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**BEYOND D-DAY:
MAINTAINING MORALE IN
THE 3rd CANADIAN INFANTRY DIVISION
JUNE – JULY 1944**

By

R. Alexander Souchen

Thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
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ABSTRACT

**BEYOND D-DAY:
MAINTAINING MORALE IN
THE 3rd CANADIAN INFANTRY DIVISION,
JUNE – JULY 1944**

Russell Alexander Souchen
University of Ottawa, 2010

Supervisor:
Dr. Serge M. Durflinger

This thesis evaluates the “human dimension” of military history and focuses primarily on soldiers from the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division during the first half of the Normandy campaign, 6 June to early July 1944. This study concerns itself with the subject of morale and the individual’s experience in war. Therefore, it couples an exploration of the challenging physical and psychological conditions that the infantry confronted in battle, with a discussion of how they coped with, and persevered through, the awful bloodbath beyond D-Day. Five critical and related themes are addressed 1) anticipation versus reality; 2) privation and hardship; 3) improvisation and adaption; 4) coping, culture, and comradeship; and 5) administration and morale. By placing the common soldier at the centre of attention, this thesis reveals an interesting and innovative perspective into a variety of important subjects that are virtually unknown in the relevant historiography.

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could not be overcome with some hard work, attention to detail, and lots of digging. His knowledge of Canadian military history is not only humbling and inspiring, but also lent itself to precise and extensive editorial comments that improved the structure, focus, and most especially, the grammar of my work. In addition, Dr. Durflinger's insistence on professional development, through teaching assistantships and conference presentations, and his writing of a seemingly endless cycle of reference letters on my behalf, have opened up so many opportunities for my future and greatly influenced my growth as an historian. Thank you for everything!

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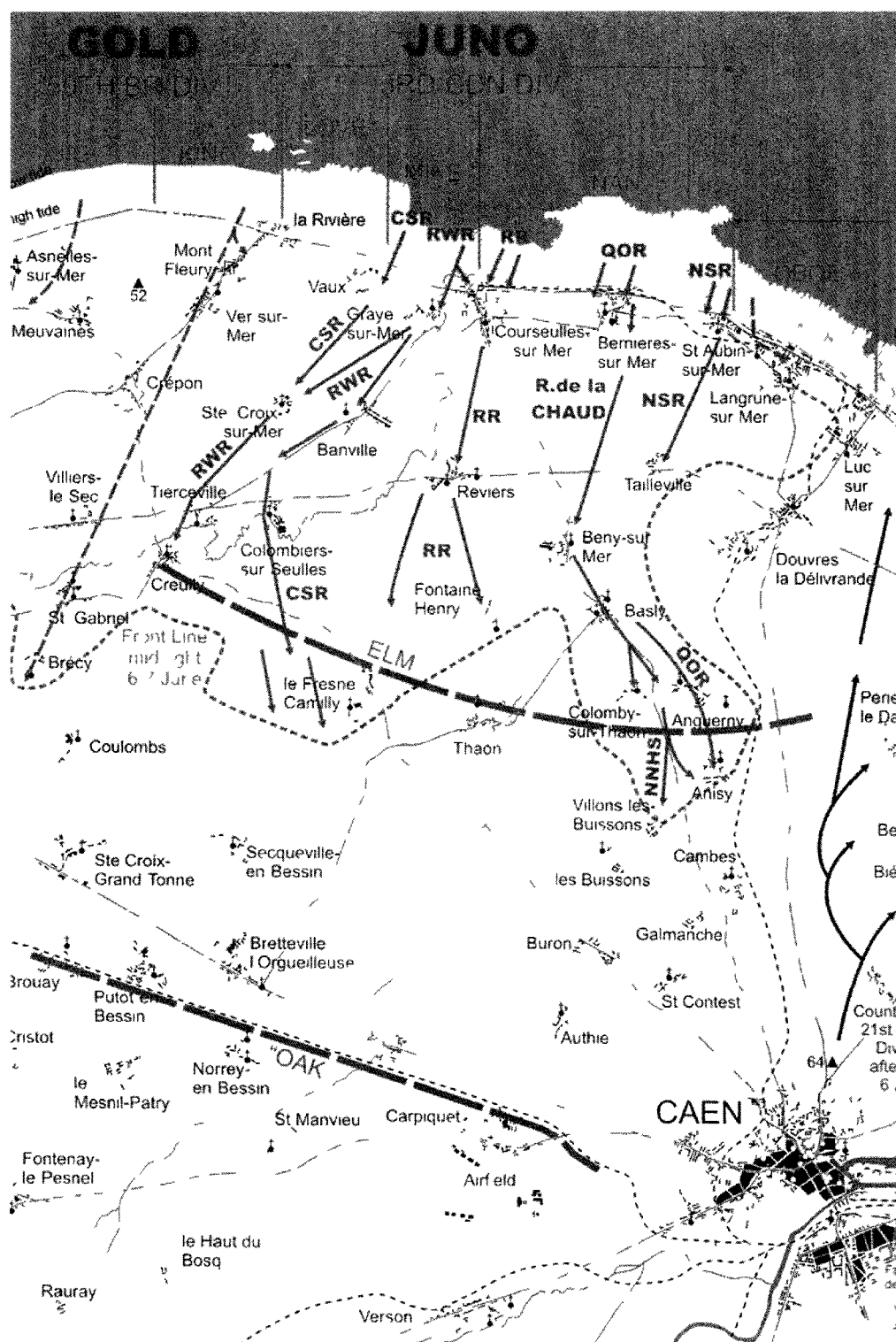
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Assistant Director of Medical Services.....	ADMS
Battalion Headquarters.....	BnHQ
Brigade Headquarters.....	BdeHQ
Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa.....	CH of O
Canadian Military Headquarters.....	CMHQ
Canadian Scottish Regiment.....	Can Scots
Commanding Officer.....	CO
Company Sergeant-Major.....	CSM
Company Quartermaster Sergeant.....	CQMS
Corporal.....	Cpl.
Headquarters Company.....	HQ Coy
Highland Light Infantry of Canada.....	HLI
Intelligence Officer.....	IO
Landing Craft (Assault).....	LCA
Landing Craft (Tank).....	LCT
Landing Ship Infantry.....	LSI
Lieutenant-Colonel.....	Lt-Col.
Lieutenant.....	Lt.
Left Out of Battle.....	LOB
Medical Officer.....	MO
Non-Commissioned Officer.....	NCO
North Nova Scotia Highlanders.....	NNSH
North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment.....	NS
Observation Post.....	OP
Other Ranks.....	ORs
Prisoner of War.....	POW
Private.....	Pte.
Quartermaster.....	QM
Queen's Own Rifles of Canada.....	QOR
Regimental Aid Post.....	RAP
Régiment de la Chaudière.....	Chauds
Regimental Sergeant-Major.....	RSM
Regina Rifles.....	RR
Rifleman.....	Rfn.
Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps.....	RCAMC
Royal Canadian Army Service Corps.....	RCASC
Royal Winnipeg Rifles.....	RWR
Second in Command.....	2IC
Sergeant.....	Sgt.
Signals Officer.....	SO
Stormont, Dundas, and Glengarry Highlanders.....	SDGs
Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force.....	SHAEF
Venereal Disease.....	VD
Venereal Disease Control Officer.....	VDCO

CANADIAN SECTOR, JUNE 1944



Source: Mike Bechthold, and Terry Copp. *The Canadian Battlefields in Normandy: A Visitor's Guide* (Waterloo, ON: LCMSDS, 2004), 20.

INTRODUCTION

“For God’s sake send up the M. O.”

When the Canadian Scottish Regiment (Can Scots) occupied the area in and around the village of Rots, Normandy on the night of the 18-19 June 1944, its ranks were decimated and exhausted. The unit had just fought nearly two weeks of exceptionally brutal and strenuous combat at Putot-en-Bessin, and was now being rotated away from that hell to a relatively “quiet” sector. Yet Rots was hardly a break. Like every other Norman village occupied by the Allies, it was a heap of rubble, the stench of death was everywhere, and the area was under constant mortar and artillery bombardment. This situation was nothing new for the battalion’s second-in-command (2IC), Major C. M. Wightman, who had been fighting with the unit since D-Day, 6 June 1944. However, on about the second or third day in Rots, a most unusual message came in to his Battalion Headquarters (BnHQ) from one of the forward companies occupying a blown-out schoolhouse. The first line, “For God’s sake send up the M. O.,” immediately grabbed Wightman’s attention. He quickly read the rest of it and radioed Captain J. C. G. Young, the battalion’s Medical Officer (MO). Minutes later, the two Canadians raced forward to the schoolhouse, dodging machine-gun and shell fire with every step. When they finally arrived at their destination they found a most peculiar predicament: a French civilian woman was about to give birth. Without missing a beat, Captain Young took charge and helped deliver a healthy baby boy to the relief of all those present.¹

¹ Directorate of History and Heritage (DHH), 145.2C4 (D4), “Battle Narrative Putot-en-Bessin Counter Attack – June 8th, 1944 and the Move to Rots,” Lt-Col. C. M. Wightman, September 1957, 7.

There, amidst the destruction, strife, and killing, the miracle of life unfolded before the informal audience of warriors – a spectacular episode taking place during a momentous time. Yet if one wanted to learn more about this or other non-combat related events involving Canadians during the Normandy campaign, one would be disappointed to discover that the emphasis of scholarly research and analysis has been focused elsewhere. This is largely due to the powerful and trend-setting influence of Colonel C.



Photo 1: Major C. M. Wightman (right) and Captain J. C. G. Young (kneeling), 15 June 1944. LAC, Credit: Lt. Donald I. Grant, PA-132805.

P. Stacey, Canada's official army historian of the Second World War, and his early work on the Normandy campaign. In what was the first authoritative account of Canadian operations in Northwest Europe, Stacey's widely popular book *The Victory Campaign* (1960), took on the daunting challenge of reconstructing the totality of Canadian participation

in Normandy and beyond. The immensity of the task required him to focus his attention on specific topics that met his mandate and fit into the broad narrative he was creating. Consequently, there was little space to discuss individuals and their experience in war or events like Wightman and Young's frantic few moments at Rots.² Instead, Stacey

² Tim Cook, *Clio's Warriors: Canadian Historians and the Writing of the World Wars* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), Chapters 3-5; C. P. Stacey, *The Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War: The Victory Campaign, Vol. III: The Operations in North-West Europe, 1944-1945* (Ottawa: The Queen's Printer, 1960).

adopted a traditional “top-down” approach to the subject matter and in doing so he analyzed the army, corps, divisional, and brigade levels of command, incorporated interviews with high-ranking commanders, and illuminated operational planning and doctrine, the course and chronology of the fighting, casualty statistics, and various other tactical and operational fundamentals. In the end, Stacey produced a masterpiece of operational-strategic history that, in regards to Normandy, discussed the occasionally questionable conduct of Canadian operations in the face of a more experienced German enemy, who appeared to hold the advantages of superior training, leadership, and tactics.³

Stacey’s “top-down” approach was mirrored in the work of his British and American counterparts. The official histories produced in those countries, mainly Forrest Pogue’s *The Supreme Command* (1954), John Ehrman’s *Grand Strategy: Volume V* (1956), Martin Blumenson’s *Breakout and Pursuit* (1961), Gordon A. Harrison’s *The Cross-Channel Attack* (1968), and Michael Howard’s *Grand Strategy: Volume IV* (1972), were all operational-strategic histories that covered top-level planning, Anglo-American relations, and Allied combat effectiveness in order to construct a broad synthesis of the Northwest European campaign.⁴ By the 1980s, the declassification and release of documents chipped away at the monopoly of information possessed by the official historians in Canada, Britain, and the United States. Their work was therefore

³ Stacey, *The Victory Campaign*, 270-278.

⁴ Forrest Pogue, *United States Army in World War II: The European Theatre of Operations: The Supreme Command* (Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1954); John Ehrman, *Grand Strategy: Volume V: August 1943-September 1944* (London: HMSO, 1956); Martin Blumenson, *United States Army in World War II: The European Theatre of Operations: Breakout and Pursuit* (Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1961); Gordon A. Harrison, *United States Army in World War II: The European Theatre of Operations: The Cross-Channel Attack* (Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1968); Michael Howard, *Grand Strategy, Volume IV: August 1942-September 1943* (London: HMSO, 1972).

followed by various other studies written by a second generation of military historians. Ralph Bennett's memoir/history *Ultra in the West* (1979), Russell Weigley's *Eisenhower's Lieutenants* (1981), John Keegan's *Six Armies in Normandy* (1982), Carlo D'Este's *Decision in Normandy* (1983), Max Hastings's *Overlord: D-Day and the Battle for Normandy* (1984), J. L. Granatstein and Desmond Morton's *Bloody Victory* (1984), and Reginald Roy's *1944: The Canadians in Normandy* (1984) represent some of the best research from that era on that important campaign. However, each study focused to varying extents on the operational-strategic paradigm and Allied combat effectiveness. The influence of the official histories seemed difficult to escape.⁵

This was especially the case in Canada, where Stacey's interpretation and criticism of Canadian operations in Normandy dominated and, even today, still inspire debate amongst historians.⁶ This trend is particularly evident in the publication of two important books, John A. English's *The Canadian Army and the Normandy Campaign* (1991) and Terry Copp's *Fields of Fire* (2003). In both books, the issue of combat effectiveness reigned supreme though each scholar advanced drastically different arguments. English set out to expand upon Stacey's perception of the Canadian performance. As he pointed out in the introduction, his book “. . . illustrates the cumulative nature of history, for its argument could not have been raised up without the

⁵ Ralph Bennett, *Ultra in the West The Normandy Campaign of 1944-1945* (London Hutchinson, 1979), Russell Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants* (Bloomington Indiana University Press, 1981), John Keegan, *Six Armies in Normandy From D-Day to the Liberation of Paris, June 6th – August 25th, 1944* (New York The Viking Press, 1982), Carlo D'Este, *Decision in Normandy The Unwritten Story of Montgomery and the Allied Campaign* (London Pan Books, 1983), Max Hastings, *Overlord D Day and the Battle for Normandy* (New York Vintage Books, 1984), J L Granatstein and Desmond Morton, *Bloody Victory Canadians and the D-Day Campaign* (Toronto Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1984), Reginald Roy, *1944 The Canadians in Normandy* (Toronto MacMillan, 1984)

⁶ For example, see Marc Milner, “Stopping the Panzers Reassessing the Role of 3rd Canadian Infantry Division in Normandy, 7-10 June 1944” *Journal of Military History*, Vol 74, No 2 (April 2010) 491-522

firm foundations provided by Colonel C. P. Stacey's official and unofficial histories."⁷ However, where Stacey had limited his criticism to the battalion and regimental levels of command in order to conveniently avoid drawing the ire of the high-ranking generals (who both planned the operations he was critiquing and reviewed the book after the war), English sought to demonstrate how badly the entire command structure functioned in Normandy.⁸ He therefore discussed failures in training prior to D-Day, doctrinal shortcomings, command and morale problems, and described what he felt was avoidably slow operational progress toward Falaise.⁹

In complete opposition to English and Stacey, Terry Copp has worked tirelessly to revise prevailing trends and rehabilitate the Canadian performance in Normandy. He argued in *Fields of Fire* that the Canadians fought with an underrated effectiveness and skilful flexibility demonstrated in their ability to overcome significant casualty rates and topographical challenges, to improvise doctrinal and tactical solutions to evolving combat operations.¹⁰ Copp's strongly argued, if celebratory convictions, serve as a formidable counterweight to Stacey's legacy. Rather than completely re-examining the higher echelons of command to prove his argument, Copp looked for evidence elsewhere and delved deeper into the army's structure. His focus was on the lower levels of command, particularly the infantry brigades and battalions (with occasional references to the company or platoon levels), where the orders from higher headquarters were enacted in life-and-death situations.¹¹ He therefore emphasized different forms of

⁷ Quotation from John English, *The Canadian Army and the Normandy Campaign: A Study of Failure in High Command*, (New York: Praeger, 1991), xv.

⁸ Cook, *Clio's Warriors*, Chapters 3-5.

⁹ English, *The Canadian Army and the Normandy Campaign*, introduction.

¹⁰ Terry Copp, *Fields of Fire: The Canadians in Normandy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), Chapter 1.

¹¹ *Ibid*, Chapter 1 and 10.

evidence drawn from interviews with participants, aerial photographs, his previous work on neuropsychiatric casualties, contemporary operational research, veterans' memoirs, and other non-traditional sources ignored by Stacey and English. Inevitably he came to different conclusions that have done much to refocus scholarly inquiry into other progressive aspects of combat effectiveness in Normandy.¹²

However, no Canadian historian has published a study exploring the logical extension of Copp's perspective. As of yet there remains no scholarly account of the physical and psychological conditions through which the ordinary Canadian soldier fought and defeated his German enemy. Although Copp did make some attempt to discuss the individual and their experience in war, his attempt at revision limited the scope of his inquiry to the same operational-strategic parameters that Stacey had established. On a fundamental level *Fields of Fire*, remained a narrative about combat effectiveness even though Copp's approach benefitted from John Keegan's and John Ellis's work on the "human dimension" of war in their books, *The Face of Battle* (1976) and *The Sharp End of War* (1980), respectively.¹³ Even the regimental histories, published throughout the postwar period, only partially address the "human dimension" – if at all. Of varying quality, most regimental histories followed a strict combat narrative and paid sparse attention to the full range of individual experiences or non-

¹² Two recent publications by Copp help make this point. One highlights the intensity of casualty rates among the Canadian and British infantry divisions in 1944, see Terry Copp, "To the Last Canadian? Casualties in 21st Army Group" *Canadian Military History*, Vol.18. No. 1 (Winter, 2009): 3-6. The other was a report on battle wastage rates in the British army written by H. G. Gee and published by Copp in a new Military Operational Research Series put out by the Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies, see H. G. Gee, *Battle Wastage Rates, British Army, 1940-1945: Army Operational Research Group Report No. 2/54* (Waterloo, ON: LCMSDS Press of Wilfrid Laurier University, 2010) See also, Cook, *Cho's Warriors*, 237.

¹³ Copp, *Fields of Fire*, 9-10; John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (London: Plimco, 2004, c1976); John Ellis, *The Sharp End of War: The Fighting Man in World War II* (London: David & Charles Ltd, 1980).

combat related developments.¹⁴ Remaining conspicuously absent from the historiography of the Canadian participation in Normandy is a study that definitively places the individual's combat and non-combat experiences in their proper historical context by attributing significance to the variety of daily events encountered by ordinary men like Major Wightman, Captain Young, and every other Canadian soldier.

The emphasis on combat effectiveness and the "top-down" narrative has obscured rather than illuminated the human experience in war, as these approaches prejudice the historian against the types of evidence (memoirs, letters collections, diaries, and other first-hand accounts produced by the common soldier) needed to reconstruct it. In Canada, Second World War historians have traditionally treated veterans' first-hand accounts with a mix of admiration and scepticism: memories can change, while documents produced at the time do not. Understandably, historians have felt compelled to corroborate first-hand accounts (especially memoirs published decades after the war) with contemporary documented proof, and since the overwhelming mass of such evidence was produced by the higher-ranking officers, the influence of ordinary veterans' testimonies on wider historiographical trends was limited. As C. P. Stacey commented in his memoirs, *A Date with History* (1983), "The human memory . . . is a very frail instrument . . . one scrap of paper written on the evening of the battle is worth reams of reminiscences written down or spoken into tape recorders after months or years have passed."¹⁵ In that vein, Stacey believed that the most important historical source for

¹⁴ For example see: Will R. Bird, *North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment* (Fredericton, NB.: Brunswick Press, 1963); Bruce Tascona and Eric Wells, *Little Black Devils: A History of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles* (Winnipeg, Man.: Frye Pub., 1983); Jacques Castonguay and Armand Ross, *Le Régiment de la Chaudière* (Levis, Que: Le Régiment de la Chaudière, 1983).

