

SECOND WORLD WAR

60<sup>TH</sup>

ANNIVERSARY

The Final Battle for Normandy  
Northern France  
9 July – 30 August 1944

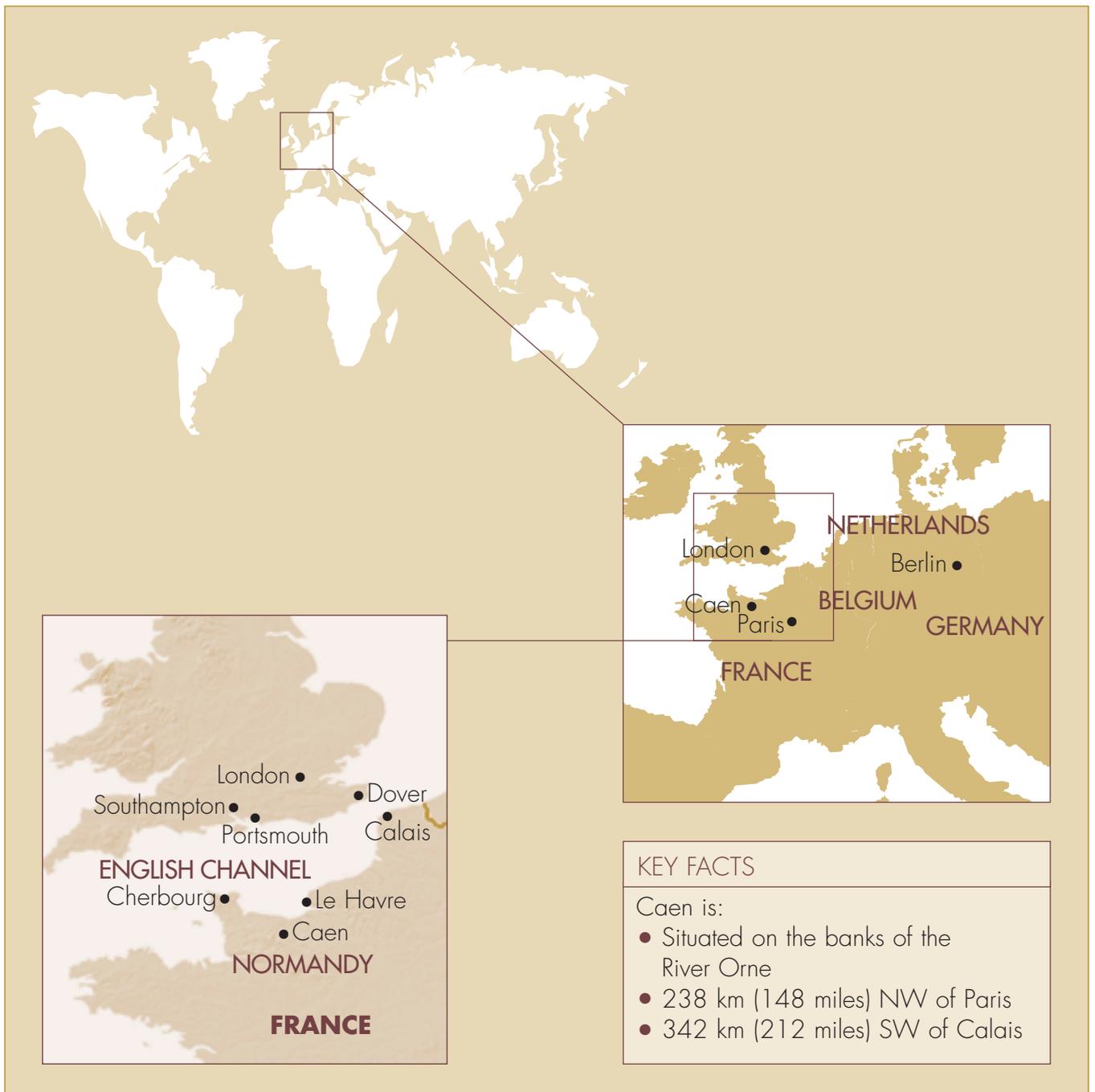


'The decisive defeat of the German forces in Normandy'

No.5

# The Final Battle for Normandy

CAEN, LOWER NORMANDY, NORTHERN FRANCE



Cover image: A Sexton 25-pounder Self-Propelled (SP) Howitzer crosses the River Seine



## Foreword by the Under Secretary of State for Defence and Minister for Veterans, Don Touhig MP

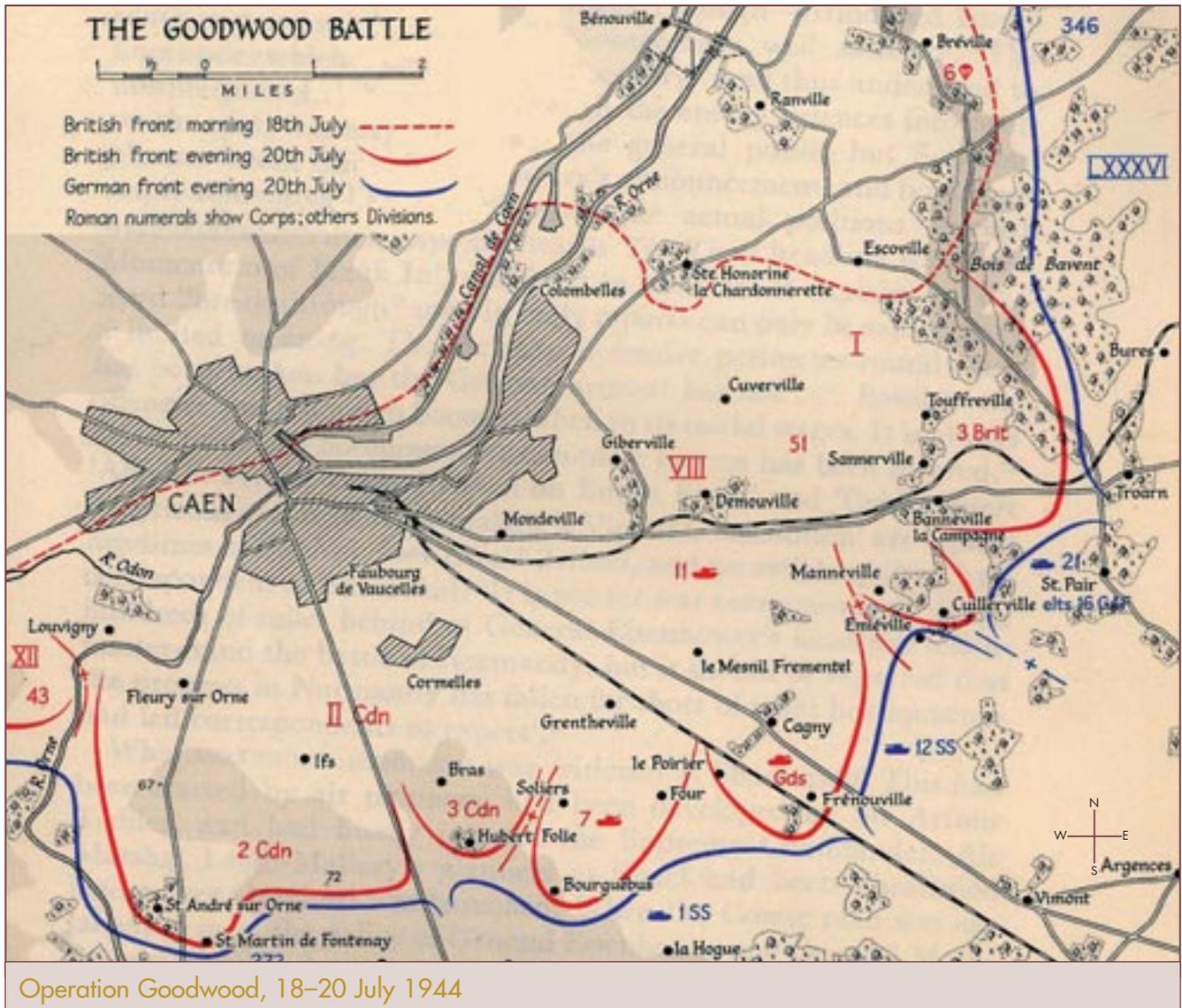
This series of 60th anniversary commemorative booklets aims to highlight battles and operations fought during the Second World War. Through the booklets, readers have an opportunity to gain an understanding of the campaigns and the hardships endured by those who were there.

