
Civil Affairs in Antwerp 1944-1945: Critical Infrastructure and Civil Defense

Louise Tumchewics
King's College London, ltumchewics@gmail.com

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Recommended Citation

Tumchewics, Louise. "Civil Affairs in Antwerp 1944-1945: Critical Infrastructure and Civil Defense." *Journal of Strategic Security* 16, no. 3 (2023) : 1-16.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.16.3.2145>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/jss/vol16/iss3/2>

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Civil Affairs in Antwerp 1944-1945: Critical Infrastructure and Civil Defense

Abstract

In the autumn of 1944, as the Allies moved through France and towards Germany, the city of Antwerp became a key logistics hub owing to its large, and for the time, modern port facilities. Owing to its strategic significance, it became a prime target for German V-1 and V-2 rocket strikes. In order to keep the population in the bombarded city, 1st Canadian Army Civil Affairs took on the challenge of Civil Defense to keep the population safe and the port operational.

Introduction

Antwerp, Belgium was a vital logistics center as the Allies advanced towards Germany in 1944-1945. Antwerp offered proximity to Germany and a vast cargo capacity, reducing the pressures on the Allies' long supply lines from France. As a major port under Allied control, Antwerp was a prime target for German V-1 and V-2 rocket strikes, and German forces bombed the city daily for over five months. As the bombardment intensified, Allied leadership feared the relentless bombardment would drive the civilian workforce to seek safety outside of the city, reducing the port's capacity.

Preventing a mass exodus of the civilian population fell to 1st Canadian Army Civil Affairs. In a matter of months, a small detachment of Civil Affairs staff officers supporting Belgian authorities revitalized Antwerp's civil defense and essential services. The story of Antwerp offers a case study of preserving critical national infrastructure and logistics capability through protecting a city's population and systems, despite intense air strikes.

Literature Review

Antwerp's experience of V-1 and V-2 rockets is addressed in several studies of these weapons, including Michael Neufeld's *The Rocket and the Reich*.¹ The bombardment of the port is analyzed in detail by Ben King in a study for the United States Army Transportation Corps.² The air defense of Antwerp and the Scheldt was the subject of a thesis by Lieutenant Colonel Richard Backus.³ Medical reports on the psychological effects of the V-weapons on the combatants in Antwerp.⁴ The city's losses during the bombardment are the subject of several popular commemorative historical websites and museum collections in Canada and the United Kingdom.⁵

Canadian Army Civil Affairs is a relatively obscure aspect of the Allied liberation of Northwest Europe, largely overshadowed by the military aspects of the campaign. While there is no official history of Canadian Army Civil Affairs, there are official histories of British and American Civil Affairs that make limited mention of their Canadian counterparts but provide information on the operational challenges and policy direction of Civil Affairs in Europe.⁶ War diaries, military records, and other surviving documentation from Canadian Army Civil Affairs held at national archives in the United Kingdom and Canada provide a rich

source of detailed information on civil affairs operations. These sources offer insight into events, the multifaceted challenges presented by liberation, and an understanding of the context in which Civil Affairs officers operated.

Civil Affairs' role in the liberation and governance of specific occupied countries has been the subject of several valuable studies by Canadian scholars. Terry Copp and Michelle Fowler explored 21st Army Group Civil Affairs in Caen and Northwest France.⁷ Matthew Wiseman has detailed the role of civil affairs in the urban operation for the city of Groningen, exploring Civil Affairs' role in managing a complex humanitarian operation amidst significant urban combat.⁸ Kirk Goodlet has examined the role of Civil Affairs in the reconstruction of the agrarian province Zeeland, largely flooded in the liberation of the Netherlands.⁹ Canadian historian David Borys has written the first comprehensive history of Canadian Army Civil Affairs across Northwest Europe, looking at Civil Affairs operations in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany, as well as the historical origins of Civil Affairs, and the institutional changes and political developments during the war.¹⁰ Borys devotes a chapter of his study to Civil Affairs efforts in Antwerp and throughout Belgium. He approaches the bombardment of Antwerp from the perspective of protecting civilian morale in the city and surrounding suburbs. Studies of Civil Affairs acknowledge the importance of logistics yet focus instead on other aspects of Civil Affairs' diverse and complex roles and responsibilities. Using archival sources and building on existing scholarship, this article assesses Civil Affairs' role in maintaining critical national logistics infrastructure through its support for the civilian population in a city subject to widespread bombardment.

