

= Operation Totalize =

Operation Totalize (also spelled " Operation Totalise " in some more recent British sources) was an offensive launched by Allied troops of the First Canadian Army during the later stages of Operation Overlord , from 8 to 13 August 1944 . The intention was to break through the German defences south of Caen on the eastern flank of the Allied positions in Normandy and exploit success by driving south to capture the high ground north of the city of Falaise . The goal was to precipitate the collapse of the entire German front , and cut off the retreat of German forces fighting American and British armies further west . The battle is considered the inaugural operation of the First Canadian Army , which had been formally activated on 23 July .

In the early hours of 8 August 1944 , II Canadian Corps launched the attack using mechanized infantry . They broke through the German front lines and captured vital positions deep in the German defences . It was intended that two fresh armoured divisions would continue the attack , but some hesitancy by these two comparatively inexperienced divisions and German armoured counter @-@ attacks slowed the offensive . Having advanced 9 mi (14 km) , the Allies were halted 7 mi (11 km) north of Falaise , and forced to prepare a fresh attack .

= = Background = =

Caen had been an objective of the British forces assaulting Sword Beach on D @-@ Day . However , the German defences were strongest in this sector , and most of the German reinforcements sent to Normandy were committed to the defence of the city . Positional warfare ensued for the next six weeks . Several attempts by British and Canadian forces to capture Caen were unsuccessful until 9 July , when all of the city , north of the Orne River , was captured during Operation Charnwood . Between 18 July and 20 July , British forces launched Operation Goodwood to outflank the city to the east and south , while Canadian forces mounted Operation Atlantic to cross the Orne River and clear the remaining portions of the city . Although Operation Goodwood was halted with heavy tank losses , the two operations ultimately secured a bridgehead 6 mi (9 @.@ 7 km) wide and 3 mi (4 @.@ 8 km) deep south of the Orne .

The Germans still held the commanding terrain of the Verrières Ridge , 5 mi (8 @.@ 0 km) south of the city . The repeated British and Canadian attacks launched around Caen (in part to distract the Germans from the western part of the front , where the First United States Army was preparing to break out of the Allied lodgement) had caused the Germans to defend Verrières ridge with some of their strongest and most determined formations , including elements of three SS Panzer divisions of the I SS Panzer Corps .

Within 48 hours of the end of Operation Goodwood , the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division launched an attack against the " formidable " German defences on Verrières Ridge . They suffered over 1 @,@ 300 casualties and territorial gains were minimal . From 25 July to 27 July , another attempt was made to take the ridge as part of Operation Spring . Poor execution resulted in around 1 @,@ 500 Canadian casualties . In total , the Battle of Verrières Ridge had claimed upwards of 2 @,@ 800 Canadian casualties . While the ridge remained in German hands , the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division had gained a foothold on the ridge between the village of Verrières to St.Martin @-@ de @-@ Fontenay , which would allow the troops to assemble free of German observation while they prepared to launch Totalize .

Also on 25 July the Americans launched their break @-@ out offensive , Operation Cobra , which gained immediate success . By the end of the third day of the operation , American forces had advanced 15 mi (24 km) south of the Cobra start line at several points . On 30 July , American forces captured Avranches , at the base of the Cotentin peninsula . The German left flank was now open and within 24 hours , units of the United States Third Army had entered Brittany and began advancing south and west through open country almost without opposition . Three German Panzer divisions ? the 1st SS , 9th SS and 116th ? were shifted westward from Verrières Ridge to face this new threat .

British General Bernard Montgomery (commanding the ground forces in Normandy) now wanted

an attack on the eastern flank of the front to capture Falaise , intending that such a move would precipitate a general German collapse . The First Canadian Army , commanded by Lieutenant General Harry Crerar , held this part of the Allied front . It consisted of the British I Corps , responsible for the extreme eastern flank of the Allied lines , and II Canadian Corps south of Caen . Canadian II Corps , which was to launch Operation Totalize , was commanded by Lieutenant General Guy Simonds and consisted of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division , 3rd Canadian Infantry Division , 49th (West Riding) Infantry Division , 51st (Highland) Infantry Division , 4th Canadian (Armoured) Division , 1st Polish Armoured Division , 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade and the British 33rd Armoured Brigade .

