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The 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion in France  
6 June - 6 September 1944

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Appendix "A" Map: Initial Dispersion and Subsequent Operations

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5. In the eastern sector, on the left of the Allied landings, the 3rd (British) Infantry Division was to land on the beach west of Ouistreham and capture Caen by H plus 12 hours. To protect the left flank of that force was the task of 6 Airborne Div. This entailed the previous seizing by the airborne division of the area between the Rivers Orne and Dives north of the Troarn - Sannerville - Colombelles road (see Appendix "A" to this Report), and the holding of this bridgehead until the arrival of the seaborne forces. Such was 6 Airborne Div's part in the assault phase of Operation "OVERLORD", which was given the code name "NEPTUNE".

6. 6 Airborne Div was commanded by Maj-Gen R.N. Gale, O.B.E., M.C., and included the following formations:

- 5th Parachute Brigade Group
- 6th Airlanding Brigade Group
- 1st Airlanding Reconnaissance Regiment
- 1st Special Service Brigade (under command)
- 3rd Parachute Brigade Group (including 8 and 9 Para Bns (Brit) and 1 Cdn Para Bn)

3 Para Bde was at this time commanded by Brigadier S.J.L. Hill, D.S.O., M.C., and 1 Cdn Para Bn by Lt-Col G.F.P. Bradbrooke.

7. Each of the five components of 6 Airborne Div was assigned important tasks within the divisional area. 5 Para Bde, in the role of securing a link with 3 (Brit) Div, was to seize and hold the two bridges crossing the Canal de Caen à la Mer and the Orne River (near Benouville), and to establish a bridgehead in the Ranville area. Immediately to the south, the airlanding brigade group was to come down on a landing zone west of Amfreville and to secure a firm base area between Escoville and the Orne River. The reconnaissance regiment landing in gliders east of Ranville later on D Day, was to strike southward beyond the divisional boundary to Cagny and thus establish a base for further operations to the east and south-east. To the north, 1 S.S. Bde (seaborne commandos) landing on the Ouistreham beaches would mop up the coastal area between the Rivers Orne and Dives as far south as Le Plein and Varaville. 3 Para Bde's responsibility was threefold: (1) the destruction of the five bridges across the Dives River and one across the Divette, (2) the denial to the enemy of all main roads into the divisional area and (3) the silencing of a coastal defence battery at Merville (155776). The object of the first two tasks was to prevent the entry of the enemy's reserves into the divisional area. (3 Para Bde O.O. No. 1, 19 May 44 (copy placed in W.D., 1 Cdn Para Bn, June 1944))

8. It was to the British components of 3 Para Bde that these tasks were allotted, 1 Cdn Para Bn being responsible for the protection of flanks and the cover of movements. The specific tasks of the Canadian unit as enumerated in the brigade operation order were as follows:

- (i) Secure and protect DZ during ldg of Bde Gp by destruction of HQ area VARAVILLE and neutralization of enemy if occupying houses area 167753.
- (ii) Destroy br at VARAVILLE 186758 by H plus 2 hrs and cover demolition until relieved by 1 SS Bde NOT before H plus 5 hrs.

- (iii) Destroy brs at ROBEHOMME 195727 and 199739<sup>\*</sup> by H plus 2 hrs and cover demolition.
- (iv) Cover move to and assault on bty by 9 Para Bn from interference from SOUTH.
- (v) Seize and hold area rd junc 141728.

(3 Para Bde O.O. No. 1, para 8 (b))

This road junction topped the narrower Le Plein - Bois de Bavent ridge, a strategic feature 180 feet high dividing the Orne and Dives valley. Possession of this thickly wooded ridge would protect the Benouville bridges and prevent enemy observation of the Ranville bridgehead. (W.D., 1 Cdn Para Bn, June 1944: Appx 1, Appreciation of the Situation by Brigadier Hill, 14 Apr 44) In view of these factors the vicinity of the cross roads at Le Mesnil was selected as the site of 3 Para Bde command post, with the headquarters of the three battalions grouped about it. Of 1 Cdn Para Bn's tasks, (i) and (ii) were allotted to "C" Coy, (iii) and (v) to "B" and (iv) to "A" Coy ((H.S.) 145.4016(D1), 1 Cdn Para Bn O.O. No. 1, 28 May 44, pp 5-7).

9. To accomplish its various tasks the unit, numbering approximately 450 all ranks<sup>\*\*</sup>, was divided between the first and second waves of the divisional air lift. "C" Coy, comprising almost half the first wave, took off from Harwell field (between Oxford and Reading) at 2230 hours on D Day minus one, in twelve<sup>\*\*\*</sup> modified Albemarle bombers. (6 Airborne Div Report

\* There is no indication on the map of any bridge, or the need of one, at 199739; nor does the account of the operation in the unit War Diary mention the destruction of such a bridge. It is suggested this may have been one of a number of small bridges in the area "looked after" by "B" Coy ((H.S.) 145.4011(D2): Memo of Interview with Maj J.A. Clancy, M.C.). There is elsewhere, reference to a "culvert at Le Hoin" which was concealed by the floods and therefore could not be destroyed (Shave, op cit, p. 123).

\*\* Part II Orders, in referring to "Embarkation and Debarkation", indicate the number of 1 Cdn Para Bn personnel dropped on D Day as 27 officers and 416 other ranks (see W.D., 1 Cdn Para Bn, July 1944: Appx 5). As will be shown, some troops were flown back to base; these would obviously not be included in this number.

\*\*\* These figures are derived from "Air Lift by Waves", op cit and 3 Para Bde O.O. No. 1: Appx "B", Allocation of A/C (see W.D., 1 Cdn Para Bn, June 1944: Appx 14). Supporting these, but giving detail which is challenged by other evidence (i.e. numbers chalked on aircraft), is ((H.S.) 252B6.016, 6 Airborne Div Op Instr No. 1: Appx "B"2, Allocation to 3 Para Bde). Other sources consulted include Report on Ops: Appx "K", Sheet 6 (map showing by number locations of 1 Cdn Para Bn sticks) and Information re Dispersion on D Day, op cit, including appendices; these, however, contain obvious mutual contradictions and other inadequacies which seriously limit their positive value. Furthermore, whatever the final official figures for the allotment of troop-carrying aircraft, there would seem to be little assurance that they represent the number actually used. ((H.S.) 145.4011(D3), Interview with Capt D.W.W. Mascall para 6 (a)).

on Operations, op cit: Appx "A", "Air Lift by Waves"; also, W.D., 1 Cdn Para Bn, 6 Jun 44) Other components of the first wave included the 22nd (British) Independent Parachute Company and the advance party of H.Q. 3 Para Bde (Report on Operations: op cit).

#### THE ASSAULT, 6 JUN 44

10. Owing to unfavourable weather the Allied invasion was postponed 24 hours, from 5 Jun to 6 Jun. 1 Cdn Para Bn, therefore, emplaned late on 5 Jun, but according to the same plan as for the previous night. The unit, less the advanced company (see para 9), took off at 2325 hours from Down Ampney (between Swindon and Cirencester) in 26<sup>xx</sup> Douglas C-47 Dakotas. Three additional Dakotas towed gliders in which were carried jeeps and trailers loaded with ammunition and signals equipment. Each parachutist carried, in addition to normal military equipment, a fighting knife, toggle rope, escape kit (with French currency) and two 24-hour rations; in all, a man's load amounted to about 70 pounds. A special duty party from the 1st Canadian Parachute Training Company<sup>xx</sup> attended the unit in the concentration area and relieved it of various administrative tasks during the final stages of preparation for the assault.

