

The operations to clear the approaches to Antwerp were among the most important actions carried out by the Canadian forces in the Second World War yet relatively little is known about them. The decision to mount an amphibious attack behind German defences in the Breskens Pocket was a particularly brilliant example of what is now called manoeuvre warfare, but neither Lieutenant-Guy Simonds, acting commander of First Canadian Army, nor

Major-General Dan Spry, General Officer Commanding 3rd Canadian Infantry Division, have been given much credit for the exploit. One of the many aspects of Operation "Switchback" deserving of study is the logistical problems of the operation. This contemporary report prepared from 3rd Division's CRASC (Commander, Royal Army Service Corps) describes one aspect of the work of the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps. - Editor

Supply Problems in an Amphibious Operation

extract from War Diary, HQ, RCASC 3 CDN DIV, October 1944

CRASC
3CdnInfDiv

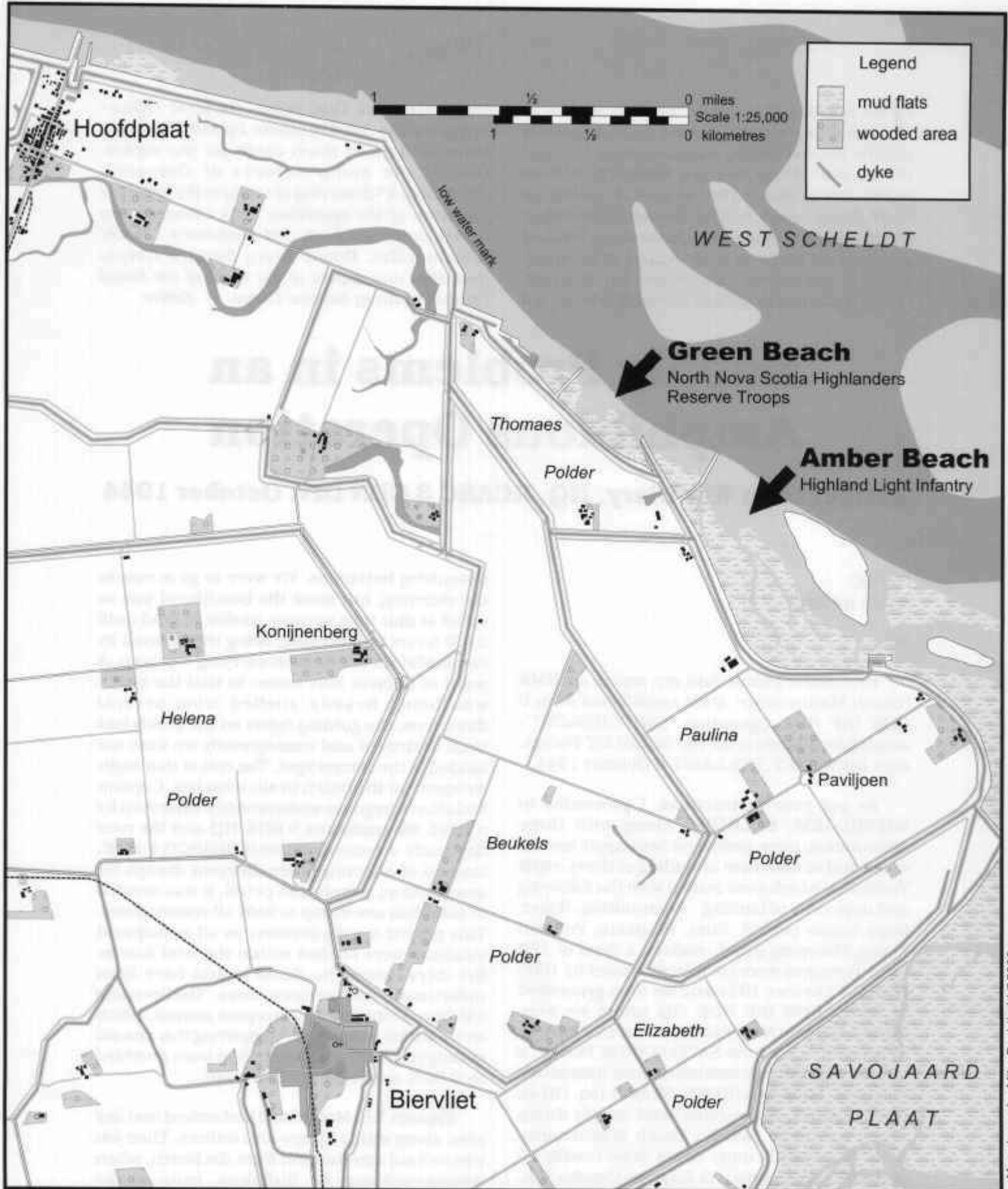
Sir,

Hereunder please find my report on BMA [Beach Maintenance Area] established from 9 CDN INF BDE Operation "SWITCHBACK" - amphibious landing on the SCHELDT Pocket, area BIERVLIET, HOLLAND, 9 October 1944.