Canadian Army Civil Affairs

Prior to the invasion of Sicily in 1943, the Allies were aware that, once in Europe, their troops would encounter a continent of civilians trying to flee the battlespace and suffering from the deprivation brought by years of Nazi occupation. They anticipated there would be a need to prevent populations from impeding military objectives and a requirement to restore functioning national governments and local authorities as soon as possible. Allied governments had to develop doctrine for managing the civil-military relationship in liberated and occupied countries.

The legal basis for operations in liberated countries was the formal agreement or invitation by the accredited government of that country. In liberated countries, Civil Affairs worked to reconcile the needs of the population with practical military requirements. Civil Affairs' mission was twofold: Assisting the military commander's plans by liaising with civil authorities and controlling to prevent "disorganization, disease, or unrest from hampering the activities of fighting troops activities."¹¹ Second, Civil Affairs exercised administrative control and supervision, where needed, to preserve law and order. Its mission was not to win hearts and minds, but to help rebuild local and national administrative capacity so critical population needs like hunger, housing, health, and security did not interfere with, or overwhelm, military objectives.

Training and Selection

Civil Affairs training was delivered at Southwolds House in Wimbledon, Southwest London.¹² Over six weeks, prospective Civil Affairs officers received instruction in military organization and staff officer responsibilities, as well as the history, government structure, and administrative system of France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Norway.¹³ After qualifying, newly minted Civil Affairs officers received additional instruction on a specialized area, such as international law, finance, fire, and civil Defense, public safety, or relief, and then were sent to the front.¹⁴

Not everyone was eligible to become a Civil Affairs officer. Candidates for Civil Affairs roles required second language proficiency and experience in either law, finance, engineering, trade, and industry, or civil defense. These criteria meant for most, joining the army had interrupted a well-established civilian career, and many were above the age of the average combat soldier or officer. Their life experience, skills and greater maturity assisted with the many and varied challenges that arose and the diplomacy and judgment required in building relationships with local governments, businesses, and individuals.¹⁵

Structure and Deployment

The liberation of Belgium was the responsibility of British 21st Army Group, a multinational formation including 1st Canadian Army and 2nd British Army, as well as Polish I Corps, and smaller Dutch, Belgian, Czechoslovak, and American units. Within First Canadian Army, Major General Kirby led the Directorate of Civil Affairs, (DCA) supported by a

small staff. The DCA provided the overall direction of Civil Affairs, as well as liaising with government bodies. The DCA worked in an advisory capacity to Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) and G-5 SHAEF issued orders to all Allied Civil Affairs in Europe.¹⁶

Civil Affairs units integrated into the headquarters of military formations, organized by pools, groups, and detachments, at Army, Corps, and Division levels, respectively. A detachment comprised one Senior Civil Affairs Officer and a small supporting staff of administrative and public safety officers and other ranks attached to the division headquarters to ensure communication and coordination with combat formations.¹⁷ As required, their numbers would be supplemented by specialist officers providing expertise in law, labor relations, public health, relief, logistics, transport, and engineering.¹⁸

There were two types of Civil Affairs detachment: Spearhead and static. As the name suggests, spearhead detachments moved alongside their assigned combat division, rapidly assessing the civilian situation in newly liberated areas, and providing immediate and short-term relief for the most acute problems. Spearheads moved quickly, identifying key local authorities, influential figures, and known collaborators. Spearhead detachments then handed over responsibility to static detachments, who established a base of operations in major towns and cities and made a much longer-term commitment to relief and rehabilitation needs.¹⁹ Both spearhead and static detachments had to be flexible to handle the wide range of tasks they encountered.

