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The 1st Polish Armoured Division in Normandy

Major-General Stanislaw Maczek

Editor's note: The 1st Polish Armoured Division fought side-by-side with the Canadians during the Normandy Campaign. The Division was formed in England in early 1942 mainly from Poles who had fled the German occupation of their country in 1939. On 30 July 1944 the Division arrived in Normandy where it was placed under the command of Lieutenant-General Guy Simonds' 2nd Canadian Corps. Its first introduction to battle came on 7 August during the battles south of Caen. The report reproduced below constitutes the afteraction report of the 1st Polish Armoured Division for its operations in Normandy. This report forms the basis of many accounts of the Division and deserves to be read in its original, unedited form.

13 August 1944,
Operational Report
Commanding Officer,
1st Polish Armoured Division

Fighting During the Period from 7-12 August 1944

MAP REF: 1:50,000 Caen Falaise
Sheets 7F/2 and 7F/6.

Organization of Fighting

On 7 August 1944 at 0500 hours 1st Polish Armoured Division became attached to and at the disposal of 2nd Canadian Corps (Commanding Officer Lieutenant-General Simonds) which included 2nd and 3rd Canadian Infantry Divisions, 4th Cdn Armd Div, and 51st Highland Division.

Task of 2 Cdn Corps

To attack in the general direction of Falaise and to break open the hinge S [south] of Caen, then to exploit the use of 4 Cdn Armd Div on Falaise and 1 Pol Armd Div on the crossings of the River Dives in a South-Easterly direction.

Task of 1 Polish Armd Div

To by-pass the 51 (H) Div. To attack and seize the area of Hills 170 and 159, N [north] of Falaise and from there to carry out recce [reconnaissance] patrols in the arc made by the Falaise - Argentan (included) and the Mont-Boint (1446) - Condesur-Ifs (1952) rds (excluded).

Intention

Task to be executed in two phases:

First Phase: The Armd Bde [Brigade] to seize first objective (area S of Estrée la Campagne and the Hill 140 (1347)). Rifle Bde was to form a pivot in the area of Cauvicourt.

Second Phase: Rifle Bde was to change over with the Armd Bde, which was to attack the second objective (area of Hills 170 & 159 N of Falaise).

Total operation to be covered by reinforced 10 Mounted Rifle Regt from the E [east] in order to maintain closest contact with 4 Cdn Armd Div in the W [west].

Method

10 Mounted Rifle Regt less one sqn, reinforced by one A [Anti] Tk [Tank] Bty [Battery] SP 17-pdr received the task to reconnoitre and cover the left flank of Div, according to special order, after leading regts of Armd Bde had crossed the rd Bretteville-le Rabet – St. Sylvain. Further, execution of marching orders as Attack Order No.1.

Development of Military Operations

Night march on 7/8 August 1944 and activity on 8 August 1944

The march was executed by two columns from former positions:

- 10 Armd Cavalry Bde (from area Buchot)
- 3 Rifle Bde (from area Magny)
- Arty (from area Meuvaines)
- Div Tps and Div HQ (from area Sommervieu)

Leading Bde - 10 Armd Cavalry Bde in complete formation:

- 1 Mech Arty Regt.
- One A Tk Bty
- One AA Bty, less two troops
- 8 Rifle Bn from 3 Rifle Bde

Major-General Stanislaw Maczek, commander of 1st Polish Armoured Division, and his staff talking to war correspondents at Amblie, Normandy, 7 August 1944. From left to right: L.S.B. Shapiro, North American Newspaper Alliance; Ralph Allen, *Globe & Mail*; and J.A.M. Cook, *Winnipeg Free Press*; Captain T.A. Wysocki, Colonel K. Dworak and Maczek.



10 Light Med Coy

10 Sap Coy

Att to Bde, 22 Brit Dragoons, equipped with Anti-mine tanks (Crab-type).

On 7 Aug 44, at 1800 hours the columns were formed; at 0230 hours the fwd [forward] elements of the bde reached the start line. The bde, marching on the Red axis was followed by the Adv Div HQ and 3 Rifle Bde, less 8 Rifle Bn [Battalion], reinf by: 2 Mech [Mechanized] Arty [Artillery] Regt [Regiment]; two A Tk Btys; one AA [Anti-Aircraft] Bty 11 Coy Engrs [Engineers] (less one platoon); 11 Medical Coy.

Div HQ marched as fourth echelon and Quartermaster Group as fifth echelon.

By 0630 hours the leading elements of 10 Armd Cav Bde reached the designated area – the bridges S of Caen. 3 Rifle Bde reached the bridges between 1300 and 1400 hours, the Div HQ between 1400 and 1500 hours.

The route was traced and controlled by Polish and British Traffic Control.

During the march tps [troops] encountered several difficulties, namely: poor roads for vehs [vehicles], clouds of dust which rendered forward cars invisible to the drivers, in a drive without lights, rds so narrow that only jeeps and motorcycles could overtake.

Generally speaking the march was efficiently executed – in spite of an exceptional concentration of troops in this area.

The distance covered in the march was nearly 30 kilometres. The 10 Armd Cav Bde reaches Bras by 0800 hours. After breakfast, the echelons A 1 and A 2 were left in Bras and the Bde regrouped for the march to the forming up place.

Here the 22 Brit Dragoons joined the bde. The attack was to be preceded by the bombardment by 21 A Gp Air Force, after which an arty barrage was to be laid on enemy positions. At 1330 hours, the Air Force started the bombardment but, probably by mistake, instead of bombing the area of Cauvicourt–St. Sylvain, bombed the area S of Caen, just as the Div HQ, as fourth echelon arrived at its appointed place.

1st Polish Armoured Division

Divisional Command Group
Headquarters
No.4 Liaison HQ (British)
10th Mounted Rifles Regiment (reconnaissance)

10th Armoured Cavalry Brigade
1st Armoured Regiment
2nd Armoured Regiment
24th Lancer Regiment
10th Dragoon Regiment (motor battalion)

3rd Rifle Brigade
Podhole Rifle Battalion, 1st (Highland) Battalion
8th Rifle Battalion
9th Rifle Battalion

Divisional Artillery
1st Motorized Artillery Regiment
2nd Motorized Artillery Regiment
1st Anti-Tank Regiment
1 Anti-Aircraft Regiment

Divisional Engineers
10th Engineer Company
11th Engineer Company
1st Bridging Platoon
1st Field Park Company