Booklet number 5 focuses on the actions of Operation Goodwood, Operation Bluecoat and the advance towards Falaise. Through the coalition of the Allied forces, all operations were successful and resulted in the encirclement of German troops to the south of Falaise. However, although the war in Normandy was transformed, the forces involved encountered determined enemy resistance, which resulted in many casualties on both sides.

Sixty years later, we have the opportunity to pay tribute to the self-sacrifice, discipline and dedication of all involved in the Final Battle for Normandy. Through commemoration, remembrance and education, we can honour the generations who served and try to gain an understanding of the sacrifices made for the freedoms we have today.

*Don Touhig*

## Operation Goodwood (18–20 July 1944)



Having captured the northern part of Caen during Operation Charnwood, General Montgomery, on 9 July 1944, began planning a new offensive. Operation Goodwood aimed to capture the southern half of Caen and the Bourguébus Ridge. Seizing these locations would allow further Allied operations to unfold to the south across the excellent tank terrain of the Falaise plain. Securing the Falaise plain would provide the Allies with adequate space to establish airfields on Norman soil, a development considered critical by the Second Tactical Air Force Commander, Air Chief Marshal Coningham. It would also allow the Allies to develop their supply lines. Montgomery wanted to initiate an offensive to tie down German armour

in the east, thus assisting with the American Operation Cobra offensive. However, the British Army was struggling to replace the large number of infantry casualties already sustained in Normandy. Consequently, Montgomery decided to use armoured units in this offensive, as he could afford to lose tanks but not infantrymen.

The German defences south of Caen were formidable, consisting of four defensive belts up to 16 km (10 miles) deep. These comprised: (1) infantry, (2) panzer grenadiers, (3) fortified villages with anti-tank guns and mortars, and (4) defensive positions running across higher ground from the Bourguébus Ridge in the south-west to Troarn in the east. Beyond the fourth

belt was an armoured reserve of Panther and Tiger tanks from the 1st and 2nd SS Panzer Divisions. Montgomery could not start Operation Goodwood until 18 July because he needed to assemble a large force to overcome this well-established German defence. He also relied heavily on aerial bombardment. However, given the depth and dispersal of the German defences, Montgomery probably appreciated that it was optimistic to expect bombing to be very effective.

For Montgomery to secure the maximum bombing support possible, it seems he had to convince senior air commanders that Operation Goodwood would be a decisive breakthrough offensive. The Second (British) Army commander, Lieutenant-General Dempsey, who originally conceived the offensive, certainly believed this to be the case. Montgomery privately had held more modest and realistic expectations for the offensive. It would appear Lt-General Dempsey, to an extent, convinced Montgomery that, during Operation Goodwood, British armoured forces could secure the ground required to answer the

## KEY FACTS

### List of senior Allied commanders

#### 21st Army Group

*General B Montgomery*

#### Second (British) Army

*Lt-General M Dempsey*

#### First Canadian Army

*Lt-General H Crerar*

#### I (British) Corps

*Lt-General J Crocker*

#### II Canadian Corps

*Lt-General G Simonds*

#### VIII (British) Corps

*Lt-General R O'Connor*

#### XII (British) Corps

*Lt-General N Ritchie*

#### XXX (British) Corps

*Lt-General G Bucknall*

*Lt-General B Horrocks (from 4 August 1944)*

IWM B 9473



Allied commanders: US General Hodges, Lt-General Crerar, General Montgomery, US General Bradley and Lt-General Dempsey

mounting criticisms made by Coningham and the Americans concerning the lack of British progress. In addition, Dempsey argued, Operation Goodwood would tie down German strength in the east, aiding the American Operation Cobra and minimising infantry losses. The controversy that subsequently surrounded the extent to which Operation Goodwood could be deemed a success stemmed from the differing understanding of the objectives of the offensive.

Given that the previous attempt to outflank Caen from the west (Operation Epsom) had failed, in mid-July Montgomery now decided to attempt an outflanking move from the east. The three armoured divisions of VIII (British) Corps commenced Operation Goodwood from the bridgehead east of the River Orne which had been captured on D-Day (6 June 1944).

These divisions would strike south to secure the dominating Bourguébus Ridge between Verrières and Troarn. To their east, I (British) Corps was to mount a flank protection attack towards Troarn. At the same time, Operation Atlantic, led by II Canadian Corps, struck south-east from its positions around Caen to secure the western fringes of the Bourguébus Ridge.

However, the bridgehead east of the River Orne was narrow and this caused VIII (British) Corps serious problems in starting the offensive. The three armoured divisions could only be launched one behind the other into the attack, restricting the combat power that could be deployed against the enemy.