¹⁵ C. P. Stacey, *A Date with History: Memoirs of a Canadian Historian* (Ottawa: Deneau Publishers, 1983), 229-230.

reconstructing events during the course of battle was the operations log maintained at every unit headquarters:

Here the historian has before him the record of information received and sent out, of orders given and received. Every entry is timed. The record is strictly contemporary; it is almost wholly impersonal; and it is maintained, not for historical purposes, as the unit or formation war diary is, but as an instrument for fighting the battle.¹⁶

Although the operations log provides an accurate chronological account of tactical deployments in combat, the over-reliance on “impersonal” primary evidence hinders an investigation of the “human dimension” of war, as those types of sources – especially when written far to the rear – do not convey the complete range of the individual’s physical and psychological experiences in forward areas. Therefore the impression such sources impart is sanitized and detached from the actual means and ends of combat. As veteran George Blackburn eloquently stated in his introduction to *The Guns of Normandy* (1995), “the war historians” and their work “give the impression that [war] was some sort of game played out by cunning generals, with the outcome hinging on the level of ‘aggressiveness’ shown by one side or the other.”¹⁷ Moreover, according to Blackburn, the meagre interest in the plight of those individuals actually fighting the battles has led to “inaccurate” and “irresponsible conclusions bordering on outright dishonesty” which were perpetuated by the historical community under Stacey’s influence. Blackburn continued:

Armchair strategists writing of those days – whether British, American, or Canadian – have all spent too much time wondering why [the Canadians] were so slow getting down past Falaise to meet up with the Americans. They

¹⁶ Ibid, 230.

¹⁷ George Blackburn, *The Guns of Normandy: A Soldier’s Eye View, France 1944* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1995), xiii-xiv.

should have spent more time wondering how men ever summoned up the necessary moral courage and physical stamina to get there at all.¹⁸

This thesis is motivated both by Blackburn's critical remarks and the desire to expand the burgeoning field of inquiry into the "human dimension" of war, so vibrantly embraced by Canadian historians of the Great War, to the study of the battle for Normandy. In recent years, historian Tim Cook's extra-ordinary two-volume study of the infantry in the First World War, *At the Sharp End* (2007) and *Shock Troops* (2008), have altered the way historians interpret the human element of that conflict.¹⁹ Perhaps most significantly, Cook's work demonstrated the importance of melding documented evidence with first-hand accounts written by the participants, in order to achieve a greater understanding and a more balanced interpretation of past events. The insight gained from this approach revealed a thoroughly animating, dynamic, and evolving human experience in war; and it is worth noting here that a study similar to Cook's landmark work has yet to be written on the Second World War.

Before outlining the argument and direction of this thesis a note on its scope and content must be made. The initial hope of exploring the "human dimension" during the entire battle for Normandy proved too large a concept to complete in one thesis and obliged the imposition of temporal and thematic limitations. This was done for two reasons. First, covering the whole June to August period would have required an examination of approximately 76 days. Although such an approach is more conducive to the type of operational-strategic history written by Stacey and others, it is not as favourable to the type of in-depth analysis required for understanding the "soldiers' eye

¹⁸ Ibid, xv

¹⁹ Tim, Cook, *At the Sharp End Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1914-1916* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2007), Tim Cook, *Shock Troops Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1917-1918* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2008)

view.” Second, focusing on such a long time period would have obscured appreciation for the evolving nature of the campaign, which made each month’s experiences for the men highly distinctive. In order to effectively examine the “human dimension” it is best to avoid a macro perspective in favour of a finite time period involving one particular formation. The fact that the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division was the main Canadian formation fighting in Normandy from D-Day until just after the capture of Caen on 8-9 July 1944, it offered a convenient thematic and temporal microcosm. Therefore, the scope and content of this thesis is limited to the 3rd Division during the first half of the campaign in Normandy.

However, records relating to the 3rd Division during that time were not always accessible or even in existence. At least two battalion war diaries are known to have been completely destroyed by German shelling (although one was partially rewritten).²⁰ Moreover, despite the author’s best efforts, not a single 3rd Division soldier’s letter collection covering this time period could be found at the Library and Archives Canada (LAC), the Canadian War Museum (CWM), the Directorate of History and Heritage (DHH), and the Canadian Letters and Images Project. It therefore became necessary to incorporate evidence from other Canadian formations fighting during that time and slightly after, mainly: the 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade, the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion, and, in a few isolated cases, the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division. It is hoped that the reader will forgive this unavoidable contingency, as every effort was made to ensure this evidence was linked to more universal aspects of human experience (such as: letter writing tendencies, experience with shelling and disease, and views on

²⁰ The two war diaries in question were the Can Scots’ June war diary (probably destroyed by a direct hit to the unit’s BnHQ on 26 June) and the Queen’s Own Rifles’ (QOR) July war diary (destroyed when the Intelligence Section’s truck was hit by anti-tank fire on 25 July) The QOR’s was hastily rewritten.

reinforcements) so as not to obscure the distinctive experience of the 3rd Division's soldiers. Nevertheless, there does exist a wealth of primary evidence from 3rd Division units and soldiers that form the basis of this study. The battalion war diaries proved invaluable as they provided a daily log of activities and, depending on the unit, also provided other important sources such as Battalion Orders, battalion newspapers, photographs, and other miscellaneous paperwork. Moreover, a significant number of first-hand accounts from 3rd Division veterans do exist in the form of diaries, memoirs, interviews, and some available personal fonds. These important sources greatly complemented the documented record.

Those readers who seek a new opinion on operations, strategy, or tactics must look elsewhere. This thesis is on the "human dimension" during the first five weeks after D-Day, and although it discusses various engagements throughout June and part of July, every effort has been made to keep the traditional combat narrative to a minimum in favour of other issues. Its focus is on the Canadian infantry, the branch of the army that did most of the fighting and almost all of the dying, and it primarily concerns itself with the subject of morale and the individual's experience in war. Therefore this thesis couples an exploration of the challenging physical and psychological conditions that the infantry confronted while in Normandy with a discussion of how they persevered and continued fighting through the awful bloodbath beyond D-Day. This analysis is addressed through the discussion of five critical and related themes: 1) anticipation versus reality 2) privation and hardship 3) improvisation and adaption 4) coping, culture, and comradeship 5) administration and morale. Derived from the surviving veterans' own testimonies and the contemporary documentary record, these five themes shed light on a dynamic array of experiences, both individual and collective, which defined the

parameters of the “human dimension” and highlights the intricate pillars of morale amongst Canadian soldiers.

In chapter one, the first three themes are explored in conjunction to illuminate the physical and psychological impact of combat. Every soldier anticipated and envisioned what battle would be like while preparing and training for the invasion of Europe. However, each soldier received a rude awakening upon his first introduction to the reality of severe hardship, despair, and horror produced by the death, savagery, and bewilderment of combat. Moreover, this depressing and transformative experience was compounded by the gruelling and disgusting physical environment that challenged the limits of human endurance. Not only did the foot-soldier have to live below ground in horrendous squalor, battling terrain, weather, exhaustion and sickness every day, but he also had to engage in physically demanding and acutely brutal combat actions and patrols against a fanatical enemy often supported by soul-shattering shelling. However, in that terrible cauldron called Normandy, Canadian soldiers showed an ability to make-do, adapt, learn, and persevere through the strain and dangerous environment – which is perhaps one of the more dominant themes discussed in this work as it reappears in subsequent chapters.

In chapter two, the theme of coping, culture, and comradeship is explored in order to assess how the strain of front-line service was managed and understood by the troops at the time. During June and most of July, rest areas completely removed from the sights, smells, sounds, and landscape of battle were impossible as the beachhead was too narrow. However, unit commanders improvised by keeping a close eye on the physical and mental state of the troops under their command, and whenever possible initiated a rotation of subordinate units to the reserve position for a quick break. This allowed the

strain of combat to be managed as best as possible since soldiers could indulge themselves in various activities other than killing. However, when they were on the line, the peer pressure and support from the individual's closest companions provided the bonds of comradeship that could incite previously unknown reserves of strength, courage, and action, motivating the soldier to avoid failure in front of his friends. The primary group's influence was supported by the social outlets of communication and conversation, mainly provided by battalion newspapers, that not only offered a means to establish a vibrant cultural environment and identity, but also acted as a collective coping mechanism since the humour, verse, parodies, and news published in them acted as a means of expression and relief for all concerned.

In chapter three, the final theme of administration and morale is investigated through the wider social, structural, and bureaucratic factors that manipulated the individual's experience and morale in tangible and intangible ways. To be maintained at a high level, morale had to be carefully coordinated by a diverse number of people, both inside and outside the soldier's primary group. This chapter therefore analyses the role of BnHQ and its vital Headquarters Company (HQ Coy) in providing the critical administrative, leadership, disciplinary, and logistical incentives needed to continue fighting. As the nine infantry battalions in the 3rd Division lacked combat experience prior to D-Day, they learned their crafts on the job and tinkered with their war establishments, streamlined or adapted the administrative apparatus to improve efficiency, and improvised solutions to combat and non-combat related dilemmas. Often overlooked by historians, these administrative personnel were crucial to supporting unit morale, as their efforts helped galvanize the battalion as a corporative entity and

maintained unit cohesion despite exceptionally high casualties and the resulting turnover of personnel in the surviving veterans' primary groups.

In melding first-hand accounts with documented primary evidence, this thesis advances a new and innovated approach to the Normandy campaign, as it attributes meaning and consequence to the individual's combat and non-combat related experiences. It is hoped that such an interpretation complements the existing scholarship by exposing the "human dimension" of the Normandy campaign to greater scrutiny.

CHAPTER 1

THE SHOCK OF BATTLE

It is hoped that someone with a pen to do justice to the subject will later provide the flesh and blood of the story. Someone who can describe such things as the beauty of the countryside, the ghastly smells of the battlefield after a few days of the hot Normandy sun, and most important of all, the spirit and actions of the men.¹

Lt-Col. D. F. Forbes, North Nova Scotia Highlanders

We live in slit trenches, a hole about five feet deep, six or seven feet long, width according to time allowed to dig and energy left to expend. We never have any lack of the latter when Jerry pins us with his mortar. These trenches are our only protection.²

Lt. Stewart Ross, Canadian Scottish Regiment

Understanding the conditions in which the Canadian infantry fought and defeated their German enemy is a very daunting task, especially for someone who has neither experienced the sensations of combat, the psychological torture of watching friends die violently, nor the dreadful living conditions through which the survivors persevered. For those individuals caught in war's clutches, its gruesome realities, its callous disregard for life and property, and its nightmarish legacy, haunt its participants long after the fighting ends. The experience of war was all-consuming, deeply scarring, and very difficult to explain, as the actions and emotions that surfaced during its course cannot be easily translated into words and ideas. Reconstructing the experience of war is therefore an especially complicated task since surprisingly little is actually known about it, as so many soldiers never lived long enough to impart their story to posterity and only a small fraction of veterans have been able or willing to describe their war as they saw it. However, what little first-hand accounts that do exist on the infantry's experience in

¹ D F Forbes, *The North Nova Scotia Highlanders in World War II* (Published by the Regiment, 23 August 1945), preface

² Library and Archives Canada (LAC), RG24, Vol 15037, File No. 734(400), War Diary (WD) – Can Scots, newspaper clipping of 9 July 1944

June and early July, provide important sources for conceptualizing and contextualizing the documented record, as they illuminate the physical and psychological conditions of battle.

This chapter explores the experience of war from the “soldiers’ eye view” and attempts to understand its impact on the individual. The shock of battle was immensely challenging. Its true nature assaulted the limits of the individual’s senses, emotions, and physical endurance. Not only did the foot-soldier have to cope with the intense swings of emotional energy prior to and during combat, but he also had to deal with the dreadful sights, sounds, smells, and touch of death, destruction, and a squalid living environment – all which engulfed every painful moment of existence. In an unrelenting fashion, war assailed the limitations of the mind and body, overwhelming the normal human condition and socializing the soldier to a new sinister reality. Entering combat proved to be a transformative experience for those “lucky” few who continued to persevere through the danger and strain, day after day. Those who survived this torturous learning curve were combat veterans, to be held in high esteem by their less-experienced comrades, but many (perhaps all) were also traumatized products of war – casualties of a different sort. Moreover, the ever-present features of the physical experience, including depravity and squalor, destruction and strife, geography, weather, and a fanatical enemy conspired to bend and break the body, compounding the already-strenuous psychological impact. War challenged the soldier to not only psychologically evolve to meet the needs of the moment, but also to improvise and adapt to the physically demanding reality in order to survive. War was an experience of extremes.

The Anticipation for Combat

For the men of the 3rd Division, the road to D-Day was long and winding. Many had volunteered to join the army four years before when the division was formed in June 1940. Its creation was perhaps the symbolic end of Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King's early wartime policy of "limited liability," as the Allied defeat in France and Canada's sudden emergence as Britain's ranking ally in the war against Nazi Germany spurred the country to invest even greater human and material resources into the cause of victory. The 3rd Division was composed entirely of militia units from across the country that had not been called to colours with the 1st or 2nd Canadian Infantry Divisions. At the time of D-Day, the 7th Brigade was commanded by Brigadier Harry Foster, a permanent force officer whose good reputation might have been a reflection of his three exceptional battalion commanders: Lt-Col. Fred Cabeldu of the Can Scots, Lt-Col. J. M. Meldrum of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles (RWR), and Lt-Col. F. M. Matheson of the Regina Rifles (RR). Brigadier K. G. Blackader, a militia officer with tremendous potential commanded the 8th Brigade, which consisted of Lt-Col. J. G. Spragge's Queen's Own Rifles of Canada (QOR), one of the oldest militia units in the country, Lt-Col. D. B. Buell of the bilingual North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment (NS), and the lone French-Canadian battalion in the division, Lt-Col. J. E. Mathieu's Le Régiment de la Chaudière (Chauds). The 9th Brigade was perhaps the most unique element in the entire Canadian army since it consisted of three Highland battalions recruited from Ontario and Nova Scotia. Brigadier D. G. Cunningham was the officer commanding, and Lt-Col. Charles Petch of the North Nova Scotia Highlanders (NNSH), Lt-Col. G. H. Christiansen of the Stormont, Dundas, and Glengarry Highlanders (SDGs),

and Lt-Col. F. M. “Smokey” Griffiths of the Highland Light Infantry of Canada (HLI) were his primary subordinates on D-Day.³

In the summer and fall of 1941, the three brigades of the division arrived in Britain, joining the 1st and 2nd Divisions already stationed there. Far from home and relatively young (most volunteers ranged in age from eighteen to twenty-five) life became an adventure of opportunity for many Canadians.⁴ Growing up in the depression had yielded little luxury, but army life had offered them three square meals a day, a salary, close friendships, and an exciting trip overseas. As Cpl. Rolph Jackson, a member of “B” Company in the QOR explained, “You have to remember that we were young, irresponsible, and slowly growing up – but not normal growing up because we joined the army as kids and four years later we were at the beach.”⁵ When they were not out on training exercises or fraternizing with the locals, many soldiers made efforts to harness the opportunity of service, and pursued careers or jobs that appealed to them. The army offered specialist courses in medicine, engineering, leadership, mechanics, field craft, and hygiene, in addition to the basic and advanced infantry training courses. On their own initiative, some soldiers enrolled in classes or reading programs provided by the Canadian Legion’s Educational Services in order to finish their high school studies or simply to occupy the mind while they waited for action.⁶ Moreover, sports,

³ The Division also had the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa (CH of O) as machine gun and mortar support, the 14th, 22nd, and 23rd Field Ambulances for medical support, the 7th Reconnaissance Regiment, as well as several supporting units from the Royal Canadian Artillery (RCA), the Provost Corps, Royal Canadian Engineers (RCE), Royal Canadian Army Service Corps (RCASC), and Royal Canadian Ordnance Corps (RCOC). Copp, *Fields of Fire*, 23-25.

⁴ Ibid, 15.

⁵ As quoted in Lance Goddard, *D-Day Juno Beach: Canada’s 24 Hours of Destiny* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2004), 44.

⁶ C.P. Stacey and Barbara M. Wilson, *The Half-Million: The Canadians in Britain, 1939-1946* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 94-131; Clifford H. Bowering, *Service: The Story of the Canadian Legion, 1925-1960* (Ottawa: Dominion Command), Chapter IX; Robert England, *Discharged: A Commentary on Civil Re-establishment of Veterans in Canada* (Toronto: MacMillan, 1943).

recreation, and especially travel, helped pass the time between training exercises. Accordingly, the sense of adventure tended to permeate the lives of many of these young men before landing in Normandy. As Lt Barney Danson of the QOR later recounted in his memoirs, the first time he and his friends travelled to London's Trafalgar Square in November 1941, they were like "awe-struck kids standing in the centre of the British Empire, if not the world, as we perceived it."⁷ Although Danson was on a course in Canada at the time of D-Day, he eventually served in Normandy and was severely wounded in August.

Like Danson, many of his comrades were singularly focused on getting into combat. One of his good friends in "B" Company, Sgt Fred Harris, stands out as an example. Throughout Harris's time in England, the test of battle remained a burning ambition that propelled him to relinquish his position in an officer training school in January 1944 in order to return to his unit and comrades in time for the invasion. However, this decision ultimately cost Harris his life as he was killed instantly in the opening seconds of D-Day when the landing craft's ramp came down at Bernières-sur-Mer.⁸ The long training period in England and Scotland nurtured, if it did not create, this eagerness for combat. On 3 July 1943, nearly two years after its arrival in Britain, the 3rd Division (and the 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade) were selected by General A. G. L. McNoughton as the main Canadian contribution to the Allied invasion of Europe.⁹ From then on, the division began a very elaborate training program that consisted of four

⁷ Barney Danson, *Not Bad for a Sergeant: The Memoirs of Barney Danson* (Toronto: The Dundurn Group, 2002), 37.

⁸ LAC, RG24, Vol. 26062, Second World War Service Files, B62616 Sgt Frederick Bernard Harris, Danson, *Not Bad for a Sergeant*, 34-49-50. Roy J. Whitson, ed., *Canadians: A Battalion at War* (Mississauga: Burlington Books, 1996), 3-5; Charles Martin, *Battle Diary: From D-Day and Normandy to the Zuider Zee and VE* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1994), 11-13.

⁹ Stacey, *The Victory Campaign*, 34-35.

phases. The first phase involved preliminary assault training that included rigorous physical fitness, the study of the principles of combined operations, and the practice of disembarking from mock landing craft on dry land. The second phase took place at two Combined Training Centres located near Inveraray and Castle Toward in Scotland. Between August and September 1943, the men rehearsed amphibious landings in more realistic assault conditions, first beginning with company-sized landings and then building up to full-scale brigade landings. In the third and fourth phases, assault landings were practiced at the divisional level near Studland Bay from 16-19 October 1943 and at Slapton Sands on 12 April 1944.¹⁰

Each exercise and course helped to weld a sense of self-assurance amongst the troops. As Lt. Donald Thompson, a platoon commander in “D” Company of the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa (CH of O) explained, the training regimen provided cohesiveness to his platoon and gave his men confidence. One of their favourite sayings was “we may not be the best, but there’s none better.”¹¹ Lt. Doug Barrie, a platoon commander with the HLI, echoed the same sentiments, “We knew [D-Day] was coming and we were anxious to take part in it. We knew it was going to be an historic day and we had been chomping at the bit for a long time in Britain.”¹² Nevertheless, there were others who doubted the prospects of invading Europe in the summer of 1944. Major G. T. MacEwan, a company commander with the Can Scots, recalled that although he had the “feeling of being caught up in a great forward movement, unable to change or influence its course” he and his men found it difficult to believe that *this* time was any

¹⁰ Ibid, 34-38.

¹¹ Interview with Donald Thompson. Conducted by Aloma Jardine, 9 July 1999, 15-18. Courtesy of Dr. Ken Reynolds. The author would like to thank Dr. Reynolds for transcripts of the interview.

¹² As quoted in Goddard, *D-Day Juno Beach*, 39.

different than the *other* training exercises.¹³ Another D-Day veteran, Lt. Ben Dunkelman of the QOR, also referred to this scepticism when he explained that the training had established a “stage of numbness where we could barely think of what awaited us on the other side of the channel – perhaps, for once, the army knew what it was doing.”¹⁴

However, it was impossible to ignore the uniqueness of the situation and completely remove oneself from the emotional excitement. In late May and early June 1944, Allied soldiers were concentrated in various transit camps in southern England, where they were completely cut off from the outside world for security purposes. The troops quickly termed this, “the sausage machine” in reference to the number of Allied troops packed into the camps and the omnipotent machinery controlling their destiny.¹⁵ In the camps the troops went about last-minute preparations. Carrier Platoons waterproofed vehicles and everyone was issued their special invasion kit, including two 24-hour ration packs, Tommy cookers (a rudimentary stove for cooking rations), Mae-west life preservers, vomit bags, seasickness pills, and a pack of cigarettes courtesy of the Canadian government.¹⁶ It was here that the emotional rollercoaster picked up speed: eagerness and impatience mixed with nervous excitement. Attempts were made to control these feelings through activities, such as volleyball games between officers or baseball games against the Americans, hot showers, reading, letter writing, and sunbathing. Moreover, the auxiliary services also put on a number of shows for the troops.¹⁷ However despite the effort, the air of expectancy only intensified as the days

¹³ DHH, 145.2C4013 (D3), “D-Day and the Counter-Attack on Putot-en-Bessin” by Major G. T. MacEwan, n. d., 2.