= = Offensive plan = =

The German defensive positions on Verrières Ridge remained very strong . The forward infantry positions were well dug @-@ in , with wide fields of fire . The main concentration of one hundred 75 mm and 88 mm anti @-@ tank guns was deployed around the villages of Cramenil and Saint @-@ Aignan @-@ de @-@ Cramenil 3 mi (4 @-@ 8 km) behind the forward positions to halt any breakthrough by tanks along the Caen @-@ Falaise road . The front line and defences in depth were held by the 89th Infantry Division , 85th Infantry Division (recently arrived from Rouen) and the remnants of the 272nd Grenadier Infantry Division (severely depleted by the Canadians in Operation Atlantic) . The 12th SS Panzer Division Hitlerjugend with an attached heavy tank battalion , with fifty tanks , was in reserve a further 3 mi (4 @-@ 8 km) back . Some of the infantry were commanded by the German LXXXVI Korps , but most of the sector (and the 12th SS Panzer Division) was under the command of the I SS Panzer Corps , which had arrived during Operation Goodwood .

Simonds knew that infantry assaults supported by massed artillery had failed to overcome the German forward lines in Operation Atlantic and Operation Spring . During Operation Goodwood , a bombardment by aircraft of RAF Bomber Command had allowed British tanks to break through the German front but they had then suffered heavy casualties from the intact German defences in depth . Infantry had been unable to follow up quickly enough to support the leading tanks or to secure ground behind them (so that follow @-@ up units were also slowed) . To solve the tactical problem presented by the terrain and the deep defences , Simonds proposed a radical solution ; in effect , the world 's first large mechanized infantry attack .

Some Canadian and British infantry divisions had been temporarily equipped with M7 Priest self @-@ propelled guns for the D @-@ Day landings , which had been replaced by towed Ordnance QF 25 pounders . Simonds had the Priests converted into Kangaroo Armoured Personnel Carriers , which would allow infantry to follow the tanks closely on any terrain . Permission was first requested from the Americans , from whom the M7s had been borrowed , to convert them into APCs .

Simonds made air power an essential component in his plan for breaking through the German tactical zones . The preliminary aerial bombardment called for RAF bombers to saturate the German defences on both flanks of a 4 mi (6 @-@ 4 km) wide corridor along the axis of the Caen ? Falaise road during the night of 7 August . During the early hours of 8 August , two attacking forces of tanks and armoured personnel carriers would advance along this corridor . West of the road under the Canadian 2nd Division were the 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade and 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade . East of the road , under the British 51st Division were the 154th (Highland) Brigade and the 33rd Armoured Brigade . These two columns would bypass the front @-@ line defenders and capture the main German anti @-@ tank defences around Cramenil and Saint @-@ Aignan de Cramenil at dawn .

The second phase would follow immediately . While the remaining four infantry brigades of the 2nd Canadian and 51st British divisions cleared up the isolated German forward defences and the 3rd Canadian and British 49th divisions (from I Corps) began subsidiary attacks , to widen the base of salient captured in the first phase , the 4th Canadian Armoured Division and 1st Polish Armoured Division would move up the corridor to Cramenil and prepare to advance further south . To prepare for their attack , bombers of the US Eighth Air Force would bombard the German reserve positions

at Hautmesnil . The ultimate objective was the high ground north of Falaise , 15 mi (24 km) beyond the start line .

= = Anglo @-@ Canadian assault = =

During the evening of 7 August 1944 , the attacking forces formed up in six columns , four vehicles wide , comprising tanks , Kangaroo APCs , half tracks , self @-@ propelled anti @-@ tank guns and Mine flail tanks . At 23 : 00 , Bomber Command commenced the bombardment of German positions along the entire Caen front . At 23 : 30 , the armoured columns began their advance behind a rolling barrage . Movement was slow at first , many APC drivers became disorientated by the dust caused by the vehicles . Several vehicles became stuck in bomb craters . Simonds had arranged several methods for the columns to maintain direction , some vehicles were fitted with radio direction finders , the artillery fired target @-@ marking shells , Bofors 40 mm guns fired bursts of tracer in the direction of advance . In spite of all these measures , there was still confusion . Several vehicles collided or were knocked out .