11. The dropping time for the battalion was from 0100 hours to 0130. Although flying conditions were good and visibility normal, the dispersion of both the main body and the advance party was very wide and erratic (see map attached as Appx "A" to this Report). Even excluding those sticks which landed farthest from the intended area, the actual dropping zone of the battalion was 40 times as great as that designated for the brigade (less 8 Para Bn). The chief cause of this dispersion appears to have been the absence of clearly distinguishable landmarks about the dropping zone, the approach to which is described as a "stretch of featureless fenland" (Information re Dispersion: Appx "B", para 1). Another factor in the dispersion is described as follows:

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\* See p. 3, third footnote.

xx For further information on this unit, see Report No. 138.

...No. 46 Group R.A.F. had been instructed to fly in loose formation and release on a signal from the leaders. Thus if the leader was wrong, those that followed were. After this the standard principle of individual navigation was adhered to....

(Ibid: Appx "A", Extract from R.A.F. Monograph, The History of the Airborne Forces, footnote)

Capt (later Maj) J.P. Hanson, who jumped with the advance party on D Day, has suggested still a further factor:

...The causes of the dispersal were in my opinion the fact that as we crossed the mouth of the Canal de Caen we were met with a stream of light AA tracer. My aircraft was second in and the tracer cracked past us, about 15 feet to our right. The aircraft immediately swung left and we were thrown violently about. When we sorted ourselves out I could see that we had changed our direction and the coast was on my right. We swung inland further down the coast, resulting in my stick being dropped about ten miles off the D.Z. During the briefing in England the aircraft of my coy were detailed to fly inland over the lock-gates of the Canal de Caen, and then swing east to the village of Varaville which was also the course of the rest of the Bde.

It is my opinion that the remainder of the flight followed our course and the pilots became confused with the Orne River and the Dives River.

This is not intended as a slur on the good name of the 38 Group R.A.F. There would probably have been very many more aircraft shot down\* had we followed the original flight plan, as a large plane flying at minimum flying speed at that altitude for the jump made an easy target to Light AA and small arms fire from the ground. There were definitely two gun positions near the lock-gates at the opening of the Canal de Caen to the Channel....

(H.Q. 54-27-128-18 (D.D.H.S.): Hanson to Nicholson, 31 Oct 49, p. 2)

This suggestion of the effect of enemy fire on the dispersion has also been advanced by Capt (later Maj) J.A. Clancy, who proceeded with the main body (see Interview with Clancy, op cit, para 4). In this reference, however, there is no mention of any alteration of course due to flak - only of air speed. Both these officers' statements may have been made without full knowledge of scheduled changes of course and speed; in any case, it is considered that the lack of landmarks and the system of navigation employed would in themselves largely account for the wide dispersion.

12. The attached map (Appx "A") shows, so far as is known, the location of each stick of 1 Cdn Para Bn. The chief

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\* Whether any aircraft conveying Canadian troops were shot down is not stated, either in this or any other available source.

source of this information is a map of R.A.F. origin<sup>K</sup> which plots the positions of 27 sticks, 26 of which appear also on a similar map appended to the divisional Report<sup>KK</sup>. This discrepancy may well account for one of three missing aircraft listed on the latter map. Another of these aircraft may be represented by a 28th stick which landed at 297769, near Heuland (Interview with Mascall, op cit, para 7). Seven other sticks, not shown on either of the maps referred to, landed within the dropping zone<sup>KKK</sup>. (Information re Dispersion, p. 3 and Appx "E" (analysis of map)). Another stick is accounted for in the following report on seven aircraft of No. 570 Sqn R.A.F.:

All these aircraft were successful with the exception of No. 5 who had the misfortune to get the No. 1 man jammed in the parachute exit. In spite of 7 runs made on the D.Z. by this aircraft, the troops were unable to successfully extricate this man and as the main force was by this time coming in, they returned to base with the stick.

(Operations Record Book, No. 570 Sqn R.A.F., June 1944 (quoted in Information re Dispersion, p. 2))

While the reason given this failure may be questioned<sup>KKKK</sup>, the fact of the stick's return to base appears clearly established. The addition of this and the seven which landed in the dropping zone brings the number of sticks accounted for to 36; if, therefore, 38 were dispatched (see footnote to paras 9 and 10) there remain two whose locations on D Day are yet to be ascertained.

13. Of the advance party alone, 18 Canadian personnel were returned to base (Information re Dispersion, p. 2). It is suggested that these might have included one complete stick in addition to that already discussed; this suggestion cannot, however, be accepted without further support. Similarly, the obvious possibility that one or more complete sticks of the main body were flown back to England does not provide a satisfactory explanation.

14. The abnormal dispersion of 1 Cdn Para Bn might have had far more unfortunate results than actually ensued. As it happened, the battalion lost upwards of 80 all ranks as prisoners of war. Two platoons of "B" Coy landed in the marshy ground two miles from the prescribed dropping zone; one stick of "C" Coy dropped five miles off its intended target. These parachutists were fortunate in making their way back to the unit on the following day; that so many of them did return safely speaks well for their individual initiative and the thoroughness of the briefing given all ranks prior to their departure from England. Among the Vickers and mortar platoons there was an unexpectedly heavy wastage in weapons, due to the special kit bags in which these arms were carried tearing loose during the drop (W.D., 1 Cdn Para Bn, 6 Jun 44).

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<sup>K</sup> Information re Dispersion: Appx "D".

<sup>KK</sup> Report on Ops: Appx "K", Sheet 6, 1 Cdn Para Bn.

<sup>KKK</sup> These are, curiously enough, indicated by number on the map of 9 Para Bn's dispersion (see Report on Ops: Appx "K", Sheet 5; also, Op Instr No. 1, op cit).

<sup>KKKK</sup> The returning of troops to base was normal procedure where the dropping zone could not be located, but is not regarded as adequately explained by one man (even the No. 1) becoming jammed in the parachute exit (Mascall, para 6(c)).

PROGRESS DURING D DAY

15. In spite of its initial dispersion the battalion achieved surprise, and all objectives were speedily attained. "C" Coy, having secured the dropping zone, demolished the bridge across the Divette River at Varaville and engaged a German strongpoint just west of the town. This position, which had to be cleared in order to protect the dropping zone, proved much more strongly held than had been expected. By 1030 hours the enemy pillbox had surrendered, but not before a large number of Canadian casualties had been sustained. Its capitulation was largely brought about by the effect of our PIAT bombs, according to the evidence of a Canadian mortar detachment commander who had landed on top of the enemy position and temporarily been held prisoner. The reduction of this post and the neutralization of the Merville battery by 9 Para Bn removed the two strongest local enemy threats to the security of the brigade area. At 1500 hours, on the arrival of No. 6 Commando, "C" Coy proceeded to the battalion area at Le Mesnil. Meanwhile the other companies had had little difficulty in achieving their objectives. "A" Coy, having covered the flank of 9 Para Bn in its successful assault on the bomb-shattered Merville battery<sup>x</sup> and its subsequent withdrawal to Le Plain, rejoined its own battalion at the Le Mesnil - Bavent crossroads at 1530 hours. "B" Coy, having blown its bridge across the Dives River at Robehomme, established a defensive position and observation post on Robehomme Hill (1873). It remained there for a day and half, after which the forced withdrawal of 6 Commando from Varaville compelled removal from this exposed position. It was called back under cover of darkness on the night 7/8 Jun (W.D., 3 Para Bde, 7 Jun 44) and reached battalion headquarters at 0330 hours on 8 Jun.