¹⁴ Ben Dunkelman, *Dual Allegiance* (Toronto: MacMillan, 1976), 82-83.

¹⁵ DHH, 145.2C4013 (D3), “D-Day and the Counter-Attack on Putot-en-Bessin” Major MacEwan, 1.

¹⁶ LAC, RG-24, Vol. 15270, File No. 752, WD – SDGs, Log Entry, 1-3 June 1944; LAC, RG24, Vol. 15076, File No. 754, WD – HLI, Log Entry, 1-3 June 1944.

¹⁷ Ibid, Log Entry, 1-3 June 1944; Ibid, Log Entry, 1-3 June 1944.

passed. “Everyone is on edge” wrote the war diarist of the QOR, “and wants ‘D’ day to dawn as soon as possible.” In the camps, the coming assault preoccupied every individual and dominated every conversation.¹⁸

This highly animated atmosphere only intensified as “the sausage machine” directed each battalion and individual company to its respective troop transports. At Southampton, friends bade farewell and shared a last cigarette or the current gossip before boarding. As they prepared to set sail for D-Day, the enormity of the situation became obvious. “All around us lie craft of every conceivable shape and size and down the navigation channel moves an endless stream of ships to their allotted areas” wrote the war diarist of the SDGs, “the magnitude of the operation [became] apparent.”¹⁹ This was no training exercise. Tension and apprehension took hold and soldiers responded in different ways. In most cases, last letters were written and mailed home to loved ones. Pte. Leslie Neufeld from Nipawin, Saskatchewan and a member of “C” Company in the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion wrote one such letter to his parents. On 4 June 1944, he informed them that he had volunteered for the paratroopers in February and finished his training in April 1944. He also explained the dangerous role his unit would play in the invasion and told them that, “If anything should happen to me, do not feel sad or burdened by it, but take the attitude of ‘He served his country to his utmost’ . . . with that spirit I am going into battle.”²⁰ Sadly, Neufeld was called upon to give his utmost and

¹⁸ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15168, File No. 753, WD – QOR, Log Entry, 31 May 1944.

¹⁹ LAC, RG-24, Vol. 15270, File No. 752, WD – SDGs, Log Entry, 4 June 1944.

²⁰ Cited from Leslie Abram Neufeld Fonds, Letter to Parents, 4 June 1944. www.canadianletters.ca.

was killed sometime in the early morning on D-Day in the fighting for a concrete bunker²¹

By all accounts the spirits and morale of the men were extremely high, but in this emotionally charged and anxious atmosphere they were also vulnerable to sudden changes. This was especially the case on 4 June when the invasion was postponed for 24-hours due to bad weather in the Channel. Idle chatter and nervous rumours spread almost as fast as doubt and disappointment amongst the soldiers crammed into their troop ships and landing craft. The QOR's war diarist recorded the mood on board, "The men are very worried about an indefinite postponement. The water is quite rough and if we miss this set of tides craft will be off loaded and troops returned to respective camps which of course will be sealed. This period would last from 14 to 28 days and the lads would sooner have anything happen than that."²² Thus, the anticipation for combat could trigger great swings in the collective mood of soldiers already on edge and overwrought with their own emotional baggage.

The 24-hour delay only intensified the tension. Some soldiers were lucky in that their units were off-loaded from their ships, others were not as fortunate since the larger transport ships had already left port and were anchored downstream. These men, most having boarded the vessels on the 2 or 3 June, had to spend another night in the cramped and stuffy compartments of ships rolling in the ocean's current. On 5 June, the original date for D-Day, most soldiers lounged around their ships until the early afternoon when the vast armada began to assemble off the southern coast of England. As they sailed away, no bands or cheering crowds sent them off – the operational security was too

²¹ LAC, RG24, Vol 30870, Second World War Service Files, L74243 Pte Leslie Abram Neufeld, LAC, RG24, Vol 15299, File No 1351, WD – 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion, Log Entry, 6 June 1944

²² LAC, RG24, Vol 15168, File No 753, WD – QOR, Log Entry, 4 June 1944

strict Nonetheless, spirits were high “with the prospects of action” according the H/Major John W Forth, the CH of O’s padre, who organized a sing-song and quiz contest over the ship’s broadcast system to help pass the time and channel nervous energy²³ By 4 00 PM maps and orders were opened from sealed envelopes and the troops were told where they were going The briefings continued into the evening and questions were answered until everyone was sure of his role²⁴ However, it was fortunate that the previous briefings with the bogus maps (and while on dry land) were so detailed, because so many troops were violently seasick The combination of tense nerves and rough seas rendered the seasickness pills virtually useless “Everyone was sick” according to Rfn Jack Martin, a D-Day veteran of “C” Company in the QOR “Our platoon commander and his batman were on our craft and he had to run to the side, and he puked and lost all his false teeth and everything there There was an awful lot of them getting sick because those little craft bounce around something terrible ”²⁵

Between bouts of intense seasickness, soldiers caught glimpses of the vast armada sailing for France, a view that provided a sense of confidence for those who cared to notice. As the HLI’s war diarist noted, “One felt awed by the immensity of the picture and at the same time comforted by the presence of such a large number of ‘big ships’ ready to lend the support of their powerful guns ”²⁶ However, while the larger ships may have attracted more attention, the vast proportion of the invasion fleet consisted of much smaller and far less impressive ships and craft In total, the Allied armada consisted of over 6,900 vessels, including 1,213 warships ranging from

²³ LAC RG24, Vol 15026, File No 184(733) WD – CH of O, Diary of H/Major John W Forth, Log Entry, 5 June 1944, and WD – D(2) Coy (CH of O), Log Entry, D-1 (5 June 1944)

²⁴ LAC, RG24, Vol 15076 File No 754, WD – HLI Log Entry, 5 June 1944

²⁵ As quoted in Goddard, *D-Day Juno Beach* 58

²⁶ LAC, RG24, Vol 15076 File No 754, WD – HLI, Log Entry, 6 June 1944

battleships to motor torpedo boats, and more than 4,100 landing ships and craft to ferry men and equipment to the shore.²⁷ Most Canadian soldiers making the assault on D-Day were ferried across the English Channel by a variety of LSIs (Landing Ship Infantry) and LCTs (Landing Craft Tank) of both Canadian and British origin that composed Force "J." The LSIs carried a flotilla of smaller LCAs (Landing Craft Assault) that were used by the assaulting waves and also to ferry supplies to the beach in the early stages of the attack. The LCTs were used to carry the battalion's heavier equipment, its supporting vehicles, anti-tank guns, mortars, and pioneers.²⁸

At sunset on 5 June 1944, most troops in the division felt a mix of apprehension and confidence, as the RWR's war diarist noted, "There was an air of expectancy and sense of adventure on all craft this night, the eve of the day we had trained for so hard and long in England."²⁹ However, deep down everyone was also scared. The most common emotional reaction to entering combat was fear and that only intensified as combat experience was gained. Fear was a complicated sensation as it encompassed many different factors, all of which seem to have surrounded the uncertainty of the future. In other words, the troops were terribly frightened by the unknown: would one be killed or maimed in the coming moments? Would one do his duty or fail in front of his comrades? All troops, whether entering combat on D-Day or as replacements weeks later, experienced fear and Cpl. Frank Ryan's opinion probably reflected the norm when he explained his D-Day experience with the NS at St. Aubin: "I was scared to death,

²⁷ W. A. B. Douglas, Roger Sarty, et al., *A Blue Water Navy: The Official Operational History of the Royal Canadian Navy in the Second World War, 1943-1945, Vol. II Part 2* (St. Catharines, ON: Vanwell Publishing Ltd., 2007), 231.

²⁸ The two Canadian LSIs were the HMCS *Prince Henry* and HMCS *Prince David*, but some battalions such as the QOR were transported from England on British vessels such as the S. S. *Monoway*. Ibid, Chapters 17, 231-232; William T. Barnard, *The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada, 1860-1960: One Hundred Years of Canada*, (Don Mills, ON: Ontario Publishing Company, 1960), 193.

²⁹ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15233, File No. 934/1, WD – RWR, Log Entry, 5 June 1944.

there's no doubt about that. Anybody that says that they weren't scared, they're lying. I didn't enjoy it at all. You can die at any minute . . ."³⁰ Charles McNabb, a QOR D-Day veteran, echoed Ryan's sentiments, "I'll tell you, any man who says he wasn't scared, I'll show you a liar."³¹ The key was to control fear in order to get the job done. Some could do that better than others as Cpl. J. Oggy discovered on D-Day when he nearly lost his composure sitting in a shell crater overcome with terror. His sergeant, "Stumpy" Gordon, consoled him by sharing a drink from his water bottle and telling him that he was also scared, but they had a job to do. The reassurance greatly helped Oggy regain his courage and continue fighting inland.³²

Thus, the night before D-Day hardly anyone slept. The nervous tension was too great, the fear of what lay ahead preoccupied the mind, the smell of vomit was overpowering, the lack of space and stuffy heat made everyone uncomfortable, and the constant drone of aircraft over head and the ship's engines conspired to keep everyone awake and alert. Moreover, the troops were not given much of a chance to sleep as reveille was set for 3:15 AM. At that time, the troops were mustered for a breakfast of bacon, eggs, and a shot of navy rum. Afterwards they were given some time to get dressed, recheck their equipment, and then they were loaded into the LCAs for the final leg of their journey. As the troops made their final preparations, the opening Allied naval and aerial bombardment of the German defences commenced with startling ferocity. Ear drums were blasted out and the smell of cordite hung in the air as the men descended down the cargo nets into the waiting LCAs churning in the swell of the English Channel. This was a dangerous process according to Company Sergeant-Major

³⁰ As quoted in Goddard, *D-Day Juno Beach*, 122.

³¹ *Ibid*, 129.

³² *Ibid*, 137.

(CSM) Charles Martin of the QOR's "A" Company, who almost became his unit's first casualty when he nearly fell between the LCA and the mother ship; but two comrades caught him just in time.³³ For the men in the landing craft there was no turning back and a deafening silence gripped them. Minds began retreating inward as the sound of the LCA's engine churned onwards and as the ocean's waves crashed up on the bow, spraying a cold mist onto damp and shivering bodies. As the LCAs made their way towards Juno Beach, the smoking French coastline became visible and the invasion fleet disappeared from view. A distinct sense of solitude and loneliness struck them, especially as the distance between each landing craft increased. CSM Martin explained:

Ten boats stretched out over fifteen hundred yards is not really a whole lot of assault force. The boats began to look even tinier as the gaps widened, with more than the length of a football field between us. Our initial concept of a brave attack began to seem questionable, though none of us would admit it . . . Military art puts forward a different scenario. The assault boats appear to be very close together and the troops within sight and sound of one another. This is likely necessary in order to get all the action into a reasonable frame, but in the actual event it was quite a different thing.³⁴

Preparing for battle was an emotionally exhausting experience. A combination of intense feelings of happiness, eagerness, impatience, confidence, anxiety, excitement, and especially fear, gripped every soldier of the 3rd Division in the days, hours, and minutes before H-Hour. The emotional rollercoaster was in itself a very traumatic and draining event, but it was only the beginning. Thus, the Canadian soldiers who landed on Normandy's shores between approximately 07:45 AM and 8:15 AM on the cool and overcast morning of 6 June 1944, were already beginning to feel the impact and depravity of combat. Most were tired as they had barely slept during the preceding nights due to the nervous tension and cramped quarters. Moreover, since the vast

³³ Martin, *Battle Diary*, 3.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 5.

number of soldiers were seasick most landed on D-Day with empty stomachs, fortified only by liquid courage. Nonetheless, most preferred action as opposed to returning to England and “the sausage machine.” That mentality would rapidly change as green, inexperienced soldiers became experienced combat veterans, who longed for any chance to escape the horror.

Killing and Being Killed

The 3rd Division’s invasion front was divided into two sectors codenamed “Mike” and “Nan.” Landing on the right flank at “Mike” was the 7th Brigade’s RWR, RR, plus an additional company from the Can Scots (the brigade’s reserve battalion) with the objective of capturing the town of Courseulles-sur-Mer, a number of bridges over the Seules River, and the area south towards Bretteville L’Orgeuilleuse. On the left flank, the 8th Brigade’s QOR and NS stormed the German defences around Bernières-sur-Mer and St Aubin, respectively, incurring heavy losses while the reserve battalion, the Chauds, followed them inland towards Beny-sur-Mer. By the end of D-Day the division’s 9th Brigade was also ashore and Canadian units were consolidating defensive positions on their intermediate D-Day objectives.³⁵ For most soldiers in the 3rd Division, *Overlord* was their first taste of action and many quickly concluded that it was nothing like they had anticipated. Veterans often discuss their individual combat experience by highlighting a variety of events that produced profound emotional and psychological reactions. What follows is an attempt to explore some of these reactions in an effort to understand both the overwhelming nature of combat and how the experience of killing

³⁵ Stacey, *The Victory Campaign*, 90-120; Copp, *Fields of Fire*, Chapter 2.

and the potential for being killed could transform the individual's psyche and produce hardened combat veterans. However, at times the chronology of examples may be skewed owing to the nature of the subject matter, which has been organized thematically. This not only brings some degree of coherence to an abstract and ethereal topic, but also allows for a greater understanding of the connection between event and psychological reaction.

In recounting their first taste of action, many veterans recalled the jarring horror of combat playing out like a disgusting nightmare. For Rfn. Jim Parks, a member of the RWR's mortar platoon, his memory of D-Day was scarred by one particularly shocking incident. Rushing across the open beach, Parks somehow made it to the seawall unscathed, only to find his comrade Cpl. W. J. Martin lying in the sand moaning in pain. Cpl. Martin had been "badly raked with machine [gun] fire across his midriff" and was bleeding profusely. Upon seeing the familiar face, Martin asked Parks to stay and "Hold me, I'm cold" and a few minutes later, after "bubbles of blood" seeped from his mouth, Martin was dead – never too see the young child he had fathered back in England.³⁶ No area of the battlefield was without its own distinct set of horrors. Even aboard ship the gruesome scenery was present for all to see when bodies of dead Canadians who had landed in the initial assault waves floated by the ships carrying some members of the HLI, bouncing and skidding off the hull.³⁷ Once ashore the HLI's padre, H/Captain J. M. Anderson, was appalled by what he saw on the beach: dead and broken bodies, smoking shell craters, blood, and the sound of shooting off in the distance. He turned to CSM George Rutherford, a veteran of the Great War and had this exchange:

³⁶ As quoted in Goddard, *D-Day Juno Beach*, 112.

³⁷ Zen Karp, *War Diary: The Highland Light Infantry of Canada in North-West Europe, 1944-45* (Cambridge, ON: Z. Karp, 2007), 25.

Padre Anderson: "George, can I say that I've been in action now?"

CSM Rutherford: "Yes"

Padre Anderson: "Okay then, enough of this, take me home!"³⁸

Despite his comments, Padre Anderson served with distinction and bravery throughout Normandy, receiving the Military Cross (MC) for his actions at Buron on 8 July.³⁹ Perhaps, the horror of one's first experience in battle was summarized best by Charles McNabb, who later served in Korea, when he explained that D-Day was by far "the worst experience I ever had."⁴⁰

Compounding the terror was the frantic and bewildering chaos of battle that assaulted the senses and emotions. Sgt. Howard Bailey of the CH of O remembered the disorder and bedlam of his introduction to combat on D-Day, "[it] was plain hell. Noisy, confusion . . . and dead bodies all over the place, in the water, out of the water, and on the beaches and [the wounded] screaming for help . . . you couldn't stop to help them because if you did you might end up being one of them."⁴¹ Sgt. Bailey's remarks were echoed by Rfn. Jack Martin, who explained that the atmosphere on D-Day was "hectic!" as he "ran like hell" to the seawall for protection.⁴² The inevitable by-product of this dangerous and confusing environment was the isolation of experience, as each small group of soldiers became "an independent fighting unit," according to CSM Charles Martin: "None had communication with the other."⁴³ Thus on D-Day, the sensations and experience of battle became narrowly restricted to the immediate surroundings on the

³⁸ Ibid, 25.

³⁹ LAC, RG24, Vol 15076, File No. 754, WD – HLI, Award Recommendation, H/Captain J H. Anderson, 8 July 1944; Karp, *War Diary*, 27.

⁴⁰ As quoted in Goddard, *D-Day Juno Beach*, 129.

⁴¹ Interview with Howard Bailey. Conducted by Aloma Jardine, 23 June 1999, 19. Courtesy of Dr. Ken Reynolds.

⁴² Interview with Jack Martin. Conducted by Ryan Lutz, Geoffrey Brookes, and James Lutz, 15 November 1998, 5. Courtesy of Mr James Lutz. The author would like to thank Mr. Lutz for transcripts of the interview.

⁴³ Martin, *Battle Diary*, 6.

beach. As Rfn. Jim Parks added, “You’re just concerned with where you’re at. You’re looking right ahead of you.”⁴⁴ In the weeks after D-Day, this phenomenon continued in a slightly different form. Forced into the protective confines of slit trenches for days on end, the barren earth walls became symbolic and physical restraints of the infantryman’s psychological and physical horizons, often segregating him from basic interaction with comrades in holes metres away.⁴⁵ Consequently, many veterans recall being completely devoid of any real understanding of the big picture, since location, times, and dates, were obscured by the strain and stress. Perhaps George Blackburn explained it best: “In addition to the overpowering sense of sinister menace lying over the front, all soldiers in a battle zone must learn to live in a dense fog of mystery.”⁴⁶

Although a chaotic uncertainty gripped virtually every moment of an individual’s combat experience, one unmistakable constant was apparent to all: death. The possibility of life ending in a sudden and violent manner was an ever-present and traumatic feature of the abyss of combat. Witnessing comrades die violently could prompt intense swings of emotional energy depending on the situation and circumstances. Therefore the situational and emotive nature of combat was another important aspect of experience that many veterans remembered or implied in their accounts. Anger was perhaps the most common. It often arose in response to a comrade’s death or a situation in which the individual in question nearly died, and not only caused him to react with rampaging fury but also greatly assisted him in focusing his effort towards a particular task. One example highlights this point. On D-Day, Rfn. Doug Hester of the QOR landed at

⁴⁴ As quoted in Goddard, *D-Day Juno Beach*, 110.

⁴⁵ Sean Longden, *To the Victor the Spoils D-Day to VE-Day: The Reality Behind the Heroism* (Gloucestershire, UK: Arris Publishing Ltd., 2004), 5-8; Anthony Kellett, *Combat Motivation: The Behaviour of Soldiers in Battle* (Boston: Kluwer-Nijhoff, 1982), 321-322.

⁴⁶ Blackburn, *The Guns of Normandy*, 128-129.

Bernières in the same LCA as Sgt. Fred Harris and Cpl. Rolph Jackson. Jackson remembered that he was the eleventh man out of the LCA, and “of the ten men in the section [ahead of him and probably led by Harris], seven were killed, two of us were wounded”⁴⁷ Hester recalled later how angry he was at witnessing his comrades die so quickly. In particular, the death of his section’s corporal, John Gibson, stood out as it propelled him to become “a killer with a single purpose.”⁴⁸

Anger over the death of a comrade could evict collective action as well. The death of Lt. R. J. McCormick, a platoon commander in the HLI, serves as another example. On 8 July, Lt McCormick’s platoon became heavily engaged by machine-gun and mortar fire while attacking the village of Buron. Realizing his men would be done for if they went to ground, he stood up and encouraged his men to keep moving. He was heard saying, “Now boys, we’re gonna charge!” as bullets bounced off his shovel and whizzed by him in all directions. His men watched in disbelief as they inched forward. Suddenly McCormick was hit in the shoulder. The blast spun him around and the following burst blew his head a part. McCormick was killed instantly and his men moved forward, intent on to getting their revenge.⁴⁹ Thus, the experience of witnessing friends and comrades die could spark the intense desire for retribution and hatred, to the point where killing Germans became an activity that was promoted and celebrated. As

⁴⁷ As quoted in: Goddard, *D-Day Juno Beach*, 129 In a 1998 interview, Rolph Jackson commented on his feelings when he first made it to the beach: “How did we feel when we were on the beach? Fairly angry.” Interview with Rolph Jackson. Conducted by Ryan Lutz, Geoffrey Brookes, and James Lutz, 15 November 1998, 4. Courtesy of Mr. James Lutz

⁴⁸ Whitsed, *Canadians: A Battalion At War*, 3-5

⁴⁹ Karp, *War Diary*, 42

Major Norman Wilson-Smith of the RWR reported in his Battle Experience Questionnaire, “giving the Hun a good beating” was an excellent boost for morale.⁵⁰

Sadness was another emotion some veterans recalled experiencing when dealing with death. In Major Clifford Chadderton’s case the sadness he felt was profound and stuck with him long after his anger subsided. The particular death that rattled him occurred on D-Day when one of his best friends, Cpl. Lawrence Scaife, was killed. The death not only angered him, but sent him reeling. However, unlike most soldiers, Chadderton had the opportunity to return to the body before Scaife was buried. There, on the beach, he exchanged helmets with him and although he was not sure why he did so, the symbolic gesture was quite clear: the burden of Scaife’s death would be carried forward with him.⁵¹ Others wept and cried as the reality of war and death settled into minds overwrought with terror and heartache. By late evening on D-Day, CSM Charles Martin could not hold back the tears. Half of his beloved “A” Company, many original members of the QOR, were either dead or wounded.⁵² Thus, the aftermath of combat could spark a significant emotional crash as the survivor, bewildered by the events of the day or night in question, absorbed the full shock of their consequences.