Additionally, the fact that so few bridges existed over the River Orne made it difficult for

National Archives WO 171/1349

WAR DIARY or INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY (Exact heading not required).		Unit	Commanding Officer	
Month and Year July, 1944		3 BATT	Lt-Col. H.G. G.	
Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	References to Appendices
COULOMNS	16th	2000	Bn move to conc area EAST of R. ORNE near RANVILLE.	
RANVILLE	17th	0100	Bn arrived at conc area complete.	
	18th		Commencement of great armed thrust SOUTH from EAST of CAEN. Bn is spearhead of all inf in 2nd Army's attack. Attack preceded by 2000 bomber force.	
		0745	Bn crosses Start Line, and is assisted by arty barrage of six medium and six Fd Regts. First objective was CUVERVILLE.	
		0845	Village captured and prisoners taken. Opposition slight; most trouble being MG posts. One position of 6 MG posts wiped out by Lt Cdn. SHORT (Cdn Inf) and one section. This day was a momentous one in the history of the unit, and everyone is thrilled by the sight of our first prisoners. Maj W.P. SWEETMAN, 2IC, wounded.	
Coulombs	16th	2000	Battalion (Bn) move to concentration (conc) area EAST of River ORNE near RANVILLE.	
Ranville	17th	0100	Bn arrived at conc area complete.	
	18th		Commencement of great armoured thrust SOUTH from EAST of CAEN. Bn is spearhead of all infantry (inf) in 2nd Army's attack. Attack preceded by 2000 bomber force.	
		0745	Bn crosses Start Line, and is assisted by artillery (arty) barrage of six medium and six Field (Fd) Regiments (Regts). First objective was CUVERVILLE.	
		0845	Village captured and prisoners taken. Opposition slight; most trouble being machine gun (MG) posts. One position of 6 MG posts wiped out by Lieutenant C.G. SHORT (Canadian Infantry (Cdn Inf)) and one section. This day was a momentous one in the history of the unit, and everyone is thrilled by the sight of our first prisoners. Major (Maj) W.P. SWEETMAN, Second in Command (2IC), wounded.	

Extract from 3rd Battalion Monmouthshire Regiment war diary, 16–18 July 1944

IWM CL 692



The bomb-damaged Normandy town of May sur Orne, south west of Cagny

VIII (British) Corps to move these spearhead divisions forward. Indeed, much of VIII (British) Corps' supporting artillery had to be kept back on the western side of the River Orne as there was insufficient room for them on the other side. This meant that some of the supporting artillery was deployed further back than was tactically desirable.

Additionally, the Germans could observe this bridgehead from high ground, which made it very difficult for VIII (British) Corps to preserve any degree of surprise.

These considerations meant that Operation Goodwood could not be 'teed-up' as tidily as the Allies would have wished. Operation Goodwood, therefore, was an offensive that was launched for strategic and political reasons, in spite of the attack's unpromising tactical potential.

Operation Goodwood commenced before dawn on 18 July, initiated by aerial support operations. The air plan that Dempsey's staff formulated for Operation Goodwood was significantly more complex than in Operation Charnwood and involved over 1850 heavy

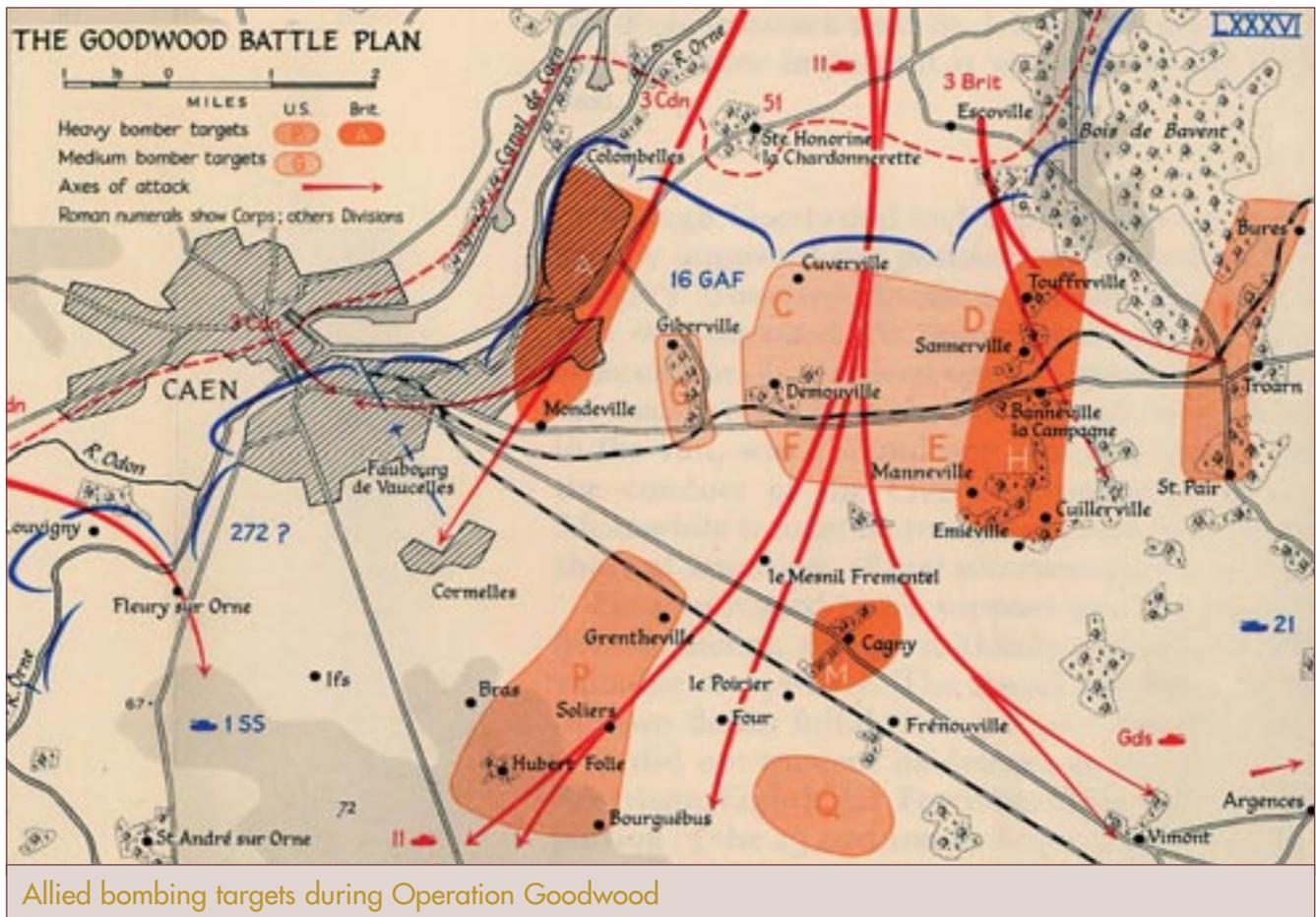
and medium bombers striking 11 target zones. The offensive began between 0530 and 0615 hours, when over 850 RAF heavy bombers attacked in good weather conditions and delivered over 15,500 bombs onto three targets – the Colombelles–Mondeville and Touffreville–Emiéville areas on the flanks of the offensive, as well as Cagny. By 1944 standards of accuracy, this was an effective bombing strike, which successfully neutralised the German flank defences.