16. The Canadian battalion's initial success was characteristic of that achieved by the division as a whole. All bridges from Troarn to Varaville had been blown by units of 3 Para Bde. By 1200 hours on D Day the important bridges over the Canal de Caen a la Mer and the Orne River west of Ranville had been captured intact by 5 Para Bde, and by 2100 hours 6 Airlfdg Bde had made successful glider landings. 1 Airlfdg Recce Regt reconnoitred forward to Troarn and Sannerville, obtaining information of considerable value both to the division and to the 1st (British) Corps. Divisional F.D.Ls. had been established through Longueval, Escoville, and along the main road running south-east to, but excluding, Troarn. Continual attacks from the south had all been held ((H.S. 145.4015(D1). Sitreps - 1 Cdn Para Bn, Sitrep No. 3, 7 Jun 44). The first round had been won, and now it was a question of holding on until the arrival of the seaborne forces. The aerial phase of the initial assault behind it, 1 Cdn Para Bn was destined to operate solely as infantry for the remainder of its stay in France; a period of nine months was to elapse before the unit made another operational descent. In the meantime the lessons learned during the months of preparation in Southern England were put into practice; and in the difficult weeks that followed D Day, when attacks by enemy infantry and sometimes tanks and self-propelled guns had to be met with an inferior weight of fire power<sup>xx</sup>, the emphasis that had been placed on intensive weapon training (see Hist Offr, C.M.H.Q. Report No. 138) proved a worthwhile investment.

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x Prior to the assault, it had been subjected to terrific aerial bombing.

xx The primary offensive weapon of paratroops was the Sten machine carbine, lightly supplemented by the rifle. The L.M.G. was regarded as a reserve of fire power (Mascall, para 2).

LE MESNIL CROSSROADS, 7-17 JUN

17. From a brigade standpoint, events during the next ten days followed a fairly regular pattern. Frequent and sometimes heavy enemy counter-attacks were effectively dealt with, usually in their early stages. Small-scale attacks of one or two-platoon strength on the part of the British and Canadians secured points of vantage on the edge of the defended area and helped to stabilize the brigade front. In these operations the brigade's rather limited fire power<sup>x</sup> was supplemented by field batteries of 3 (Brit) Div artillery and by naval bombardment, the cruiser Arethusa and one destroyer being in support of 3 Para Bde (Bde O.O. No. 1, op cit: Appx "A"). Constant patrolling was maintained in attempts to obtain information concerning enemy positions and movements. Sometimes these patrols were unable to probe very deeply into the opposing defences due to early contact with superior numbers of the enemy; on other occasions no enemy were to be found (W.D., 1 Cdn Para Bn, June 1944; see also Clancy, para 6). During most of this period sporadic shelling and mortaring of the brigade areas continued, though without inflicting many casualties. Enemy riflemen in trees and hedgerows proved a nuisance factor until they were "winkled out". More unpleasant than this was an accidental attack by British Typhoons on 13 Jun; brigade headquarters and the main dressing station were shot up with 20-millimetre cannon and rocket projectiles, a French female civilian being killed and two Canadian officers wounded (W.D., 3 Para Bde, 13 Jun 44).

18. From the battalion's point of view there were several outstanding events during the period 7-17 Jun. One of these is described in the unit War Diary as follows:

In the early hours of the morning of 7<sup>xxx</sup> Jun German infantry of the 857 and 858<sup>xxxx</sup> Grenadier Regiments supported by S.P. Guns and a number of Mk. IV Tanks attacked "B" and "C" Companies' positions. Our mortars in the brickworks were given an ideal target as the German infantry formed up in close groups along a road in the apparent belief that we possessed no mortars<sup>xxxx</sup>. Heavy casualties were inflicted on the enemy and the main force of the attack broken, however casualties were inflicted on our own Battalion by the S.P. Guns and tanks. One tank penetrated to within one hundred yards of the "C" Company position but

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<sup>x</sup> See para 2, Appx "B" to this Report.

<sup>xx</sup> The date of this attack has been established as 8 Jun, not 7 Jun as indicated in the battalion War Diary; this is confirmed by the statements of two former senior officers of the unit (H.Q. 54-27-128-18: Lt-Col G.F.P. Bradbrooke to D.D.H.S., 31 Oct 49, and Hanson, op cit, p. 3).

<sup>xxx</sup> No mention of this formation appears in divisional intelligence reports prior to 2000 hrs 8 Jun (see W.D., 6 Airborne Div, June 1944). There is no reason to question the reference to 857 Gren Regt.

<sup>xxxx</sup> All except two of the unit's mortars had been lost in the drop (Bradbrooke, op cit; see also para 14 of this Report). Two more mortars and a plentiful supply of bombs had been allotted to the battalion in the first re-supply drop, on 7 Jun (Bradbrooke).

withdrew before the P.I.A.Ts. could fire effectively on it. Some of the enemy infantry also attempted to assault our forward positions but were driven off. It was learned later from P.Ws. that the object of the German attack was to secure the brickworks and cross roads at LE MESNIL. The rest of the day was quiet save for activity by enemy snipers.

(W.D., 1 Cdn Para Bn, 7<sup>th</sup> Jun 44)

This account is supplemented by those of "C" Coy's commander and a British engineer officer who was at that time with 3 Para Bde:

We were attacked on the morning of the 8th June after heavy shell and mortar fire the previous night. The attacking force was Infantry of the 858 Panzer Grenadier Regiment<sup>xx</sup>. The enemy occupied a group of houses across an orchard some 200 yards to our front and a tank, I believe it was a MK. IV, managed to get in between "B" & "C" Coys and inflicted some casualties. Two hits with PIAT were scored and it retired. "A" Coy<sup>xxx</sup> was ordered to attack through "C" Coy and clear the houses and occupy them. This they succeeded in doing but suffered heavy casualties crossing the orchard. They were forced to vacate the houses later, due to heavy tank fire. This attack petered out on the afternoon of D 2.

(Hanson, p. 3)

...The time was 0530 hrs. [8 Jun] ...The attack was preceded by groups of men all squirting out bullets from Schmeissers; they were given good covering fire. ...The action was ended by a superb bayonet assault by the Canadian Para Battalion on our right. We saw them hurtle across the road some 200 yards down, flinging smoke grenades and "thirtysixes" as they went....

(Shave, op cit, pp 126, 127)

The Canadian counter-attack described by Maj Shave may well have been one launched by "B" Coy at 0900 hours on the same date. This assault was supported by naval bombardment<sup>xxxx</sup>, but not by the unit's close support weapons ((H.S.) 713.065(D2), Honours and Awards: Griffin, Capt P.R.). The objective was a group of buildings from which the battalion had been harassed by machine gun and rifle fire. The Germans were dispersed, leaving behind some 50 dead. "B" Coy subsequently effected a partial consolidation of the newly cleared area. (W.D., 1 Cdn Para Bn, 8 Jun 44)

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x See second footnote, p. 8.

xx See third footnote, p. 8.

xxx No other reference to this action by "A" Coy has been encountered; it is known, however, that "B" Coy launched such an attack about this time. It therefore appears that this should read "'B' Coy".

xxxx That naval support was provided is not substantiated by the brigade War Diary (see entry for 0900 hours 8 Jun). The significance of this omission is weakened, however, by the failure of that source to mention the attack itself.