Another common reaction to death was revulsion and nausea. Pte. N. Hilborn of the HLI’s mortar platoon first experienced death when a random 88-mm shell exploded near his commander, Lt. L. S. Butters. The force of the blast and resulting shrapnel tore Butters’s leg off and despite the efforts of his comrades, he bled out from a severed femoral artery. Stunned and demoralized, Pte. Hilborn and the other blood-soaked

⁵⁰ LAC, RG24, Vol. 10450, “Battle Experience Questionnaire (BEQ), #113, Major Norman G Wilson-Smith, RWR.”

⁵¹ Clifford H. Chadderton, *Excuse Us! Herr Schicklgruber: A Memoir of an Officer who Commanded an Infantry Company of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles in Normandy* (Ottawa: War Amputations of Canada, 2004), 30-31.

⁵² Martin, *Battle Diary*, 14-15.

survivors were left cursing their exposed position in an orchard near “Hell’s Corner,” an extremely dangerous area about 1000 yards south of Villons-Les-Buissons.⁵³ Lt. Doug Barrie’s first experience with death left him badly shaken and disgusted as well. Moving inland from the beaches, his unit encountered a German reconnaissance column which was quickly dispatched with PIAT and anti-tank fire.⁵⁴ Satisfied the job had been completed, Barrie suddenly became aware of his grumbling, hungry stomach and decided that this was as good a time as any to eat a can of bully beef. As he shovelled the food into his mouth his carrier passed by a burning German armoured car and he received a very gruesome introduction to war. The smell of burning fuel was bad enough, but the smell of burning flesh overpowered his nostrils and the ear-piercing screams from the crew burning alive inside made him nauseous. An appalled and sickened Barrie tossed his bully beef as far away as he could.⁵⁵

Shortly after D-Day, the campaign in Normandy ground down into a stalemate north of the city of Caen, the final Anglo-Canadian D-Day objective. This month-long stalemate proved costly for Canadian units. Casualty-rates climbed with a startling rapidity and therefore death became the zenith of experience. By the 28 June it was conservatively reported that a total of approximately 2,815 Canadian casualties had been suffered between D-Day and 20 June. However, it appears to have taken some time to sort out the bloodletting, as only 363 of that total were reported as killed in action – but in actuality 1,112 Canadians had lost their lives during that time, the majority between

⁵³ Karp, *War Diary*, 33-34.

⁵⁴ A PIAT (Projector, Infantry, Anti-Tank) was the hand-held anti-tank weapon common to the Anglo-Canadian armies.

⁵⁵ Karp, *War Diary*, 27.

6-11 June.⁵⁶ At any rate, it amounted to an astonishing average of about 187 casualties per day across the line. In other words, the 3rd Division was losing the strength of an entire rifle company plus another half every day while making very little headway inland towards Caen. Fatal casualties were so large in number that it was impossible to bury them immediately since manpower was scarce and any movement on the line brought down concentrations of murderous mortar and artillery fire. Scattered everywhere and laying in the warm sun, human corpses and animal carcasses turned black and bloated, attracted thousands of flies and other insects, and unleashed a putrid odour so thick it could be tasted when eating.

At places where the fighting was particularly brutal, such as at Putot, Bretteville, and Le Mesnil Patry, the dead lay in every direction and the horrible vomit-inducing smell of decomposing flesh filled nostrils with every breath.⁵⁷ Unit padres, largely responsible for burial duties, were overwhelmed. At Putot, the Can Scots padre H/Captain Robert L. Seaborn buried nineteen and twenty-six Canadian soldiers on two separate days. The exasperated padre captured the immensity of the task before him in one diary entry: "Saturday 17 June 44: Burials (26): not much else done."⁵⁸ To the smell of the dead could be added the smells of the living. Garbage littered the battlefield, the smell of feces in latrines baked in the hot sun, burning fuel and cordite from the guns and explosions clung to the air and ground, and of course the foul body odours of hundreds of young men living in the same clothing for weeks without the chance to

⁵⁶ It stands to reason that a portion of the 1,093 casualties listed as missing were indeed fatal casualties yet to be recorded or discovered when the numbers were tabulated. LAC, RG24, Vol. 12702, File: 18/Press/1/3, Message from SHAEF, 28 June 1944; Copp, *Fields of Fire*, Appendix B; Stacey, *The Victory Campaign*, 140.

⁵⁷ Marc Milner, *D-Day to Carpiquet: The North Shore Regiment and the Liberation of Europe* (Fredericton, NB.: Goose Lane Editions, 2007), 60 and 82.

⁵⁸ LAC, MG31 F18, Robert Lowder Seaborn and Family Fonds, File No.: 15: Army Journal (6 Aug 1942 – 9 Sept 1944) (hereafter Army Journal), Entries for 16 and 17 June 1944.

clean themselves all combined to form a sickly, putrid smell that stuck to every inch of the battlefield.

Accompanying the sights and smells of the dead was the destruction of war. The stark contrast between beauty and obliteration became instantly apparent. Normandy's beautiful landscapes and scenic towns were deceptive and could quickly turn into killing zones that claimed life at an astonishing pace. This fact reinforced the poignant



Photo 2: An undated photograph of a destroyed village in Normandy, July 1944.
LAC, RG24, Vol. 15199, File No. 744, WD - RR, July 1944.

contradiction between beauty and destruction, and danger and safety, to the point where troops cheered for destruction (especially when Caen was carpet bombed before its capture) and grew tensely worried when the landscape was not scarred by battle.⁵⁹ However, the appalling destruction of war and the strife it caused also left

its mark on the Canadians. Across the front, villages were reduced to rubble, civilians were left homeless, farm fields were destroyed, and livestock butchered in the cauldron of battle. These scenes left strong impressions on the troops trying to survive in the desolate landscape. "It is a sorry sight," wrote the SDG war diarist on 12 June, "the same sad picture of women and children with homes destroyed as war ravages their

⁵⁹ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15076, File No. 754, WD – HLI, Log Entry, 7 July 1944; LAC, RG24, Vol. 15169, File No. 753, WD – QOR, Log Entry, 7 July 1944; LAC, MG30 E-538, File No. 2, Peter R. Griffin Fonds, Letter to Marg, 8 July 1944.

countryside.”⁶⁰ The sight of wounded civilians troubled H/Major John W. Forth, who commented in his diary on 10 June after visiting the 14th Canadian Field Ambulance, “It made my heart bleed to see little children injured.”⁶¹ The NNSH’s war diarist also noted similar regret and sympathy when he discussed the arrival of a group of civilians in the battalion’s area on 20 June. The group, one of whom was a First World War veteran, had lost everything: their towns, homes, furniture, clothing, and all their valued possessions. Witnessing the unsettling scene “certainly makes you think,” wrote the war diarist, “the Frenchman is paying an awfully high price for this war.”⁶²

Near-death experiences compounded this assault on the senses and emotions. These incidents occurred frequently while in the line and affected each individual differently, mainly because they were always intensely personal and the psychological or physical trauma they caused had to be managed independently by the “lucky” soldier. Cpl. Rolph Jackson endured a particularly chilling near-death experience racing ashore from his LCA on D-Day, “To tell you how lucky I am, I shouldn’t be here. I had the front of my uniform shot to tatters. I can tell you what bullets going through your clothes feels like . . . If I had been half a step further ahead, I wouldn’t be here.”⁶³ If not by the end of D-Day, then by the end of the first week of fighting in Normandy, many surviving Canadian soldiers had come frightfully close to dying. Bullets or whirling bits of shrapnel had pierced water bottles, put holes in clothing, grazed the skin, or bounced off of shovels – each time barely missing their mark.⁶⁴ CSM Charles Martin was nearly

⁶⁰ LAC, RG-24, Vol. 15270, File No. 752, WD – SDGs, Log Entry, 12 June 1944.

⁶¹ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15026, File No.: 184(733) WD – CH of O, Diary of H/Major John W. Forth, Log Entry, 10 June 1944.

⁶² LAC, RG24, Vol. 15122, File No. 734, WD – NNSH, Log Entry, 20 June 1944.

⁶³ As quoted in Goddard, *D-Day Juno Beach*, 134. The story is also mentioned in: Dan Van Der Vat, *D-Day: The Greatest Invasion – A People’s History* (Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 2003), 120.

⁶⁴ Arnold Wayne, untitled memoir, www.canadianletters.ca

killed by a bullet that hit the inside of his helmet and miraculously spun around his head without leaving a scratch. This happened just as he was ducking for cover after triggering a mine, which exploded seconds later.⁶⁵ To escape death by calculation or prediction was impossible; those who were narrowly saved from it or permanent disability were merely lucky. As Pte. R. H. Tutte, the carrier driver of the Can Scots' "D" Company, asked rhetorically while recounting his near-death experience to an historical officer, "how [the bullet] ever bounced around as it did inside the small space in the front [of the carrier] without hitting me I'll leave for others to wonder."⁶⁶

Perhaps the most frightening of all near-death experiences was being shelled. The German army was extremely well endowed with a large number of mortars and artillery and given the static nature of the fighting throughout June they became a paramount feature of daily life. Being shelled was probably one of the worst experiences possible. It compounded terror for the soldier caught in the open or huddled nervously in his slit-trench, as shells rained down from distant guns. The explosions sent shrapnel, debris, and body parts whirling through the air, they rocked the earth, bent or broke the senses, and the concussion could blow out ear drums or knock the wind from gasping survivors. Sgt. Tom Didmon explained that when shells landed close by, his mates would holler out "Thanks, that cleaned the wax out of my ears!" which as he pointed out was true since he had trouble with excess ear wax before the war, but after suffering through intense shelling in Normandy, he never had another problem for the rest of his

⁶⁵ Martin, *Battle Diary*, 9-10

⁶⁶ LAC, RG24, Vol 15037, File No 734(400), WD – Can Scots, "The Advance, Occupation, and Holding of the Bridge at Putot-en-Bessin As I Saw It" Pte R H Tutte, n d., 1

life.⁶⁷ Casualty statistics reflect this appalling reality. Operational research conducted by the 21st Army Group, of which the Canadians formed a part, tentatively concluded that 70-percent of all casualties suffered in the first seven weeks of fighting in Normandy were caused by mortar fire.⁶⁸ Moreover, as Terry Copp and Bill McAndrew have explained in their study on neuropsychiatric casualties, *Battle Exhaustion* (1990), 80 percent of all exhaustion cases treated in June complained bitterly of the incessant mortar and artillery fire.⁶⁹

The repetitive terror of life in the lines produced intense emotional swings that became commonplace – so much so that the individual’s psyche became brutalized and altered by the overwhelming nature of his combat experience. As each near-death experience or horrific incident accumulated, the psychological catastrophe of battle manifested itself. Some soldiers managed to partially express or imply this aspect of experience in their correspondence, diaries, and later in their memoirs. Major Peter R. Griffin, a company commander with the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion, provides an example. In his first letter home after D-Day written on 20 June, he told his sister Marg that, “Your brother continues to lead a charmed life up to two days ago when we were finally pulled back into reserve. Up till then for 11 days I’ve been leading the most amazing life right from the moment we took off from England.”⁷⁰ Remarkably, after 15 days of bloody combat the tone of his letter was celebratory, even excited about his role

⁶⁷ Tom Didmon, *Lucky Guy: Memoirs of a World War II Canadian Soldier* (Victoria, BC: Trafford Publishing, 2000), 63-64.

⁶⁸ Researchers concluded several reasons why mortar fire was so effective: 1) The large number of mortars and their widespread use on the front lines. 2) Counter-mortar methods were under-developed and the guns were difficult to locate. 3) Their fragmentation pattern was dense and lower to the ground, meaning less protection for troops in the open. Terry Copp, ed., *Montgomery’s Scientists: Operational Research in Northwest Europe* (Waterloo, ON: LCMSDS, 2000), 436-437.

⁶⁹ Terry Copp and Bill McAndrew, *Battle Exhaustion: Soldiers and Psychiatrists in the Canadian Army, 1939-1945* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1990), 113.

⁷⁰ LAC, MG30 E-538, File No. 2, Peter R. Griffin Fonds, Letter to Marg, 20 June 1944.

in the invasion, and implied little concern for the death and danger that obviously surrounded him. However, his second letter to Marg written on 6 July had a distinctly different tone. It appears that the relentless cycle of brutal fighting and intense shelling had changed him and the eagerness and excitement for action had vanished to reveal a more sober, reflective, and troubled tone. Perhaps the accumulation of near-death experiences had caused this psychological transformation reflected in his writing.

According to Griffin:

This was a worst session, the last 10 days than the beginning as we just stood and took it holding ground rather than the previous attacking phase My company held what is called the Divisional hot-spot for the past 6 days . . . All of us were literally dead beat when our relief came. I was faced with a much more fearful prospect than any attack we put in in the past or enemy shelling could do to me. The prospect was could my men stand up to it one more night. I'd already had 6 men break on me and believe me, it's the worst thing a Commander on any level is faced with.⁷¹

Moreover, the depressing realization that he and his unit would be at the front for longer than just the initial assault phase had finally settled into his mind, as he asked Marg to send some extra toiletries and continually discussed the themes of rest and his return to England throughout subsequent letters. Never again was his war experience celebrated in such openly excited terms as in the first letter.⁷²

The brutalization of the individual's emotional state also entailed the detachment from normal perceptions of reality that were conditioned before one's entry into combat. This was likely caused by the psychological impact of combat and its effect on the brain. As Dr. Judith Herman, a renowned trauma expert and professor of psychiatry at Harvard University explained in a 1997 publication, traumatic events trigger profound changes in "physiological arousal, emotion, cognition, and memory" mainly because psychological

⁷¹ Ibid, 6 July 1944.

⁷² Ibid, 20 June – 28-29 August 1944.

trauma severs these integrated functions, so that each operates individually, detached from their collective utility.⁷³ This is perhaps why veterans recall their first experience with death or combat most vividly and only significant events thereafter as the rest of their memories were often clouded by the accumulated strain of the repetitive, exhausting, and terrifying experience of war. As George Blackburn explained, the full range of experience was often misinterpreted or forgotten by most veterans he encountered, “During my interviews with [comrades] – many of which were conducted



Photo 3: Infantrymen of the RWR getting haircuts while awaiting D-Day, 1 June 1944.
LAC. Credit: Lt. Donald I. Grant. PA-132466.

generalities.”⁷⁴

right after the war ended, when battle experiences should still have been alive and clear – I discovered that for those who had survived the worst of it, memories of Normandy were blurred and disordered bits and pieces. While retaining vivid impressions, they recalled few details and resorted to

This situation certainly provides some substantiation for Stacey’s remarks on memory and the unreliability of first-hand accounts. However, that does not preclude the necessity of incorporating them into this discussion, especially considering the fact that psychological detachment was a critical stage in the development of veteran troops and

⁷³ As Herman explained: “The traumatized person may experience intense emotion but without clear memory of the event, or may remember everything in detail but with no emotion.” Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence, From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 34.

⁷⁴ Blackburn, *The Guns of Normandy*, xii.

essential to one's survival in battle for two important reasons. First, detachment dulled the mind from curiosity. Soldiers were therefore alleviated of continually questioning their fate and many became fatalistic about their chances of survival, subscribing to the view that there is nothing that can be done – when your number is up, your number is up. Moreover, as historian John Ellis pointed out in his study, *The Sharp End of War*, one of the goals of training was to ensure that the foot-soldier became disciplined to think within definite limits, to obsess about the day-to-day routine only, and to evolve the mind and body towards the acceptance of death.⁷⁵ Only then could the ideal foot-soldier, unburdened by concern for his future, fulfill his function in the giant machine of war. Although some soldiers embraced this attitude completely, most appear to have made some futile attempt to control their fates. Therefore many soldiers developed specific superstitions and rituals which they clung to intensely, fearing that if certain things were not repeated in the same fashion they would perish. Accordingly, before a major operation many would eat a meal, adjust their equipment a specific way, smoke a certain number of cigarettes, speak to the padre, and some even shaved beards or polished boots.⁷⁶ One particularly humorous ritual concocted before D-Day was the sudden appearance of Mohawk-style “assault haircuts” among the rifle companies in the SDGs and RWR.⁷⁷ While these rituals and superstitions had little impact on reality or the future, they did provide psychological comfort to the soldier facing death at every moment and in doing so helped maintain his ability to continue fighting.

⁷⁵ Ellis, *The Sharp End of War*, 14-15.

⁷⁶ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15122, File No. 734, WD – NNSH, Log Entry, 28 June 1944; Karp, *War Diary*, 36-37.

⁷⁷ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15270, File No. 752, WD – SDGs, Log Entry, 1 June 1944.

The second way detachment was critical to survival is related to the first. Psychological trauma induced by combat ruptured the fabric of emotional and sensory perceptions developed throughout the individual's life prior to his introduction to battle. Distancing oneself from that perception of reality necessitated the development of a new state of awareness. In other words, the assault on the emotions and senses stimulated their evolution to a new level, one that was desensitized to the surrounding horrors, thereby allowing the soldier to function. As the mind became less curious and thinking, it reacted in more instinctive and disciplined ways. For all humans, exposure to deadly circumstances causes the body and mind to adjust through a system of instinctive reactions, commencing in the nervous system.⁷⁸ Instincts of self-preservation precipitate surges of adrenaline that leave the individual in a state of intense alertness and concentration. This bodily phenomenon perhaps explains why so many soldiers could continue fighting even after being wounded, as the sensation of intense fear altered normal sensory perceptions allowing them to continue on despite hunger, fatigue, or pain.⁷⁹ As Cpl. Rolph Jackson explained, in the mad dash across the open beach on D-Day he sustained a shoulder wound that he did not notice until a comrade pointed it out hours later and he remained completely oblivious to the second wound he suffered that day, "I had the skin nicked on my leg, too. I didn't feel it. Didn't know anything about it until I went to take my shoes off and the sock was full of dried blood."⁸⁰

This state of hyper-concentration was an important transition for veteran soldiers, as it allowed them to absorb the lessons of the battlefield and learn the best ways of continual survival. Green troops were thus at a disadvantage as they had little

⁷⁸ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* Chapter 2, especially 33-37

⁷⁹ Ibid, Chapter 2, especially 33-37

⁸⁰ As quoted in Goddard, *D Day Juno Beach*, 139

understanding of the basics and took many unnecessary risks. At first, green troops were slow to dig in, choosing to sleep above ground rather than expend the energy digging.⁸¹ Moreover, they would often let curiosity get the better of them and stand in their slit trenches to watch engagements – or even worse leave their protection for a better view. Inexperienced troops also lacked fire discipline, complained about the hardships, and had difficulty keeping their feet in good condition.⁸² However, experience bred caution and provided the veteran with the tools to decipher and react to the immediate threats. Through the noise and confusion of combat, the veteran could detect the sound of incoming shells, judge their intended target, and take the appropriate evasive action if necessary.⁸³ Others developed a “sixth sense” for battlefield conditions, knowing when to take cover, when to keep moving, or when to avoid an area all-together. Major Clifford Chadderton recounted one such incident in his memoirs:

Johnny Doucette from Jacquet River, New Brunswick . . . had earned his pre-war living as a woodsman. There were certain areas in our battlefield which he said were very dangerous. How did he know? He pointed to his nose – he could smell them. At the next junction of sunken roads, John gave the ‘no go there’ signal. It got a wide berth. Sure enough, at that particular spot, the Germans laid down a mortar and artillery shoot. Our section could have been wiped out.⁸⁴

Achieving a state of awareness that hyper-sensitized the individual to the surrounding environment allowed the veteran to distinguish the important sights, sounds, and smells from the unimportant, thus helping the individual survive. One of the great paradoxes of

⁸¹ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15026, File No.: 184(733) WD – D(2) Coy (CH of O), Log Entry, D+4½ (10 June 1944); Will R. Bird, *No Retreating Footsteps: The Story of the North Nova Scotia Highlanders* (Kentville, NS: Kentville, 1954), 69.