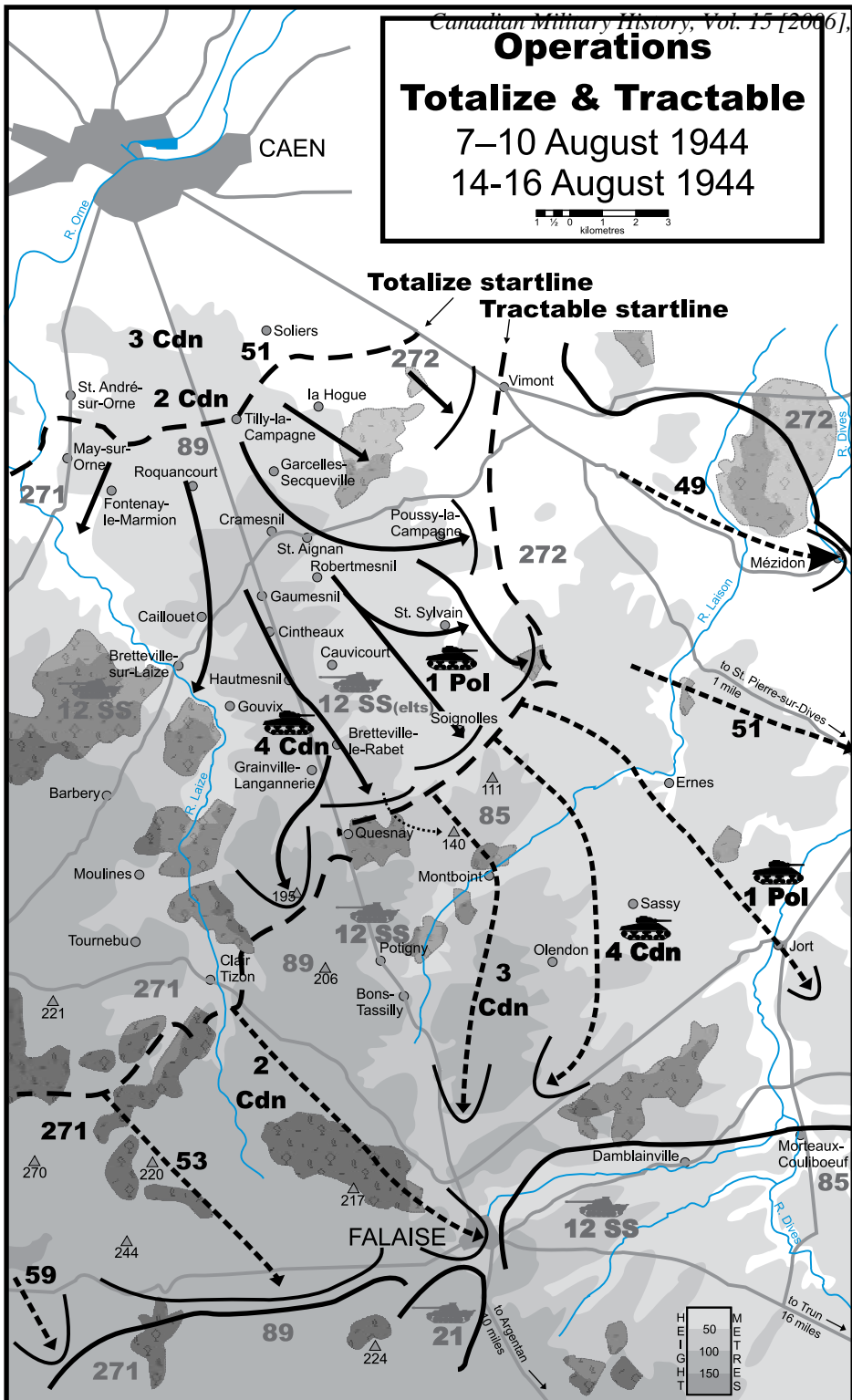
1st Signals Battalion

Supply and Transport Troops

Medical Troops

As a result of this bombardment, the Cdn AGRA suffered most, losing a great number of men and much eqpt, but our AA Arty also lost 44 men (killed and wounded). The situation was extremely difficult as the area was packed with various munition dumps which exploded for 40 minutes after the bombing as a result of fires caused. At 1335 hours 24 Lancers and 2 Tk Regt, each reinforced by one sqn [squadron] of Dragoons, one sqn of Crabs, and one platoon of Engineers, started the attack as leading regts. At 1425 hours, 2 Tk Regt was stopped in attack by twenty German tks, probably of German Tiger type and Mk IV, operating from area 108556.

24 Lancers were under enemy arty fire. The CO 10 Armd Cavalry Bde required arty on the discovered targets.



Operations
Totalize & Tractable
 7-10 August 1944
 14-16 August 1944

Our arty, very efficiently and quickly supported 2 Tk Regt.

After all day fighting, the armd regts set out for the night bivouac.

3 Rifle Bde took over the sector and protected it for the night (the Bde was to execute a night attack, which was not realized).

The losses inflicted on the enemy by 10 Armd Cavalry Bde in this day were:

- Prisoners - 1 offr, 105 ORs
- Tanks - 1 MK IV, 5 Mk V destroyed or damaged.
- 2 - 88 mm A Tk guns destroyed.
- 1 - 75 mm gun damaged
- 4 - 20 mm guns destroyed, 3 damaged.
- 1 - 105 mm gun destroyed
- 6 - mortars (15 cm) destroyed
- 7 - Hy MG destroyed.
- 2 - Hy MG damaged.

General Remarks concerning 8 August 44

The ground was difficult for an attack by the armour, having several small woods and high hedges. In spite of fairly distant horizons, the ground was very favourable for the enemy's A Tk defence.

The enemy was not sufficiently neutralized by our own Air Force and arty, so that the bde could attack without heavy losses (unfortunately the air force passed through our own forces, destroying not only a part of the arty, but also the ammunition dumped for AGRA).

There was a constant threat to the left flank, which will be henceforth a menace to the div ops and my permanent worry.

The Crab regt was almost unemployed, since we did not find any minefields.

At 1450 hours, two Arty Regts opened fire with good results. At 1520 hours contact with 4 Cdn Armd Div was established at the co-ordinate 082558. In that time, 2 Tk Regt fell into a very difficult situation, its flank being menaced by German tks. The CO Bde, arrived with help, covering the flank with 2 Sqn, 10 Mounted Rifle Regt and with one A Tk Bty.

9 August 1944 – During the night of 8/9 August, 3 Rifle Bde prepared itself for the attack, but did not carry it out, as the enemy withdrew, and after only short fighting, reached the SE boundaries of woods Robertmesnil, taking 48 prisoners. Our losses were insignificant. At 0700 hours, 10 Armd Cavalry Bde were moved to new area (N Crammesnil) 083570. Between 0900 – 1000 hours, a conference of COs was held and the orders for a further move were given.

24 Lancers were given the task of seizing the grove 1152 – La Croise and of the wood S 1249. 1 Tk Regt plus one A Tk Bty had to take 140 (130478) Cauvicourt–Rénemesnil and cover itself by the A Tk Bty from E. 2 Tk Regt was in res behind 24 Lancers. 10 Dragoons between 2 Tk Regt and 24 Lancers had the task consolidating the ground seized by the tk regts.

Arty was to support the operations of the bde as far as the R. Laison. Engrs with the reserve regt, were at the disposal of the CO 10 Armd Cavalry Bde.

Starting hour 1100 hours.

10 Mounted Rifle Regt, which very successfully and courageously reconnoitred St. Sylvain, was released by 8 Rifle Bn, which received the order to occupy and to organize the defence of

St. Sylvain, but when it was discovered that St. Sylvain was occupied by a strong enemy force with the support of hy mortars and arty, the task of capturing it was given to the Mountain Rifle



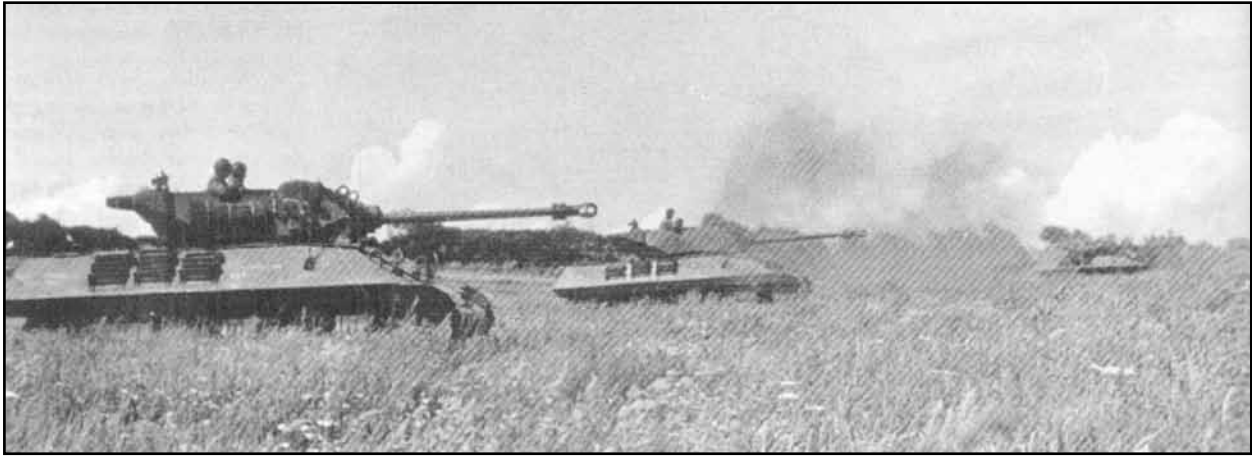
Top: Members of the 2nd Armoured Regiment waiting in the concentration area, Cintheaux, 8 August 1944.

Middle: A Sherman V of the 1st Armoured Regiment in an assembly area, August 1944.

Bottom: Anti-Aircraft troop with the forward command element of the 24th Lancer Regiment, 8 August 1944.

Photos courtesy John R. Grodzinski





M-10s of the 1st Anti-Tank Regiment firing onto German positions, August 1944.

Bn, which reinforced 8 Rifle Bn.

Between 1220 and 1255 hours, 1 Tk Regt reached the W outlets of Cauvicourt and 24 Lancers the grove 110520.

In the foreground appeared several times tks of Tiger type, numbering 10 to 15 against which the regts were fighting suffering losses.