The Liberation of Antwerp and The Battle of the Scheldt

Throughout the late summer and early autumn of 1944, the Allies pushed onwards through France and into Belgium. The United States First Army liberated the south of country, while 1st Canadian Armored Division and 1st Polish Armored division captured Bruges and Ghent to the northwest, and British 2nd Army took Brussels and then Antwerp on September 4, 1944.²⁰ The breakout from Normandy had moved the frontline forward at great speed, leading Allied planners to anticipate, perhaps with a degree of hubris, that the war could end by late 1944.²¹ The advance, however, outpaced the capacity of overstretched Allied supply lines.

The liberation of Antwerp therefore represented a major strategic success for the Allies. Antwerp was a vast deep-water port with greater capacity to receive Allied shipping than the ports on the Pas de Calais. Antwerp had modern berthing facilities, 592 cranes, dry docks, and storage capacity for 120 million gallons of fuel.²² Though Eisenhower and Montgomery differed in their respective strategies for defeating Germany, both recognized the crucial importance of the city and its port to ensure the Allied advance proceeded.²³ Supply lines from the French ports were over-extended, and Antwerp offered a large logistics hub closer to the front lines. Eisenhower underscored the importance of Antwerp in a note to General George Marshall on October 23, 1944, writing, “the logistical problem had become so acute that all plans had made Antwerp a *sine qua non* to the waging of the final all-out battle.”²⁴

The port of Antwerp had suffered limited damage during the war and the battle for liberation, and port installations were largely intact, unlike Brest and Cherbourg, which had been heavily damaged. However, Antwerp lay at the end of the heavily fortified 80-kilometer-long Scheldt estuary. Though the Allies had liberated Antwerp city itself, if the Germans controlled the banks of the river and their mines remained embedded in the estuary and the harbor, the port was off limits to the Allies.

Field Marshal Montgomery, commander of 21st Army Group, proposed to focus efforts on establishing his narrow thrust into the Ruhr in Operation Market Garden. The objective was to seize the bridges over Lower Rhine river in the Netherlands to ensure a swift Allied advance into the German industrial heartland, thereby accelerating the end of the war. The operation ultimately failed but, crucially, drew attention, effort, and resources away from the clearance of the Scheldt estuary.

The focus on Market Garden, rather than prioritizing the clearance of the Scheldt, prolonged the end of the war by delaying the opening of a major Allied logistics port.²⁵ However, given the strategic significance of Antwerp, it was likely to have been a target for V-weapons once under Allied control, regardless of the date the liberation of the city occurred. In mid-September 1944, Montgomery ordered First Canadian Army to secure the Scheldt estuary and opened access to Antwerp.

Commander of First Canadian Army, Lieutenant General Guy Simonds, planned three advances to capture the Scheldt Estuary, and break through the German defenses on the Beveland Isthmus to the north, the Breskens Pocket to the south, and Walcheren Island at the mouth of the estuary. The fighting for the estuary was tough and intense.²⁶with First Canadian Army troops bogged down by thick mud in the low-lying polder fields. Progress was slow, and casualties were heavy.²⁷

German forces finally surrendered on November 2, 1944. The Canadian operations to open the estuary to Antwerp had taken much longer than anticipated, at a cost of 13,000 casualties to First Canadian Army.²⁸ For three weeks following the German surrender, ten flotillas of minesweepers worked to clear the river of mines. After nearly three months of effort, the first Allied ships docked at Antwerp on November 28.²⁹

Physical access and control of the estuary and the port were important, but only one part of the port's functionality. November 1944 was still two decades before the advent of container shipping, and with break-bulk cargo still the norm, thousands of dockers were needed to unload Allied cargo ships. Once a ship docked, dockers used shipboard derricks or shore-based cranes to lift heavy goods off the ship. Other items would be carried off the ship by hand and organized into warehouses for shortage or immediate onward overland shipping.³⁰ Loading and unloading cargo was hugely labor- and time-intensive work, and in Antwerp, it was an essential part of keeping Allied supplies moving. It was expected that the port would handle 40,000 tons of cargo per day.³¹

While 1st Canadian Army engaged in clearing the Scheldt estuary, the city of Antwerp became the target for German V-1 and V-2 rocket attacks. Though v-weapons' gyroscopic guidance systems were too rudimentary to deliver any kind of precision strike, they packed considerable destructive punch with payloads of 1,000 kg or (2,000lbs) of explosives.³² In the absence of a credible bomber force, V-weapons offered a means for the Germans to strike back at the Allied advance and attempt to thwart progress through northwest Europe by targeting logistical centers like Antwerp. They were also vengeance weapons, intended to spread fear and wear down civilian morale. Even if they could not hit a precise target, V-1 and V-2 rockets were devastating area weapons, especially for urban centers.