As per your instructions, I proceeded to WIPPELGEM, BELGIUM, along with three ammunition, three petrol and two supply issuers to list and to take note of loading of thirty-eight Terrapins, which were loaded with the following and in priority of landing - Ammunition, Water, Sups (como packs), Rum, Blankets, Pot and Flame Throwing Fluid, making a total of 152 tons. Terrapins were completely loaded by 1500 hours, 7 October 1944 and we then proceeded to join 9 CDN INF BDE HQ where we were briefed. Captain McLellan joined us. Our job was to proceed across the SAVOJAARDS PLAAT, a stretch of water approximately four kilometres distance, land on GREEN BEACH (sq 1914), recce a petrol, ammunition and supply dump which was to be called a Beach Maintenance Area, from which units could draw readily all desirable commodities. D-Day was October 9th, H-Hour was approximately 0130 hours from two

assaulting battalions. We were to go across in the morning, but since the beachhead was so small at that time we were unable to land until 2100 hours that evening, being transported by two buffaloes (LVT), each carrying one jeep. A point of interest here arises in that the beach was being heavily shelled from several directions, the guiding lights on the beach had been destroyed and consequently we were not landed in the correct spot. The rest of that night we spent on the beach in slit trenches. Captain McLellan's jeep was unfortunately destroyed by a shell. We contacted 9 BDE HQ and the next day made a recce along with BRASCO 9 BDE. Instead of selecting three different dumps for ammunition, supply and petrol, it was decided to establish one dump to hold all commodities. This proved a wise decision as all anticipated locations were shelled within the next four or five days, which no doubt would have been unfortunate had we been there. That evening (October 10th), the 38 Terrapins arrived, which we unloaded in the dark, completing this around midnight. Thirty-six loaders had been provided by 9 BDE as part of the BMA staff.

Captain T.R. MacDonald had arrived that day also, along with 11 jeeps and trailers. Their job was to haul ammunition from the beach, when transported over by Buffaloes, because the Buffaloes, unlike the Terrapins, could not leave



Map drawn by Miles Beethold (2002)

Operation Switchback 9 Brigade Assault Landing



Green Beach (left) and Amber Beach (above) photographed on 6 October 1944, the day prior to the landings by 9 Canadian Infantry Brigade.

LCMSDS Air
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the beach on account of the harm done to their tracks by the hard roads. They off-loaded onto the beach and the jeep platoon with their trailers hauled to the BMA. These worked very satisfactorily from time to time. They were also to establish forward ammunition, petrol or supply points should the tactical situation arise. This never happened.

On 11 October, the DAQMG [Deputy Adjutant and Quartermaster General] visited us and was apparently quite satisfied. On the night of October 11 and during the day of October 12, 8 CDN INF BDE came in to enlarge the dump.

8 BDE provided one officer, Captain Bourassa and 30 men. Captain Bourassa was made Camp Commander on the BMA. Also, we received two more ammunition, supply and petrol issuers. Units would come in by troops, squadrons, companies and even platoons, to draw their requirements. We supplied them. Replenishment was controlled by Division from the other side. A State was sent them twice daily and Terrapins arrived once daily with requirements as stocks got low. The Terrapins did an excellent job and are ideal for maintaining such a dump. They loaded from RCASC dumps on the other side. We carried in the BMA at its maximum,

NAC PA 131249 Two Buffaloes, loaded with troops and supplies, leave Neuzen for the Canadian bridgehead, 11 October 1944.





NAC PA 136822

approximately 240 tons of ammunition, 60 tons of petrol, derv, FTF (H) C02 bottles and oil, and 100 tons of supplies, water, blankets, stretchers and signal equipment.

It is interesting to note that one shell, landing in our dump, perforated 12 jerry cans of petrol, but did not catch fire.

We also handled refugees and some prisoners, and feeding of the same. The three hundred prisoners did enough work to warrant the bully beef, hard tack and water expended on them.

We continued to supply 8 and 9 BDES along with supporting troops all their requirements until October 18 when all remaining petrol and supplies were withdrawn to company lines and the ammunition remained there as a forward ammunition point under the command of Captain E. Manning.

Lessons to be learned from this operation are as follows:

1. Adequate facilities should be provided for refugees in the early stages. In our case we took this on because of necessity. We handled 150 people, young and old, overnight as shipping space was not available.
2. A Prisoner of War cage, together with proper staff, should be set up in early stages.
3. An Ordnance Officer with small staff should be located in the BMA, to handle mainly signal equipment.
4. Wireless communications should be available between BMA and those controlling the replenishment of the BMA for urgent needs....

Field
25 October 1944

signed
A. J.S. Turvey, Captain
HQ RCASC 3 CDN INF DIV



NAC PA 137239



Canadian Army Photo 41339-N

Top: Canadian wounded being unloaded from a Terrapin amphibious vehicle at a Scheldt Pocket embarkation point west of Terneuzen, Netherlands, 13 October 1944.

Middle: German prisoners, captured during the Operation Switchback, disembark a Buffalo, 13 October 1944.

Above: A Buffalo making the transition from land to water.