About 1600 hours 1 Tk Regt captured Hill 84, distinguishing itself in this fighting.

24 Lancers seized the NW boundary of la Croix, 1149.

For the night, 9 Rifle Bn took over Cauvicourt from 10 Armd Cavalry Bde. At 1930 hours, the Mountain Rifle Bn started to attack St. Sylvain. The action was preceded by heavy bombardment by arty and Air Force. By 2200 hours St. Sylvain was occupied up to the area incl the church, and by 2400 hours St. Martin de Bois was also taken.

The enemy losses were:

- Prisoners – 3 officers, 77 ORs.
- Destroyed – 4 tks Mk IV, 1 Tk Mk V and 1 Tk Mk VI.
- Damaged – 1 tk Mk VI
- Destroyed – 3 75 mm guns
- Damaged – 3 75 mm guns
- Destroyed – 4 22 mm A Tk guns, 8 15cm Mortars, 2 Hy MGs.

During the day of 9 Aug, I received the order to hand over the sector to 51 (H) Div, and to move my div.

10 August 1944: After midnight, began the relief of the Mountain Rifle Bn by the units of 51 (H)

Div. The Mountain Rifle Bn moved to the region of Réennesnil, 9 Rifle Bn, which passed under the comd of C.O. 10 Armd Cavalry Bde moved to the area of Soignolles.

10 Dragoons carried out a night attack on Estrées la Campagne, receiving with 9 Rifle Bn a task to reconnoitre.

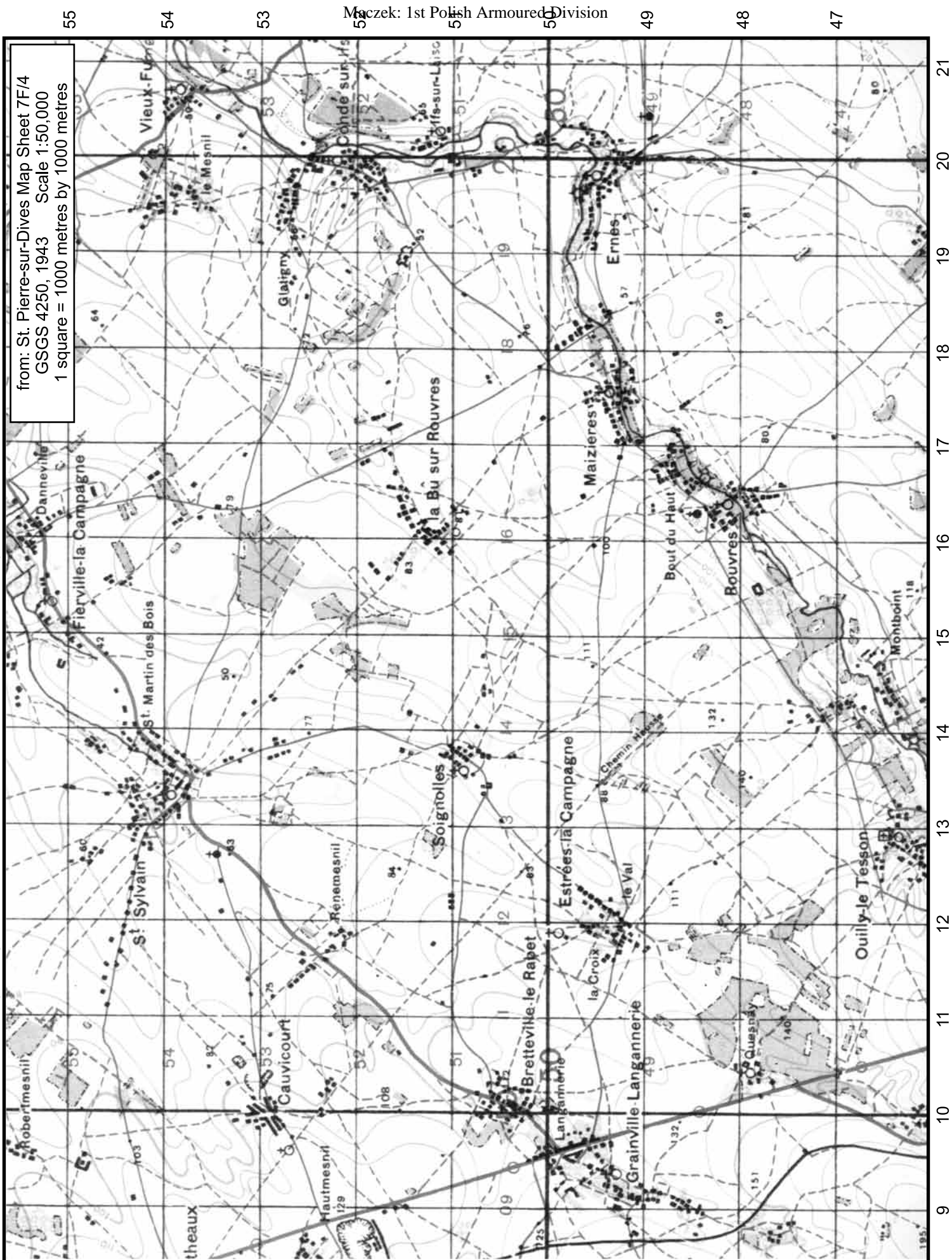
At 1055 hours the enemy launched a counter-attack from the area 140525 against 9 Rifle Bn. The counter-attack was repulsed. During this action the A Tk Bty distinguished itself. At 1530 hours the C.O., 3 Rifle Bde received the order to attack the area of hill 140111 (E and S of Estrées la Campagne) and to seize the brhead [bridgehead] on the R Liaison at Montbpoint and Rouvres. Simultaneously, 9 Rifle Bn attacked, seized and maintained the horizon E of Soignolles.

At 1520 hours, another German counter-attack developed on the spot height 83 (128500). It was repulsed with the help of AGRA fire.

At night, the situation of the leading units was E of Soignolles and Estrées la Campagne. During the day of 10 Aug, 9 Rifle Bn worked well, repulsing several attacks of the enemy and maintaining its positions. The Dragoons also did well, and had excellent support from the A Tk units.

11 August 1944: On 11 Aug 44, the div remained in its assigned area and maintained Soignolles and Estrées la Campagne.

During the day, I received orders to attack and cl up with one bn the whole wood of Quesnay. The Corps Comd, decided later that this area should be attacked by 3 Cdn Inf Div. I received instead, the task of forming a special group for operational





Above: ASP 40 mm AA (Bofors) Morris-Commerical C9/B of the 1st Anti-Aircraft Regiment, Normandy, August 1944



Photos courtesy John R. Grodzinski

Right: Officers of the 1st Motorized Artillery Regiment make a final review of plans, August 1944.

General Characteristics of 1 Polish Armd Divsion's Operations During the Period 7-12 Aug 44.

Marches to the battle:

(a) The first factor to note was the great accumulation of Allied tps operating in Normandy. From this fact resulted immense difficulty in the execution of movements and in the disposition of tps and rear units in assigned areas. There was also the menace of the enemy Air Force and arty fire. (Unfortunately, equally from the Allied Air Force).

After leaving Caen, the div moved on certain sectors cross-country. The CO Div Engrs was forced repeatedly to prepare and maintain the rds.

(b) The ops resembled the West Front fighting in the war of 1918; but the attacking forces had more liberty of action, considering the strong superiority of our Air Force and arty.

(c) The ground was not quite as shown by maps of France which have been supplied, having more woods and particularly bushes, which was very cunningly exploited by the enemy.

With his perfect camouflage, it made a great difference to us.

(d) The enemy operated with individual battle groups (Kampfgruppe) composed by inf, A Tk arty, hy Inf weapons, and a few tks of Tiger, Panther or Mk IV type. These groups held the regions suitable for A Tk defence and their strength and composition varied according to the size of these regions.

reconnoitring of the areas la Bû sur Rouvres, Ernes and Ifs-sur-Laison. This reconnaissance was to be carried out for the Corps.

During the day, the Germans launched several counter-attacks against Estrées la Campagne and Soignolles, all of which were repulsed, and the tps maintained their positions.

12 Aug 44: (until 1200 hours). At night units of 1 Pol Armd Div were relieved by 3 Cdn Inf Div, in area Estrées la Campagne and Soignolles. The relief was completed at 0500 hours.

