



in the crossroads by the *mairie*, supported by three SAR tanks, and the remainder in the northern part of the village and in the area of a low hill or hummock near the banks of the Dives. Currie was unable to prevent the Germans moving into the village across the two little bridges over the river and they began to pour through the southern end. It is important to note, however, that although the Germans regarded the St. Lambert bridges as crucial, there is not a single mention of these bridges in any of the 2 Canadian Corps, 4th Armoured Division, or 9th or 10th Brigades' orders, radio messages or War Diaries for the period, 18–21 August 1944.

The crew of Corporal Walter Fengler's tank, stationed at the intersection of the D-13 and the street leading to the bridge, quickly became aware of the enemy infiltration. Trooper Ed Davies of Fengler's crew recalled that, in the early hours of the morning, they heard movement around the tank. Fengler opened his hatch to have a look and closed it quickly, saying "hey, there are Jerries out there ... what are we going to do?"<sup>20</sup> His crew responded that "the best thing we could do was do what we were supposed to do – start shooting." So they

swung the turret around and fired a couple of shots at vehicles moving behind us, swung around again and opened up with the machine guns and then we shot 75 mm AP rounds down the road, figuring there might be a tank among those vehicles which we could hear but not see. .... We set a truck on fire and it must have been full of mortar rounds, Moaning Minnies, and that stuff started going off and you should have heard it.

Fengler says, "pass me the Sten" and we gave it to him and he started firing out of the turret but it jammed. So he passed it to Young and got another one and was shooting out there. Young went to clear the goddamned thing and it fired and the bullet went right through my leg, between the knee and the ankle. I said to Young: "Jesus, you shot me" and he says, "I'm sorry."

Having got through the positions of A Squadron along the D-13 and C Squadron in St. Lambert, the flood of determined Germans lapped around the isolated position of Nash's B Squadron

at Point 124. The crews of that squadron were anxiously awaiting the infantry of Rockingham's 9th Brigade but the infantry of the *Wehrmacht* reached them first and, in the early hours of 20 August, they became aware of movement all around their position – and there was also the noise of tank engines, which did not bode well at all.

Just after first light, Wotherspoon informed Jefferson that 9th Brigade had not arrived and that, during the night, there had been much "enemy filtration including some tanks which they [the SAR] are unable to stop as they are too thin on the ground."<sup>21</sup> At 7 A.M. Swatty elaborated on the situation, informing 10th Brigade that the Argyll company had been pushed back from their objective at Moissy but that they would probably return that morning. He again noted that no advance parties from 9th Brigade had yet arrived, something that was beginning to concern him. By this time, major enemy movement was visible to the west across the Dives and Wotherspoon requested that artillery fire be brought down on it. This request was refused, however, as there was to be no firing on targets west of the river because Second British Army, which had not been present on the Canadian situation maps for some time, was expected to move into that area during the day. This did not please Swatty who, at 7.45 A.M., again informed Jefferson that 9th Brigade had still not appeared and again requested that artillery fire be brought down on the enemy because the situation was beginning to worry him: "Must have all artillery support possible to hold firm today."<sup>22</sup>

Just as Swatty sent this message, the greater part of the German units involved in the break-out (armour and infantry) began to approach the Dives from the west. Their movement had been partially concealed by the morning mist and the woods, sunken lanes and orchards of the valley floor. They hit the South Albertas a few minutes after 8 A.M. and Currie's men in St. Lambert bore the brunt of the attack.

A Tiger rolled across the Dives bridges, blew the infantry stationed around the intersection of the D-13 and the road leading to the bridges out of their houses with AP fire, and brewed up two of the SAR tanks posted near the *mairie*. Waves of German infantry splashed across the shallow Dives (only chest deep at this point), surrounded the infantry holding the northwest corner of the village and came close to overrunning the SAR troop stationed to support them. The crew commanders hastily backed down a sunken lane to the northern end of the village only to find German infantry running along the banks, almost level with their turrets, firing at them. One troop leader was wounded but all the tanks got back to Currie's headquarters at the northern end of St. Lambert. The Germans, however, were not interested in taking the village, they just wanted to get through it and keep moving east. Nonetheless, the situation was serious – at one point Currie remembered "firing at snipers who were pinging bullets off the top of the tank and I had spotted them so I used a rifle I carried in the tank."<sup>23</sup> He was gradually forced back to the north end of St. Lambert and the Germans

were now in complete possession of the bridges. Currie met any enemy attempts to move up the D-13 with fire and called down heavy artillery concentrations on the area of the bridges – and that was about all he could do.

The enemy also came upon A Squadron, in position north of the village, but here they were less successful as Lavoie's crews had good fields of fire across open ground that the Germans had to cross once they left the tree-lined course of the Dives. The South Albertas cut them down with 75 mm HE rounds and .30 calibre Browning fire, but the enemy pressed on and managed to take out one tank with a *Panzerfaust* at close range. The Germans veered away from the squadron's positions and managed to get around them by using the wooded gully of the Foulbec stream to move north of Hill 117. At 8.45 A.M. Swatty informed Jefferson that, unless he received support, he might be "pushed out" of his positions and followed this with a more serious message at 9.45 A.M.: "General attack is reported by 29 Recce and are asking for assistance."<sup>24</sup>

The Germans kept on coming and to keep them away from the crucial Hill 117, Wotherspoon reinforced Lavoie with his RHQ Troop and they "began to mow down the advancing Infantry."<sup>25</sup> Still, the enemy infantry kept advancing, so Wotherspoon ordered Lavoie to attack down the D-13 to the area of RHQ. Corporal John Galipeau participated in that attack and remembered crossing a field covered with stooks of grain which the Germans tried to use for cover to no avail, as the tanks "picked them off with the machineguns. It was just a slaughter."<sup>26</sup> In the middle of this mayhem Galipeau was amazed to see Corporal Herb Roulston, a crew commander, "out of the turret on top of his tank, sitting with his feet across the opening of the hatch, having a turkey shoot with a captured German rifle, sniping at the Germans running from stook to stook."<sup>27</sup> His troop leader ordered the brave but foolish Roulston to get back into his tank, only to receive the immortal reply: "Haven't you heard? There's a war on." Roulston then resumed his target practice.

Lavoie's attack ended the threat to Hill 117 but, by 10 A.M., there were thousands of Germans in and around the South Alberta positions. B Squadron had a particularly difficult time as their position was screened by woods that concealed the enemy infantry streaming by them. They nevertheless opened fire on every armoured and soft-skinned vehicle that came in view, nailing two Panthers and a column of trucks and half-tracks which they left burning. The enemy had hit the entire line of the Dives and although they had been rebuffed with serious losses at Trun and Chambois, they now had the bridges at St. Lambert and the ford at Moissy. The situation was steadily getting worse and, at 10.12 A.M., Jefferson signalled to all units in contact: "Enemy breaking through."<sup>28</sup>

This brought the Canadian and American artillery to life and they shelled the area of the German movement throughout the day. For the gunners the biggest problem was the location of friendly units in what was a very fluid situation and 13th Field recorded that the trace on their plotting boards "showing firing