

# THE CLEARING OF THE SCHELDT ESTUARY

## OUTLINE PLAN

5. The plan to clear the SCHELDT estuary may be divided into three parts :-

First: To seal off the isthmus leading to SOUTH BEVELAND, and to clear the BRESKENS "island".

Second: to clear SOUTH BEVELAND by an advance along the isthmus, in conjunction with an assault across the estuary from the SOUTH.

Third: To clear WALCHEREN by concentric assaults from the EAST, SOUTH and WEST. This involved a second crossing of the estuary, and a seaborne expedition from one of the Channel Ports. It was decided to neutralize the fixed and heavy defences of WALCHEREN by bombing the sea dykes and flooding the island.

## OPERATIONS VITALITY

### PLANNING

33. The intended method of clearing SOUTH BEVELAND was briefly as follows. While 4 Canadian Armoured Division attacked in the direction of BERGEN-OP-ZOOM, with the object of securing the front and RIGHT flank of 2 Canadian Infantry Division, the latter formation would clear the peninsula and secure the causeway leading to WALCHEREN island. 4 Canadian Infantry Brigade was to have the primary task of advancing WEST along the isthmus to seize a bridgehead over the BEVELAND CANAL. 5 Canadian Infantry Brigade was to carry out an amphibious assault from the SOUTH of the SCHELDT, and the two brigades were to link up in the area of GRAVENPOLDER. Alternatively, 5 Canadian Infantry Brigade was to be prepared to follow 4 Canadian Infantry Brigade Westwards along the isthmus. 6 Canadian Infantry Brigade was to contain the enemy NORTH and EAST of WOENSDRECHT, and was to be prepared to pass through 4 Canadian Infantry Brigade beyond the line of the BEVELAND CANAL.

34. It is difficult to imagine a more unsuitable piece of country in which to fight a battle. The greater part of it is reclaimed land, held in position by dykes. Movement is restricted to the one main road, and the minor approach roads along the dykes SOUTH of the main road. Large areas had been flooded, particularly just EAST of the BEVELAND CANAL, while the remainder was saturated ground.

The enemy strength on SOUTH BEVELAND was problematical. PW reports stated that reinforcements had recently arrived on the peninsula, but indications generally were that about 3000 troops might be encountered.

52. On 30 October, 2 Canadian Infantry Division pushed on towards the causeway, until held up at the EAST end by determined opposition and mines. With 157 Infantry Brigade leading, directed on the causeway, 52 (L) Division expanded NW and held the area SOUTH of the general line HOEDENSKERKE - S' HEERENHOEK.

The next day, 4 Canadian Infantry Brigade cleared the EAST end of the causeway, and 5 Canadian Infantry Brigade, who passed through them, had their leading elements within 100 yards of the far end where they were pinned by heavy mortar fire and a profusion of MGs sited in the WALCHEREN dykes.

### COMMAND

53. It was decided that GOC 52 (L) Division should command the impending WALCHEREN operations. Accordingly, he directed CRA 52 (L) Division to assume general direction of the two infantry brigades and the divisional artillery operating in SOUTH BEVELAND. The task of the force -

to be known as "BURNFORCE" - was to take over from 2 Canadian Infantry Division and to be prepared, subsequently, to clear the Eastern portion of WALCHEREN and to advance, firstly on FLUSHING and secondly, or alternatively, on MIDDELBURG.

#### CONCLUSION OF VITALITY I AND II

54. Meanwhile, the Northern portion of SOUTH BEVELAND had been cleared by 8 Canadian Recce Regiment, and it was clear that all resistance on the peninsula had now ceased.

As they considered the clearance of NORTH BEVELAND was necessary for the safety of the peninsula, a Squadron of 8 Canadian Recce Regiment crossed over by means of some barges found near KORTGENE. They established a firm base around their bridgehead, and patrols sent out in all directions collected some 600 PW on the island.

### AANVAL OP WALCHEREN

#### OUTLINE PLAN

64. Two sea-borne assaults were to be made on the island, on the same day.

INFATUATE I - An attack on FLUSHING by No. 4 Commando, proceeding direct from BRESKENS in LCA.

INFATUATE II - An attack on the Western side of the island, near WESTKAPELLE, by Nos. 41, 47 and 48 Commandos of 4 SS Brigade, and No. 10 (I.A.) Commando.

155 Infantry Brigade was to be held in reserve at BRESKENS. If the initial assault at FLUSHING proved successful, the Brigade would immediately follow through. If the initial assault failed, 155 Infantry Brigade was to move overland to OSTEND, and was then to be landed at WESTKAPELLE and pass through 4 SS Brigade.

In conjunction with the sea-borne landings an assault was to be made from SOUTH BEVELAND.

#### TARGET DATE AND H HOUR

65. From the Naval point of view, it was essential to land at WESTKAPELLE as soon after low water as possible. As far as the ground troops were concerned, about 5 hours daylight was the minimum required to secure the D day objectives, and therefore a landing was not acceptable later than 1300 hours.

To allow time for a rehearsal, 12 November was the date originally selected. Owing to the urgency of commencing sweeping operations, the success of the flooding, anticipated heavy bomber programme, and the fact that the troops detailed were well acquainted with the technique of combined operations, a decision was taken on 23 October to go without a rehearsal. The assault was to be made on 1 November, the first occasion on which the tides served.

H hour was accordingly fixed for 0945 hours.