19. On the morning of 10 Jun a force of approximately two-battalion strength supported by infantry guns and armour, using the glider field (area 1273) as a base, attacked the brigade area. This attack was repulsed by artillery and machine gun fire before it reached the Canadian position. Of this attack the unit War Diary states:

...During the day the enemy formed up on the glider field for an attack against the Brigade area but this attack was broken up by our artillery and M.M.G.'s before it got under way....

(W.D., 1 Cdn Para Bn, 10 Jun 44)

References presumably to the same action, made at formation level, include the following:

2-Bn attack on 9 Para Bn and 1 Cdn Para Bn posns. Enemy infiltrate between Cdns and 9 Para with Inf Guns and armour. Driven out by fire.

(W.D., 3 Para Bde, 10 Jun 44 (0730 hrs))

PW captured by 3 Para Bde states that in attack from BREVILLE area this morn II Bn 857 Gren Regt was ordered to capture glider DZ and III Bn 827<sup>th</sup> was ordered to pass through and consolidate.

(W.D., 6 Airborne Div, 10 Jun 44 (1000 hrs))

...Throughout the morning the area of the DZ... witnessed yet another battle in which the enemy put in mixed forces of inf, str approx two coys [sic], some tks and armd Cs<sup>XX</sup>....

(Ibid: Intelligence Summary No. 5)

Identification from corpses after the DZ battle of 10 Jun in area 1273 revealed that 6 and 8 coys, 2 Bn 858 Gren Regt suffered most severely. 3 Coy from 1 Bn was also identified. What was new was the fact that 9 and 11 coys of 744 Gren Regt had taken part in the battle....

(Ibid, No. 7, Part II)

20. About noon on 12 Jun the 5th Battalion, The Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment), then under command of 3 Para Bde, were forced to vacate some of their positions in the Bréville area. These positions were reoccupied by "C" Coy 1 Cdn Para Bn, under the personal direction of Brigadier Hill. This action is described by the officer then commanding "C" Coy as follows:

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\* This is presumably an error; 827 Gren Regt is not mentioned in Intelligence Summaries for this period, nor does it appear in the orders of battle of 346 and 711 Divs.

XX Armoured cars.

On the 12th June at about 1200 hrs I received a wireless message to vacate my position and report with my Coy in light fighting order to Bde HQ...

As the situation was critical there was no time to put me in the picture. Brig. Hill took the coy down to the road bend immediately north of Breville and told me to report to the Commander of the 5th Black Watch in the Château Bréville. The area was littered with burning trucks and carriers.

The forward coy of this bn. had been overrun and there were two German S.P. guns about 50 yards from the Château. The Germans had retaken Breville and were advancing East and had not much further to go to cut through to the high ground overlooking Ranville and the Canal, and all the landing areas East of the River Orne.

My Coy succeeded in retaking the woods east of the Château and the fighting was all at close quarters. We held on until three Sherman Tanks sent to us from Div. H.Q. at Ranville came up. A lively battle ensued. This could be called a counter-attack or a relief. The Black Watch Bn was completely disorganized and I can safely say that "C" Coy saved a complete route and a split in our left flank. The air-landing Brigade (Glider) mounted a large scale attack on Breville the evening of the 12th, and were successful in retaking the town. My Coy. returned to our original position the following day. A written congratulation was sent to our Coy. from Div. for this action.

(Hanson, pp 3, 4)<sup>██</sup>

21. On 16<sup>██</sup> Jun, following a heavy mortar and artillery concentration, heavily supported<sup>██</sup> enemy infantry attacked "A" Coy's position (W.D., 1 Cdn Para Bn, 15<sup>██</sup> Jun 44). After inflicting some casualties with S.P. guns<sup>██</sup> the enemy were beaten off (ibid and W.D., 3 Para Bde, 16 Jun 44; see also Clancy, op cit, para 6).

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██ Brief references to this action are contained in the brigade and divisional war diaries, Report on Ops (Part I, para 12(g)) and Gale, op cit, p. 99. The brigade diarist evidently considered the Canadian company's action a relief in the line, whereas the other sources mentioned (all probably related) suggest that this was a genuine counter-attack. Maj Hanson's account supports, to some extent, both interpretations. No mention of this action appears in the unit War Diary.

██ Both the unit War Diary and Clancy have given 15 Jun as the date of this action. A comparison of the entries for 14-17 Jun in the battalion and brigade war diaries would, however, indicate 16 Jun as the appropriate date.

███ The unit diarist and Maj Clancy both stress that tanks were used, but do not mention S.P. guns. The brigade War Diary, on the other hand, refers only to S.Ps.

22. Comparatively speaking, the opposition encountered by the Canadian battalion during its first ten days in France was not severe; the enemy's local superiority was not as great as might have been expected. Most of the prisoners taken by 3 Para Bde on D Day were Poles and Russians (W.D., 3 Para Bde, 7 Jun 44). Despite the enemy's apt use of fieldcraft and skilful employment of weapons, his efforts to dislodge the Canadians were costly as well as unsuccessful. The area became littered with dead Germans and abandoned equipment. A B.B.C. war correspondent gives a graphic account of the force of the enemy's counter-attacks in the early days of the invasion:

While operations proceeded on the beaches and on the other side of the river and canal, the Germans came at us with tanks and men, again and again. At night they pushed patrols forward, probing and seeking out our weak spots. Every day men died, men were wounded, and our ranks thinned. But the Germans got nowhere; their dead were to be found in the woods along the lines, in the cornfields... everywhere. They left burnt-out tanks and smashed mortars. Sometimes we were shelled for long periods, and the blast stripped the trees and splattered into slit trenches where it killed men....

(Guy Byam, "A Great Feat of Arms",  
Radio Times, Vol 84, No. 1086,  
21 Jul 44)

23. Maintenance of 6 Airborne Div with supplies and ammunition was effectively carried out, after the first day's fighting, from the divisional maintenance area at Ranville. When the parachutists dropped on D Day, each jumper carried two days' rations, and ammunition for 36 hours. A brigade dump of ammunition dropped from aircraft at the time of the initial assault was formed by the BRASCO at brigade headquarters. On the night 6/7 Jun a re-supply drop involving 50 aircraft took place at the divisional maintenance area, two miles behind the Canadian position,\* and for the next two weeks maintenance air missions effectively handled the problem of re-supply for the division (Sitrops - 1 Cdn Para Bn, op cit, Nos 2-27, June 1944).

#### IN AND OUT OF THE LINE, 20 JUN - 20 JUL

24. Within a week after D Day 3 Para Bde's position had been made more secure by the arrival of seaborne reinforcements - units of the 51st (Highland) Division (W.D., 3 Para Bde, 10 Jun 44). To the north of the Canadian position German resistance at Bréville had been overcome and the whole brigade front from Le Plein to the Bois de Bavent stabilized. General Montgomery had reported: "We have won the battle of the beaches";

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\* Equipment provided the battalion in this drop included two mortars and a plentiful supply of bombs, which proved particularly helpful in breaking up the attack of 8 Jun (Bradbrooke, op cit).

now in the British Sector Operation "OVERLORD" had entered its second phase - the defence of the Normandy bridgehead. On 17 Jun, 3 Para Bde was relieved in the line by 5 Para Bde, which had been defending the approaches to the Ranville bridgehead.