At 0700 hours, over 340 American and British medium bombers struck the German defences in Giberville, Cuverville, Démouville and Manneville. By the time that these aircraft arrived over the battlefield, visibility had declined. Many of the target areas were obscured by the smoke and dust thrown up from the recent British heavy bombing strikes. Consequently, nearly 25 per cent of the medium bombers had to abort their missions. These medium bombing strikes were less accurate than the previous Allied sorties and achieved only about 12 per cent of the envisaged bombing density. Simultaneously, fighters and fighter-bombers from 83 and 84 RAF Groups attacked various enemy positions.

From 0830 to 0930 hours, over 640 American Liberator heavy bombers attacked three locations – two areas located along the northern face of the Bourguébus Ridge and the

### A Welsh Guardsman's perspective of Operation Goodwood

'The whole northern sky was filled with them [bombers] for as far as the eye could see – wave upon wave, stepped up one above the other and spreading out east and west till it seemed that there was no room for more. Everyone was out of their vehicles now, staring in awed wonder until the last wave dropped its bombs and turned away. Then the guns took up in a steadily increasing crescendo the work which the bombers had begun.'



Bures–Saint-Pair region on the extreme eastern flank. Approximately 570 aircraft dropped some 13,000 45-kg (100-lb) bombs and 76,000 9-kg (20-lb) fragmentation bombs. These strikes were not particularly accurate because of declining visibility. Aircrews delayed bomb release to avoid inflicting friendly casualties on the ground and consequently many bombs fell to the south of their target areas. The German forces that remained in this sector later played a major part in halting the British advance.

As these attacks developed, Allied artillery engaged known German gun positions and selected enemy defensive locations. At 0745 hours the artillery began a creeping barrage, behind which the 11th Armoured Division commenced its attack south. This initial phase of Operation Goodwood proved highly successful. The powerful aerial and artillery strikes inflicted tremendous damage on the forward enemy defences. This allowed the following spearhead of British armour to advance rapidly through the initial

German defences in the Cuverville–Démouville area. It reached the embanked Caen–Vimont railway at around 0930 hours. The restricted space in the Orne bridgehead continued to cause traffic congestion and did more to slow the British advance than enemy resistance in those first few hours. Enemy resistance did however increase and the British made slow progress south during the rest of the morning.

All afternoon, the Germans launched counter-attacks against the Allied advance, and this intense series of battles continued into the evening. It was not until late on 18 July that the spearhead British armoured forces reached the foot of the northern slope of the Bourguébus Ridge. The bypassed pockets of enemy resistance prevented the supporting British infantry from keeping up with the armour, which together with the inability to get artillery guns through the traffic congestion meant that the spearhead forces had only limited artillery support and were therefore vulnerable. The British armour now encountered a largely intact

German anti-tank gun screen deployed across the northern face of the Bourguébus Ridge, which repulsed the Allies and inflicted heavy losses. As dusk approached, numbers of German all-arms counter-attacks drove the British armour back with further heavy losses.

On 19 July, Montgomery's forces resumed the attack. On the eastern flank, after intense fighting, the British 3rd Infantry Division closed in on Troarn and Emiéville. In the afternoon, in the centre, the British armour resumed their attack south. The Guards Armoured Division captured Le Poirier but was halted short of Frénouville by intense enemy resistance. Meanwhile, the 7th Armoured Division captured the village of Four and all but encircled Bourguébus. Finally, the 11th Armoured Division battled its way south against bitter enemy resistance to capture Bras and Hubert-Folie. On the western flank, the Canadian forces captured Fleury-sur-Orne and Hill 67. Success had been achieved, but everywhere German resistance was extremely strong. This was not the economical operation that Dempsey had anticipated.

On 20 July, the Allied forces tried to consolidate their gains by securing a few key locations. During that day, the British forces captured

Bourguébus and Frénouville. The Canadians secured Beauvoir and Troteval Farms; the subsequent drive on Verrières encountered extremely heavy enemy resistance and was repulsed with high numbers of casualties. On 21 July, the Allied forces held off repeated German counter-attacks, but by now both sides were exhausted, and a lull descended over the battlefield. Operation Goodwood was over.

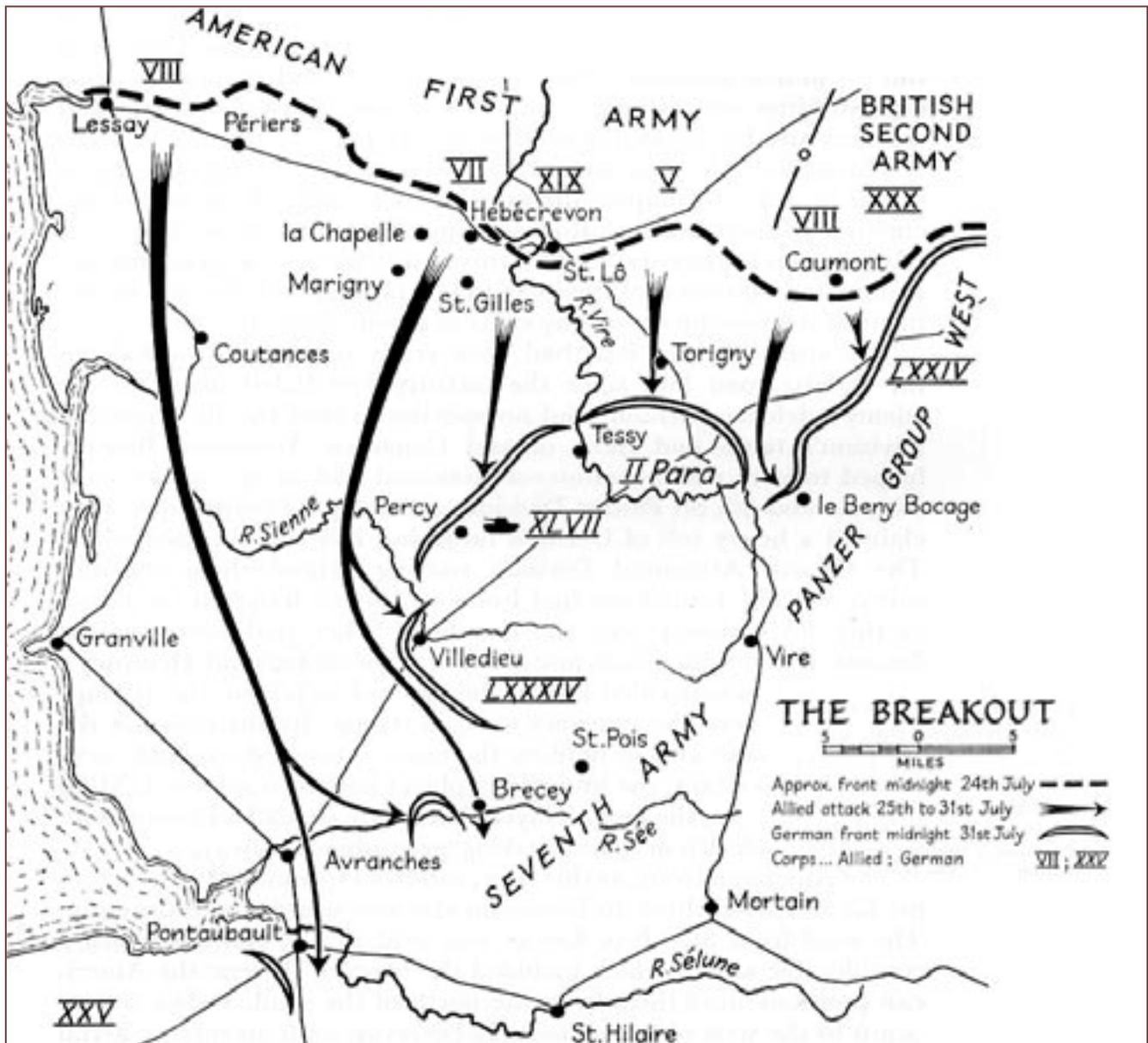
The success of Operation Goodwood remains debatable. The employment of massed armour against intact German defences brought high tank losses. Operation Goodwood accounted for more than one-third of the entire British tank strength in Normandy. While Operation Goodwood gained additional ground and held some German reserves on the Caen front, these achievements were won at a high price which the British forces could not afford to repeat. On the other hand, Operation Goodwood did assist with the success of the American Operation Cobra offensive initiated on 25 July. The heavy defensive fighting during Operation Goodwood compelled the enemy to send most of their supplies to this sector. This emptied the Saint-Lô front of vital supplies during the crucial days before Operation Cobra, and these German logistical shortages assisted the American offensive.