⁸² Longden, *To the Victor the Spoils*, 5-8; LAC, RG24, Vol. 10450, “BEQ, #16 A/Major Thomas McCoy, Essex Scottish Regiment”; Ibid, “BEQ, #81 Lt-Col. P. W. Bennett, Essex Scottish Regiment”; Robert Engen, *Canadians Under Fire: Infantry Effectiveness in the Second World War* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009), 128-130.

⁸³ LAC, RG24, Vol. 10450, “BEQ, #61, Lt-Col. G. H. Christiansen, SDGs”; Ibid “BEQ, #100, Lt-Col. C. Petch, NNSH.”

⁸⁴ Chadderton, *Excuse Us!*, 38.

modern war was thus fulfilled: the longer one fought, the more chance one could continue to survive.⁸⁵

Although experience helped soldiers stay alive, nothing was guaranteed. No place on the battlefield was safe since no one was immune to the whirling bits of shrapnel or murderous gun fire – they killed or maimed without discrimination, veteran or replacement. Thus, the need to remain trapped within a state of extreme awareness became permanent. This triggered irritability and incessant grousing among veterans, while enhancing the grinding tension and strain of prolonged operations.⁸⁶ Remaining in a constant state of extreme vigilance, provoked by intense fear and instincts of self-preservation, was psychologically exhausting. Veterans became “numb” to situations of extreme danger and terror, where the detached state of mind paradoxically remained intimately aware but reacted with acute calmness.⁸⁷ On 25 June the war diarist of the HLI witnessed a particularly chilling scene which illustrates this point:

Morale is quite high. Everyone has settled down [to] weather the shelling without any thought of it. As an example of the calm with which they regard it here is a true story. Two D Co[mpany] lads were sitting in their slit trench when an 88mm shell passed between them. Neither one spoke for a second then one of the lads calmly pulled himself to his feet and said “I think I’ll write a letter” and walked off.⁸⁸

The state of numbness, exhaustion, and indifference to brutality and danger were the hallmarks of the new psychological condition produced by battle experience – hence the term *hardened* combat veteran.

⁸⁵ Cook, *At the Sharp End*, Chapters 17-20, 23, and 40; Cook, *Shock Troops*, introduction, Chapters 1, 3, and 14.

⁸⁶ LAC, RG-24, Vol. 15270, File No. 752, WD – SDGs, Log Entry, 9 and 13 June 1944.

⁸⁷ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, Chapter 2, especially 43-47.

⁸⁸ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15076, File No. 754, WD – HLI, Log Entry, 25 June 1944.

The Landscape of Hell

The nature and character of the fighting dominated the physical experience of war. Since the Canadians remained largely on the defensive in June and early July, protecting their limited D-Day gains, the character of the fighting was different than the latter half of the campaign, when the Allies launched weekly offensives. This distinction is not always explored in depth by historians, who traditionally ignore the “human dimension” of war in favour of the operational-strategic paradigm. Accordingly, historians often interpret the whole campaign in Normandy through the guise of major operations, such as *Overlord*, *Charnwood*, *Atlantic*, *Spring*, *Totalize* and so on which have provided a well-entrenched framework for understanding its course and character. As important as this “top-down” narrative is for appreciating unfolding events, the analysis can be misleading. In effect, for the infantry, major offensive operations were the exception and not the norm of their combat experience – especially in the bewildering static conditions of June. Regardless of success, cost, or failure, each one of these offensives took place during a relatively short time period – perhaps only several days – but for the individual the torturous strain continued every hour in between, rising acutely only when combat operations were underway.

For those at the sharp end, the daily monotony and mind-numbing routine of the front line could dominate the experience of war. The foot-soldier’s day-to-day existence was comprised of little more than a specific set of taxing routines adapted to meet the needs of the tactical situation. Much like in the First World War, a normal day began very early when the troops were mustered to front-line positions and required to “stand-to” every morning and night, as these times were seen as being ideal for enemy patrols

or offensive operations. Without fail, between 4:00 AM and 4:30 AM battalions would hold a 100 or 66 percent stand-to and throughout the night soldiers would rotate sentry duties, tensely guarding comrades feigning sleep in nearby slit trenches.⁸⁹ Stand-to also offered officers a chance to visit their men, maybe issue a rum ration if the battalion commander had given the order to do so, and perhaps most important of all, deliver the mail.⁹⁰ Following stand-to the normal day's work and routine began and it varied little for the 'poor bloody infantry.' After breakfast, work parties or carrying parties were organized and continued throughout the day with breaks for lunch and supper, while the rest of the unit guarded the front or improved local defences – often spending most days digging.

The banality of the front-line existence was often broken by the sudden onset of swift, vicious, and chaotic engagements interspersed with frequent shelling. During June and early July neither the Germans nor the Canadians could successfully hold the initiative, as each side's defensive positions ground down any offensive action. Thus, in the Canadian sector the battle denigrated into a malicious cycle of patrols, as each side attempted to maintain an aggressive defensive policy and gather information for the next operation. This resulted in a unique tactical situation in which the two opposing lines remained entrenched in relatively static positions while the battle raged over the broken and charred landscape in fluid patterns, as each side raided the other on a daily and

⁸⁹ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15122, File No. 734, WD – NNSH, Log Entry, various dates June 1944; LAC, RG24, Vol. 15169, File No. 753, WD – QOR, Log Entry, various dates July 1944; LAC, RG-24, Vol. 15270, File No. 752, WD – SDGs, Log Entry, 29 June 1944; Bird, *No Retreating Footsteps*, 111.

⁹⁰ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15076, File No. 754, WD – HLI, Log Entry, 13 June 1944; LAC, RG24, Vol. 15122, File No. 734, WD – NNSH, Log Entry, 20 June 1944; Bird, *No Retreating Footsteps*, 111.

nightly basis.⁹¹ Since patrolling became a central feature of combat, it was a critical part of the daily routine. Defending against enemy patrols was a serious business and two protective measures are worth noting, both for their importance and frequency as well as their toll on the body and mind: observation posts (or OPs) and standing patrols. Observation posts were an essential defensive requirement common to all armies. The OPs were positioned forward of the main line of resistance and acted as defensive ‘doorbells’ by observing enemy movement or engaging them before they reached the main line.⁹² The standing patrol provided a similar task except that it had greater tactical flexibility. The standing patrol, usually consisting of a small number of troops (between two and five), would set out for “no man’s land” or the German lines to observe the enemy for an extended period, often 24 hours. Moreover, the standing patrol was expected to occupy positions that the enemy might take as a preliminary to an offensive. Therefore the soldiers on a standing patrol were encouraged to take the initiative and switch positions or fall back to other defensive features should the need arise.⁹³

However tactically useful these defensive measures were, they were a troubling and exhausting endeavour for the soldiers. The physical isolation of their exposed positions made it abundantly clear to the troops that they were an expendable resource, screening the main defensive line. This was especially the case for those in the OPs, as they were confined to their static positions for hours on end without bathroom breaks or relief. Compounding the situation was the threatening menace of the battlefield. Being

⁹¹ Every war diarist noted the prevalence of patrolling in log entries and many war diaries even possess copies of the patrol report issued daily by Brigade headquarters. For an example, see LAC, RG24, Vol. 15122, File No. 734, WD – NNSH, Log Entry, various dates June 1944 and Patrol Reports June 1944.

⁹² Canadian War Museum (CWM), *Infantry Section Leading, 1938*, (Great Britain, War Office: 1940), 41-48; Engen, *Canadians Under Fire*, 112-113; Stephen Bull and Gordon L. Rottman, *Infantry Tactics of the Second World War* (New York: Osprey Publishing, 2008), 58-68.

⁹³ Ibid, 41-48; Ibid, 112-113; Ibid, 58-68.

stationed in the OP or sent out on a standing patrol was a dangerous task since virtually any contact with the enemy meant the patrol would likely be outnumbered. This left the soldiers in a nerve-wracked state of tension for prolonged periods in which they battled boredom, nervous shivers, hunger pains, the elements, and the urge to smoke. Furthermore, the German enemy was not the only danger, as the OPs and standing patrols were also subjected to friendly fire. More than a few casualties were suffered by nervous sentries shooting at shadows and artillery rounds falling short.⁹⁴

In this war of patrols, implementing them was just as critical as defending against them. Incessant patrolling was done for several reasons. It got the troops out of their slit trenches and defensive posture on a regular basis and required them to attack the enemy aggressively, which helped to eliminate a deadlock mentality.⁹⁵ It also allowed the troops to become familiar with the terrain in no man's land and around the German defences, facilitating future offensive operations. Finally, it allowed the Canadians to dominate the area in front of their positions and gain the local initiative, thereby keeping the Germans off-balance and reactive to Canadian aggressiveness.⁹⁶ Two types of offensive patrols were organized: the "recce" or reconnaissance patrol and the fighting patrol. The main purpose of the recce was to gain as much information about the enemy as possible. Thus, they comprised few men (no more than three or four soldiers) and carried out a variety of different tasks, such as observing or locating enemy positions, capturing prisoners, or liaising with flanking friendly battalions. The fighting

⁹⁴ On 26 June the SDGs' war diarist noted "'B' Co[mpan]y OP received almost a direct hit from 4 of our shells, wounding 2 men and destroying a telescope." LAC, RG-24, Vol 15270, File No. 752, WD – SDGs, Log Entry, 26 June 1944. The QOR's war diarist also noted on 26 June that Cpl. G. Hadley of "B" Company was shot and killed "while trying to connect with 17 Recce on our left flank" LAC, RG24, Vol. 15168, File No 753, WD – QOR, Log Entry, 26 June 1944

⁹⁵ Ellis, *The Sharp End of War*, 53.

⁹⁶ Engen, *Canadians Under Fire*, 112.

patrol was similar to a trench raid from the First World War. Its purpose was to harass and create havoc within the German lines by drawing fire, destroying defensive fortifications, and killing as many of the enemy as possible.⁹⁷

Through a process of trial and error the Canadians became highly proficient in the art of patrolling as they adapted and improvised the tactics and methods which worked best. At first the Canadians would send entire companies or platoons into no man's land on fighting patrols or reces. However, the large number of personnel complicated the process, especially at night when command and control were limited by the darkness. By the end of the first week in Normandy, Canadian battalions began limiting the size of recce patrols to less than half a section and fighting patrols to platoon sizes (about 35 men).⁹⁸ As lessons were learned, BnHQ became increasingly more selective about who was assigned to patrol duty. As Major D. N. Durward, a company commander in the HLI stated, "Men are jumpy when working within enemy lines at night and great care must be used in selecting personnel."⁹⁹ At all times the primary consideration was reliability and efficiency. In the QOR, individuals who had an innate talent for patrolling were relied upon regularly – regardless of rank. In many cases a patrol might be led by an experienced sergeant or corporal and not an officer. As CSM Charles Martin pointed out, most of his company's patrol experts were in fact riflemen and not officers.¹⁰⁰

To ensure that others gained experience, volunteers were added to the patrol's roster. At first they were taken on without much hesitation, but once it was realized that

⁹⁷ CWM, *Infantry Section Leading*, 1938, 41-48; Engen, *Canadians Under Fire*, 112-113; Martin, *Battle Diary*, 30-36.

⁹⁸ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15076, File No. 754, WD – HLI, Log Entry, 11 June 1944; LAC, RG24, Vol. 10450, "BEQ, #115, Major D. N. Durward, HLI."

⁹⁹ LAC, RG24, Vol. 10450, "BEQ, #115, Major D. N. Durward, HLI."

¹⁰⁰ Martin, *Battle Diary*, 31.

soldiers suffering from head colds or allergies were dangerous – as they might sneeze, cough, or sniffle their way through the darkness – units became more stringent on who was selected. As CSM Martin explained, “I’d never take along a man who had any sign of a head cold . . . we didn’t want to hear a man breathing”¹⁰¹ The need for absolute silence was obvious to the small number of soldiers stealthily creeping around the battlefield. Communication had to be “quick and quiet.” Hand signals were used on moonlit nights, but on other occasions the touch of the hand was the only means for communication in the darkness. CSM Martin added, “We developed a language for things like: I’m moving ahead, stay with me, stay put, cover me or other such signals.”¹⁰² Moreover, any equipment that was shiny or liable to make noise while on the move was discarded. Faces were blackened, helmets removed, and in some cases heavy boots were exchanged for running shoes. Patrols were also lightly armed. On a recce patrol weapons were light – usually only the knife, Sten gun, and garrotte – and on a fighting patrol, heavier weapons were carried, such as Bren guns, PIATS, and grenades, in order to add greater firepower.¹⁰³

Furthermore, navigation in the darkness was a serious problem that required substantial effort to overcome. A typical night-time patrol programme consisted of around three or four patrols per battalion, which made for quite a bustle of activity in no man’s land. This increased the potential of friendly casualties and necessitated the involvement of Brigade Headquarters (BdeHQ) in coordinating tasks, disbursing information, and assigning areas of responsibility. Whenever possible all nightly patrols were detailed by noon, which allowed time to study the terrain in the daylight and it also

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 31.

¹⁰² Ibid, 31.

¹⁰³ Martin, *Battle Diary*, 30-32; LAC, RG24, Vol. 10450, “BEQ, #115, Major D. N. Durward, HLI.”

allowed the soldiers to familiarize themselves with their role on the mission. In the darkness, maintaining direction was helped substantially by the nature of the terrain since it was “undulating, under crop, and land marks were prominent.”¹⁰⁴ However, in some units special strategies were developed to ensure that patrols never got lost. In the QOR, the patrol’s starting point was occupied all-night by one member of the patrol who acted as “watchdog” while the other members went forward to the objectives. Moreover, with limited resources at their disposal, the troops amazingly adapted certain devices to aid their nightly endeavours. CSM Martin explained:

Leaving the start point, we’d roll out the white tape as we advanced and pull it back as we returned. This meant if we found our way through the mines on the way out, we’d have the same safe trail coming back. If the enemy opened fire, real problems could develop in darkness. You could easily lose direction. So the tape was our lifeline.¹⁰⁵

However, despite the elaborate measures instances of patrols being wiped out by friend or foe were not uncommon. On 15 June, the NNSH war diarist recorded one incident when Captain J. R. Grieves and three other ranks (ORs) of “B” Company went out to patrol near Buron, and ran into another unknown Allied patrol which had gotten lost. In the darkness, Grieves and his men opened fire and wiped it out “not knowing it was friendly” and then returned to their lines.¹⁰⁶ These common occurrences reinforced the dangerous nature of patrolling. The slightest mistake, noise, or wrong turn was liable to result in one’s swift and anonymous death in the darkness. Patrolling therefore demanded considerable concentration and preparation, and challenged the limits of physical strength and stamina. Not only did one need to focus for hours on end, but quite

¹⁰⁴ LAC, RG24, Vol. 10450, “BEQ, #115, Major D. N. Durward, HLI.”

¹⁰⁵ Martin, *Battle Diary*, 32.

¹⁰⁶ At daybreak some wounded arrived and were taken to the Regimental Aid Post (RAP) and stretcher bearers went out to find others retrieving only one other wounded soldier. LAC, RG24, Vol. 15122, File No. 734, WD – NNSH, Log Entry, 15 June 1944.

often soldiers had to carry wounded comrades or prisoners back to their lines once the job was completed. Soldiers also had to crawl for hundreds of yards or dart and dash silently in the darkness in order to find cover, get into position, or quickly set up an ambush.¹⁰⁷ Even for these physically fit and well-conditioned young men, the exertion strained every muscle and could leave them gasping for breath.

Moreover, with the constant fear of death overshadowing every movement, soldiers grew tense, especially on the longer patrols. In the humid summer nights, it was not uncommon for the stressed soldiers to lose five or six pounds of body weight by sweating alone. As CSM Martin recalled, “A patrol was as tough or tougher than any regular attack. The tension didn’t let up for a second.”¹⁰⁸ The whole experience left soldiers drained of energy, dehydrated, and dizzy from lack of sleep. Patrolling was so gruelling it was felt that a soldier should not go out on more than one per week, because the frequent “shelling and mortaring [during the day] keeps the nerves from settling down quickly” after spending a strenuous night out hunting Germans.¹⁰⁹ However, with such heavy casualties and the need to have experienced patrollers out every night to ensure success, this was not practical and the same cadre of soldiers repeatedly carried out the stressful job. CSM Martin estimated that he took part in more than 75 patrols throughout the entire battle for Normandy (June-August), which is a startling number considering the campaign lasted for about 76 days and nights altogether.¹¹⁰

Compounding the physically exhausting reality was the nature of German resistance. The 12th SS “*Hitlerjugend*” Panzer Division was the primary German

¹⁰⁷ Martin, *Battle Diary*, 30-36

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 30

¹⁰⁹ LAC, RG24, Vol. 10450, “BEQ #115, Major D. N. Durward, HLI.”

¹¹⁰ Martin, *Battle Diary*, 30

division that the Canadians confronted in the June-July period. It proved to be a highly dedicated and fanatical enemy, though its effectiveness in combat was inhibited by these characteristics. Although its cadre of veteran officers and NCOs had seen substantial action in the war of annihilation in the Soviet Union, the unit's ORs were entirely composed of hand-picked Hitler Youth members. Most were born in the 1926 draft year and were therefore socialized to hate from a very early age. More than a decade of exposure to Nazi propaganda and ideological indoctrination, warped racialized education in the Hitler Youth, and finally the challenging and effective training they received in the *Waffen SS*, had produced a group of highly fit, young, and enthusiastic soldiers who were all imbued with the notion of the *Heldentod* or the desire to die gloriously in battle for their *Führer*.¹¹¹ These fanatical soldiers therefore proved to be a persistent enemy that enacted a terribly heavy price as they clung to every inch of terrain with a determination that trumped instincts of survival and even sound military logic.¹¹² For example, rather than shooting at the Allied tanks as they approached their positions, some members of the *Hitlerjugend* would wait for the tanks to roll over their trenches before detonating an explosive killing themselves and (maybe) damaging the tank. Perhaps the most shocking aspect of this example is how often it occurred during the

¹¹¹ For further information about the 12th SS and its origins see Kurt Meyer, *Grenadiers The Story of Waffen-SS General Kurt "Panzer" Meyer* (Mechanicsburg, PA Stackpole Books, 2005), Michael H Kater, *Hitler Youth* (London Harvard University Press, 2004), Craig H W Luther, *Blood and Honor The 12th SS Panzer Division "Hitler Youth", 1943-1945* (San Jose R James Bender Publishing, 1988), Howard Margolian, *Conduct Unbecoming The Story of the Murder of Canadian Prisoners of War in Normandy* (Toronto University of Toronto Press, 1998), Nicholas Stargardt, *Witnesses of War Children's Lives Under the Nazis* (London Jonathan Cape, 2005)

¹¹² Oliver Haller, "The Defeat of the 12th SS 7-10 June 1944" *Canadian Military History*, Vol 3 No 1 (1994), 9-25, Michael E Sullivan, "Combat Motivation and the Roots of Fanaticism: The 12th SS Panzer Division Hitlerjugend in Normandy" *Canadian Military History*, Vol 10, No 3 (Summer, 2001), 43-56, Copp, *Fields of Fire*, Chapter 3, Stacey, *The Victory Campaign*, 121-152

entire campaign.¹¹³ Battling the 12th SS was almost akin to fighting the Japanese in the Pacific as they often displayed a similar suicidal determination.