The Div passed to the res in Cramensnil la Bruyère.

3 Rifle Bde was in the woods S of Cramensnil 090555 with 1 A Tk Regt, (less two Btys) and 11 Engr Coy. 10 Armd Cav Bde in area St. Sylvain (W) Cauvicourt – Rénemesnil. Div HQ unchanged 081571. Recce Group of Major Maciejowski (10 Mounted Rifles, 1 A Tk Bty SP and one Mech Arty Bty SP) reconnoitred La Bû sur Rouvres and area N and S of this locality. Between 1100 and 1230 hours the recce group established that the enemy is occupying La Bû sur Rouvres by inf (987 Inf Regt) and supposedly also by A Tk guns on the flanks of this formation (2 88 mm guns). The group received fire from two to three German tks in a hull-down position from area 150508. Another sqn was under A Tk fire. As a result of this fire, four tks were lost (set on fire), one tk damaged on a mine. At 1200 hours the recce gp still reconnoitres.

1 Pol Armd Div fought with the following identified enemy units during the whole period 7-12 Aug; the 89 Inf Div (arrived direct from Norway five days before our engagement). In the days 8-10 Aug with 12 SS Panzer Div "Hitlerjugend", with 101 Hy Tk Bn, belonging to the 1 SS Corps (at Robertmesnil) and with the 272 Inf Div (at Bû sur Rouvres).

In the days 10 and 11 Aug, with the group "Waldmuller" (at Robertmesnil) and with 85 Inf Div (which arrived recently from Germany and on the day of 11 Aug was identified on our sector).

The enemy fought stubbornly. The SS units are fighting particularly well. Weak fighters were the inf of the 89 Inf Div, but they were successfully supported by the mortars and inf guns, as well as by single tks.

(e) All subordinate units fought well, sacrificing themselves. The losses in proportion to the

enemy strength and the progress made (10 kilometres of heavy struggle) are not important.

Captured Localities: Cramesnil-La Bruyère (8 Aug); Cauvicourt (9 Aug); Robertmesnil (9 Aug); St. Sylvain (10 Aug); St Martin de Bois (9 Aug); Soignolles (10 Aug); Estrées la Campagne (10 Aug).

On 11 Aug, all objectives have been maintained. On 12 Aug a special group reconnoitred La Bû sur Rouvres.

(f) Losses

By 1200 hours 12 Aug 44, the following losses were recorded:

121 killed (incl 11 offr)

499 wounded (incl 57 offr)

36 missing (incl 5 offr)

Total 656

Soldiers from the 1st Polish Armoured Division talk with a French civilian walking away with what she could salvage from her house in Normandy, August 1944.





Photo courtesy John R. Grodzinski

Cromwell tanks of the 10th Mounted Rifles, the divisional reconnaissance regiment waiting to advance.

In proportion to the strength of the div, the losses were not too heavy, but the specialists, chiefly tk crews, lost are difficult to replace.

(g) Losses of Equipment

The losses in armour (mostly from direct hits or set on fire): total number 66. They have been replaced with the exception of ten tks destroyed. There are also destroyed 5 A Tk guns SP (4 - 3-inch and 1 - 17-pdr); 5 6-pdr A Tk guns; 1 25-pdr gun SP and 1 25-pdr gun tractor drawn.

(h) The Booty

Up to 12 Aug 44 at 1200 hours, the number of prisoners taken and recorded in Div HQ was: 4 offr and 175 ORs. Apart from these nearly 250 prisoners were directed straight to the British posts. A total of 429 prisoners. Among the recorded POW were 1 offr and 9 ORs (incl 7 Poles), 85 Inf Div; 67 ORs (incl 4 Poles), 89 Inf Div; 15 prisoners (incl 3 Poles), 272 Inf Div; 3 prisoners, 12 SS Panzer Div; 3 offr (among

whom was Major Von Fischbach, OC 1193 Bty of Coastal Arty, now 2 i/c of the group), Group Waldmuller.

Equipment: destroyed or put out of action:

- 5 - tks Mk IV
- 6 - tks Mk V
- 2 - tks Mk VI
- 2 - 88 mm guns
- 7 - 75 mm guns
- 1 - 105 mm gun
- 14 - 15 cm mortars
- 7 - MGs
- 4 - 22 mm A Tk guns.

(i) I have always maintained that the morale of the soldiers belonging to 1 Pol Armd Div is good, but now, after this first period of fighting, I must stress that the morale of the units, as well as other services, is even better than very good.

(j) Description of Some Actions

1 Tk Regt – distinguished itself in the battle for Rénemesnil on 9 Aug. About 1200 hours the Regt received a heavy arty and mortar fire in the neighbourhood of the church. In the area of Hill 84 (S Rénemesnil) Tigers appeared, with the support of very well working arty. The regt, in an attack, took Hill 84, but on the S slope was stopped by very fierce A Tk defence. At 1300 hours CO Regt decided to attack Hill 111 (along the axis 84 Chemin Hausse). The second sqn captured the hill. The enemy put up a very heavy fire of mortars, arty, and A Tk guns. In this op the regt suffered quite heavy losses, namely: 3 officers killed (incl the 2 i/c) and 10 ORs; 4 officers wounded and 11 ORs; 1 officer missing and 7 ORs.

During the action on Hill 111 the regt freed from the Germans about 100 Cdn soldiers, who had been without food and ammunition for two days. The captured prisoners confessed that the attack demoralized the enemy infantry garrison.

9 Rifle Bn – were exposed in Soignolles to German fire and counter-attacks. They kept their ground in spite of several enemy counter-attacks and notwithstanding losses of 20 killed and nearly 120 wounded, showed a very high morale.

10 Dragoons – held Estrées la Campagne (SE outlets) during 11 Aug under a heavy fire of coupled mortars. In spite of losses and over-fatigue morale of this regt was excellent, which I could personally establish.

The A Tk Regt – all battalions competed with each other in stoutness and bravery as well as in good firing. The relatively high amount of destroyed or damaged enemy equipment is to be attributed chiefly to their good action.

10 Mounted Rifle Regt – worked all the time with sacrifice and persistence, demoralizing the enemy. According to the statements of prisoners, as a result of this regt's action the Germans in La Bû sur Rouvres suffered losses necessitating their release by tanks from Ernes.

Div HQ, with supply tanks and workshops, fell into the range of bomber Air Force, probably American, S of Caen on 8 Aug, which by mistake bombed this area. In spite of the large accumulation of arty, Air Force and infantry munitions deposited in the area designated for us, and the explosions which lasted 40 minutes, and in spite of AA Arty losses, all endured the fire very praiseworthy and no missing were reported.

The Div passed through their baptism of battle very well and bravely, and one feels one can rely on these soldiers.

General Remarks:

(1) The op was not executed according to plan of the Corps Comd, as the 51 (H) Div did not capture on the first day all their objectives. In consequence, 1 Pol Armd Div could not by-pass 51 (H) Div and make an advance according to plan just after the air bombardment of the hill S Estrées la Campagne 140, but was forced to help 51 (H) Div in capturing their objectives. The mistakes of our own Bomber Air Force were the reason.

(2) The enemy gained time to recover, not having been sufficiently neutralized by the arty and Air Force.

(3) 1 Pol Armd Div was obliged to execute several short attacks in succession, typical for infantry ops. It had not the chance to take advantage of an infantry action, which is the proper work of an armoured div.

(4) 1 Pol Armd Div fell into the fire of enemy tanks of Tiger type, and into A Tk fire before reaching so called "Bomblines", where it was brought by the British Traffic Control, and where it had not the right of decision.

The op started, however, without any friction, thanks to valiant action by 2 A Tk Regt and 24 Lancers, which immediately deployed, inflicting losses on the enemy and forcing him to retreat. They themselves, however, suffered likewise fairly considerable losses, especially in officers and heavy losses in equipment.

* * * * *

Fighting During the Period from 12-22 August 1944.

The Closing of the Trun Pocket.

Hill 259 Hordouseaux (3333)

Hill 240 Ecorches (4258)

Hill 252 and 262 Coudehard (4455) (so called Maczuga – the Mace)

Chambois (4051-4152).