IWM CL 669



Allied military personnel move past a destroyed tank in the Normandy town of Villers Bocage

## Operation Cobra (25 July – 1 August 1944)



Operation Cobra, 25 July – 1 August 1944

On 25 July, First United States Army commenced Operation Cobra. This was conceived as a concentrated operation mounted by three infantry divisions on a narrow front, supported by intense air and artillery attack. Afterwards, three mechanised divisions would advance through the rear enemy defences.

The heavy bombing strike was one of the most effective air attacks on ground forces yet seen in the war. It crippled German

communications and so battered the defending German forces that the US VII Corps successfully advanced 3.2 km (2 miles) during that first day. During the next 48 hours, American speed and mobility turned this attack into a decisive operation which secured a 27-km (17-mile) advance. During 29–31 July, with the German front broken, Bradley expanded the scope of Operation Cobra. His forces crossed the River Sélune at Pontaubault, opening the gateway to Brittany and central France. The war in Normandy had been transformed.

## Operation Bluecoat (30 July – 7 August 1944)

IWM CL 672



A wrecked German Tiger tank in the Normandy town of Villers Bocage, east of Caumont

On 30 July, General Montgomery's forces resumed the offensive by launching Operation Bluecoat. Striking the weak German front around Caumont, Montgomery hoped the attack would prevent the Germans from transferring their armour from the British sector to the American front. Deploying three armoured and three infantry divisions, the British VIII and XXX Corps attacked a sector of the front that was held by a single German infantry division. Given the need for speed, Lt-General Dempsey had to launch the attack before VIII (British) Corps had managed to fully assemble.

The hasty preparations meant the attacking force lacked the artillery support usually available for Montgomery's offensives. Allied heavy and medium bombers, and fighter-bombers of the Second Tactical Air Force, supported the ground attack, although at first poor weather severely hampered air operations. In addition, the Bocage landscape comprised numerous small fields bordered by thick and tall hedgerows, between which ran narrow sunken country lanes. The terrain provided excellent cover for the defending German forces.

The British forces quickly penetrated the German defences and successfully drew into battle the enemy armour that was en route to the American sector. However, the failure of British forces to secure the nearby high ground at Amaye slowed their progress. During 31 July, British forces successfully attacked and secured a vital bridgehead over the River Souleuvre west of Le Bény-Bocage, a success that left a 3.2-km (2-mile) gap in the German line. Unfortunately, by the time the British had commenced an attack, the Germans had managed to move up reserves to close the gap.

As Operation Bluecoat unfolded, one of its principal objectives became the capture of the key road junction at Vire. If the Germans had lost this town, their withdrawal south-east from the Mortain area would have been seriously compromised. The town was located just inside the American sector, adjacent to the boundary between the American and British sectors of the front, and this hampered the British forces' drive south towards Vire. The 11th Armoured Division made steady progress south during 31 July, but the advance of the 7th Armoured Division and Guards Armoured Division, in the XXX Corps' sector, was slowed by German resistance.

On 1 August, German armoured reinforcements arrived and began to threaten the exposed flanks of the 11th Armoured Division. On 6 August, German armoured counter-thrusts overran the 11th Armoured Division's spearheads. On the same day, elements of the 43rd (Wessex) Division overcame fierce German resistance to secure the high ground of Mont Pinçon.

On 7 August, further east, the 59th (Staffordshire) Division seized a bridgehead over the River Orne near Brieux and fought off repeated German attacks.

However, the forward momentum of Operation Bluecoat had slowed. The situation at the front became more fluid, with the German forces in this area withdrawing south-east in a series of phased operations, in response to the outflanking threat by the advancing American forces. The weary British forces continued to follow up these retreating German forces.

As Operation Bluecoat commenced, the new operational 12th US Army Group took control of First US Army and General George Patton's new

Third US Army. Given the collapse of the western part of the German front in Normandy, these two American armies raced south-east to occupy Mortain and thrust west deep into Brittany.

Hitler's response to this strategic threat inadvertently condemned the German Army Group B to total defeat. He ordered the launching of a major counter-offensive to recapture Avranches and thus cut off to the south those American divisions that had broken out from Normandy. During the night of 6–7 August, the XLVII Panzer Corps attacked west towards Mortain and Avranches. The forces of General Hans Freiherr von Funck, General of the Armoured Troops, made some initial progress, but then failed to secure Hill 317. During the next 48 hours, the combination of Allied fighter-bomber attacks and newly arrived American reinforcements halted the German counter-strike.

The unwise offensive simply pushed the German armoured forces west. To their south, American forces steadily outflanked them by advancing rapidly east and south-east towards Alençon and Le Mans.

WWM B 8498



A breakdown gang working on wrecked vehicles in the centre of Cahagnes, 2 August 1944

## Operation Totalize (7–21 August 1944)

IWM MH 28256



Allied tanks moving forward into battle on 8 August 1944

During early August it became both strategically and politically important for the Anglo-Canadian forces still bogged down along the Bourguébus Ridge to drive south towards Falaise. This advance would assist the British attacks taking place further east. The task fell to Lieutenant-General Simonds' II Canadian Corps, part of Lieutenant-General Henry Crerar's newly operational First Canadian Army.