Their youthful fanaticism also prompted vicious brutality that was demonstrated in the appalling treatment of prisoners of war (POWs). The 12th SS quickly developed a despicable reputation for murdering POWs, so much so that it became known as the “murder division” by other German soldiers.¹¹⁴ It is estimated that they killed somewhere between 156 and 178 Canadian POWs in a variety of cruel and exceptionally violent ways. For example, near Authie on 7 June, eight captured NNSH were ordered to remove their helmets and then they were all promptly shot in the head by their guards. After the execution, the bodies of the Canadian soldiers were dragged into the middle of the road so that tanks and other traffic would run them over.¹¹⁵ Excessive acts of brutality have always existed in war. They often arise from momentary psychological and emotional circumstances, such as adrenaline surges, sheer panic and terror, stress, or rage. But this act and others like it were different. They took place in the rear after the battle was over and often after several minutes of deliberations between officers and ORs.¹¹⁶ They were calculated and cold blooded. Instances of Canadian reprisals are obscure as the low number of *Hitlerjugend* prisoners can be attributed to their desire for the *Heldentod* and penchant for not surrendering as much as it can be attributed to Canadian retaliation (or dubious records management at the battalion level). However, what can be said with certainty is the fact that the actions of the 12th SS precipitated a cycle of violence that denigrated into a remorseless and ruthless clash of arms.

¹¹³ Copp, *Fields of Fire*, 83; Kater, *Hitler Youth*, 214-215.

¹¹⁴ Sullivan, “Combat Motivation and the Roots of Fanaticism” 42.

¹¹⁵ Margolian, *Conduct Unbecoming*, 60.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, Chapters 4-11.

The intense shelling and swift engagements between the two opposing forces at Buron, Authie, Putot, Bretteville, Le Mesnil Patry and many other places, not only caused heavy casualties and heartache but was often followed by the savage ritual of souveniring. Scavenging for loot and tokens of battle from the deceased and decaying enemy quickly became a custom for Canadian soldiers. "One thing I noticed was the rapidity with which the men picked up souvenirs" explained Major G. T. MacEwan, "Within a very short time of landing most men seemed to have a memento." As for himself, MacEwan picked up only a bottle of champagne which he left in his company's carrier, but sadly he never got to drink it as he was badly wounded two days later in the Canadian counterattack on Putot.¹¹⁷ Strewn about the battlefield were the memorabilia of war there for the survivors to pillage: Nazi flags or SS camouflage ponchos were highly prized for their symbolic value as much as their portability. According to Pte. Arnold Wayne of the Can Scots, German pistols were also highly coveted, as he recalled spending some time searching for a German officer's P38 pistol in a river and then trading it shortly afterwards to an American:

He wanted a P38 in the worst way. He offered me a 7.65 calibre pistol plus cash, just name my price. Considering this P38 was large in size, it had been in the water for some time and had a somewhat complicated mechanism as well as being 38mm calibre. I then decided the 7.65 pistol would suit me fine as it was small and would use 32 calibre ammo . . . We made an even trade and I slipped it into my inside tunic pocket, where it fit perfectly. This 7.65 was always in my tunic pocket for evermore.¹¹⁸

Thus, war turned everyone into savages. The souvenir trade enmeshed all that was rotten about the physical reality of the soldiers' world. A product of the quick and savage fighting and the resulting death it caused, the survivors would scavenge and pillage the

¹¹⁷ DHH, 145.2C4013 (D3), "D-Day and the Counter-Attack on Putot-en-Bessin" Major MacEwan, 4.

¹¹⁸ Wayne, untitled memoir, www.canadianletters.ca

ghastly environment for anything of value – sentimental or otherwise – as soldiers were so intimately aware of the importance of objects and equipment to support their living conditions.

This material culture was another important aspect of the physical experience of war and deserves further attention. Everything a soldier possessed he carried with him and therefore his equipment was inexorably intertwined with his survival and the appalling living conditions at the front. The Canadian soldier carried on average fifty pounds of kit including a variety of indispensable tools and objects such as weapons and ammunition, personal items, the entrenching tool, and provisions. While much has been written on the subject of Canadian weaponry in the Second World War, it remains useful to briefly highlight the different types of weapons the infantry carried. The standard weapons at the disposal of the Canadian soldier were the dependable bolt action No. 4 Mk I Rifle, the unreliable Sten sub-machinegun, the venerable Bren light machine-gun, the PIAT, and the No. 36 fragmentation grenade.¹¹⁹ According to historian Robert Engen's recent study of Canadian infantry effectiveness in the Second World War, the troops had confidence in most of the weapons they utilized (especially the PIAT and Bren gun), but had a low opinion of the Sten gun because it was prone to jamming.¹²⁰

The amount of equipment a soldier carried varied according to his role in the unit, combat conditions, weather, geography, and personal inclinations. For example, most soldiers in a rifle company carried extra ammunition for his section's Bren gun or the company's two- and three-inch mortars, in addition to his own required allotment of

¹¹⁹ Engen, *Canadians Under Fire*, 122; Jean Bouchery, *The Canadian Soldier in North-West Europe, 1944-1945* (Paris: Histoire & Collections, 2003), 116.

¹²⁰ Engen, *Canadians Under Fire*, 121-126, 167-169.

rations, tools, and weapons.¹²¹ The exact weight one carried in his haversack, pockets, and webbing also depended on the needs of the soldier's lifestyle, rank, and personal preferences. In the haversack of an ORs could be found any number of items: a cardigan, toilet gear (conveniently stored in the "Hold All"), a mess tin and cutlery, the Tommy cooker, and extra socks. In addition to these items, officers carried binoculars, maps, notebooks, and pencils.¹²² Furthermore, all soldiers carried items of a more personal



Photo 4: An unidentified member of the HLI digging a slit trench, July 1944. LAC, RG24, Vol. 15076, File No. 754, WD - HLI, July 1944.

nature: playing cards, stacks of letters or paper, writing utensils, a toothbrush and paste, a flask, "the housewife" (a small pouch containing sewing supplies), souvenirs, a bible, and all manner of other things which could accumulate space and weight in one's pouches and pockets.¹²³

One exceptionally important piece of equipment was the entrenching tool. As the RWR's war diarist commented, "picks and shovels" were "almost as important as a weapon to the individual."¹²⁴ The shovel was the soldier's life-preserver, the importance of which was quickly discovered upon the first encounter with German mortars or artillery. Getting

¹²¹ Andrew Iarocci, "Equipment of the Canadian Infantryman, 1939-1982: A Material/Historical Assessment" *Canadian Military History*, Vol. 9, No. 4, (Autumn, 2000): 35; Martin, *Battle Diary*, 3.

¹²² Bouchery, *The Canadian Soldier in North-West Europe*, 99-100.

¹²³ *Ibid*, 109.

¹²⁴ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15233, File No. 934/1, WD - RWR, Log Entry, 12 June 1944.

below ground, and doing so quickly, was often the difference between life, death, or permanent injury. Pte. Tutte described his company's response to German shelling during their counterattack on Putot on 8-9 June: "About 2230 h[our]rs things began to quiet down and we started to dig. Not like we used to on schemes, what [I] mean is – We Dug. Badgers had nothing on us."¹²⁵ One of the most common routines of the infantry's miserable fighting experience was digging. It was a constant task done whenever and wherever they went, regardless of time, energy, or numbers. Two soldiers could dig a fairly good trench of about five feet deep and six or seven feet long in about an hour – though this could be done very quickly if one was under fire. However, after lugging around more than fifty pounds of equipment all day or night and fighting the enemy, digging proved an especially taxing chore that strained muscles and backs, as soldiers had to hack and dig their way through rocks, roots, and clay. Moreover, the men also had to spend time camouflaging their positions so that the enemy could not easily locate and shell them. Of course, this could all happen more than once a day depending on whether the unit moved to a new location or had its defences damaged in battle.¹²⁶

Since getting below ground level was the only means of protection against the merciless shelling, soldiers appreciated the safety slit trenches provided, despite the exertion required to construct them. As the war diarist of the SDGs commented at the end of June, "Slit trenches are not without their virtues . . . there are times when there is nothing so comforting as the feel of solid earth at one's back."¹²⁷ Soldiers therefore made the most of in-ground living and adapted their lifestyles through improvisation. On

¹²⁵ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15037, File No. 734(400), WD – Can Scots, "The Advance, Occupation, and Holding of the Bridge at Putot-en-Bessin As I Saw It" Pte. R. H. Tutte, 2.

¹²⁶ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15037, File No: 734(400), WD – Can Scots, Lt. Stewart Ross, Newspaper Clipping, 9 July 1944; Martin, *Battle Diary*, 41-42.

¹²⁷ LAC, RG-24, Vol. 15270, File No. 752, WD – SDGs, Log Entry, 30 June 1944

their own initiative, they erected roofs over their trenches made from tree branches, barn doors, or sheet metal to protect against the elements. If mattresses could be “liberated” from nearby abandoned houses, they were used for resting. To accommodate a roof and “bed” whilst still remaining effective for combat operations, soldiers would dig slit trenches in the shape of an “L” and cover the longer part, leaving the shorter exposed portion for observation.¹²⁸ Competitions for building the most elaborate slit trench were often informally undertaken between sections or platoons. In the QOR, Riflemen E. Hackett and A. Alexander of “A” Company always attempted to build the most camouflaged slit trench. They became so skilful at it that when a troop of Allied tanks came into their area, one parked right on top of them without noticing them.¹²⁹ Other members of “A” Company strove for elegance in their slit trenches. CSM Charles Martin explained:

Another time when we knew we were going to hole up for a few days, Joey Carmichael and Bill Lennox gave themselves a deluxe treatment. They had one room for sleeping, one room as a kitchen, and a specially well constructed lookout so they could watch without being seen. They even pinned draperies on the sides to hide the dirt walls.¹³⁰

However well Canadian soldiers adapted to living below ground, conditions and standards of life remained dreadful. Holes in the earth hardly offered sufficient shelter from the elements; thus soldiers were subjected to the extremes of weather. A comparative analysis between the 14th Meteorological Section’s war diary and four battalion war diaries that noted the weather regularly, establishes that in mid-June the

¹²⁸ Martin, *Battle Diary*, 41-42; LAC, RG24, Vol. 15122, File No. 734, WD – NNSH, Log Entry, 19 June 1944.

¹²⁹ Martin, *Battle Diary*, 42.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 42.

weather was relatively sunny and warm with changing cloud cover.¹³¹ These weather conditions might be considered ideal for offensive operations since the sun's heat dried and hardened the landscape, provided excellent visibility, improved morale, and ensured that Canadian troops could receive tactical air support should the need arise. However, the sultry heat could also bring discomfort. In addition to intensifying the vomit-inducing odours of rotting carcasses, dead bodies, excrement, and garbage, the heat brought the threat of dehydration. Moreover, the dry ground also kicked up a thin layer of dust that clung to sticky and unwashed skin or sweaty uniforms already filthy from too much digging. Parched-mouthed, under the blistering sun for hours on end, soldiers not only received a good "farmer's tan" they also got badly sunburned.¹³² When one had to carry an extra fifty pounds of kit and wear prickly unwashed uniforms, the sunburned skin chafed and became irritated as the soldier's heavy load pulled at his shoulders and neck.¹³³

While the middle part of June appeared to be characterized more by cloudy and sunny periods, it rained rather often in the later part of June, particularly on 19, 26, 27, 28, and 29 June.¹³⁴ Rain was depressing. As the war diarist for the RR noted on 19 June, "It started raining in the early hours of the morning and continued throughout the day

¹³¹ LAC, RG24, Vol. 14653, File No.: 477E, Reel: T-17270, WD - No. 14 Meteorological Section, Royal Canadian Artillery (RCA), Log Entry, 1-30 June 1944; LAC, RG24, Vol. 15122, File No. 734, WD - NNSH, Log Entry, 1-30 June 1944; LAC, RG24, Vol. 15076, File No. 754, WD - HLI, Log Entry, 1-30 June 1944; LAC, RG24, Vol. 15127, File No. 742, WD - NS, Log Entry, 1-30 June 1944; LAC, RG24, Vol. 15198, File No. 744, WD - RR, Log Entry, 1-30 June 1944

¹³² Longden, *To the Victor the Spoils*, 11.

¹³³ Karp, *War Diary*, 38.

¹³⁴ LAC, RG24, Vol. 14653, File No.: 477E, Reel: T-17270, WD - No. 14 Met. Section, Log Entry, 1-30 June 1944; LAC, RG24, Vol. 15122, File No. 734, WD - NNSH, Log Entry, 1-30 June 1944; LAC, RG24, Vol. 15076, File No. 754, WD - HLI, Log Entry, 1-30 June 1944; LAC, RG24, Vol. 15127, File No. 742, WD - NS, Log Entry, 1-30 June 1944; LAC, RG24, Vol. 15198, File No. 744, WD - RR, Log Entry, 1-30 June 1944.

making conditions generally miserable for all.”¹³⁵ Those who had the foresight to build roofs for slit trenches, were partially saved from being drenched – at least until it was their turn to take watch. Rain soaked uniforms and everything a soldier carried, leaving him cold and damp long after it stopped. Moreover, soaked feet in sodden boots not only caused blisters and boils, but if left untreated could lead to trench-foot or gangrene. The worst part of rain was the mud. Saturating the earth the soldiers lived in, mud made even the smallest chore an exhausting task. It clung to everything, weighing soldiers down as they trudged ankle deep in it, followed everywhere by the suckling noises of worn-out boots being pried from the brown glue, one at a time. “We have heard from the veterans of World War I about the mud of France” wrote the exasperated NNSH war diarist on 19 June, “and now we have experienced it for the first time ourselves. It is the worst thing that we have had since Jerry let up on his mortar.”¹³⁶

Living below ground also posed serious hygienic challenges and health-related concerns. Throughout June, not only were washing and laundry facilities a sporadic luxury for soldiers, but given the fact that they were surrounded by garbage, decomposing remains, and living in holes dug primarily in agricultural and pastoral lands which had been fertilized with manure for centuries, any cut, sunburn, or irritation (no matter how minor) was liable to get infected.¹³⁷ Thus, hygienic standards were extremely low and worsened as the campaign wore on. The 7th Field Hygiene Section, attached to the 3rd Division and active from 18 June onwards, did what it could. Its personnel policed “water points” to prevent contamination, provided guidance and sanitary inspections to rear units, improvised some shower facilities at Fontaine Henry,

¹³⁵ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15198, File No. 744, WD – RR, Log Entry, 19 June 1944.

¹³⁶ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15122, File No. 734, WD – NNSH, Log Entry, 19 June 1944.

¹³⁷ Similar problems occurred in the First World War. See Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 199.

and built “compo box latrine seats” which they distributed to “several units in [the] 3rd Cdn Inf Div.” However, its personnel could not be everywhere at once and it appears that sanitary inspections of the infantry battalions in forward areas were uncommon, as only one inspection (on 10 July) was recorded in the unit’s war diaries for June and July.¹³⁸

The poor hygienic standards meant that soldiers contracted sickness and disease. Records relating to the health of soldiers are surprisingly well-documented and intact. In June, 451 Canadians contracted some type of disease or sickness, and judging by the “simple bed state” records kept by the 3rd Division’s Assistant Director of Medical Services (ADMS) and updated every 12 hours, the majority seem to have occurred near the end of the month when the weather turned foul. In addition to shell fragments and bullets, soldiers also had to contend with the scourge of disease: diphtheria, influenza, jaundice, pneumonia, and even food poisoning. Moreover, soldiers also suffered through what were termed “Ordinary Sicknesses” which included head and chest colds, fevers, rheumatism, boils, concussions, diarrhoea, haemorrhoids, cuts and scrapes, minor infections, and many other conditions and diseases.¹³⁹ Perhaps most annoying of all were the infestations of mosquitoes, flies, lice, and crabs which savagely assaulted the skin and left soldiers in a persistent, uncomfortable, itchy state and also threatened to spread disease from person to person.

¹³⁸ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15931, File No. 769, WD – 7th Field Hygiene Section (RCAMC), Log Entry, various dates June and July 1944. Quotations from 29 June 1944.

¹³⁹ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15661, file 700, WD - Assistant Director of Medical Services, Headquarters, 3rd Canadian Infantry Division (ADMS), “Simple Bed State Signal Code,” June 1944 and Log Entry, 19 June 1944; Ibid, “Monthly Hygiene Report (Sanitary & Epidemiological State)” by Major E. L. Davey, 7th Field Hygiene Section, 2 August 1944, 1-3, Tables I-IV. The report was for July. Unfortunately, a similar report was not produced for June as the 7th Hygiene Section arrived in Normandy only near the end of the month. See Table 1 in Appendix I

The putrid living conditions and squalor in which the exhausted soldier lived, culminated, by the end of July and throughout August, in the widespread existence of what Major E. L. Davey, the commanding officer of the 7th Field Hygiene Section, called “mild outbreaks of diarrhoea or gastro intestinal disturbances unattended by fever, malaise, crampy abdominal pain and with no blood, puss, or mucous in the stool. These have not been severe enough . . . to warrant evacuation or cause the affected personnel to be off duty for more than 24 hours.”¹⁴⁰ However, it is doubtful that those suffering from dysentery would have agreed with the major’s assessment. Dysentery, the awful by-product of bad nutrition and squalor, that could send a man to his knees convulsing in uncontrollable cramps followed by severe bowel movements shooting fecal matter several feet from his rectum. It was a horrible plague that sapped energy from the soul and complicated offensive operations. As George Blackburn noted:

One man’s dysentery-induced expulsion aroused my own memories of the convulsive cramps and feverish, shuddering ague brought on by that damnable scourge that struck the Canadian Army around Verrières before the drive down the Falaise road began, which worsened as time went on to the point where it came close to putting some units out of action when supplies of medicine to treat it ran out.¹⁴¹

Later bacterial tests of stool samples would partially prove Davey’s assessment as mistaken. From the test results, it was estimated that 20 to 30 percent of the samples

¹⁴⁰ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15661, file 700, WD - ADMS, “Monthly Hygiene Report” by Major E. L. Davey, 7th Field Hygiene Section, 2 August 1944, 1-2.

¹⁴¹ Blackburn continued: “Yet dysentery, if mentioned at all by historians, is touched on only in passing, as though of no more consequence than some minor irritating inconvenience like lice or mosquitoes.” This particular example certainly highlights the need to meld documented evidence with veteran testimony, as Major Davey’s report understated the impact of dysentery and historians appear to have perpetuated the bias. Blackburn, *The Guns of Normandy*, quote from xv, 353, 383, 391, 422-425

were positive for the bacteria, Flexner A-2, and therefore categorized as “mild dysentery” – something Major Davey seemed reluctant to diagnose at the time.¹⁴²

The constant physical exertion, lack of hygiene, squalid living conditions, and exposure to the elements, combined to leave the soldier – and his uniform – in filthy tatters. The uniform was a soldier’s exoskeleton. For days on end, his blouse, leggings, helmet, boots, and webbing were the only things he wore – day and night. When the soldier was wet, dirty, or bloodied, so was his clothing. Thus, the state of one’s uniform was also a reflection of the soldier, and although it may have been filthy, frayed, and torn from overuse, the uniform was appreciated by the soldiers as it became a source of pride and means of identification. Most significantly, the uniform distinguished the veteran from the replacement. Aside from his uniform’s ragged and filthy appearance, the most telling characteristic of a combat veteran was his helmet. All Canadian soldiers who landed on D-Day had been issued the new Mk III helmet, nicknamed the “Tortoise” by the troops because of its rounder curve that resembled something like a tortoise shell. Reinforcements were issued with the standard Mk II helmet, which was the flatter iconic British-style helmet.¹⁴³ Thus, one could immediately distinguish the veteran from the replacement by a quick glance at the head gear. Major Clifford Chadderton discovered this to his horror when ordered to remove the dead RWR from the open wheat fields around Carpiquet and Caen:

We began to notice that a large number of the dead or dying included those who had landed on the beach and were accorded the accolade of original D-Day veterans. They had survived the landing and the slaughter at [Putot].

¹⁴² LAC, RG24, Vol. 15661, file 700, WD – ADMS, “Monthly Hygiene Report (Sanitary & Epidemiological State)” by Major E. L. Davey, 7th Field Hygiene Section, 3 September 1944, 2.

¹⁴³ Bouchery, *The Canadian Soldier in North-West Europe*, 40-43.

