

D DAY AND THE ADVANCE TO GERMANY

JUNE 1944

6 June Allied forces land in Normandy. The British and Canadian (2nd Army) landed on “gold”, “Juno” and “sword” beaches whilst the American First Army landed on the western beaches, “Omaha” and “Utah”. The British and Canadian’s moved inland with the intention of reaching the first day’s objective, Caen and its airfield Carpiquet. The advance is halted by the German 21st Panzer Division as it attempted to drive a wedge between the British (Sword beach) and Canadians (Juno beaches) and reach the sea. The attack fails but the Allied cannot advance any further that day.

7 June The British and Canadians advance but are again halted, this time by the 12TH SS Panzer Division.

7 -14 June Operation Perch-The Canadians attempt to enlarge their beachhead towards the west of Caen and capture Carpiquet Airfield but are counter attacked by the 12th SS Panzer.

12 June The British 7Th Armoured division advances towards Caen but is halted at the village of Villers Bocage.

18 June A major storm in the channel damages the artificial Mulberry Harbours used to bring in supplies to the beachhead, this delays any further offensive action by four days.

25 June Operation Martlet/Dauntless British XXX Corps attempts to seize the high ground around Rauray to protect the flank of Epsom.

27 June Operation Mitten launched to seize two Chateaus occupied by the Germans. The 1st Battalion, The Suffolk Regiment is heavily involved.

26-29 June Operation Epsom is launched by the British and Canadian, the objective is to seize a bridgehead over the River Odon and secure Hill 112. Hill 112 is not secured but all German counterattacks are beaten off.

JULY

1 July A German attack fails to penetrate the Second Army’s defensive line.

2 July The German Commander in Chief in the west, Von Rundstedt, is dismissed by Hilter for suggesting Caen is abandoned.

4-5 July The Canadian 3rd Division launches Operation Windsor to seize Carpiquet and its airfield. Despite heavy losses the Germans hold onto the totally unusable airfield but lose control of the village.

8-9 July Operation Charnwood is launched to secure a bridge across the River Orne. Following heavy Allied bombing during which much of Caen is reduced to rubble the attack fails.

10 – 12 July Operation Jupiter is launched to secure Hill 112. After two days of severe fighting, it is taken but then lost to a German counter attack.

10 -11 July Operation Stack the British attempt to seize the Colombelles Metallurgical Factory and destroy its chimneys which are being used as observation platforms.

15-16 July Operations Greenline and Pomegranate are launched to tie down the Germans reserves prior to Operation Goodwood.

18 July Operation Goodwood is launched, this is a major offensive to secure the high ground astride the Caen to Falaise Road. German defences are deep and the attack is closed down. The Canadians support Goodwood with Operation Atlantic.

19 July The Canadian 2nd Division crosses the River Orne and after fierce fighting links up with the Canadian 3rd Division. Caen is now surrounded and is taken after 36 days of hard fighting; it had been the objective of Day One.

20 July Still short of the Caen/Falaise road Goodwood is halted. Hitler survives an assassination attempt.

25-31 July US First Army launches Operation Cobra and achieves a decisive breakthrough reaching the southwestern corner of the Cotentin Peninsula. From here they could advance to the west into Brittany or south towards the Loire and east to the Seine. The First Army and the newly activated Third Army under General Patton exploited all possible opportunities with rapid advances in all directions.

30 July In order to block German reinforcements from derailing the US breakout the British 2nd Army launched Operation Bluecoat. The Canadians started to plan for an offensive towards Falaise, Operation Totalise.

August

1 August The Third Army launches an attack through the Avaranches Gap into Brittany and southwest towards the River Loire.

3 August Hitler orders an attack towards Avranches and Mortain to cut off the American advance.

7 August The Canadian II Corps launches Operation Totalise but despite 624 Bomber Command aircraft targeting the flanks of the Canadians offensive Totalise is halted after the high ground north of Falaise is not taken. However the Americans defeat German counterattacks and drive them back.

8 August Patton is ordered to turn northwest and link up with the Canadians who are attacking south-westwards. If successful, this would catch the German division in a trap.

13- 14 August The Canadian II Corps launches Operation Tractable to take Falaise and spring the trap.

15 August Hitler permits a general withdrawal to the River Dives to attempt to prevent his troops being surrounded. Operation Dragoon: American and French forces land on the French coast near Cannes.

16 August The Canadians reach Falaise.

17 August Operation Paddle launched to encircle those German forces east of the Seine, succeeds in preventing the Germans from creating a defences in front of the Seine.

18 August The Falaise pockets is shrinking under immense Allied pressure and is now confined to the area between Trun and Chamboir. The Canadians and Poles take Trun and the heights overlooking the River Dives.