(a) Relief (12 Aug)

(b) Regrouping E of R Laise (14 Aug) and night fighting for Aisy and Potigny (night of 14-15 Aug)

(c) Race for the crossings, their capture and the occupation of brheads on the R Dives at Jort and LHomme Couliboef (15, 16 Aug)

(d) Assault from brheads against Trun (16 Aug)

(e) Ops for closing of the Trun pocket (night of 16/17 Aug)

(f) Diversion on Les Champeaux (18 Aug)

(g) Capture of Chambois and the Mace (Maczuga). The estab of contact with Americans at Chambois and with 4 Cdn Armd Div in the area of Ecorches.

(h) Battle of the Mace (Maczuga) with penetrating German Armd Corps (18 – 22 Aug).

1. Task of 1 Pol Armd Div

The Div got the task of regrouping itself for the ops on the crossing of the R Dives.

To attack and capture the crossings on the R Dives at Jort.

To org the brheads on the R Dives.

To occupy the hills 159 and 259.

To attack and seize Trun.

General Characteristics of the Fighting

1. The Enemy

(a) The enemy is surprised and misled by the recent ops,

(b) He finds himself in a pocket, which must be closed,

(c) The strength of the enemy is estimated to include several of the higher formations, as much as 50% of armoured units.

(d) The enemy will fight desperately and valiantly in an attempt to break out of the trap (particularly the SS and Panzer units).

The decisive Factors of the success of the op were:

(a) The speed of capturing the crossings on the R Dives.

(b) The strength of the two pincers which should close the breach

(c) The equality of speed of the Polish div and their neighbors

(d) The superiority in arty and Air Force

(e) The dry weather (rds)

2. Own Forces

The losses (656 killed, wounded and missing, as given in the battle-report No.1) have not influenced the op ability of the div to such a degree that the task could not be fulfilled.

The spirit of the tps was excellent, the stubbornness even higher than in the first phase of the fighting. The supplement of men were incorporated and the eqpt was replenished (except 10 Shermans for the regts of 10 Armd Cav Bde and 2 Cromwells for 10 Mounted Rifle Regt).

The fatigue caused by the fighting was great, but was forgotten in the pride at the results achieved. The relief as well as the regrouping E of the R Laise, was accompanied efficiently and in proper time.

An unexpected mishap, however, was the second bombardment by our own Air Force on the afternoon of 14 Aug, which resulted in 204 cas, namely: 1 offr, 47 ORs killed, 103 ORs wounded and 53 ORs missing.

The rigidity of the control of the bombing ops (from London) made it, as a result, impossible to stop it when once started. It lasted two hours. The yellow smoke was of no use, because of the clouds caused by the first released bombs.

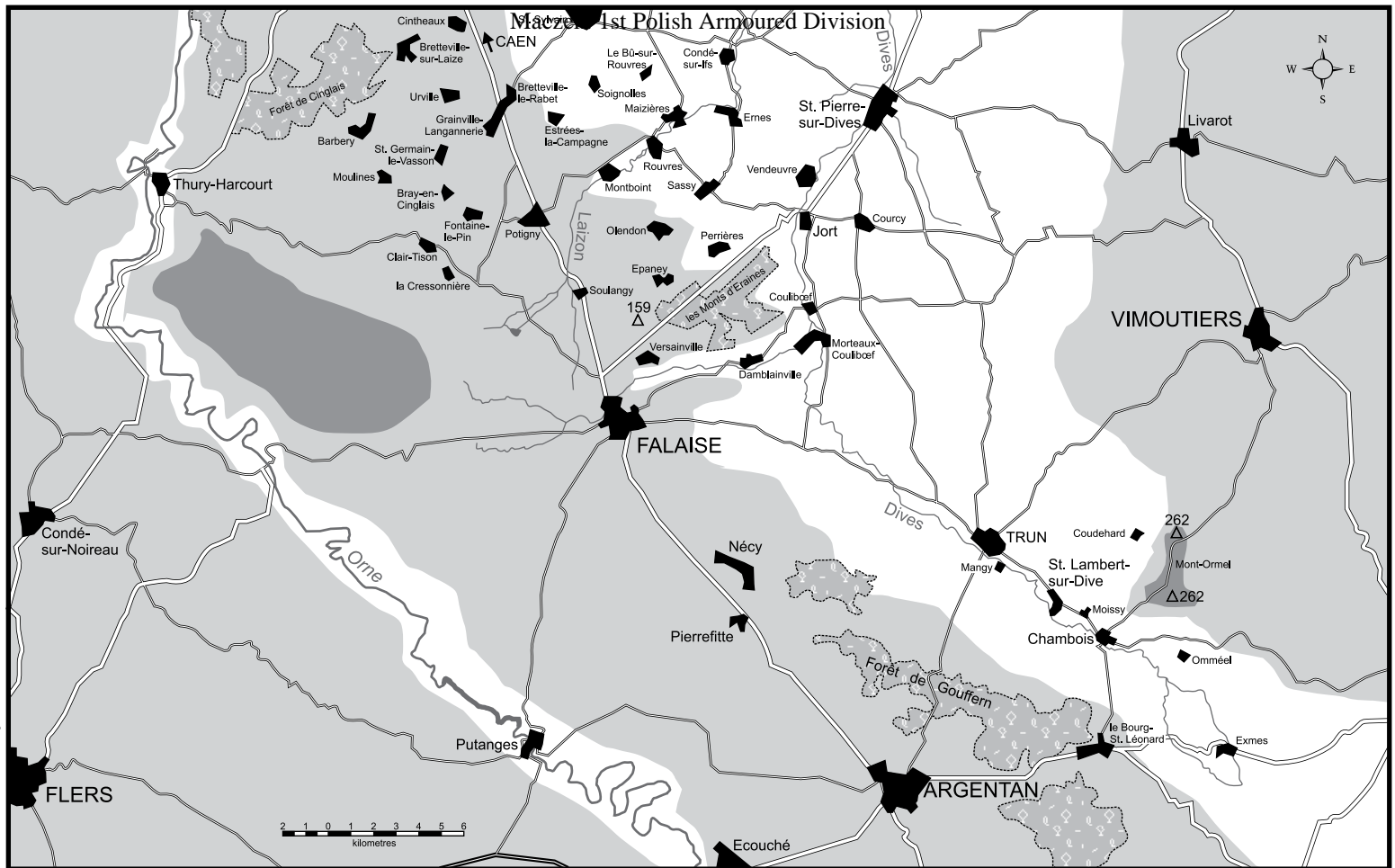
3. The Ground

Features and cover.

Between the R Laise and R Dives – flat and cut up with many small plantations and bushes. They made natural camouflage for the enemy. The armour could be moved only very carefully and hence very slowly.

To the E of the R Dives, more or less, on the vertical co-ordinate 30, and in the corridor of Trun between the woods of de Gouffern (6 kilometres S of Trun) and the wooded expanse to the E of the river, the ground rises, passing to outstanding hills with a difference of altitude running to 100 meters in 3 kilometres.

This ground was rather more difficult for tk ops than the previous area, but not impossible, particularly in dry and good weather.



The ground lying farther to the W was more wooded and hilly, and not suitable at all for manoeuvring by larger groups of armour.

The obstacle which it was necessary to master was the R Dives with important crossings in: St. Pierre sur Dives (for 51 (H) Div), Jort (for 1 Pol Armd Div), Morteaux-Couliboef (for 4 Cdn Armd Div); besides the other obstacles to the movement of tks, was the N basin of the R. Dives with a SW direction, namely, Radon Du Ravin Des Hautes; Radon Rau; R de Neauphie and R de Fontbec.

The following hills comprised the barrier closing the corridor of Trun; 159 (289365); 259 (332346); the area of hills 137, Hordoseaux and the region of Ecorches; the hills 250, 240, 252, 262 the area Coudehard (the pommel of the Mace "Maczuga"); 262 region of Mont Ormel (the stock of the Mace "Maczuga").

4. Communications

(a) **Enemy** – he would try to break through at all costs under cover of his armour or if no other possibility, with his armour only.

(b) **Task** – to occupy speedily and hold, the crossings on the R Dives (for 1 Pol Armd Div in Jort).

To capture the hills 159 and 259 as a basis for the action to the S, especially on Trun and Chambois.

To attack Trun, take and hold it.

To block the enemy's retreat from Trun by capturing and holding the area of hills Horoseaux 258259 and Ecorche 240 and from Chambois, by capturing and holding the area of hills Coudehard 262, 252 and the hill Mont Ormel 262.

To block the E rd from Chambois (the task of the other Army).