They lived to fight another day as they advanced across the fields towards Caen. Many of the first ashore died a month later in the battle for Caen.¹⁴⁴

Boots were another giveaway for identifying those with combat experience. D-Day veterans had been issued with the ten-inch high boot which they laced halfway up the calf. Replacements were also issued the high boot, but it had a buckle at the top and not a knife sheath like those of a D-Day veteran.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, they were also Canadian-made, which made them a source of national pride as well. According to a February 1943 report comparing the standard issue British War Office boot with the Canadian-made boot, the troops despised the British pattern because of its tendency to cause blisters.¹⁴⁶ The Canadian boot was better made according to Sgt. C. A. Gibson of the SDGs, who survived D-Day and the hell of June only to be killed at Caen, “My feet will not take the [War Office] boots, owing to their blistering effect and hurting of tendons. Canadian high boot 10-inch are the best I have ever worn. They get my highest recommendation in any conditions.”¹⁴⁷ Gibson’s comments were echoed by others in the SDGs. Sgt. (later CSM) G. M. Dickson, a D-Day veteran who sadly lost his life on the same day as Sgt. Gibson (8 July 1944), stated that, “The best boots I have ever worn are the two pairs of 10-inch boots issued about four months ago. They will stand all sorts of rough country and are the best boots to turn water I have ever worn.”¹⁴⁸ The blouse and leggings were also a source of pride and identity for Canadians. Although they were patterned on the 1937 British model, the Canuck’s uniform was distinguished by its unique greenish-bronze colour. Moreover, Canadians had a tendency to adapt different

¹⁴⁴ Chadderton, *Excuse Us!*, 59-60.

¹⁴⁵ Chadderton, *Excuse Us!*, 59-60; Bouchery, *The Canadian Soldier in North-West Europe*, 86-89.

¹⁴⁶ The report concluded that blistering occurred because North Americans were used to more rubber in their footwear than the British. LAC, RG24, Vol.: 10050, File No.: 13/Cloth/18, “Comparison WO Pattern boots and CDN pattern boots, 1943/12-1945/09,” n. p.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, n. p.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, n. p.

dress regulations to their uniform, as Major J. J. Andrews, a D-Day veteran with the Can Scots, remarked when discussing one incident in which his men nearly opened fire on a group of soldiers emerging from a hedge:

Fortunately, as they broke from the hedge, their most evident “assault helmets” and sacking camouflage gave them a most Canadian-looking appearance. This was verified when the lead scout was observed to have his pants completely lacking in anklets and rolled up logger style.¹⁴⁹

The other major item carried everywhere by the troops was their rations. Prior to D-Day, a variety of different strategies were tested relating to unit messing and food supply. In Britain, 3-tonne lorries had been converted into mobile kitchens and performed quite well in field exercises.¹⁵⁰ However, once ashore in Normandy unit messing became a stubborn problem that demanded improvisation and decentralization since groups of soldiers crowding around “chow lines” invited mortar fire, and given the exigencies of combat, opportunities for feeding had to be seized upon by company or platoon commanders whenever they arose.¹⁵¹ Thus, for the first six weeks in Normandy soldiers were supplied with tinned rations which they cooked in pairs huddled in slit trenches, as field kitchens, cold storage units, and bakeries were not available until mid-July.¹⁵² To help attenuate morale problems caused by dietary monotony, the British and Canadians utilized composite (or “compo”) rations, which provided soldiers with 14 meals of various types per box, thus allowing greater variety. Soldiers could mix and

¹⁴⁹ DHH, 145 2C4 (D5) “Battle Narrative of D-Day and the Counter Attack on Putot-en-Bessin” Major J. Andrews, n d , 2.

¹⁵⁰ LAC, RG24, Vol. 10089, File No. 14/Cat Mob Kitchen/1, “Special Report on Mobile Kitchen,” 1-11; DHH, AHQ Report, No. 59, C. A. Larson Series, “Food Complaints and Cooks’ Training, Canadian Army Overseas, 1939-1943” 1-9

¹⁵¹ CWM, *Infantry Training Part I: The Infantry Battalion* (HMSO 15 January 1944), 15-17.

¹⁵² As the pamphlet on operational feeding stated: “Every available inch of shipping space which can be saved for fighting equipment and petrol means more hitting power and mobility for the fighting troops. To ship field bakeries instead of, say, field batteries, would be weakening the Force. ” DHH, 78/361, *Operational Feeding: The Use of Field Rations, 1942* (Canada HMSO, Dec. 1942), 1.

match tins of meat, sausage, bacon, Irish stew, steak and kidney pudding, sweets, margarine, vegetables, biscuit, and beans to form their own menus at mealtimes.¹⁵³ Although the compo rations formed the basis of the foot soldiers' diet, before going into battle the troops were also issued the 24-Hour Emergency ration, which could feed them for a day while the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps (RCASC) and the battalion's Administrative Platoon brought the compo rations forward.¹⁵⁴

The tinned food was hardly delicious but at least no one starved, as the soldiers' rations provided them with almost all their daily nutritional needs.¹⁵⁵ However, the soldiers were trapped within terribly stressful conditions that required considerable physical exertion, thus their nutritional requirements often increased well beyond the basic minimum provided. This created two additional problems. First, it left soldiers hungrier, which not only meant that they lost weight faster as the body burned off excess fat, but it also increased appetites. The gnawing impulse of hunger was a powerful stimulant, and soldiers were liable to leave their posts in order to search and scrounge for more food in the nearby towns or villages. This threatened fighting efficiency, morale and discipline, and could damage relations with the locals.¹⁵⁶ Second, the lack of fresh vegetables, fruit, and meat, and the corresponding reliance on dehydrated and tinned supplements, meant that soldiers saw a distinct decrease both in their physical condition and stamina. Although in June and early July, the years of training and

¹⁵³ One box could feed 14 men for one day or one man for 14 days, etc. DHH, 78/361, *Operational Feeding*, 1-7; LAC, RG24, Vol. 12634, File: 11/Rations/9, "Army Nutrition: Notes for Medical Officers," n. d., 1-12; LAC, RG24, Vol. 12633, File: 11/Rations/4, "Food Facts to Keep You Fighting Fit," n. d., 1-5; Ellis, *The Sharp End of War*, 275-277; Blackburn, *The Guns of Normandy*, 46-51.

¹⁵⁴ Arnold Warren, *Wait for the Wagon: The Story of the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1961), 280-285.

¹⁵⁵ See Table 2 in Appendix I.

¹⁵⁶ LAC, RG24, Vol. 16391, File. No: 543, WD – 3rd Canadian Field Security Section, "Security Report No. 2, 24 June 1944" 2-3; DHH, 81/289, Bernard Montgomery, *Morale in Battle: Analysis* (Canada: HMSO, 1947), 11.

gruelling physical fitness helped to attenuate this problem somewhat, as the campaign wore on this issue became more serious. As Major Peter Griffin wrote to his sister in late August:

In the meantime we're all tuckered out with sore feet, bad stomachs etc. I firmly believe I've lost over 10 pounds. We've been on tin food since June 6 and for over two months sat in trenches pursuing a "what we have we hold" role with a consequent rapid drop in our physical fitness. Our training has always been strenuous and fitted us for those first 15 or 20 days (hectic) but we're not suited to doing relatively nothing, so when we leaped out and started after Ludwig two weeks ago it took about one 6 mile pursuit march to put most of us on our knees.¹⁵⁷

Not only did the strain of prolonged combat operations bring the threat of death and injury, but it took its toll on the soldier's physical condition.

An individual's first experience with battle proved to be deeply transformative, especially as the endless slaughter continued. Perceptions of one's self, purpose, and surrounding environment were altered in ways many soldiers had never anticipated. The psychological trauma of battle went hand-in-hand with the physical torment. Living in a filthy hole offered little comfort or luxury, while the horrific casualty rate magnified the squalor and exhaustion. Yet through it all, Canadian soldiers showed a propensity for persevering through the overwhelming strain and intensity of battle that harkened back to the earlier generation of Canadians that had fought in the First World War. For many, that lineage was very important as Cpl. Rolph Jackson explained to his interviewers in 1998: "It was a job. We knew it was going to be tough. You people are not brought up with Canadian history, but we had our forefathers, our father's generation's reputation to

¹⁵⁷ LAC, MG30 E-538, File No. 2, Peter R. Griffin Fonds, Letter to Marg, 28 August 1944.

live up to from World War I.” Jackson was also quick to add, “And we did it.”¹⁵⁸ This study now turns to a discussion of exactly how they “did it.”

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Rolph Jackson. Conducted by Ryan Lutz, Geoffrey Brookes, and James Lutz, 15 November 1998, 5. Courtesy of Mr. James Lutz.

CHAPTER 2

KILLING TIME, NOT GERMANS

The chief entertainment of the day was at “B” Co[mpan]y. The ‘show’ consisted of an exhibition of breeding by a fine French stallion and a mare. The stallion did his work six times, each time to the accompaniment of cheers and encouragement from the assembled troops.¹

War Diary, Stormont, Dundas, and Glengarry Highlanders

It is felt that the appalling exhibition which our t[roo]ps are making in the present area in-so-far as camouflage and concealment are concerned is due to the fact that t[roo]ps feel that they are not in direct contact with the enemy and that this is no longer important.²

Battalion Order, Regina Rifles

War is a horrible thing and yet it produces in a man something that normally wouldn’t come out. There are many things, such as comradeship, willingness to help others and teamwork. Yes even poets. We have a small battalion paper called The Tommy Cooker and every once in a while one of the boys will come out with a poem that is very good indeed.³

Sgt. Tom Carney, Canadian Scottish Regiment

In line with the operational-strategic paradigm, Allied victory in Normandy is often described in terms of overwhelming material and manpower resources, aerial supremacy, sustained operational tempo, tactical ingenuity, and several German strategic miscalculations. However, this interpretation creates an illusion of experience that does not always conform to the reality of a soldier’s daily life and it also obscures the variety of other non-combat related developments that contributed to Allied success. Though combat was certainly a major element of that experience – not to mention the ultimate purpose of the infantry and primary means for achieving victory – there was much more to the experience of war than fighting the enemy. Canadian soldiers killed time as often

¹ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15271, File No.: 752, WD – SDGs, Log Entry, 2 July 1944.

² LAC, RG24, Vol. 15198, File No.: 744, WD – RR, Battalion Order, 23 June 1944.

³ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15037, File No.: 734(400), WD – Can Scots, Newspaper Clipping, Sgt. Tom Carney letter to Mrs T. D. Carney, 19 July 1944.

as they killed Germans, and although much importance has been attached to the latter, without the former, victory in Normandy might never have been achieved. Apart from several studies focusing on the auxiliary services and an article by Laurel Halladay on the Canadian Army, Navy, and Air Force entertainment units during the Second World War, little else is known about how soldiers occupied themselves away from the fighting. Nor is much significance attached to these periods of “down-time” and rest.⁴ This was especially the case during the bloody month of June when the Allies possessed no safe rear area large enough for such luxuries as field kitchens or field bakeries, let alone entertainment units. Nevertheless, soldiers still found ways to re-energize and amuse themselves between combat actions, and since the larger infrastructure that accommodated these elaborate rear area services did not exist on the continent until July, soldiers were largely left to their own devices and initiative to fill the void.

This chapter focuses on the men’s experience of war away from combat. It explores the themes of comradeship and “down-time” in the context of the soldiers’ efforts to cope with the psychological and physical strain of battle. Beyond engaging or being in contact with the enemy, most soldiers also spent time in their unit’s reserve position. Although their stay was often cut short and proved no vacation from the rigours of war, the reserve position allowed soldiers to experience a wide range of other important activities that traditional military history ignores. If they were not organizing work parties or patrols or training replacements, soldiers had the opportunity to catch up

⁴ Alan Hurst, *The Canadian Y. M. C. A. In World War II* (Goodfellow Printing Co. Ltd., n.d.); Bowering, *Service*, chapters 7-9; Scott Young, *Red Shield in Action: A Record of Canadian Salvation Army War Services in the Second Great War* (Toronto: F. F. Clarke & Co., 1949), Chapters 3-5; *War Services of the Canadian Knights of Columbus, 1939-1947: A History of the Work of the Knights of Columbus Canadian Army Huts* (Montreal: Knights of Columbus, 1948); Laurel Halladay, “‘It Made Them Forget About the War For a Minute’ Canadian Army, Navy, and Air Force Entertainment Units During the Second World War” *Canadian Military History*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (Autumn 2002): 21-35.

on sleep and their letter writing, clean their clothing, equipment, and themselves, and unwind with a little recreational activity. This opened up a whole realm of different social interaction that bonded soldiers together and helped them cope with the strain, as they had time to communicate and share experience with one another through conversation. With only basic material possessions, low standards of living, the constant fear of death or injury, and limited avenues for entertainment, comradeship became extremely important and soldiers tended to pursue it with energy, focus, and optimism. Social interaction between peers and through available media outlets, such as battalion newspapers, therefore became important fixtures of experience during that time, as they offered the means to define a unique self-image (both individually and collectively) from contemporary developments. This allowed soldiers to construct a cultural identity surrounding their profession and in doing so they were able to attach meaning and purpose to their sacrifice and experience.

In the Eye of a Deadly Storm: The Reserve Position

On any given day in Normandy, Canadian units could be heavily engaged with the enemy as the grisly casualty rate attests. However, Canadian soldiers were not always fighting the Germans. Even periods of intense combat were interspersed with periods of inaction. As Pte. R. H. Tutte explained during the bloody counterattack at Putot on 8-9 June, it became necessary to make lunch during a “quiet spell” around noon and he added that “it was certainly very decent of ‘Jerry’ to allow a pause for

refreshments.”⁵ This example illustrates some broader trends most apparent at the battalion and brigade levels. Even at the height of continuous combat operations, short breaks or designated rest periods occurred whenever possible. Brigade and battalion commanders utilized the reserve position to manage their manpower by periodically rotating units to the rear for short breaks to rest and reorganize. This meant that for every unit *actively fighting* the enemy at any given moment, there was another one in reserve, *not fighting* the Germans.

The reserve position was strategically and tactically important to the prosecution of “bite and hold” operations, as it provided defensive depth and flexibility for future offensives. In many cases a brigade, consisting of three infantry battalions, would create a “fortress” by positioning two battalions forward and one in reserve. During the fighting north of Caen, a brigade fortress was generally formed around a cluster of small villages. The deployment of the 7th Brigade in early June serves to illustrate how this “fortress” tactic worked.⁶ In the early morning of 7 June, the RWR and the RR occupied their intermediate D-Day objectives, Putot and Bretteville, respectively. Both units were then subjected to furious German counterattacks and, while the RR were able to hold their positions until relieved and redeployed to a “quiet” sector near Bray on 18-19 June, the RWR were overrun and nearly annihilated on 8 June. Only the evening counterattack by Pte. Tutte’s Can Scots, the 7th Brigade’s reserve battalion situated in the rear at Secqueville-en-Bessin, restored the situation and allowed the RWR to be withdrawn into

⁵ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15037, File No. 734(400), WD – Can Scots, “The Advance, Occupation, and Holding of the Bridge at Putot-en-Bessin As I Saw It” Pte. R. H. Tutte, 3.

⁶ Copp, *Fields of Fire*, 26-31, Chapters 2 and 3; Engen, *Canadians Under Fire*, Chapters 4 and 5.

reserve. The Can Scots then defended Putot until relieved and redeployed to Rots on the night of 18-19 June ⁷

Despite heavy casualties, the brigade's deployment offered sufficient defensive depth and operational flexibility to hold the crucial position, and while the Can Scots and RR bore the brunt of continuous action throughout this period, the RWR was placed in reserve where it was able to rebuild its shattered companies, integrate reinforcements, and provide some rest to surviving veterans ⁸ Thus, the 7th Brigade example demonstrates that even at the height of battle, some units (at first the Can Scots and then the RWR) were in reserve and not in direct confrontation with the enemy. To say that the 7th Brigade was in continuous combat from D-Day onwards makes perfect sense when utilizing an operational-strategic paradigm to interpret events, but when exploring the experience of war from the sharpest end, such generalizations about the continuity of combat operations are obscured and difficult to conclude

This is also evident on a much smaller scale, as similar rotational practices were employed within each battalion. Depending on circumstances and the exigencies of combat, a battalion's Commanding Officer (CO) would establish a rotation amongst his four rifle companies by positioning one or maybe two of his companies in reserve for a short period of time. This provided the battalion with a variety of advantages, such as greater defensive depth and offensive potential for patrols or counterattacks. Moreover, the rotation of companies into the reserve position ensured that relief was distributed somewhat evenly and, if one was particularly decimated, it could receive a short break to

⁷ LAC, RG24, Vol 15198, File No 744, WD – RR, Log Entry, 7-19 June 1944, LAC RG24, Vol 15233, File No 934/1, WD – RWR, Log Entry, 7-19 June 1944, LAC, RG24, Vol 15037, File No 734(400), WD – Can Scots, various battle narratives, June 1944, LAC, MG31 F18, Robert Lowder Seaborn and Family Fonds, Army Journal, Entry for 18 June 1944, DHH, 145 2C4 (D4), "Battle Narrative Putot-en-Bessin Counter Attack – June 8th, 1944 and the Move to Rots," Lt-Col Wightman, 1 7

⁸ LAC, RG24, Vol 15233, File No 934/1, WD – RWR, Log Entry, 11, 12, and 14 June 1944

absorb reinforcements. In the heavy fighting at Bretteville, the RR employed this rotation on at least one documented instance. On 15 June, the war diarist noted that “A” Company was repositioned to the same area as BnHQ and, although its members were shelled at various times throughout the day, withdrawing them a few hundred metres from the immediacy and intensity of battle proved a welcome respite.⁹

Similarly, in the 9th Brigade’s sector on 8 June, “C” Company of the HLI was positioned in an open field and its soldiers spent the better part of the next 24-36 hours huddled in slit trenches under observation from the Germans who, in St. Contest and Galmanche, shelled anything that moved. Trapped in the hell of continuous shelling without an ability to fight back, nerves began to fray. As the war diarist noted on 9 June, “C Co[mpan]y has been putting in an uncomfortable few days . . . they are beginning to resemble the earth they live in and are feeling the strain.”¹⁰ When civilians reported that Buron was unoccupied, plans were made to send “C” Company out to investigate, but an astute Lt-Col. Griffiths decided it was best to postpone the patrol and instead moved “C” Company to the rear on the afternoon of 10 June. The company took up a much preferable position in a small wooded area behind the church in Villons-les-Buissons and received about a 12-hour break before heading back out on a fighting patrol into Buron the next morning.¹¹ As these two examples illustrate, the strain of battle could be loosely managed though periodic rotations to the reserve position where individuals received a quick break to regain some composure before returning to the cauldron of battle.

⁹ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15198, File No. 744, WD – RR, Log Entry, 15 June 1944.

¹⁰ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15076, File No. 754, WD – HLI, Log Entry, 9 June 1944.

¹¹ Ibid, Log Entry, 8-11 June 1944.

Although the reserve position may have been somewhat removed from the immediacy of combat, it did not necessarily entail a holiday. In order to be tactically and operationally effective the reserve position could not be located more than a few hundred meters from the front, and therefore it was hardly ever out of the range of German mortar or artillery fire. This greatly affected the quality of rest soldiers received while in reserve, as the strain of combat never fully left an individual's conscience. The sights, smells, and sounds of war were always present in reserve and the sporadic shell fire was nearly as harmful to one's health and life expectancy as it was at the front.¹² This was especially true given the fact that the reserve units also embodied the offensive potential of the formation. Therefore, they were required to dispatch patrols regularly and were also called upon to launch any needed counterattacks, as the Can Scots had done when the RWR were overrun at Putot. Furthermore, prolonged periods of rest and relaxation were impossible in June and early July, as the beachhead was too narrow and congested to be safe from German observation and shelling. Therefore, soldiers could only be provided with short, periodic breaks from battle which, according to some 3rd Division officers in the line from D-Day onwards, were almost always insufficient and of unsatisfactory length.¹³ Trapped in the paradox of front-line existence, the 'poor bloody infantry' never really got a chance for adequate rest when placed in reserve. As the war diarist of the QOR wrote after the unit was withdrawn for rest after the battle for Carpiquet: "T[roo]ps are finally established in their rest area. Galmanche. The lads are

¹² The NNSH war diarist noted the casualties sustained while the unit was on the line and in reserve. The number of casualties dropped substantially when the unit was in reserve, but it still incurred a handful each day. LAC, RG24, Vol. 15122, File No. 734, WD – NNSH, Log Entry, various dates June 1944.