25. For three days the brigade remained in the Ranville - Herouvillotte area. The only enemy activity was the occasional shelling of the main road through Ranville, and the Canadians enjoyed their first relaxation since D Day. Then, on 20 Jun, they moved to a rest area by the River Orne (1176). On 23 Jun the battalion was visited by the G.O.C. First Cdn Army, Lt-Gen H.D.G. Crerar, C.B., D.S.O. During their five days stay the Canadians were blessed with fine, warm weather, and parties were organized daily for bathing in the Orne. An Army cinema at Luc-sur-Mer provided welcome entertainment. Sight-seeing tours were arranged to enable all to visit the beaches at Ouistreham, the scene of the landing of 3 (Brit) Inf Div, where they might learn something more of the vast scale on which "OVERLORD" was patterned.

26. On 25 Jun 3 Para Bde returned to Le Mesnil cross-roads, the Canadian battalion relieving 13 Para Bn at its former position. The week that followed saw an intensifying of enemy fire upon the brigade area, and the Canadian casualty list mounted as a result of long range artillery shells, harassing mortar fire and sniping, and, on at least two occasions, close-range bursts from 75-millimetre anti-tank guns. Because the closely wooded country did not allow long-vision O.P.s., it was difficult to observe fire, and ranging by the battalion mortars in their counter-fire had to be effected by sound and map references. Vigorous patrolling was continued with a view to pin-pointing enemy positions in the area; the initial results, however, were meagre and unsatisfactory (W.D., 1 Cdn Para Bn, 26, 27 Jun 44). Further patrolling soon revealed two facts which would account for such failure: (1) the Germans were now themselves only patrolling certain areas which they had formerly occupied, (2) whether to avoid danger to their own patrols or to deceive ours, or for both reasons, they had become unusually cautious about opening fire (W.D., 6 Airborne Div, June 1944: Intelligence Summary No. 22, para 1). Elsewhere on the battalion front the enemy were erecting strong-points and roadblocks; similar defensive measures were being taken by the Canadians (W.D., 1 Cdn Para Bn, 27 Jun 44). Thus by the first week of July, when 3 Para Bde was again relieved by 5 Para Bde, the situation had become one of completely static warfare.

27. From 4 Jul to 20 Jul the battalion was again granted a respite from fighting on moving to the divisional rest area by the River Orne.<sup>\*</sup> The first week was spent in cleaning up and resting after the tour of duty in the line. "Progress towards a complete mental and physical recovery was aided by rumours that the Division was shortly to return to England to reform and refit" (*ibid*, 12 Jul 44). The cheering news of the fall of Caen (9 Jul) and the American success at St. Lô (18 Jul)

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\* This was frequently shelled, at least until the latter part of July (Mascall, para 3). There were also during this period occasional night raids by enemy aircraft (W.D., 1 Cdn Para Bn, 5-11 Jul 44).

suggested that the period of static warfare was ending; and from their battalion area the Canadians saw, pouring across the Orne on newly constructed pontoon bridges, the huge masses of armour and troops that were taking part in the big push southwards. During this period the unit was reinforced by the arrival of seven officers and 100 other ranks from a Canadian base reinforcement battalion. This was a welcome addition to the fighting strength of the parachute battalion, which had sustained some 300 casualties since D Day. The fact that these reinforcements were not trained parachutists mattered little. Indeed, for the role in which the battalion was to be engaged during the remainder of its stay in France, well trained and equipped infantrymen provided the most valuable acquisition that could have been supplied.

28. The reinforcing of 1 Cdn Para Bn with infantry personnel was not a stop-gap measure, but a matter of policy. The majority of the reinforcements received during the campaign were infantry; the proportion of qualified jumpers posted to the unit from 1 Cdn Para Trg Coy was comparatively small.<sup>¶</sup> Theoretically, the training company, whose strength at the time of the invasion was over 400 all ranks, was an alternative source of replacements for the battalion; actually, it was maintained as a reserve for further airborne operations. The infantry reinforcements, whose fighting qualities and esprit de corps were highly esteemed, would have been gladly retained by the units; however, in view of the numbers of qualified parachutists in the training company, very few permanent postings of non-jumpers could be authorized. Accordingly at the end of 1 Cdn Para Bn's part in the Normandy campaign, almost all the infantry personnel were withdrawn to their respective reinforcement units for reposting to Canadian infantry battalions. (Mascall, para 5)

#### BOIS DE BAVENT - BOIS DE BURES, 21 JUL - 16 AUG

29. The battalion's hopes for an early return to England were not immediately realized. On 21 Jul 3 Para Bde returned to the line, moving to an area immediately south of 5 Para Bde which continued to man the Le Mesnil position. The new brigade area extended along the western edge of the thickly timbered Bois de Bavent,<sup>¶¶</sup> 1 Cdn Para Bn relieving the 12th Battalion, The Devonshire Regiment in their position about the Le Mesnil-Troarn road (1471). The weather had broken and heavy rain had flooded the countryside, necessitating the immediate digging of new slit trenches at the end of the wood. That night the battalion was issued with its first rum ration.

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¶ Mascall states that "some" reinforcements were received from 1 Cdn Para Trg Coy "later in the campaign". This rather general statement is not entirely supported, however, by Part II Orders (appended to W.D., 1 Cdn Para Bn, June - August 1944).

¶¶ The Bois de Bavent includes the Bois de Bures; the latter name applies only to that portion of the wood nearer Bures.

30. After a comparatively uneventful week in the line the Canadians were relieved by 8 Para Bn on 27 Jul and returned for a further period of relaxation<sup>\*</sup> in the Orne rest area. Four days later the battalion moved up to relieve the 7th Battalion, The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders (51 (H.) Div) in a position west of the Bois de Bavent. 3 Para Bde still held its place in the centre of the eastern line. To its left the other formations of 6 Airborne Div extended in order to the mouth of the Orne - 1 S.S. Bde along the ridge north to Le Mesnil cross-roads - 6 Airlbg Bde between them and Bréville (1374) - and 4 S.S. Bde<sup>\*\*</sup> completing the line from Le Plein (1375) to Sallenelles (1376). To the right of the airborne division were 146 Bde and other formations of the 49th (West Riding) Infantry Division, in a line bending south and west through Demouville (1067) towards Caen. In the rear, west of the Orne, were the remaining divisions of 1 (Brit) Corps. Since 23 Jul, when the First Canadian Army had taken over the Eastern Normandy sector, 1 (Brit) Corps had been under Canadian operational command (W.D., G.S. Ops, First Cdn Army: Appx 79). Thus 1 Cdn Para Bn, while still part of a British brigade, a British division and a British corps, was now for the first time under Canadian command at army level.

31. For the first half of August the situation on 6 Airborne Div's front saw little change. The Canadian battalion continued to send out patrols, but only meagre information about the enemy was obtained (W.D., 1 Cdn Para Bn, 6 Aug 44). Propaganda broadcasts by means of amplifiers were arranged by brigade headquarters to encourage deserters from whom identification of enemy units might be made. Polish deserters later stated that the Germans dismissed the general contents of these broadcasts as incorrect in view of a few inaccuracies which were contained in the remarks about their own positions and strengths (*ibid*, August 1944: Appx 3, Interrogation Report, 15 Aug 44, para 1). In the same manner it was learned that 858 Gren Gren Regt had received reinforcements from a coastal defence regiment near Boulogne. Enemy sections were reported as being reorganized in such a way that to each Pole there were eight Germans; all automatic weapons were handled by Germans. (*Ibid*, 11 Aug, paras 1, 3) Daily exchanges of artillery and mortar fire took place, the German shells and bombs usually landing accurately upon the battalion positions. On 15 Aug enemy aircraft bombed the area to the south of the Canadian position. The tempo of the German artillery fire increased. Patrols probing into the Bois de Bures that night and the next day encountered no enemy. It looked as though the long period of static warfare were over. On the evening of 16 Aug the unit received orders to advance the next day. (W.D., 1 Cdn Para Bn, 15, 16 Aug 44)

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\* See para 27, footnote.