Initially, Allied leadership expected V-weapons to be a mere nuisance because of the rockets' inaccuracy, and effects on the port would be minimal.³³ As attacks intensified, Allied leadership feared the bombardments would drive dock workers to leave their jobs and seek refuge in the comparative safety of the countryside. This situation had already occurred in London, where factory production dipped as workers fled to the countryside to avoid v-weapon bombardment.³⁴ Antwerp's operations could not support a similar decline in productivity or Allies' supply needs would suffer.

Though the port was largely intact, and the city secured, it was critical that the 13,000 Belgian civilian dockers who lived in the city and its suburbs continued to go to the docks.³⁵ Without these men (and dockers were overwhelmingly male), Allied ships could not be unloaded. The Allies did not have 13,000 replacement dock workers available, and the steady flow of supplies from Antwerp, across Netherlands and into Germany was essential for the last winter of the war. It was important therefore, that daily life in Antwerp proceeded as normal, and that people felt sufficiently safe to go to work. Keeping the city stable and secure would be the mission of 1st Canadian Army Civil Affairs.

Civil Affairs in Antwerp

Unlike the Scheldt estuary, Allied troops liberated Antwerp speedily, with minimal damage to the port installations. During the Nazis' four-year occupation of the country, Belgium had suffered far less material damage than other parts of France and the Netherlands.³⁶ There was not the same urgent hunger crisis as Civil Affairs officers would see in the Netherlands, nor the widespread destruction and civilian dislocation that characterized northern France.³⁷ However, the civil affairs situation in Belgium was neither easy nor straightforward.

Though a small country, Belgium presented a complex cultural and socio-economic picture. Historic distinctions between the French and Flemish, Walloons, and Flemings, rural and urban, and rivalries amongst the industrialized cities of Ghent, Bruges, Brussels, and Antwerp divided the small country's population. The Nazi occupation added to these divisions by creating another fault line between those who collaborated with the occupiers and those who did not.³⁸ Even the resistance was highly factionalized: A wide range of groups were drawn from differing political convictions. Many resistance groups pursued

vigilante justice, punishing suspected collaborators, settling personal and political scores, and participating in a range of criminal activities including theft, arson, and murder.³⁹

Belgians had little in the way of central authority to promote unity in the country. At the start of the war, the Belgian King, Leopold II had surrendered to the Nazis, and remained in the country throughout the occupation. The government, led by Walloon Hubert Pierlot, had fled into exile in London. After the liberation, the government was slow to return to the country and even slower to reassert its authority. The Belgian government was ineffective, unwilling, or unable to assert control and provide clear administrative direction, out of step with the population, and uncertain of its course. Provincial authorities were reluctant to act without consultation with the national government, adding to uncertainty and lack of decision-making.⁴⁰ Civil Affairs thus took on a much larger administrative role, becoming heavily involved in long-term commitments, especially as Belgium became an increasingly important rear area for the Allies in the late autumn and winter.⁴¹

Bombardment

Against a backdrop of division and discord, Civil Affairs officers faced the challenge of establishing the civil defense and emergency response infrastructure needed to manage the threat of the V-1 and V-2 rocket attacks. Antwerp had not experienced as much bomb damage as other major European cities had in the past four years. Compared to port cities like Rotterdam, Liverpool, and London, it was relatively unscathed. The bombardment of V-1 and v-2 rockets was the first sustained bombing campaign the city had experienced. The First V-2 rocket hit the city on October 7, 1944, and for 175 consecutive days, the bombing and V rocket attacks continued, with an average of 35 strikes per day. The bombing campaign killed 8,333 civilians and 5,960 bombs and rockets hit the 900 square kilometers (347 square miles) of greater Antwerp.⁴²