Simonds' plan was codenamed Operation Totalize. It envisaged that, after Bomber Command heavy night raids had struck targets on the flanks of the attack, two infantry divisions would start the operation during the night of 7–8 August. In this, mobile columns would infiltrate between the forward enemy positions. Then, a little after noon on 8 August, a second strategic heavy bombing run by the United States Army Air Force (USAAF) would strike the reserve German defensive position. Afterwards, in the offensive's second phase, two armoured divisions would break through this second enemy line. With the German defences torn apart, these two formations would then move to exploit the situation by mounting a rapid 16-km (10-mile) advance deep into the German rear area during the

final phase to seize the key high ground situated north of Falaise.

The initial attack secured significant success, despite the inevitable confusion that affects night operations. After a pause for the daylight bombers to arrive, Simonds' two armoured divisions struck south into the reserve German defensive line. These forces managed to secure only modest forward momentum that afternoon, advancing no more than 3 km (2 miles).

In an attempt to kick-start the flagging offensive, a frustrated Simonds ordered Worthington Force – a battle group built around the 28th Canadian Armoured Regiment (the British Columbia Regiment) and the Algonquin Regiment – to mount a daring night attack deep into enemy defences and capture the vital high ground of Hill 195. That night the ill-fated battle group became lost, and around dawn it secured a hill which it believed was its objective. Sadly, neither the battle group nor the Allied High Command had realised that they had secured Hill 140, some 6 km (4 miles) north-east of Hill 195. German armoured forces counter-attacked the isolated task group and all but annihilated it.

Despite the benefit of effective tactical air support, the other Allied attacks mounted that day also made only modest progress against increasing enemy resistance. A final assault on the powerful German Quesnay Wood position during the night of 10–11 August failed, and Simonds terminated Operation Totalize.

While Operation Totalize unfolded during 8–10 August, the strategic situation in Normandy had developed rapidly. During this period, US forces had advanced north from Le Mans to Alençon. The Americans were just 40 km (25 miles) away from Simonds' spearheads. If the two could link up in the Falaise–Argentan area, the entire German Seventh Army would be caught in a large pocket. If they could be successfully eliminated, the Allies would have secured a decisive victory over the German Army in the west. This context led Simonds, on 14 August, to mount another attempt to advance south to Falaise, this time an improvised offensive codenamed Operation Tractable.

This offensive was similar to that of Operation Totalize. Both operations employed mobile spearheads and strategic heavy bombing, as well as exploiting restricted enemy observation. Simonds switched his Corps' axis of advance to the east of the main Caen–Falaise road to avoid the dangerous Quesnay Wood position. He then envisaged a two-phase attack.

Simonds' two break-in infantry divisions would strike south in tightly packed groupings through a dense artillery-delivered smokescreen. Despite chaotic scenes similar to the first phase of Operation Totalize, Simonds' forces successfully advanced 8 km (5 miles) that first day. In the process, they crossed the inconspicuous River Laison, which turned out to be a bigger tank obstacle than Allied intelligence had predicted. During 15 August, the forward momentum of Simonds' forces dwindled in the face of stiffening enemy resistance. By the end of the second day, much of the high ground north of Falaise – which the offensive had been intended to secure – was still in German hands.

### A description of the actions of Captain Boardman's Sherman tank crew during part of Operation Totalize at St. Aignan de Cramenil on 8 August 1944

'Captain Boardman ... moved to the left of No.3 Troop, towards the gully. Imagine the surprise felt by his crew to see the turret of a [German] Mark IV [tank] suddenly appear in the gully a hundred yards away, so close that they could clearly see the German Commander's face, with his head stuck over the top of the cupola. Tpr. [Trooper] Rutledge, the gunner, could not resist such an invitation. One shot from his 75-mm [gun] into the turret and the Mark IV began to burn. Those who could baled out and vanished into some corn on the far side of the gully; Tpr. Rutledge encouraged them with bursts of Browning [machine gun]. This set the corn on fire and Tpr. Buck, the driver, says that he distinctly saw the last Hun turn and, as he vanished into the smoke, shake his fist at the hated, decadent, British.'

Source: R F Neville, *The 1st and 2nd Northants Yeomanry 1939–1946* (Brunswick Joh Heinr Meyer, 1946).

IWM B 9365



An army chaplain reads the last rites over a fallen comrade's grave beside the road to Lisieux as colleagues pay homage, 19 August 1944

## The Falaise Pocket (16–20 August 1944)



The Falaise Pocket, 16–20 August 1944

Lt-General Simonds was saved from having to breathe renewed vigour into his stalled Operation Tractable offensive due to the rapidly developing strategic situation. By 15 August, the Falaise Pocket was well formed, with just the 16-km (10-mile) neck between Morteaux-Coulboeuf and Chambois still remaining unsecured by Allied forces. The imperative need to close the neck of this all-but-formed pocket – to stop the German forces breaking out – led Simonds to shift his Corps' axis of advance further east.

During 16–18 August, Simonds' two armoured divisions pushed south-east towards Trun, where they aimed to link up with US General Patton's forces and close the pocket. On 19 August,

Simonds' armour did link up with American forces at Chambois, then pushing north-east beyond Argentan.

This weak Allied blocking position was unable to withstand the intense enemy attacks it faced. For as the remnants of the German Seventh Army desperately attempted to fight their way out of the pocket, elements of the German II-SS Armoured Corps attacked the Allied blocking position from 'outside' the pocket.

The simultaneous attacks overran parts of this blocking position, leaving isolated Allied enclaves still holding on tenaciously to key ground. Similarly, isolated elements of the

Allied 1st Polish Armoured Division withstood all enemy attacks to keep hold of the key Hill 262 near Coudehard. These courageous actions helped to ensure that fewer of the enemy escaped from the Falaise Pocket.

As the German retreat gathered momentum, the Second Tactical Air Force and the US IXth Air Force were presented with exceptionally large concentrations of ground targets to the east of Falaise. Confined to a few narrow, open roads, and compelled to move in broad daylight, the German columns were relentlessly attacked from the air by Typhoons, P-47s and other fighter-bombers using machine guns and rockets, as they edged slowly eastwards. So great was the damage inflicted that the area between Trun and Chambois, where these attacks occurred, became known as the 'Shambles'.

However, as many as 40,000 enemy troops did manage to escape encirclement, although most of their equipment and vehicles were abandoned. After the battle was over, Allied investigators counted no fewer than 3000 German vehicles in the pocket. Thus, while many German troops escaped the Falaise Pocket, the German Seventh Army was no longer a cohesive fighting force. With the Americans racing into the interior of France, the Germans now had no choice but to conduct a strategic withdrawal back to the River Seine.