\*\* This brigade joined the division on 11 Jun 44 (W.D., 6 Airborne Div, 11 Jun 44).

THE EASTWARD ADVANCE, 17 - 26 AUG

32. The forward move which in ten days was to take 1 Cdn Para Bn 40 miles onwards to the mouth of the Seine began early in the morning of 17 Aug. Falaise, on the right flank of First Cdn Army, had fallen the previous day; with this pivot of the enemy's whole position in Normandy smashed, a large part of his army was encircled and being destroyed while the remainder was forced back. As its share in the general Allied offensive 1 (Brit) Corps was directed to advance on Lisieux (5387). The corps front now stretched from the mouth of the Orne to St. Pierre-sur-Dives (2649) and was held by 51 (H) Div and 7 (Brit) Armd Div in the south, 49 (W.R.) Div in the centre, and 6 Airborne Div in the north. The last-named formation now included under command the 1st Belgian Group (Light Brigade) and the Royal Netherlands Brigade (Princess Irene's).<sup>¶</sup> Occupying practically the same positions it had seized on D Day (Sallenelles (1376) to Troarn (1667)), the airborne division was to push forward as far as Cabourg (2178) on the left, and on the right as far as Bures (1769). The latter objective was assigned to 3 Para Bde in this operation (code name "PADDLE").

33. The task of seizing and holding Bures was allotted to 8 and 9 Para Bns, 1 Cdn Para Bn being in brigade reserve. The operation commenced at 0300 hours; no opposition was encountered, and by 0700 hours occupation of the objective was complete. Now the Canadian battalion took over a larger section of the brigade front (139706 - 147695) and at 0800 hours began a sweep through the Bois de Bures. The enemy, who for ten days had held the wood so tenaciously, had withdrawn; he had, however, sown the area with mines and booby-traps. This delayed the pursuing battalion and caused ten casualties in "B" Coy. Bridges across the River Dives at Bures had been constructed by 3 Para Sqn R.E., permitting all units of the brigade to cross before nightfall. By 2100 hours 1 Cdn Para Bn, having advanced three miles along the railway running north-east from Bures, had made contact with the enemy at Plain Lugan (2072) and taken up positions for the night. 8 Para Bn was at Goustranville (2271), 9 Para Bn in reserve (2271) and H.Q. 3 Para Bde at St. Richer (2069).

34. The lack, or comparative lightness, of enemy resistance offered 3 Para Bde on the first day and in general during the whole period of the advance to the Seine, underlines the instructions of the G.O.C. 6 Airborne Div (given to the brigade prior to Operation "PADDLE") "to advance if and when it is certain that the enemy are withdrawing" (W.D., 3 Para Bde, August 1944: Appx "A"2, Report on Operation "PADDLE").<sup>¶¶</sup> The lightly equipped formations of the airborne division, which had very little armour at its disposal, were not intended to drive against heavily armed enemy forces or to storm strongly held positions. Their part in the general eastward advance now

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¶ For a note on the organization and employment of the Dutch and Belgian contingents see W.D., G.S. Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army, August 1944: Appx 7, First Cdn Army Instr No. 9, 2 Aug 44.

¶¶ Not included in the copy presently available.

under way was rather to maintain contact with the retreating enemy, driving his rearguards back and mopping up isolated pockets of resistance as encountered.

35. Further progress of 3 Para Bde was halted by the enemy's destruction of the bridge (237720) across the St. Samson - Dives sur Mer Canal. This canal parallels the Dives River in a generally north-easterly direction, swinging north to cut the Troarn - Dozulé road 1000 yards east of Goustranville. But the map showed four bridges crossing the canal at 400-yard intervals in squares 2371 and 2372, the most northerly carrying the railway line from Troarn just west of its junction with the main line. As its part in this next phase (Operation "PADDLE II") 1 Cdn Para Bn was ordered to seize the four bridges, and to ascertain whether any were passable to infantry or vehicles. H Hour was set at 2145 (18 Aug), with the crossroads (2271) west of Goustranville as the forming up place. The attack went in at H plus three minutes. At 2220 "C" Coy seized the railway bridge, and by 2350 hours all four bridges were in the hands of the Canadians. The southernmost bridge was captured intact by "A" Coy, who named it "Canada Bridge". The battalion had, in this operation, taken 150 prisoners and "successfully liquidated two enemy companies in well fortified positions" (*ibid*: Appx "A"2, Report on Operation "PADDLE II"). Considering the nature of the task, casualties were surprisingly light.

36. The railway bridge, though partially demolished, was found passable to infantry. Shortly after midnight 9 Para Bn crossed, in four feet of water, and by 0245 hours (19 Aug) had seized the railway line and routed the balance of the opposing battalion. Now the brigade area included the whole of the "island" enclosed by the river and the canal. Operations "PADDLE" and "PADDLE II" had been highly successful; in three days the brigade had destroyed an enemy battalion (the 744th Grenadier Regiment (711 Inf Div)) and cleared a passage for the further advance of the division.

37. In the course of the morning (19 Aug) 5 Para Bde, 4 S.S. Bde and 1 S.S. Bde passed through the 3 Para Bde area, crossing by Canada Bridge. The next objective of the division was Dozulé (2673) from which area the enemy were cleared during the following day and a half. Now 1 Cdn Para Bn resumed the advance, passing through the two special service brigades at Dozulé and pushing on towards Annebault (4201). Their role as infantry must have been unpleasantly driven home to the paratroops as they marched under heavy shellfire and pouring rain. No contact was made with the retreating enemy until the evening (of 21 Aug). At 1800 hours 8 Para Bn passed through to capture Annebault, and the Canadian unit swung north to engage a resistance point on the high ground at La Vallée Tantot (4101). Here the enemy's 81-millimetre mortars and S.P. guns prevented further progress, and the battalion dug in for the night. By morning the Germans had withdrawn, and the Canadians proceeded to the area of La Haie Tondue (4501) where they rejoined the remainder of the brigade (1000 hours, 22 Aug).

38. It was now 3 Para Bde's turn to halt while 5 Para Bde pushed through to Pont-l'Évêque. For 48 hours personnel of 1 Cdn Para Bn took full advantage of the opportunity to rest, clean up, and generally prepare themselves for further action. On 23 Aug they were visited by the Chief of Staff, Lt-Gen K. Stuart, C.B., D.S.O., M.C. The same day, Lt-Col G.F.P.

Bradbrooke relinquished command, to take a staff appointment as G.S.O. 1 (Air) with 38 Gp R.A.F. Temporary command of the battalion was assumed by Maj (later Lt-Col) G.F. Eadie. At a battalion orders group that afternoon it was announced that 3 Para Bde would execute another jump behind the enemy lines, but this was shortly cancelled (W.D., 1 Cdn Para Bn, 23 Aug 44; see also W.D., 3 Para Bde, 23-24 Aug 44). On 24 Aug First Cdn Army advised that on the afternoon of 30 Aug, 6 Airborne Div would prepare to move into 21 Army Gp reserve (W.D., G.S., S.D., First Cdn Army, August 1944: Appx 275). This anticipated the end of the division's role in the rapid advance by First Cdn Army across Normandy.