5. The General Course of Ops

14 August 1944: The regrouping on the E from the R Laise was carried out by 14 Aug, whilst 10 Dragoons reconnoitred the locality and the woods of Quesnay, 8 Rifle Bn Aisy and Potigny, and 9 Rifle Bn Fontaine le Pin.

In the night of 14/15 Aug, 9 Rifle Bn, by 2400 hours, had taken Fontaine le Pin and by 0700

hours of 15 Aug, had capture the Hill 206, taking there 26 prisoners of 85 Inf Div.

8 Rifle Bn, by 0700 hours, had taken Aisy and by 0900 hours had captured Potigny, taking also prisoners.

Simultaneously with the ops of these bns, 24 Lancers shot up and captured three tks, 2 Panthers and 1 Mk IV. Ten prisoners from 12 SS Panzer Div taken.

15 August 1944 – The race for the crossings on the R Dives and the capture of the crossings in Jort.

The div started at 1100 hours in two columns, getting permission to pass over the highway Caen–Falaise at two points. Right column on Rouvres–Sassy–Jort; and the left column on Bout de Haut–Vendeuvre–Morières.

The whole was preceded by 10 Mounted Rifles, which reconnoitred the crossings and after their daring capture, went on to Courcy.

The river was reached and the crossings taken at night. The enemy defended them furiously in Jort, especially in the area of the rlwy station and in a small wood W of the station.

10 Mounted Rifles, with A Tk bty SP, destroyed in this action two tks Mk V and captured one tk Mk V (co-ordinates 222452 and 219449). Moreover, they destroyed four A Tk guns including two 88 mm (218469, 219449 and 234451). They also put out of action a six gun tp, taking 5 guns on the position (one was damaged). Prisoners numbering 120 were taken from the 272 and 85 Inf Divs.

At Vendeuvre the crossing had been captured by 1745 hours.

3 Rifle Bde was ordered to occupy the bridgeheads on the R Dives.

10 Mounted Rifle Regt plus one squadron 10 Dragoons plus one A Tk bty SP have the task of reconnoitring on Courcy–Louvagny. The whole arty plus one Med Regt RA to support the formation at the brhead. The Engrs are building a bridge at Jort, clring minefields, repairing rds and organizing crossing points.

During the night, 3 Rifle Bde occupied and prepared the brheads on the R Dives.

16 August 1944 – The attack from bridgeheads to the south.

The attack was carried out by 10 Armd Cav Bde less one tk regt, reinf by 8 Rifle Bn from Vendeuvre. At that time 3 Rifle Bde less 8 Rifle Bn held the brheads in Jort (1 Mountain Rifle Bn) and Morières (9 Rifle Bn) reinforced by 1 Tk Regt, which reconnoitred in the direction of the woods of Courcy.

The attack was carried out in two columns: Right column, 24 Lancers plus 10 Dragoons plus one A Tk Bty (comd Major Kanski and after he was wounded Major Zgorzelski) on the way 24-39 L'Homme Coulibeouf–Barou. Left Column, 2 Tk Regt plus 8 Rifle Bn plus one A Tk Bty on Barou.

The whole Polish Arty SP the attack from the area of Sassy and the Brit arty from the area N of Rouvres.

At 2100 hours Barou was captured and the rd from Morteaux-Coulibeouf–Barou cut. Morteaux was still in enemy hands, as the Cdn Div did not manage to take the crossing. Prisoners taken were from 1053 and 1054 Grenadier Regts.

17 August 1944 – The Op of closing the Trun Gap.

10 Mounted Rifle Regt plus one A Tk Bty was withdrawn for the night 16/17 Aug to reserve and got for 17 Aug the task of reconnoitring in direction of Trun. By 0930 hours this regt stated that the enemy columns were moving to the E on the highway Crocy – Trun.

10 Armd Cav Bde, which as ordered to attack the hills 159 and 259, attacked from Barou, captured Norry-en-Auge, and took 2 offr and 22 ORs prisoner, of 21 Panzer Div.

By 1700 hours the group of Lt.Col. Koszutski (2 Tk Regt, 8 Rifle Bn and 1 A Tk Bty) had taken the Hill 259 (381346) and the group of Major Zgorzelksi (24 Lancers and 10 Dragoons) the hill 310360.

More prisoners were taken, numbering 1 offr and 84 ORs, from 12 SS Panzer Div, 85 Inf Div and 271 Inf Div.



LAC PA 135954

German soldiers being marched into captivity, 16 August 1944.

At 1750 hours the Corps Comd, arrived with the order of the Army Group Comd to take Chambois that same night. At that time also Trun was to be taken by 4 Cdn Armd Div.

Although the tps were extremely exhausted, as 1 Pol Armd Div had been fighting as a frontal wedge strictly speaking without co-operation of the right and left forces and bearing the whole burden of what proved later to be a huge weight, the Div Comd assigned to Lt.-Col. Koszutski's group the task of an immediate stroke at Chambois, which should have started by 1930 hours. A further plan of Div Comd was to block the exits from Chambois by capturing and holding the Hills 262, 252, and 262, Mont Ormel ("Maczuga").

18 August 1944 – The Diversion of the Group Comd (Lt.-Col Koszutski).

Unfortunately the intention of the Div Comd failed. It was thwarted by the Group Comd of 2 Tk Regt. He did not move, but at 0200 hours, and moreover in the wrong direction, i.e. not in direction Chambois SE, but in direction les Champeaux, straight to the E, engaging himself in a combat with enemy inf and A Tk weapons in a country very difficult for tks.

In the morning Div Comd got the alarming report of the threat that 2 Tk Regt and 8 Rifle Bn may be destroyed. He ordered the comd of 10 Armd Cav Bde to help the group, which he did, detailing 1 Mountain Rifle Bn.

The Div Comd directed a reconnaissance (10 Mounted Rifle Regt plus two A Tk Btys) on Chambois, which was reached by 1650 hours (one kilometre S of Chambois – the first sqn

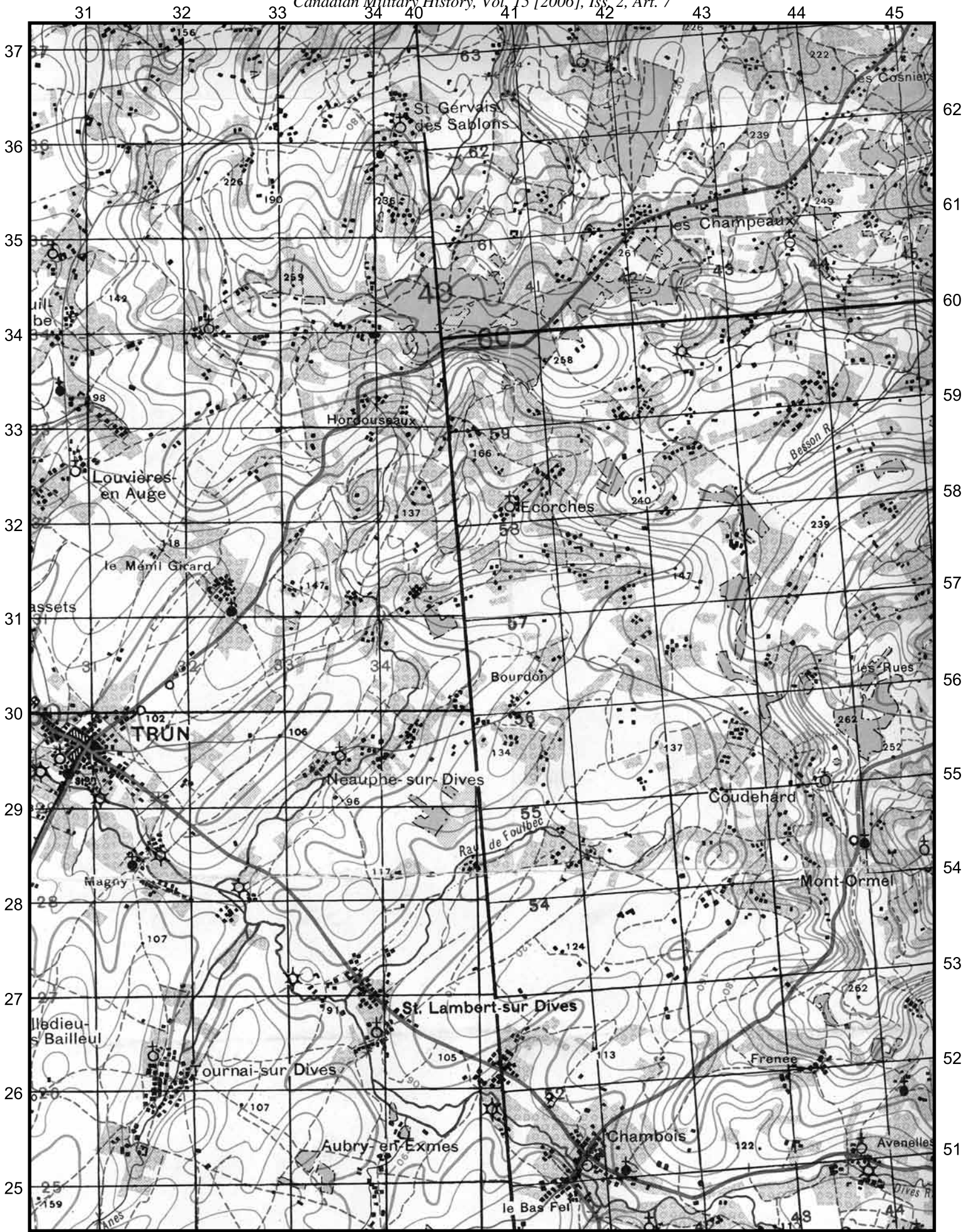
of 10 Mtd Rifle Regt) but the regt was forced to withdraw 1 kilometre further S in view of the bombardment by our own Air Force.