An estimated 150 V-1s and 152 V-2s fell inside the dock area. Another 47 V-1s and 31 V-2s fell north of the dock area between the docks and the city limits. The rocket strikes on the dock area killed 53 military personnel and 131 civilians and injured a further 174 military and 380 civilians.⁴³ V-weapons destroyed two warehouses, sunk a 150-ton floating crane; and sunk or damaged 150 ships.⁴⁴

Even before the port was fully operational, SHAEF expressed concerns about transporting ammunition into a port subject to bombardment. A rocket strike on a port full of ammunition and fuel would be disastrous. Allied naval command and British 21st Army Group determined ammunition ships could be brought into the port only if their numbers were strictly limited to operational requirements, docked in an isolated part of the port, and additional firefighting preparations were made.⁴⁵

As well as limiting damage to physical installations at the port, it was vital to keep the port operational by maintaining the workforce. Antwerp municipal authorities offered a 25 percent pay differential for dockers to encourage them to stay in their jobs. The additional pay incentivized workers, but it also led to disagreements because it was paid only for those working in the immediate dock area, and the V-weapons were so inaccurate that many fell outside the designated danger zones of the port, leading other workers in the city to demand higher pay rates for their increased risk too.⁴⁶

A pay increase did not relieve the danger of the V-weapons and the chronic, persistent worry these weapons created. There was widespread anxiety in Antwerp as people, both soldiers, and civilians feared when the next attack might occur, what could happen to them, their families and property.⁴⁷ There was limited protection from V-weapons. Allied antiaircraft batteries stationed around Antwerp attempted to provide air defense but had limited range due to were hampered by the number of airfields surrounding Antwerp. To add further challenge, V-weapons' steel fuselage and aerodynamic shape meant a direct hit was required to bring a rocket down.⁴⁸ The city was highly vulnerable, and there was little in the way of public services to respond effectively to incidents and maintain public confidence.

There was virtually no functioning civil defense infrastructure in the city. The civil defense organization, the Passive Air Defense (*Passive Lucht Beschering*, or PLB), slipped into decline during the Nazi occupation. The organization suffered from insufficient personnel, inadequate training, transportation, and equipment, a lack of centralized operational control, poor incident response management, and little in the way of working relationships with fire brigade, police, and medical aid agencies. Compounding these problems was an absence of leadership, with the former chief of the PLB suspended for

collaboration, and his deputy under investigation for the same charge.⁴⁹

Without a local authority directing the *Passive Lucht Beschering* (PLB), it was the task of Senior Civil Affairs Officer, Henry Barnes, and detachment 325, to create a functional PLB for Antwerp and its surrounding suburbs.⁵⁰ The PLB and attendant services needed to respond swiftly to attacks, manage incidents, provide emergency medical and relief assistance, and return the scene to normalcy as soon as possible. A functioning and responsive Civil Defense organization would, in turn, boost public confidence and keep workers in the city.

Forming such an entity was not a straightforward task. Antwerp city authorities and the leadership of surrounding suburbs and villages did not cooperate with each other. The Nazi occupation forcibly amalgamated municipal administrations, and after the liberation, these organizations withdrew to traditional pre-war parochial structures. They were reluctant to relinquish control once again over their respective jurisdictions. Civil Affairs officers had to effectively re-merge these entities, impressing upon Belgian representatives that the Allies wanted a centralized Civil Defense organization in Antwerp and its environs.⁵¹

Once established, local Belgian officials, including the head of the fire service, formally led the PLB committee. Although local officials assumed leadership positions, Barnes remained part of the committee for the rest of the war, providing direction, support, and liaison with military leadership. The organizational scheme of the PLB included Canadian Civil Affairs officers alongside police, fire service, relief agencies, gendarmerie, the police, the Belgian Red Cross, and the Flemish Red Cross.⁵²

As Barnes and his detachment were trying to rally the cooperation of local authorities, Antwerp suffered some of its most serious rocket attacks, underscoring the need for a functioning civil defense entity. In October 1944, a rocket struck Bontemantelstraat in Central Antwerp, destroying 40 buildings and killing 71 people.⁵³ In November, a V-2 rocket struck the city's busiest intersection at noon, killing 200 people and breaking the water mains.⁵⁴ These devastating incidents emphasized the need for a coordinated civil defense and emergency response capability.