39. The army's main axis of advance was swinging more and more sharply towards the north. Meanwhile the Americans were advancing from the south, and the enemy's last foothold on the left bank of the Seine (at Elbeuf (2198)) was becoming more and more precarious. As the narrowing front moved forward, 6 Airborne Div's sector on the extreme left of 21 Army Gp diminished into a narrowing triangle whose apex met the mouth of the Seine. While 3 Para Bde rested between Annebault and La Haie Tondue, other formations had forced two crossings of the River Touques. 5 Para Bde, after overcoming stiff opposition at Pont-l'Évêque, was on the morning of 24 Aug well along the road to St. Benoit d'Hébertot (5806). 6 Airldg Bde had since 17 Aug made its way steadily along the coastal flank, closely followed by 1 Belg Gp; now it was over the river and into Bonneville sur Touques (4810). The time had come for further leapfrogging.

40. On 24 Aug 3 Para Bde moved northwards, sweeping around Pont-l'Évêque to follow 6 Airldg Bde across the river at Bonneville sur Touques. 1 Cdn Para Bn took to the road at 1015 hours, proceeding in lorries for the first five miles. On reaching Vauville (4207) the Canadians debussed and marched to St. Gatien (5210). The only resistance encountered was an S.P. gun which fired eight rounds without effect. The battalion spent the night in St. Gatien, and at 0800 hours the following day (25 Aug) proceeded to La Modèrie (6208) on the outskirts of Beuzeville. Here it halted.

41. A strong enemy force in Beuzeville was holding up the brigade's advance. 8 Para Bn attacked on the south side of the town, while 9 Para Bn moved in from the north-west. By late afternoon the town was cleared. At 1900 hours 1 Cdn Para Bn was ordered to skirt the enemy's flank to Mon Mauger (664122). The Canadians, moving cross-country through wood and open field, got no farther than 622103 that night. Here, one casualty was caused by an enemy rifle grenade. After a four-hour halt, the battalion resumed the advance at first light, arriving at Mon Mauger at 0740 hours. No further resistance having been encountered the Canadians immediately took up defensive positions, where they rested.

42. Nightfall of 26 Aug found the units of 3 Para Bde resting in the Beuzeville area. The remainder of the division was grouped along the left bank of the River Risle, from Pont Audemer (7608) to its junction with the Seine at Berville-sur-Mar (6618). On the right, 49 (W.R.) Inf Div was closed in around Pont Audemer, ready to take over or pass through the position of the airborne formations. On 28 Aug orders were given for 6 Airborne Div, less 1 and 4 S.S. Bdes, to move into 21 Army Gp reserve in the afternoon of 30 Aug.

43. It was no mean feat that the units of 6 Airborne Div had accomplished since the beginning of their campaign in the early hours of D Day. In all phases of operations they had borne themselves well - in the initial assault, when despite their undue dispersal they had speedily gained all their objectives - in the long and trying period of relatively static warfare between the Orne and the Dives, where they had withstood frequent and determined counter-attacks by superior numbers and heavier armament - and in the final rapid advance to the Risle during which, though handicapped by inadequate transport, they had seldom lost contact with the retreating enemy.

44. For a week, 1 Cdn Para Bn rested at Mon Mauger. Personnel were allowed to visit Beuzeville, 25 percent of the unit strength at a time. On 4 Sep, T.C.Vs. carried the battalion to a concentration area near Arromanches, and embarkation took place two days later. By late afternoon on 7 Sep all ranks were back in at Bulford, in the barracks they had left three months before. The following day command of the unit was assumed by Lt-Col J.A. Nicklin. From 12 to 24 Sep the battalion was on leave. On its return, general training became the normal routine - a situation that was to continue for the unit until Christmas day, when re-embarkation at Folkestone marked the beginning of another chapter in the history of 1 Cdn Para Bn (see A.H.Q. Report No. 17).

#### CASUALTIES AND DECORATIONS

45. The initial casualties of 1 Cdn Para Bn were much heavier than had been anticipated. The War Office forecast of invasion activity for 6 Airborne Div had estimated that the wastage for the first month would be at the double intense rate, i.e. 50 percent of War Establishment for officers and 40 percent for other ranks (C.M.H.Q. File 1/Para Tps/1: Col J.G.K. Strathy to D.A.G., C.M.H.Q., 15 May 44). Actual losses to the Canadian battalion during the first 12 days alone (see next para) were 14 officers and 217 other ranks: Of the 443 all ranks who jumped on D Day (see para 9, first footnote), 17 officers and 218 other ranks became casualties in the first twelve days. These losses, amounting to more than 50 percent, exceeded the estimate for an entire month. Subsequent casualties were correspondingly lighter, so that the overall effect was not much greater than that visualized. The unit reached the lowest point of its depletion about 15 Jul, when it numbered only some 150 all ranks (Mascall, para 4). By the end of the campaign its strength had increased to about 370, including 26 officers. In comparing actual losses with estimates, however, it must be borne in mind that the duration of the battalion's stay in France was longer than originally intended (see paras 27, 29; also that the nature of the operations did not follow according to expectations (see para 16, 27, 38)). The reinforcement policy (see para 28) was sufficiently flexible to help meet these factors.

46. The following table shows the casualties sustained by 1 Cdn Para Bn in France, 6 Jun - 6 Sep 44. These figures have been supplied by War Service Records<sup>2</sup>:

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<sup>2</sup> See (H.S.) 145.4065, Statistics - Casualties - 1 Cdn Para Bn.

		<u>Killed or Died of Wounds</u>	<u>Wounded</u>	<u>Prisoner of War</u>	<u>Total</u>
6 Jun	Offrs	3	1	3 <sup>##</sup>	7
	O.Rs.	18 <sup>##</sup>	8	83	109
7-17 Jun	Offrs	3	7	0	10
	O.Rs.	28	81	0	109
18 Jun	Offrs	0	8	0	8
- 16 Aug	O.Rs.	17	58	1	76
17 Aug	Offrs	0	0 <sup>###</sup>	0	0
- 6 Sep	O.Rs.	14	24	0	38
TOTAL	Offrs	6	16	3	25
	O.Rs.	77	171	84	332

47. In the fighting at Varaville on D Day (see para 15) "C" Coy commander, Maj H.M. Macleod was killed. The 2 i/c, Capt (later Maj) J.P. Hanson, assumed command and carried on with the attack. The enemy were dislodged with heavy losses in killed and captured. Although wounded, Capt Hanson refused to be evacuated. His leadership and personal bravery were rewarded with the Military Cross. For outstanding performance as a stretcher bearer, Pte W.S. Ducker (attached to "C" Coy) was awarded the Military Medal. Ten days later this soldier was fatally wounded (H.Q. 196-13-1 (E.O. - D.H.S.)). Also awarded the M.M. in connection with the Varaville engagement was a "C" Coy N.C.O., Sgt W.P. Minard. His immediate superior having fallen, Sgt Minard took over his platoon and led it very successfully in the ensuing fighting. A further example of his leadership - the steadying influence he exerted on his platoon in carrying out a difficult relief in the line on 13 Jun - is included in his citation.