Even before the Falaise Pocket had been closed, Montgomery had initiated his own offensive towards the River Seine. This reflected his desire to enact the 'long envelopment' of the German Seventh Army against the obstacle of the Seine, rather than the 'short envelopment' at Trun–Argentan, which closed the so-called Falaise Pocket on 19 August. By 21 August, three British and one Canadian corps had struck east towards the upper Seine, north of Paris, seeking to catch up with the American drive for the French capital. Indeed, the US XV Corps had secured the first bridgehead over the River Seine at Mantes-Gassicourt as early as 20 August – at

precisely the time that the battle for Saint-Lambert raged some 97 km (60 miles) further west.

During the last 10 days of August, the barely cohesive remnants of the German Army Group B successfully executed a phased withdrawal back to the northern bank of the River Seine. While Allied air attacks inflicted heavy damage on the retreating German army, their impact was restricted because the German forces made good use of available cover, dispersed their forces widely along the river, tried to restrict their evacuation to the hours of darkness, and took advantage of a period of cloudy weather, which restricted Allied air operations between 20 and 25 August.

At Vernon on 26 August, the 1st Worcestershire Regiment (part of 43rd (Wessex) Infantry Division) became the first British unit to cross the Seine. During the next three days, Montgomery's forces secured other bridgeheads across the upper Seine. By 30 August, therefore, when German resistance west of the Seine ceased, the Normandy campaign was over. By then, Paris had fallen and the Americans had raced north beyond the Seine and east into the interior of France. The Allies had so decisively won the Battle of Normandy that it remained hard to see how the German Armed Forces could recover from such a setback.

IWM CL 398



Damaged German tank near Bretteville, south of Caen

## Victoria Crosses

The Victoria Cross (VC) is the British realm's highest award for gallantry in the face of the enemy. It has precedence over any other of our Sovereign's awards or Commonwealth decorations.

The Victoria Cross was founded by Royal Warrant on 29 January 1856. The Cross itself is cast from the bronze of cannons captured at Sevastopol during the Crimean War. The design, chosen by Queen Victoria, consists of a cross with the Royal Crest resting upon a scroll bearing the words 'For Valour'.

Since its inception, the Victoria Cross has been awarded 1355 times. The youngest recipient was 15 years old and the eldest was 69 years old. Three cases exist where both father and son have won the Victoria Cross; four pairs of brothers have also been recipients.

One hundred and eighty-one members of the British and Commonwealth forces were awarded the Victoria Cross during the Second World War.

### KEY FACTS

About the Victoria Cross:

- It was founded by Royal Warrant on 29 January 1856
- It has been awarded 1355 times
- The youngest recipient was 15 years old and the eldest was 69 years old
- Five Victoria Crosses were awarded following operations mentioned in this booklet.

### SQUADRON LEADER IAN BAZALGETTE

Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve

Extract from the Citation for the Victoria Cross:

On 4 August 1944 at Trossy Saint-Maximin, France, Squadron Leader Bazalgette was one of the marking formation spearhead on a daylight raid. When he was near his target, his Lancaster came under heavy anti-aircraft fire; both starboard engines were put out of action and serious fires broke out. In spite of this, the Squadron Leader pressed on to the target, marking and bombing it accurately. He then attempted to bring the burning aircraft to safety, having ordered those of the crew who were able to do so to bale out. Using his skill, he avoided a vulnerable French village and managed to land the Lancaster, but it immediately exploded, killing him and his two wounded crew members.

### CORPORAL SYDNEY BATES

The Royal Norfolk Regiment

Extract from the Citation for the Victoria Cross:

On 6 August 1944 near Sourdeval, France, when the enemy had penetrated deeply into the area occupied by his section, Corporal Bates seized a light machine gun and charged, moving forward through a hail of bullets. Although wounded twice, he was undaunted and continued firing until the enemy started to withdraw before him. At this moment he was wounded for a third time, mortally. He still went on firing, however, until his strength failed him, but by this time the enemy had withdrawn and the situation had been restored. He died two days later.

**CAPTAIN DAVID JAMIESON**

The Royal Norfolk Regiment

Extract from the Citation for the Victoria Cross:

On 7–8 August 1944 south of Grimbosq, Normandy, France, Captain Jamieson was in command of a company which established a bridgehead over the River Orne. The enemy made seven counter-attacks on the company's position, but throughout 36 hours of bitter and close fighting Captain Jamieson showed superb qualities of leadership and great personal bravery. There were times when the situation appeared hopeless but on each occasion it was restored by his coolness and determination. He personally was largely responsible for holding the bridgehead over the river and although wounded twice he refused to be evacuated until the enemy had withdrawn defeated.

**LIEUTENANT TASKER WATKINS**

The Welch Regiment

Extract from the Citation for the Victoria Cross:

On 16 August 1944 at Barfour, Normandy, France, Lieutenant Watkins' company came under murderous machine-gun fire while advancing through corn fields set with booby traps. The only officer left, Lieutenant Watkins led a bayonet charge with his 30 remaining men against 50 enemy infantry, practically wiping them out. Finally, at dusk, separated from the rest of the battalion, he ordered his men to scatter and, after he had personally charged and silenced an enemy machine-gun post, he brought them back to safety. His superb leadership not only saved his men, but decisively influenced the course of the battle.

**MAJOR DAVID CURRIE**

29th Canadian Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment (The South Alberta Regiment)

Extract from the Citation for the Victoria Cross:

During the period 18–20 August 1944 at the Battle of Falaise, Normandy, France, Major Currie was in command of a small mixed force of tanks, self-propelled anti-tank guns and infantry which had been ordered to cut one of the main escape routes. Having attacked the village of Saint-Lambert-sur-Dives and consolidated a position halfway inside it, for 36 hours he repulsed repeated enemy attacks. Despite heavy casualties, Major Currie never considered the possibility of failure and in the final assault seven enemy tanks, 12 88-mm guns and 40 vehicles were destroyed, 300 Germans were killed, 500 wounded and 1100 captured. The remnants of two German armies were thus denied this escape route.



# The battlefield today

CWGC



Banneville-la-Campagne War Cemetery

Since 1945, both Caen and Falaise have increased in size, taking over small hamlets in the region with the construction of buildings, highways and railways. Although the battlefield has altered and much of the city has been rebuilt, the basic geography of Caen remains as it was in 1944. The rolling slopes of the Bourguébus Ridge to the south dominate the landscape and, in the hamlets of the Bourguébus Ridge and the Falaise Plain, evidence of battle can still be seen. Also, there are several Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemeteries that commemorate the Commonwealth forces who died in the region. Two are the Banneville-la-Campagne War Cemetery, which contains 2170 burials, and Bretteville-sur-Laize Canadian War Cemetery, which contains 2957 burials.