With leadership and organizational structure established, it was time to improve the physical resources of the PLB. The PLB headquarters received additional telephone lines, additional phone lines, incident boards, and city maps. Necessary equipment, such as trucks, bicycles heavy rescue equipment, and petrol, were gathered from Canadian Army stores or local contractors.⁵⁵ An additional 1400 PLB staff were recruited to provide a 24-hour emergency response service, including women who hitherto could not serve in the PLB.⁵⁶

It was difficult to attract staff to the PLB. The work was dangerous, and compared to the PLB, the port authority and other military works projects offered higher wages. It was difficult to stop workers from switching from PLB roles to more competitively paid opportunities elsewhere in the city. To resolve this, the PLB, with Barnes' support and the Ministry of Labor agreed the port authority would not hire workers who had left roles at the PLB. PLB workers, still dissatisfied with their wages, went on strike twice. Eventually, to improve the pay offer, the PLB awarded workers hourly incident pay on top of their monthly wage.⁵⁷

Two Civil Affairs officers developed and implemented the PLB training program, providing instruction on all aspects of disaster response to new PLB recruits and members of ancillary services: The police, fire service, and aid agencies. Rocket attacks frequently interrupted training, although these incidents provided experiential learning opportunities for new recruits. Civil Affairs alone could not manage the instructional needs of the rapidly growing organization. In time, additional Belgian trainers, who had received instruction in the United Kingdom., relieved some of the training burden.⁵⁸

Rocket strikes escalated throughout the winter, reaching their peak in December 1944. That month, a strike on the Cinema Rex killed 519 people and injured 291, half of whom were civilians, the other half off-duty military personnel.⁵⁹ After this attack, on Lieutenant Colonel Barnes' advice, municipal leadership forbade gatherings of over 100 people to prevent further mass casualty events. All cinemas and theaters closed to prevent a similar event.⁶⁰

Mass casualty incidents highlighted the need for medical services to be centralized. Much as municipal authorities had been, local hospitals operated as individual entities, with no coordination amongst medical services. Some hospitals received overwhelming numbers of casualties

after air strikes, while others had empty beds.⁶¹ By centralizing the administration of medical services, hospitals reported on the numbers of casualties and beds available, so ambulances could distribute casualties more evenly and hospitals could attend to casualties more rapidly.

As late as the winter of 1944, as bombings escalated, there was no single organization for the welfare of people bombed out of their homes. Without centralized support, civilians made homeless by bombings had to visit separate offices for clothing, food, money, and temporary accommodation assistance. Major J.J. Opray, detachment 325 relief officer, and Captain J. Patterson, SHAEF's post air raid advisor, encouraged the Belgian government to centralize responsibility for relief and rehabilitation. Civil Affairs officers helped expand the number of rest centers from 3 to 23, requisitioning schools and organizing staff to provide hot food, clothing, and safe temporary shelter.⁶² A single point of support and shelter prevented disorganized flight to the countryside.

Bombs and rocket strikes caused tremendous amounts of damage to the built environment, scattering debris throughout the city, impeding transportation, and posing a safety risk. In December 1944, Lieutenant Colonel Barnes assisted with the formation of a provincial coordinating committee to increase the amount of manpower and equipment available for bomb site clearance. Though led by Belgian officials, Major A.J. Dunn, a Civil Affairs technical specialist, on loan from II Canadian Corps Headquarters, oversaw operations, and successfully negotiated the loan of 100 trucks and 3 cranes from the British Ministry of Home Security to accelerate clean-up efforts.⁶³ Swift clean up restored the normal running of services, and a sense of normalcy.

Essential services kept running despite the bomb and rocket attacks. With Civil Affairs' support, the PLB enhanced utility crews, and borrowed vehicles and repair equipment from military and civilian sources to keep these systems functioning.⁶⁴ Utility companies kept the water supply flowing, and the trams running. Gas, though in short supply, did not break down. The city lights stayed on, and Antwerp experienced only one power outage when the Merxem Electric Plant took a direct hit. Fortunately, as Civil Affairs reports recount, the Schelle power station in a nearby suburb could carry the additional load while repairs were carried out.⁶⁵ With electricity, water, and gas

running reliably, there was a semblance of normal daily life, and the port and other businesses continued to operate.