<sup>##</sup> The source used shows no officers as captured on 6 Jun and three on 7 Jun. It is generally known that the reverse was the case.

<sup>##</sup> "Died of wounds" cases are considered as having become such casualties on the date wounded, not the date of death. One of those fatally wounded on 6 Jun died while prisoner of war.


<sup>###</sup> Casualties, op cit indicates one officer as having been wounded during this period. It is stated in a footnote that this officer was at the time attached to the British Army in Burma.

48. In "B" Coy's engagement east of Le Mesnil cross-roads on 8 Jun (see para 18) Capt P.R. Griffin, the company commander, displayed qualities of leadership which won for him the M.C. Two N.C.Os. of "B" Coy were awarded the M.M. - Sgts J.A. Lacasse and G.H. Morgan. Both were wounded in this operation; Sgt Lacasse received three wounds, one of which proved fatal. Cpl W. Noval and L/Cpl R.A. Geddes (both private soldiers at the time) also won the M.M. for their work as a Bren gun and sniper team; between them they accounted for no fewer than 25 Germans.

49. In "A" Coy's attack on the southernmost bridge at Goustranville on 18 Aug (see para 35) two more major awards were won. Capt (later Maj) J.A. Clancy who led the assault on the bridge, capturing it intact and thereby enabling the brigade's advance to continue, received the M.C. Sgt G.W. Green, commanding a platoon, led two attacks in which upwards of 25 Germans were accounted for. Although severely wounded this N.C.O. remained on duty until he was able to hand over to the company commander. He was awarded the M.M.

50. In all three M.Cs. and seven M.Ms. were won by members of 1 Cdn Para Bn whilst serving in France. Five of these awards - two officers' and three other ranks' - were included in the first 60 decorations received within 6 Airborne Div shortly after D Day.

51. This report was prepared by Lieut F.R. McGuire.

  
(C.P. Stacey) Colonel,  
Director  
Historical Section (G.S.).



21-26 AUG 44

MILES 0 1 2 3 4 5 10 15



# **1 CDN PARA BN** **INITIAL DISPERSION** **SUBSEQUENT OPERATIONS** **6 JUN - 26 AUG 44**

MILES 0 1 2

Area flooded or wet.....

Stick of 1 Cdn Para Bn  
dropped 6 Jun 44

## **SOURCES:**

Sticks 1 Cdn Para Bn mainly from trace of map in Report on the British Airborne Effort in Operation Neptune by 38 & 46 Groups R.A.F and Report on Operations in Normandy 6 Airborne Div, Appx "K", Sheet 5.

## **NOTE:**

Probable total of sticks 38, of which 35 are accounted for on map. At least one stick was flown back to England.

THE 1ST CENTAUR BATTERY, R.C.A.

1. 1 Cdn Para Bn was not the only Canadian unit to serve with 6 Airborne Div in the Normandy campaign. Here, to supplement the account of the parachute battalion's activities, is the story of a Canadian field battery that for 25 days operated as part of 6 Airborne Div artillery.
2. Prior to D Day the artillery of the airborne division regularly consisted of one regiment of 75-millimetre pack howitzers (the 53rd (Worcestershire Yeomanry) Light Regiment). To supplement this, 1 (Brit) Corps had formed an ad hoc battery of 12 95-millimetre Centaur (self-propelled) equipments. This unit, designated "X Armoured Battery" proved especially useful for counter mortar tasks during the first two months of the campaign. But at the beginning of August, due to the need for R.A. reinforcements elsewhere, it was found necessary to disband the self-propelled battery. That such support should still be available within the division was considered an operational necessity, and the G.O.C.-in-C. First Cdn Army therefore approved the formation of a temporary Canadian unit to man the Centaurs (W.D., G.S., S.D., H.Q. First Cdn Army, August 1944: Appx 60).
3. The 1st Centaur Battery R.C.A. was formed on 6 Aug 44, under the command of Maj D.W.M. Cooper. It contained a headquarters and three troops, each troop manning a Sherman O.P. tank and four Centaurs. The Centaur was heavily armed, mounting in addition to the 95-millimetre tank howitzer two 7.92-millimetre Besa machine guns. Anti-aircraft protection was provided by twin Vickers machine guns. Auxiliary weapons carried included a Thompson and a Sten machine carbine, a smoke bomb thrower and rear smoke emitters, and a variety of grenades.
4. Personnel for the new battery were drawn from No. 12 Canadian Base Reinforcement Battalion. On 14 Aug, 1 Cdn Centaur Bty completed taking over from X Armd Bty in the Ranville area. Certain personnel of the British unit remained, on attachment to the Canadian battery: Capt E.J. Leopard (as battery captain), 15 O.Rs. of R.A. Sigs, and one R.E.M.E. fitter (gun). After a few days' preparation the gun crews were ready for action. The role which they were to play, as part of 6 Airborne Div artillery, is described in the unit War Diary as "maximum harrassing fire on the enemy's administrative machinery" and "vigorous and immediate retaliatory fire".
5. First action for the battery came on 17 Aug, with the commencement of Operation "PADDLE". For this operation, 1 Cdn Centaur Bty was placed in support of 6 Airlbg Bde. Three days later the battery, still on the west side of the River Dives when the airlanding brigade went forward, came under command of the 1st Belgian Battery and in support of the Royal Netherlands Brigade; in the Varaville area (W.D., 1 Cdn Centaur Bty, 20 Aug 44).
6. Actual movement by the battery to the new area across the Dives did not take place until 22 Aug. The same afternoon the Canadian guns again went into action south of Deauville (441094), their fire being directed from an O.P. established in one of the town's hotels. Due to steering and

brake trouble five Centaurs were left stranded along the road, and two of the unit's three Shermans had been put out of action by mines. Next day the battery, leaving Belgian command, moved to a rendezvous at La Haie Tondue, and on the afternoon of 24 Aug crossed the Touques River in support of 6 Airborne Div Armd Recce Regt. Further breakdowns had reduced the battery's total armour to one Sherman, two Centaurs and one Cromwell tank, the last-named borrowed from the reconnaissance regiment.

7. For the assault on Beuzeville on 25 Aug (see para 41 of this Report) 1 Cdn Centaur Bty gave effective support to 3 Para Bde, carrying out a fire plan of 60 rounds per gun. The unit then moved forward again (26 Aug) with Dutch infantry riding on its tanks and other vehicles. Outside Port Audemer (774063) the battery again went into action, engaging targets for the armoured reconnaissance regiment and for armoured cars of 1 Belg Gp (see para 32). As 49 (W.R.) Div moved in to take over the area (see para 42) the battery moved to a new position (718106) behind Toutainville.

8. The short but active life of 1 Cdn Centaur Bty was almost over. On 28 Aug the unit was reorganized as a six-gun battery, the remaining six gun crews being returned to the reinforcement group. But already, in view of the removal of 6 Airborne Div from an operational role, the need for the battery ceased, and on 29 Aug orders were received for its disbandment effective the following day (W.D., 1 Cdn Cent Bty, August 1944: Appx 2). The tanks were handed over to the 259th (British) Delivery Squadron, and the remaining personnel returned to the reinforcement stream. By 2 Sep 44, 1 Cdn Centaur Bty had ceased to exist. Its obituary notice may be found in the following War Diary entry:

During its short life ... it performed a very useful purposes, and though originally immobile it was able to keep up with the advance of 6 Airborne Div and give useful fire support.

(W.D., A.Q. Br, Adm H.Q., First Cdn Army,  
30 Aug 44)