19-20 August The pockets is partially closed but the Germans, despite heavy losses, attempt to breakout. The Poles are surrounded and but beat off frantic German attacks.

21 August Canadians and Americans arrive and snap shut the trap. The Allied advance gains momentum as the Germans withdraw.

25 August Paris is liberated.

26 August British XXX Corps cross the Seine at Vernon.

2 September The Belgium border is reached.

3 September After 120 km dash elements of the British Guards Armoured Division reach Brussels. The Germans withdraw from the city by the end of the next day.

4 September Antwerp is liberated, The speed of the British advance traps most of the German 15th Army between the coast and the Scheldt Estuary.

7 September The British 11th Division crosses the Albert Canal.

8 September The Germans launch the first V2 at Britain. The rocket lands in Chiswick killing three people.

10 September Operation Market Garden is approved. Its objectives are to capture the keys bridges at Waals, Nijmegen and Arnhem and advance into Germany bypassing the Siegfried Line. As the airborne forces took the bridges XXX Corps under General Brian Horrocks would push the Guards Armoured Division to join forces with the Paratroopers. The Achilles heel, other than the capture of the bridges in a usable state, was the fact the advance was limited to a single road.

17 September Operation Market Garden begins. The British 1st Airborne Corps lands near Arnhem but is met by strong resistance from the Germans. Some Paratroopers manage to reach the northern end of the bridge. US Paratroopers take the bridge over the Waals but meet strong resistance at Nijmegen.

18 September A German counter attack at Nijmegen halts the Americans. The British landing zone in Arnhem is overrun by an SS Division refitting in the area.

20 September Nijmegen Bridge falls to a combined American British assault.

22 September XXX Corps and the Polish Airborne forces fail to get through to Arnhem and are stopped on the banks of the Rhine.

25 September The 1st Airborne Corps survivors are withdrawn from the north bank of the Rhine.

30 September to 20 October As a consequence of the Market Garden the Allies now had a corridor running from Belgium to Nijmegen via Eindhoven. This had to be consolidated. The first attempt to do this was to force the Germans out of south east Holland. The battle of Overloon was fierce battle to force the Germans from a bridgehead over the River Meuse/Mass near the city

of Venlo. 1st battalion Norfolk Regiment was involved in the fighting. The bridgehead was not destroyed until December.

20 October to 4 November The Germans also had to be cleared away from the Scheldt so that the port of Antwerp could be opened. Operation Pheasant cleared most of the Germans from Brabant allowing access to Antwerp.

14 November Operation Nutcracker was launched to free the area around Limberg and by the 26 November the Germans had been forced to withdraw to the River Mass.

With winter coming operations began to tail off so that positions could be consolidated and logistical problems dealt with.

16 December 1944 to 25 January 1945 Using the short winter days the Germans launched their offensive in the Ardennes. After initial success the offensive ground to a halt and Allied counterattacks drove the Germans back to the Siegfried Line.

1945

8 February to 11 March The Battle of the Reichswald Forest was the first major offensive in 1945 with the object of clearing out the Germans from between the Rhine and Mass Rivers. Essentially this was a pincer attack with the British taking the northern arm (Operation Veritable) the Americans (operation Grenade) the Southern. It was a hard fought battle but the Allies pushed the Germans out of their defences.

23-24 March Operation Plunder: The British cross the Rhine on the night of the 23 March and established bridgeheads in a number of places. The assault was accompanied by Airborne troops landing on the German side of the Rhine. By the 27 March the bridgehead was 35 miles wide and 20 miles deep.

30-31 March Operation Forrard On started with the objective to increase the bridgehead. The 4th/7th Royal Dragoon Guards (8th Armoured Brigade) was tasked, with infantry support, with taking the villages of Sinderen and Varsveld. The commander on one of leading M3 "Honey" light reconnaissance tanks was 21 year old **Lieutenant Ronald Sheehan**, the son of the Hoxne Doctor. The 4th/7th War Diary records that at 3.10 pm that the leading Honey was knocked out and Lieut. Sheehan killed and three recce tp personnel taken prisoner".

Other accounts state that two “Honey’s” and two Kangeroos (Sherman tanks converted to troop carriers) attacked Sinderen and that Sheehans tank was “bazookad” and he was killed. The second Honey ditched and its crew captured.

The Rhine had been the last major obstacle preventing an advance into Germany. Spearheaded by the 7th armoured Division the British 2nd Army advanced into northern Germany occupying Hamburg on the 1 May 1945 whilst the Canadian First Army advanced into those parts of Holland still occupied by the Germans. On the 4th May the German forces in Northwest surrendered followed by the complete surrender on the 8th May.