By the end of the war in May 1945, the performance of the PLB and associated services had improved remarkably. Despite the persistent hail of rockets, no significant population flight from the city had occurred. Civilians continued to work in the docks, amidst the dangers. Though rocket strikes had reduced port discharge tonnage, it had remained operational even after receiving 302 rocket strikes. However, the port of Antwerp did not meet the planned discharge targets.⁶⁶ and the Allies were obligated to open an additional port at Ghent.⁶⁷

In the six months since October 1944, detachment 325 had helped the city establish a comprehensive civil defense and emergency response system. A Civil Affairs postwar report modestly summarized the unit's extensive work in Antwerp as having "assisted and guided" local authorities.⁶⁸ Belgian authorities recognized the assistance provided by civil affairs officers. In a May 1945 letter, the head of Antwerp's PLB, wrote to detachment 325 to express his gratitude:

I fully realize that it is mainly due to your great efforts, to your help, and to your previous experience that it has been possible to develop the PLB into a solid organization and that thousands of civilians could be rescued alive.⁶⁹

Analysis and Conclusion

The task facing Civil Affairs in Antwerp in the autumn of 1944 was a mammoth one: Standing up a civil defense network in a city under bombardment by novel weapons in a country emerging from Nazi occupation and historically divided. Belgium was a challenging social environment to operate within, but Civil Affairs had several advantages. The port installations were still intact, and the city was habitable. Antwerp was a strategic priority for the Allies and diverted resources for the city's protection. Civil Affairs could also draw upon additional expertise within II Canadian Corps and SHAEF. Although there were inevitable frictions, the population was overall friendly towards the Allies and not actively undermining Civil Affairs work. Belgian central government was weak, and there was a lack of local capacity at all levels of civil administration, but Belgian society and economy remained intact.

The absence of effective government at national and local levels meant Civil Affairs took on considerable responsibilities and commanded authority. They could centralize services and governing bodies and issue safety advisories. Belgians respected Civil Affairs officers and heeded their advice. The material resources of the Allies, and the amount of goods flowing through Antwerp, meant Civil Affairs officers could requisition necessary equipment and vehicles to fill critical needs. Civil Affairs officers could thus rectify supply shortages for Antwerp's civil defense with relative ease and speed. Civil Affairs gained experience working with populations and local governments in Italy and France as an organization and brought their best practices to Belgium. The structure of Civil Affairs enabled detachment 325 to remain in the city for a prolonged period, allowing for building working relationships and trust.

The nature of V-weapons impeded the interdiction of rocket strikes on the port and the city, and the strikes succeeded in disrupting the pace and quantity of Allied cargo shipping. However, a well-organized civil defense organization could minimize loss of life, provide swift medical treatment for the injured, and maintain public order in the aftermath of bombings. Orderly incident management boosted public confidence, and people remained in the city.

Civil Affairs officers did not—and could not—rectify Allied logistics challenges nor arrest the v-weapon strikes. They helped develop local capacity and create conditions enabling civilian dock workers to remain in the city despite near-constant bombardment. This kept critical national logistics infrastructure functioning, albeit at reduced volume, and supplies moving towards the front lines—critical for ending the war. Therefore, Civil Affairs' experience in Antwerp is of contemporary relevance as Ukrainian cities grapple with the challenge of protecting civilians and keeping logistics and critical national infrastructure functioning despite air strikes.