## KEY FACTS

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission maintains over 1,147,192 war graves (which does not include the graves of some 40,000 foreign nationals) at 23,203 burial sites in 149 countries around the world. It also commemorates a further 759,597 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%.

# Formations assigned to the Final Battle for Normandy

Space limitations mean that we cannot list all the units and formations involved in the operations mentioned in this booklet.

## Army

21st Army Group  
Second British Army  
First Canadian Army

## Corps

I (British) Corps  
II Canadian Corps  
VIII (British) Corps  
XII (British) Corps  
XXX (British) Corps

## Divisions

### *Armoured*

Guards Armoured Division  
7th Armoured Division  
11th Armoured Division  
79th Armoured Division  
4th Canadian Armoured Division  
1st Polish Armoured Division

### *Infantry*

3rd British Infantry Division  
6th Airborne Division  
15th (Scottish) Infantry Division  
43rd (Wessex) Infantry Division  
49th (West Riding) Infantry Division  
50th (Northumbrian) Infantry Division  
51st (Highland) Infantry Division  
53rd (Welsh) Infantry Division  
59th (Staffordshire) Infantry Division  
2nd Canadian Division  
3rd Canadian Division

## Brigades

### *Armoured and Tank*

4th Armoured Brigade  
5th Guards Armoured Brigade  
6th Guards Tank Brigade  
8th Armoured Brigade  
22nd Armoured Brigade  
27th Armoured Brigade  
29th Armoured Brigade  
30th Armoured Brigade  
31st Tank Brigade  
33rd Armoured Brigade  
34th Tank Brigade  
2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade  
4th Canadian Armoured Brigade  
10th Polish Armoured Brigade

## Air Forces

Bomber Command (RAF)  
Air Defence of Great Britain (previously and later known as Fighter Command) (RAF)  
Second Tactical Air Force (RAF)  
8th United States Army Air Force (USAAF)  
9th United States Army Air Force (USAAF)

Hill 112 Association



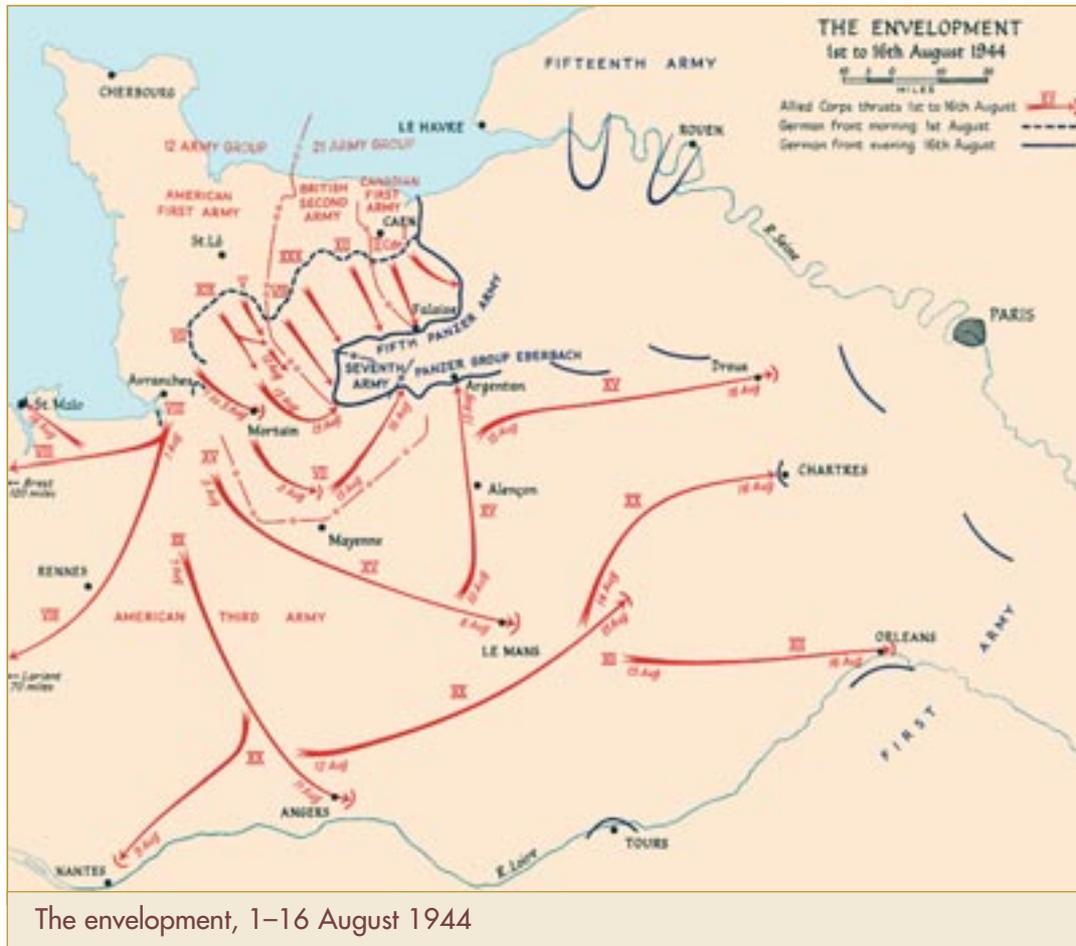
60th anniversary of the Final Battle for Normandy

# 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 reconnaissance 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 regiment.
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.
Spearheads	The leading forces in a military attack.
Anti-tank gun screen	Line of guns organised to destroy or damage oncoming tanks.
Operation Charnwood	The British offensive between 7 and 9 July 1944 that captured the northern half of Caen.
Operation Atlantic	An Allied offensive by the II Canadian Corps that formed an adjunct to the British Operation Goodwood offensive of 18–20 July 1944.
Operation Epsom	The British offensive between 25 and 30 June 1944 to try and capture Caen.
Flank	The side of a military formation.
Outflank	To go around the side of a military formation.
Creeping barrage	A barrage in which the fire of all units participating remains in the same relative position throughout and which advances in steps of one line at a time.
Bridgehead	An area of ground held or to be gained on the enemy's side of an obstacle.



### Acknowledgements

Author: Dr Stephen A Hart MA, Department of War Studies, Royal Military Academy Sandhurst  
 Commonwealth War Graves Commission  
 Confederation of British Service and Ex-Service Organisations (COBSEO)  
 Department for Education and Skills  
 Imperial War Museum  
 National Archives  
 Normandy Veterans Association  
 Royal British Legion  
 Veterans Agency

### Photography and maps

Photography reproduced with the permission of the Imperial War Museum, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and the Ministry of Defence Air Historical Branch (Royal Air Force).  
 Maps in the text taken from the Official History Series: Victory in the West, Volume 2, The Defeat of Germany, Major L F Ellis (HMSO 1968).

© Crown copyright 2005.  
 Designed and produced by COI, xxx 2005.

'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 fifth.

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