Leading elements of 10 Armd Cav Bde (10 Dragoons plus 24 Lancers) reached the area 333326 at 2030 hours and were engaged in hy fighting with enemy inf and A Tk weapons. Meanwhile, the 1 Mounted Rifle Bn have not found 2 Tk Regt in the area of Les Champeaux. The latter at this time was in the area of 428586, and asserted that they could not move farther because of shortage of supplies (part of their transport with amn and petrol was destroyed by our own Air Force).

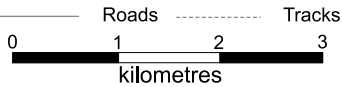
Owing to incorrect reports, the supplies which had been sent by the QM to the area of Bourdon (allegedly occupied by 2 Tk Regt) could not reach them, as the area was held by the enemy and 2 Tk Regt occupied it only temporarily.

In these extremely hard conditions began the crisis of the battle, which lasted until midday of 21 Aug. It was caused by:

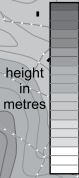
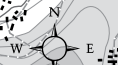
- (a) Desperate efforts of German forces, which found themselves in the gap Trun–Chambois–Coudehard–Ecorches to break through at all costs.
- (b) Co-operation of the German forces attacking from the NE with the aim of enabling the escape of German tps trapped in the gap.
- (c) Relatively small force – 1 Pol Armd Div – for the closing of the gap, as the neighbouring forces did not co-operate sufficiently.



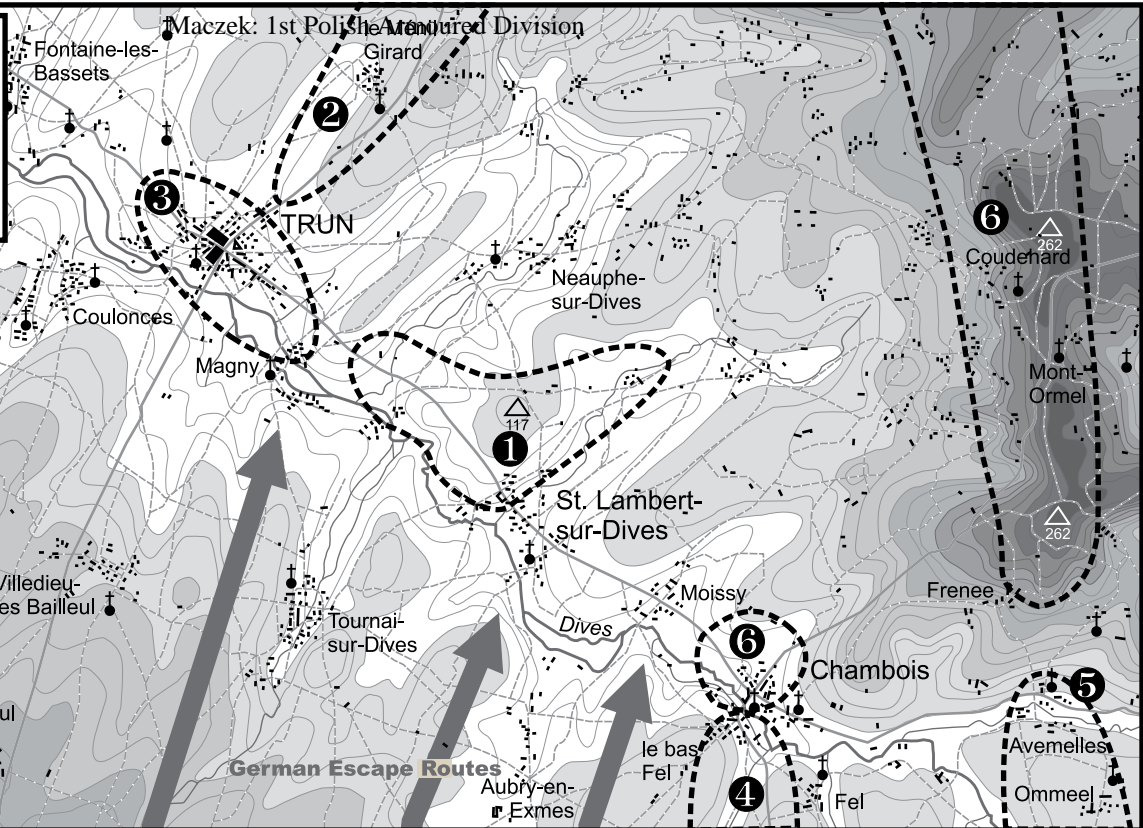
Closing the Gap 19–21 August 1944



— Roads - - - Tracks



- ① SAR/Argylls Battlegroup
- ② 4th Cdn Armd Bde
- ③ 10th Cdn Inf Bde
- ④ US 90th Inf Div
- ⑤ French 2nd Div
- ⑥ Polish Armd Div



(d) Cutting off the supply echelons from the fighting units, which greatly complicated the question of supplies of amm and petrol and the evacuation of wounded.

The Capture of Chambois and Maczuga – The Fighting for Maczuga with German Forces, trying to Break Through.

In this critical situation 10 Armd Cav Bde Comd, ordered 1 Tk Regt to attack in direction of Bourdon, to enable the supply of Lt.-Col. Koszutski's group. But again this attack could not be executed as the Allied Air Force made it impossible by shelling the area. The night of 18/19 passed with the situation unclear concerning the neighbouring forces in Trun. According to information received, 4 Cdn Armd Div should have taken Trun by 0930 hours, but it was not definitely captured until 1315 hours, advancing only slightly in the direction of St. Lambert. The left neighbour, 3 Cdn Inf Div, was relieving 51 (H) Div, which op from St. Pierre-sur-Dives in direction E.

19 August 1944: The task for the day of 19 Aug was to attack and capture Chambois and "Maczuga". At 0920 hours the group of Major Zgorzelski – 10 Dragoons plus 24 Lancers attacked the Hill 137 (420555). At 1200 hours after throwing out the German inf, 24 Lancers

captured the Hill 137, taking a great number of prisoners.

10 Dragoons had consolidated on Hill 137 at 1437 hours.

24 Lancers adv on the Hill 424544 very slowly, owing to the difficult country.

By 1539 hours 1 Tk Regt reported that with all their forces, they had taken the area of Coudehard and fought heavily with Panthers, being at the same time subjected to a strong enemy arty fire.

24 Lancers continued to attack to the S (generally on Frenes) losing contact with 10 Dragoons, which, advancing, operated on Chambois.

At this time 10 Mounted Rifle Regt plus two A Tk Btys SP, which had been acting very efficiently as div recce since the morning in direction of Chambois, linked up with Major Zgorzelski's group (10 Dragoons).

By 1930 hours 10 Dragoons had captured the S outskirts of Chambois, and in heavy hand-to-hand battles in the suburbs of Chambois, captured the whole place, occupying the highway exits in the direction of Mont Ormel, and in the direction of St. Lambert-sur-Dives linking up with American inf.

