 Nottinghamshire Yeomanry (Sherwood Rangers)
 Lothian and Border Horse Yeomanry
 Fife and Forfar Yeomanry
 2nd County of London Yeomanry (Westminster
 Dragoons)
 3rd County of London Yeomanry (Sharpshooters)
 Northamptonshire Yeomanry

Grenadier Guards
 Coldstream Guards
 Irish Guards
 Welsh Guards
 Royal Scots
 Lincolnshire Regiment
 Somerset Light Infantry
 Royal Scots Fusiliers
 Royal Welsh Fusiliers
 King's Own Scottish Borderers

OPERATION EPSOM (cont.)

Cameronians
 Worcestershire Regiment
 Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry
 Duke of Wellington's Regiment
 Hampshire Regiment
 Dorsetshire Regiment
 East Lancashire Regiment
 Welch Regiment
 Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry
 King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry
 King's Shropshire Light Infantry
 Middlesex Regiment
 King's Royal Rifle Corps
 Wiltshire Regiment
 Manchester Regiment
 Durham Light Infantry
 Highland Light Infantry
 Seaforth Highlanders
 Gordon Highlanders
 Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders
 Rifle Brigade
 Monmouthshire Regiment
 Tyneside Scottish, The Black Watch
 Herefordshire Regiment
 Princess Louise's Kensington Regiment
 Hallamshire Battalion, The York and Lancaster
 Regiment
 Glasgow Highlanders

OPERATION CHARNWOOD (8–9 JULY 1944)

13th/18th Royal Hussars
 3rd and 59th Reconnaissance Regiments
 144th and 148th Regiments Royal
 Armoured Corps
 Staffordshire Yeomanry
 Northamptonshire Yeomanry
 East Riding Yeomanry
 Inns of Court Regiment

 Royal Northumberland Fusiliers
 Royal Warwickshire Regiment
 Royal Norfolk Regiment
 Lincolnshire Regiment
 Suffolk Regiment
 East Yorkshire Regiment
 Lancashire Fusiliers
 King's Own Scottish Borderers
 East Lancashire Regiment
 South Staffordshire Regiment
 South Lancashire Regiment
 King's Shropshire Light Infantry
 Middlesex Regiment
 North Staffordshire Regiment
 Royal Ulster Rifles

Ville de Caen



50th Anniversary of the Liberation of Caen

Glossary

This booklet is intended to be of interest to young people as well as veterans. As the former may not be acquainted with basic military terminology, a simple glossary of

1944 British Army terms relating to variously sized commands is included here. These commands are listed in descending order of size with the rank of the commander shown in italics.

TERM	DESCRIPTION
Army Group <i>General or Field Marshal</i>	The largest military command deployed by the British Army, comprising two or more armies and containing 400,000–600,000 troops.
Army <i>Lieutenant-General</i>	A military command controlling several subordinate corps, plus supporting forces, amounting to 100,000–200,000 troops.
Corps <i>Lieutenant-General</i>	A military command controlling two or more divisions, as well as other supporting forces, amounting to 50,000–100,000 troops.
Division <i>Major-General</i>	The standard 1944 British Army formation, an infantry or armoured division, containing 10,000–20,000 personnel.
Brigade <i>Brigadier</i>	A formation that contains several battalions or regiments that amount to 3000–6000 personnel, which exists either independently or else forms part of a division.
Regiment <i>Lieutenant-Colonel</i>	A unit typically of armoured or artillery forces, amounting to 500–900 soldiers, that equates in status and size to an infantry battalion.
Battalion <i>Lieutenant-Colonel</i>	A unit usually comprising 500–900 soldiers (such as an infantry, engineer or signals battalion).
Squadron <i>Major</i>	Typically, a sub-unit of an armoured or recce regiment that equates in status and size to an infantry company.
Company <i>Major</i>	A small sub-unit of a battalion. A typical infantry company could contain around 150–180 soldiers.
Battery <i>Major</i>	A small sub-unit, usually of artillery, that forms part of a battalion.
Unit	A small military grouping that ranges in size from a section (of 10 soldiers) up to a battalion or regiment (500–900 personnel).
Formation	A large military grouping that ranges in size from a brigade up to an army group.
Beachhead	An area of enemy territory captured after an amphibious assault, in which the invaders can establish themselves.
Bocage	The easily defended hedgerow terrain of Normandy, with small fields bordered by high and thick hedges.
Close air support	Aerial strikes carried out against the enemy front line by tactical aircraft (fighters, fighter bombers and medium bombers).
Friendly fire	Tragic incident where forces inadvertently kill or injure their own forces, or those of an ally; also called 'blue-on-blue'.
Munitions	Collective word for bullets, shells or bombs.
Nebelwerfer	German multi-barrelled rocket launcher, known as a 'moaning minnie'.
Interlocking defence	A defensive system where each strongpoint is close enough to the others to be able to provide fire support for these others.
Salient	An area of the front line that projects into the territory controlled by enemy forces.



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'A nation that forgets its past has no future.'

These words by Winston Churchill could not be more apt to describe the purpose of this series of booklets, of which this is the fourth.

These booklets commemorate various Second World War actions, and aim not only to remember and commemorate those who fought and died, but also to remind future generations of the debt they owe to their forebears, and the inspiration that can be derived from their stories.

They will help those growing up now to be aware of the veterans' sacrifices, and of the contributions they made to our security and to the way of life we enjoy today.



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