The attack broke through the German defences in several places . By dawn , the attacking columns from the 51st (Highland) Division had reached their intended positions . The infantry dismounted from their Kangaroo APCs within 200 yards (180 m) of their objectives , the villages of Cramensnil and Saint @-@ Aignan de Cramensnil and rapidly overran the defenders . The columns from the 2nd Canadian Division were delayed by fog and unexpected opposition on their right flank but by noon on 8 August , the Allied forces had captured Verrières Ridge . The novel methods used by Simonds ensured that the attackers suffered only a fraction of the loss which would have been incurred in a normal " dismounted " attack . The Allies were poised to move against Cintheaux , 2 mi (3 @.@ 2 km) south of their furthest penetration but Simonds ordered a halt to the advance , to allow field artillery and the armoured divisions (4th Canadian and 1st Polish) to move into position for the second phase of the operation .

= = German counter @-@ moves = =

SS General Kurt Meyer , commander of the 12th SS Panzer Division , had already ordered infantry from various formations shattered by the bombers and by the armoured attack , to occupy Cintheaux . He also moved forward two battlegroups from his division , consisting of assault guns , infantry and Tiger tanks , positioning them across the Canadian front . Shortly after midday , he ordered these two battlegroups to counter @-@ attack the leading Allied troops .

At this point , the Allied offensive plan called for additional bombardment by the Eighth Air Force , before the 4th Canadian Armoured Division and the 1st Polish Armoured Division pushed south towards Falaise on either side of the Caen ? Falaise Road . The counter @-@ attack by the 12th SS Panzer Division failed but placed Meyer 's tanks north of the target area that the Eighth Air Force bombarded in preparation for the second phase of the Allied attack . Spared the effects of the bombing , the tanks slowed the advance of the 1st Polish Armoured Division , preventing a breakthrough east of the road . West of the road , the German infantry at Cintheaux held up the Canadian armoured formations . Neither division (both in combat for the first time) pressed their attacks as hard as Simonds demanded and " laagered " (went into a defensive formation while vehicles and troops were supplied and rested) when darkness fell .

To restore the momentum of the attack , Simonds ordered a column from the 4th Canadian Armoured Division to seize Hill 195 , just to the west of the main road , halfway between Cintheaux and Falaise . Worthington Force comprised three companies of the Algonquin Regiment (B , C and HQ) supporting 52 tanks from the British Columbia Regiment , bumped into the rear of Halfpenny Force fighting the SS in Bretteville @-@ le @-@ Rabet , went round them and got lost . When dawn broke on 9 August , Worthington Force was 4 @.@ 5 mi (7 @.@ 2 km) to the east of Hill 195 at Hill 140 , half @-@ way between Estrees @-@ la @-@ Campagne and Mazieres . They held their ground against German armoured counter @-@ attacks during 9 August but suffered many casualties , including most of their tanks . By 17 @.@ 00 hours what remained of Worthington Force

had either been captured or forced to withdraw .

Because the column was so far from its intended objective , other units sent to relieve it could not find it . Eventually , another force captured Hill 195 in a model night attack on 10 August but the Germans had been given time to withdraw and reform a defensive line on the Laison River . By 11 August , the Anglo @-@ Canadian offensive had ended .

= = Aftermath = =

The early phases of the assault had been a great success , despite many casualties in the two Allied armoured divisions in their attempt to push towards Falaise . Formations of four divisions of the First Canadian Army held positions on Hill 195 , directly north of Falaise . At the same time , Allied forces managed to inflict upwards of 1 @, @ 500 more casualties on the German forces .

Major General Rod Keller was removed from his command of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division , after having been badly wounded , when his headquarters were hit by American bombs . Keller 's poor performance in Totalize lost him the confidence of General Crerar and he received no further command positions for the remainder of the war . Simonds and Crerar mounted a follow @-@ up offensive , Operation Tractable , which took place between 14 and 21 August . On 21 August , the Falaise Pocket was closed when Canadian and Polish units made contact with US troops to the south , ending Commonwealth participation in the Battle of Normandy with a decisive Allied victory .