The regrouping of the units for the night according to orders was not accomplished, as the group of Lt.-Col. Koszutski had not adv SE, but remained where they were.

The disposal was as follows:

The group of Lt.-Col. Koszutski (2 Tk Regt plus 8 Rifle Bn plus one A Tk Bty) – the Hill 240.

1 Tk Regt plus 1 Mountain Rifle Bn plus one A Tk Bty – the hills 262 and 252 (“Maczuga”)

24 Lancers – 1 kilometre E of 113 (4152)

10 Dragoons – Chambois

10 Mounted Rifle Regt – 1 kilometre N of Chambois

9 Rifle Bn – in march from 240 on Maczuga.

The whole burden of the battle this day, with a superior enemy, (as it was disclosed later units of the 1 and 2 SS Corps) was borne by 1 Pol Armd Div, which outstripped their neighbouring forces in a wedge 6 -7 kilometres SE.

20 August 1944: During the night of 19/20 Aug, the 10 Mounted Rifle Regt fought very courageously with the enemy, who was trying to slip out of the trap, attacked several times at night.

The battle reached its climax when the Comd of a German higher formation, Lt.-Gen. Elfeld, trying to break through under the cover of Panthers, was taken prisoner with all his staff. At this moment the gallant Comd of 10 Mounted Rifle Regt – Major Maciejowski – was killed.

During the whole day the enemy attacked the 1 and 2 Tk Regts from all sides. The attacks followed from the W from the gap where the German forces were trapped, as well as from the E, where probably the 21 Panzer Div, with their battlegroups tried to release the trapped German forces. The battle closed at a distance of 50 metres and the best proof of its fury will be evident later in the battlefield Chambois–Maczuga.

In the area of Bourdon an enemy tk group encountered the HQ of 10 Armd Cav Bde, but was completely destroyed. The Adv HQ of the Comd 10 Armd Cav Bde was moved to Hill 259.

The question of supplies for cut-off regts became a big problem, which the blocked roads and enemy roaming all over the gap made it difficult to solve.

The supply of amn and fuel by means of air transport was in preparation, but could be carried out only on the morning of 21 Aug. An equally big question was the evacuation of wounded and prisoners. There was a lack of tracked vehicles able to move over all parts of the ground.

The crisis was mastered. The units repelled the German attack and held the designated posns though no help came from 4 Cdn Armd Div, which next day only attacked from Hill 240 in the S direction, and helped in supplying our units.

Cromwells of 1st Polish Armoured Division on the move in Normandy, August 1944.



Strong attacks were launched on 24 Lancers from the direction of St. Lambert-sur-Dives and later on 10 Dragoons in the S outskirts of Chambois. It turned out that St. Lambert-sur-Dives was held by the enemy, and not by part of 4 Cdn Armd Div as was ordered.

24 Lancers co-ordinated its action with 10 Dragoons by 0815 hours and counter-attacked, thus forcing the enemy to withdraw. At this time the Americans were approaching from the SW.

The enemy renewed his attacks and the battle raged the whole day, the enemy suffering by losses in eqpt. In the evening the attack declined and Major Agorzelski's group was supplied by the Americans with fuel and amn. The wounded were conveyed by this group to the Americans.

21 August 1944: The enemy still tried to break through in different directions, but it was obvious that the crisis had passed. There were no organized actions, but only isolated efforts by separate groups.

By 1045 hours the Canadians had linked up with 2 Tk Regt, and in the afternoon a whole Cdn Bde arrived in the area of 262 Maczuga, bringing supplies for the armd regts. The crisis was over.

At 2000 hours the order for regrouping was received. It was carried out during the day of 22 Aug.

22 August 1944: On this day the div Comd got the disposal which he had planned for 1500 hours on the 19 Aug. The disposal is as follows:

The Group of the Comd 3 Rifle Bde:

Composition:

- 8 and 9 Rifle Bns.
- 2 Tk Regt.
- One A Tk Bty
- One Sqn MG.

The area – 262, 252, Coudehard

The task – the defence of area from E and W.

The Group of the Comd 10 Armd Cav Bde:

Composition:

- 1 Tk Regt

- 24 Lancers
- 1 Mountain Rifle Bn
- 10 Dragoons
- One A Tk Bty

The area – Mont Ormel, 262, Chambois

The task – Defence of the area held in the direction of E and N and linking up and holding contact with the 4 Cdn Armd Div in St Lambert sur Dives and with American tps S of Frenes.

The whole arty from the area of Bourdon to support either group.

10 Mounted Rifle Regt less one sqn plus two A Tk Btys in the area 1 kilometre N of Chambois to be a reserve of Div Comd.

One Engr Coy and one sqn of 10 Mounted Rifle Regt (tempy) to protect Adv Div HQ (Hill 159). Second Engr Coy to sweep the mines, repair the roads and organize the crossings.

In the evening 22 Aug with a commendation for the action by the Cdn Army Comd, General Crerar, arrived an order of change for the div, which on the day 23 Aug at 1700 hours passed over to the res of Army Comd.

General Characteristics of the Ops

The regrouping of 1 Pol Armd Div on the day of 13 Aug, aimed at their operational employment in harrying the deep rear of the retreating enemy.

The first condition to be fulfilled was the quick seizure of crossings over the R Dives. By excellent fighting of 10 Mounted Rifle Regt (with one A Tk Bty and one sqn of 10 Dragoons) the crossings were seized on 16 Aug at Jort and in the morning of 17 Aug S of Jort.

Through these crossings the div attacked quickly at the designated objectives – the Hills 159 and 259, and by the afternoon at 1700 hours they had already completed their task.

At 1750 hours the Div Comd received personally, from the Corps Comd an order from the Army Group Comd to attack and seize Chambois that same night. At that time also 4 Cdn Armd Div was to attack Trun.

The task of attacking Chambois was given to Lt.-Col. Koszutski's group (2 Tk Regt, 8 Rifle Bn
69

and one A Tk Bty), but unfortunately they did not reach their destinations, but went astray and engaged themselves in battle at les Champeaux.

The leading plan of the Div Comd had been to seize Chambois and to bar the E exits by capture of the Hills 262 – 252 (Maczuga) and 262 (S of Mont Ormel).

As he was not able to get this done by Lt.-Col. Koszutski's group, the Div Comd assigned the capture of Chambois to Major Zgorzelski's group (10 Dragoons, 24 Lancers) with which were joined 10 Mounted Rifle Regt. This regt reconnoitring Chambois early was there engaged in battle.

The days of 13-20 and the morning of the 21 Aug, saw hy fighting full of glorious deeds of the div against German elite tps, namely two SS corps, which tried to break through at any cost.

The greatness of the victory can be measured by a review of the battlefields at Chambois, Mont Ormel and the Hills 262 and 252, showing the triumph of the Polish arms.

The div went through several trials during this op, and came out fully victorious. The direct rewards were the prisoners and booty as follows:

Prisoners Recorded: up to 23 Aug. – 87 Offrs (incl: 1 Lt.-Gen, 4 Cols, 2 Lt.-Cols.) and 3,576 ORs. Unrecorded: handed over to the Americans without receipt when Major Zgorzelski's group was cut off from the div: - 50 offrs and 1,400 ORs, handed over by 24 Lancers and 10 Dragoons. Total: over 5,000 prisoners.

Booty: Captured and destroyed eqpt – 55 tks and armoured vehs, (incl 14 Panthers, 6 Tigers, 12 Mk IV, 5 Mk III, 2 Mk II), 2 guns SP (88 mm), 14 armoured cars, 44 guns (various types), 38 Armoured tracked vehs for tp transport, 207 Motor vehs, 152 horse-drawn vehicles.

Remarks. The captured eqpt was recorded at co-ordinates and gives the result of the last three days of the battle (18-21 Aug). The amt of capture eqpt is however much larger, but as the co-ordinates were not given in the reports of the other units they were disregarded. It can be estimated that the same amt of eqpt was capture in the period 14-18 Aug.

Own Losses

325 killed (incl 21 offr)
1002 wounded (incl 35 offr)
114 missing (incl 00 offr)

Total losses 1,441, with previous 657, total 2,097, from which: 446 killed (incl 37 offrs), 150 wounded (incl 92 offrs) and 150 missing (incl 5 offrs).

The div obtained during the op the written appreciation of Cdn Army Comd, General Crerar, and 2 Cdn Corps Comd, General Simonds.

The editors wish to thank John R. Grodzinski for his assistance with this feature.