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- 28 Zuehkle, *Terrible Victory* 75, 76, 124.
- 29 Zuehkle, *Terrible Victory* 443, 453.
- 30 A. Vigarié, "From break-bulk to containers: the transformation of general cargo handling and trade," *GeoJournal* 48, 3-7 (1999). <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1007024300877>
- 31 King, "Antwerp and the German Attack on Allies' Supply Lines, 1944-1945," 3. The port was expected receive 22,400 tons of American Cargo and 17,500 tons of British cargo daily.
- 32 Neufeld, *The Rocket and the Reich*, 274.
- 33 King, "Antwerp and the German Attack on Allies' Supply Lines, 1944-1945," 4.
- 34 Borys, *Civilians at the Sharp End*, 124.
- 35 On an average day, the number of dock workers at the port ranged between 9,000-13,000. Archival sources consulted for this paper do not indicate the particular political persuasion of dock workers, however, as mentioned, former Nazi collaborators were actively being sought by various resistance groups.
- 36 Borys, *Civilians at the Sharp End*, 110

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- ³⁷ Wiseman, "Civil-Military Relations and Ethics," 147.
- ³⁸ Borys, *Civilians at the Sharp End*, 107.
- ³⁹ Borys, *Civilians at the Sharp End*, 113-114 and "Report on Civil Affairs in Belgium," November 1944, WO 219/3738, 15, The National Archives, Kew, London, U.K.
- ⁴⁰ Borys, *Civilians at the Sharp End*, 111.
- ⁴¹ Borys, *Civilians at the Sharp End* 112.
- ⁴² King, "Antwerp and the German Attack on Allies' Supply Lines, 1944-1945," 12; Borys, *Civilians at the Sharp End*, 103.
- ⁴³ King, "Antwerp and the German Attack on Allies' Supply Lines, 1944-1945," 12.
- ⁴⁴ King, "Antwerp and the German Attack on Allies' Supply Lines, 1944-1945," 12-13
- ⁴⁵ King, "Antwerp and the German Attack on Allies' Supply Lines, 1944-1945," 13-14.
- ⁴⁶ King, "Antwerp and the German Attack on Allies' Supply Lines, 1944-1945," 14.
- ⁴⁷ A. G. Freeman "Effect on Troops of the "V" Weapon Bombardment of Antwerp," 58, 59.
- ⁴⁸ King, "Antwerp and the German Attack on Allies' Supply Lines, 1944-1945," 6.
- ⁴⁹ Borys *Civilians at the Sharp End*, 125
- ⁵⁰ Borys, *Civilians at the Sharp End* ,124.
- ⁵¹ Borys, *Civilians at the Sharp End*, 124, 125-126; "Civil Defense in Antwerp," May 1945, WO 171/7982, 2, The National Archives, Kew, London, U.K.
- ⁵² Borys, *Civilians at the Sharp End*, 126.
- ⁵³ King, "Antwerp and the German Attack on Allies' Supply Lines, 1944-1945," 9.
- ⁵⁴ Borys, *Civilians at the Sharp End*, 132.
- ⁵⁵ "Civil Defense in Antwerp," May 1945, WO 171/7982, 18, The National Archives, Kew, London, U.K.
- ⁵⁶ "Civil Defense in Antwerp," May 1945, WO 171/7982, 9, The National Archives, Kew, London, U.K.
- ⁵⁷ Borys, *Civilians at the Sharp End*, 128.
- ⁵⁸ "Civil Defense in Antwerp," May 1945, WO 171/7982, 9, The National Archives, Kew, London, U.K.
- ⁵⁹ Borys, *Civilians at the Sharp End* ,131.
- ⁶⁰ King, "Antwerp and the German Attack on Allies' Supply Lines, 1944-1945," 14.
- ⁶¹ Borys, *Civilians at the Sharp End*,
- ⁶² Borys, *Civilians at the Sharp End* 134-135.
- ⁶³ Borys, *Civilians at the Sharp End* 136.
- ⁶⁴, Borys, *Civilians at the Sharp End* 131.
- ⁶⁵ "Civil Defense in Antwerp," May 1945, WO 171/7982, 22, The National Archives, Kew, London, U.K.
- ⁶⁶ King, "Antwerp and the German Attack on Allies' Supply Lines, 1944-1945," 16.
- ⁶⁷ King, "Antwerp and the German Attack on Allies' Supply Lines, 1944-1945," 16.
- ⁶⁸ "Civil Defense in Antwerp," May 1945, WO 171/7982, 35, The National Archives, Kew, London, U.K.
- ⁶⁹ "Letter to Major Foreshew from Major E. Van Cappelen," June 1945, WO 171/7982, The National Archives, Kew, London, U.K.