¹³ LAC, RG24, Vol. 10450, "BEQ, #36, A/Major John Irvin Mills, QOR"; Ibid, "BEQ #61, Lt Col. G. H. Christiansen, SDGs"; Ibid, "BEQ #113, Major Norman G. Wilson-Smith, RWR", Ibid, "BEQ #122, Capt. Bryson Kearns, HLI of C"; Ibid, "BEQ #205, Major J. G. Stothard, DSO, SDGs", Ibid, "BEQ #274, Capt WR Burnett, NNSH", Ibid, "BEQ #275, Capt Ian Scott Waldie, QOR."

not pleased with the spot at all for the b[ui]ld[in]gs are completely wrecked – there are dead animals and Germans all over the place and it is certainly not a spot to put the mind at rest. However the best is made of a bad go and the men bed down.”¹⁴

In addition to combat duties, reserve units were tasked with other responsibilities that were nearly as demanding and difficult as fighting the enemy. During lulls in battle, battalion areas remained a beehive of activity and reserve forces were often utilized as surplus labour. In most cases, they were required to dig and build the reserve position and work parties were organized regularly. Therefore, officers and soldiers alike were required to dig almost twice as much while “resting” in reserve. For example, in the weeks after D-Day the NS occupied Rosel in a comparatively “quiet” sector of the front. However, work parties were continuously organized and sent out under the cover of darkness. On the night of 15-16 June, “A” Company provided a “covering party” and a “carrying party” to prepare a minefield between Rosel and Vieux Cairen. Work would have continued on 17 June, but the “wire and picket” assignment was cancelled as the unit moved to Le Mesnil Patry the following day, where the hard work was restarted from scratch.¹⁵ For soldiers already weary from combat, this was another unwelcomed burden since it meant increased physical exertion. Therefore the organization of work parties could spark resentment and frustration amongst the troops already exhausted from battle. At Les Buissons on the night of 27-28 June, the North Novas’ “A” and “B” Companies were ordered by Brigadier D. G. Cunningham to dig the 9th Brigade’s new command post. During the night, the Brigade Major commanded the soldiers to dig the hole “big enough to drive a jeep into.” His orders drew the ire of “B” Company’s 2IC,

¹⁴ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15169, File No. 753, WD – QOR, Log Entry, 12 July 1944.

¹⁵ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15127, File No. 742, WD – NS, Log Entry, 15 and 17 June 1944.

who reportedly expressed his frustration by pointing out that his men were not members of the “Todt Organization” – a reference to the Germans’ use of slave labour.¹⁶

The periodic rotations into reserve also fulfilled another important combat purpose since they allowed time for reinforcement integration. The high casualty rate in Normandy demanded considerable effort in this endeavour as the effectiveness of combat units would be crippled if severe rifts developed between veterans and newcomers. Reinforcement integration was therefore a very important aspect of the experience and conduct of war, but it was also a particularly frustrating one for veterans. Manpower problems constantly beset the Canadian army after D-Day. Although pre-Normandy casualty projections were reasonably accurate as an aggregate, they had completely underestimated the proportional losses that the infantry would suffer in relation to the other supporting arms. Accordingly, too many reinforcements had been trained for the artillery, armour, and other supporting branches, and too little for the infantry. Ad-hoc solutions were utilized to fill replacement voids and many soldiers were “re-allocated” to the infantry.¹⁷ This solution may have helped attenuate the manpower shortages in the short term, but it did not produce effective replacements. The pressing manpower needs meant that training time was shortened which inadequately prepared reinforcements for the rigours of campaigning and combat. This meant a corresponding drop in the quality of soldiers each infantry battalion received while in Normandy. Major Thomas McCoy, of the 2nd Division’s Essex Scottish Regiment, probably voiced a complaint common to all veterans when he remarked that:

¹⁶ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15122, File No. 734, WD – NNSH, Log Entry, 27 June 1944.

¹⁷ C. P. Stacey, *The Canadian Army 1939-1945: An Official Historical Summary* (Ottawa: King’s Printer, 1955), 232-235; E. L. M. Burns, *Manpower in the Canadian Army, 1939-1945* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co Ltd., 1956), Chapters 4, 5, 6; Engen, *Canadians Under Fire*, 126-133.

“Reallocated troops were NOT hard physically. They did NOT know the tremendous capabilities of the human body. They had NOT been taught hardships – did NOT know how to look after feet. [They] wanted to quit.”¹⁸

The infusion of so many green replacements into decimated infantry battalions necessitated further training while in reserve. In the weeks after D-Day, the SDGs opted for a basic training regimen that included rifle and Bren-gun practice and the anti-tank platoon took the quiet afternoon on 16 June to zero its guns. Two days later the SDGs carried on with their training program, this time practicing patrolling skills as soldiers were forced to crawl 500 yards and pioneers instructed the men about an assortment of German mines and booby traps.¹⁹ These types of training initiatives helped to familiarize and indoctrinate new reinforcements with the weapons, equipment, and battle procedures that the infantry relied on in combat and that their basic training had not fully covered. This problem was widespread and particularly troubling according to Major A. H. M. Carmichael, who reported that reinforcements were “unfamiliar with the PIAT, inexpert with the Bren, in many cases afraid of grenades . . . In my opinion, unnecessary casualties were caused by their unfamiliarity with [infantry] weapons.”²⁰ The training also helped to solidify newly reconstituted sections or platoons. As casualties mounted in Normandy, the social setting and composition of each battalion and subunits evolved. Surviving veterans increasingly viewed their units as foreign places, since unfamiliar personnel imprinted their attitudes, background, mannerisms, and personalities on their peers and the unit. The situation was no less trying for reinforcements who had to overcome obstinate veterans, unfamiliar battalion traditions, and limited infantry

¹⁸ As quoted in Engen, *Canadians Under Fire*, 128-130

¹⁹ LAC, RG-24, Vol. 15270, File No 752, WD – SDGs, Log Entries, 16 and 18 June 1944

²⁰ As quoted in Engen, *Canadians Under Fire*, 130

training. Depending on the unit and personalities involved, the culture shock of reinforcements could be a smooth or complicated transition. Nevertheless, the rudimentary training program helped to pool collective assets, as reinforcements assimilated lessons from their more experienced counterparts, which helped to attenuate potential morale problems since soldiers could bond through the exercise regimen.²¹

Training was not the only method battalion commanders utilized to integrate



Photo 5: NCOs toasting the SDGs four-year anniversary, Vieux Cairon, 20 June 1944.
LAC, Credit: Lt. Ken Bell, PA-138272.

reinforcements with veterans. The SDGs' training program was complemented by a celebration: in the midst of the furious fighting in June, Lt-Col. Christiansen authorized a "half-holiday" to commemorate the day on which the unit was mobilized four years earlier. On 20 June 1944, two 12-hour shifts were organized during which only fifty percent of the unit was on duty at one time. An

officers' and sergeants' dinner was organized, alcohol rations were issued to all ranks for the first time in France (though the officers had received their first issue the day before), and the CO even ordered packages from the auxiliary services distributed to the

²¹ CSM Martin noted that reinforcements often integrated well into the QOR. Martin, *Battle Diary*, 24; Barnard, *The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada, 1860-1960*, 213-214. In the NNSH things were slightly more complicated. In the wake of the disaster at Tilly-la-Campagne on 25 July 1944, a new officers' mess had to be established so that all the new and veteran officers could meet and get to know each other. LAC, RG24, Vol. 15122, File No. 732, WD – NNSH, Log Entry, 1-2 August 1944.

companies in the evening.²² This day of celebrations allowed new and veteran soldiers to interact in a more relaxed setting, which promoted greater integration and familiarity between personnel, as veterans took the opportunity to recount past experiences and unit folklore. Thus, the anniversary celebration reinforced battalion traditions and inspired unit pride. As the SDGs war diarist recorded:

A ruined farm house provided the setting for our 4th Mobilization anniversary. We all had 3 single Scotches and sat around for an hour and laughed and told tales and experiences of our past few weeks. The prize story is of “a German sniper overrunning a Battalion armed with an 88mm MG...whole allied divisions are routed by such means!” A contending story is of a poor old duck observed wandering complacently about a village with a tag on its neck: “do not destroy, I am sitting on eggs.”²³

Although more an exception than the norm, this example illustrates both the diversity of methods that were used to integrate reinforcements and also the importance of the reserve position, as the whole celebration could not have occurred without a temporary break from the fighting. Thus, the reserve position provided combat units with some time to build cohesive (or at least more familiar) social relations and bond as cooperative entities before re-entering the chaos of battle.

Whether at the front or in reserve, campaigning offered little reprieve, yet through periodic rotations away from the line, the physical and psychological strain of battle could be managed. Regardless of the additional duties required of reserve formations, soldiers could look forward to a variety of different activities which could not normally be undertaken while fighting the enemy. The most welcomed were sleeping and cleaning, and practically every battalion’s war diarist noted their prevalence when pulled out of the line. As the HLI war diarist noted:

²² LAC, RG-24, Vol. 15270, File No. 752, WD – SDGs, Battalion Order: 4th Anniversary 20 Jun 44, and Log Entry, 19-20 June 1944.

²³ Ibid, Log Entry, 20 June 1944.

This rest gave everyone a chance to get out in the bright warm sun, have a bath and catch up on a little sleep. The strain of the last week had been considerable and it was only when things slacked off that the men realized it. For the first time since landing they were able to take off their clothes, get a good wash and clean up and do some washing.²⁴

Things were similar in other battalions that had engaged in especially heavy fighting. In the wake of the battles for Buron and Authie, the NNSH were moved to Les Buissons on 10 June and the break from the action allowed “everyone [to get] a bit of rest.”²⁵ The RR’s war diary also noted the prevalence of sleep while the unit occupied Bray. On the night of 18-19 June, when the battalion was finally transferred there from the hell of Bretteville, the vast majority of its surviving veterans took the opportunity to “catch up on [their] sleep.”²⁶

The importance of this activity cannot be overstated. While at the cutting edge of battle, sleep was not always possible especially for officers who were often required to go days without it. As Captain Ronald Shawcross, a company commander with the RR explained, “In daylight I used to visit each platoon every three hours and at night every hour . . . It was not conducive to rest or regular meals but then I couldn’t easily be seen by the Germans at night and also I could help my company stay awake.”²⁷ Furthermore, in numerous letters to his wife Captain Harold MacDonald, a company commander in the NS, recounted his activities and exhaustive duties. After describing one particularly eventful day in late July, he wrote that he simply hoped for a “chance to sleep” that night, but the fortunes of war allowed him only an hour’s nap at dawn.²⁸ Thus, there was

²⁴ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15076, File No. 754, WD – HLI, Log Entry, 12 June 1944.

²⁵ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15122, File No. 734, WD – NNSH, Log Entry, 10 June 1944.

²⁶ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15198, File No. 744, WD – RR, Log Entry, 18 June 1944.

²⁷ Ronald G. Shawcross, “*What Was It Like??*”: *A Rifleman Remembers: The Royal Regina Rifles Regiment “Swift and Bold”: Some Memoirs of World War II, 1939-1945* (Victoria: n.p., 2004), 154.

²⁸ Harold MacDonald and M. A. MacDonald, “In the Heat of Battle: Letters from the Normandy Campaign,” *Canadian Military History*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (2002): 35-36.

little time for sleeping when war occupied every waking moment, and consequently whenever a chance for extra rest appeared, soldiers made the most of the opportunity as Shawcross did when he was rotated to “A” Echelon for a few days of rest in early July.²⁹

Extra time for sleep was also accompanied with time for washing and cleaning. At the sharp end, it was hard to keep one’s self and equipment clean when the only available shelter was a muddy slit-trench, exposed to the elements. After wearing the



**Photo 6: Pte. H. B. Willis of the HLI shaving,
Vieux Cairen, 20 June 1944.
LAC, Credit: Lt. Ken Bell, PA-136953**

same clothing for days on end, cleaning one’s uniform became a top priority. Thus, when moved off the line or to a “quiet” sector, soldiers looked forward to washing themselves and their equipment. Utilizing streams, rivers, or tubs, soldiers washed their clothing as best they could and left it out to dry in the sun. In the RR, this practice became problematic as soldiers hung their laundry up without any regard for

camouflage or concealment. This prompted their BnHQ to issue an order against hanging clothing in places where it was visible from the air.³⁰ Furthermore, kit inspections were carried out whenever a battalion was put in reserve. It was then that surviving officers would ensure that soldiers repaired any tears in their uniforms and cleaned their equipment. If any deficiencies were discovered, soldiers were paraded to

²⁹ Shawcross, “*What Was It Like*”, 167

³⁰ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15198, File No. 744, WD – RR, Battalion Order, 23 June 1944.

the Quartermaster (QM) who issued them replacements.³¹ Weapons cleaning was an activity undertaken at all times, either on or off the line, since all soldiers recognized the importance of a clean and effective rifle. As Sgt. Tom Carney, of the Can Scots remarked in a letter home, “Everyone knows a clean rifle is the only rifle, that clean ammo is good and accurate ammo.”³²

When finished cleaning their equipment and clothing, soldiers took the



Photo 7: Riflemen E. Deblois (in the tub) and J. C. Sackfield, Bretteville, 20 June 1944.
LAC, Credit: Lt. Frank Dubervill, PA-190809

opportunity to wash themselves. For some, a good shave and maybe a decent haircut were always welcomed, especially if one could secure hot water for bathing afterwards. Others improvised bathing facilities, such as Riflemen E. Deblois and J. C. Sackfield of the QOR, who bathed in discarded tubs or barrels – and even helped scrub the dirt from each other’s backs. Officers

went to similar lengths. On an unusually quiet day in Les Buissons, Major Gray, Captain Sutherland, and CSM Paynter of the NNSH’s “A” Company took the time to enjoy a

³¹ LAC, RG24, Vol. 6640-6641, RO #1983: “Clothing, Necessaries, and Personal Equipment” *Canadian Army Overseas Routine Orders, Vol. I, II, III* (London: CMHQ, 20 August 1943). Various war diaries also mention the cleaning and inspecting of equipment when pulled off the line. See LAC, RG24, Vol. 15127, File No. 742, WD – NS, Log Entry, 10 June 1944; LAC, RG24, Vol. 15076, File No. 754, WD – HLI, Log Entry, 12 June 1944; LAC, RG24, Vol. 15198, File No. 744, WD – RR, Log Entry, 18 and 20 June 1944.

³² LAC, RG24, Vol. 15037, File No: 734(400), WD – Can Scots, Newspaper Clippings, Letter to Parents, 19 July 1944.

quick sponge bath behind the company carrier.³³ In other cases, soldiers simply bathed in the numerous rivers or streams, though they were careful to swim far away from designated “water points” so as to avoid contamination.³⁴ There were also “official” channels through which soldiers could clean themselves. Mobile Laundry and Bath Units roamed the 3rd Division’s area throughout the Normandy campaign. Whenever these units arrived, BnHQ organized a rotation in which one company was paraded there at a time. These units, operated by the Royal Canadian Ordnance Corps, provided soldiers with hot showers and cleaned and deloused uniforms – which were luxuries enjoyed by every soldier.³⁵ However, it appears that most of these Mobile Laundry and Bath Units did not arrive on the continent until late-July, as available evidence suggests that only the 7th Mobile Laundry and Bath Unit had arrived by late June.³⁶ This not only speaks to the dismal state of hygiene and cleanliness among the troops in June, but also suggests the importance of individual initiative in securing “unofficial” avenues to wash one’s self.

Another prominent activity undertaken in reserve was letter writing. Whether on the offensive or consolidating a defensive position, soldiers had little free time. The responsibilities of the officers and ORs were many and therefore the opportunity to write

³³ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15122, File No. 734, WD – NNSH, Log Entry, 16 June 1944.

³⁴ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15169, File No. 753, WD – QOR, Battalion Order, 11 July 1944. BnHQ could also organize rotations to surrounding farms where ‘washing facilities’ were improvised. On 10 June, the RWR companies rotated the surviving remnants of each platoon to the Bergerie Farm to utilize the well to wash themselves. LAC, RG24, Vol. 15233, File No. 934/1, WD – RWR, Log Entry, 10 June 1944.

³⁵ Padre Seaborn’s diary indicates he had only two baths per month. LAC, MG31 F18, Robert Lowder Seaborn and Family Fonds, Army Journal, various entries June-August 1944. Most war diaries indicate their arrival only once or twice a month: LAC, RG24, Vol. 15168, File No. 753, WD – QOR, Log Entry, 28 June 1944; LAC, RG24, Vol. 15169, File No. 753, WD – QOR, Log Entry, 13 July 1944; LAC, RG24, Vol. 15198, File No. 744, WD – RR, Log Entry, 29 June 1944; LAC, RG24, Vol. 15122, File No. 734, WD – NNSH, Log Entry, 17 June 1944.

³⁶ It may have been possible that Canadian battalions utilized British Mobile Laundry and Bath Units in the interval between the arrival of Canadian units on the continent. The 2nd, 4th, 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th Canadian Mobile Laundry and Bath Units all arrived in Normandy by the end of July. See: LAC, RG24, Vols. 16111, 16115, 16118, 16120, 16120, and 16121, respectively, for those units’ war diaries.

letters home was not always available. Some soldiers went to astounding lengths to find the time to write even while at the cutting edge of battle and Captain Harold MacDonald's writing prowess represents a pinnacle example in this regard.³⁷ But for every prolific letter writer, there were others who wrote home only when they had the free time. Major Peter Griffin penned numerous letters to his sister, but only after his unit was rotated into reserve, and his writing tendencies probably reflected those of most Canadian soldiers. Although letter writing could occur at any time, it probably happened most often when soldiers were pulled into reserve. As the NNSH war diarist noted on 19 June while his unit was still in the 9th Brigade's reserve position at Les Buissons, "The boys spend a lot of time writing home these days as there is not much else for them to do."³⁸

Sleeping, bathing, kit inspections, and letter writing were common occurrences while in reserve, but other sporadic and unique events were also organized which went a long way in defining the socio-cultural experience of war. Unit padres held church ceremonies whenever practical and they were often well attended, especially when a battalion had just experienced heavy losses or been placed in reserve.³⁹ Other religious ceremonies occurred less frequently. While in Les Buissons, the NNSH began receiving new drafts of replacements. Some reinforcements may have been blinded by their own eagerness for battle, but available evidence seems to suggest that at least a few were quite conscious of the fact that they were *replacing casualties*. For at least one newcomer it made sense to prepare for any eventuality and on the evening of 11 June he

³⁷ MacDonald and MacDonald, "In the Heat of Battle: Letters from the Normandy Campaign" 29-43.

³⁸ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15122, File No. 734, WD – NNSH, Log Entry, 19 June 1944.

³⁹ Two examples may suffice: LAC, RG24, Vol. 15168, File No. 753, WD – QOR, Log Entry, 11 June 1944; LAC, RG24, Vol. 15198, File No. 744, WD – RR, Log Entry, 25 June 1944

was baptized by the padre near the Regimental Aid Post (RAP).⁴⁰ The soldier had obviously calculated his own frightfully low chances of survival but, if he could not escape the hell of Normandy, at least his soul had a chance.

Prior to the capture of Caen it was difficult to organize larger recreational activities as no safe rear area existed beyond the range of German guns. Thus, after finishing all of their immediate chores and tasks, soldiers were forced to fill their remaining time through their own initiative. The efforts made by the auxiliary services to supply them with reading materials and newspapers offered relaxation for some, while others explored the liberated villages to the rear or played cards and gambled whenever the opportunity arose.⁴¹ However, once Caen was taken a distinct change in the activities and the quality of rest occurred as more elaborate arrangements became possible. Not only were team sports finally organized, but on at least two separate occasions, entire battalions were able to enjoy some time at the beach. At 9:00 AM on 15 July, half of the QOR were loaded in vehicles and taken to St. Aubin where they went swimming for half the day. At 1:00 PM they returned and the other half of the battalion went to the beach until dinnertime. Furthermore, on 1 August about 200 members of the NNSH were also given time to visit the beach and swim.⁴² Such leisure activities were impossible in June owing to the absence of other Canadian divisions on the continent, necessitating the continued deployment of every available 3rd Division soldier and unit. The comments of

⁴⁰ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15122, File No. 734, WD – NNSH, Log Entry, 11 June 1944.

⁴¹ According to historian John Ellis, gambling, card playing, and reading were common relaxation activities in all Allied armies. Ellis, *The Sharp End of War*, 299-301.

⁴² LAC, RG24, Vol. 15169, File No. 753, WD – QOR, Log Entry, 15 July 1944; LAC, RG24, Vol. 15122, File No. 734, WD – NNSH, Log Entry, 1 August 1944. Padre Seaborn attended baseball and soccer games on 1 and 2 August, respectively. LAC, MG31 F18, Robert Lowder Seaborn and Family Fonds, Army Journal, Entry 1-2 August 1944.

Brigadier Cunningham to Lt-Col. Christiansen at an Orders Group in late June help clarify the point:

It was at about this time that the Brigadier called a conference at his headquarters, and Col. Christiansen proceeded there in his jeep. After passing the HLI he saw no other units, troops or signs of life until reaching Bde HQ. The colonel remarked on this to the Brigadier – “Seems to be mighty little stuff between us and you back here.” The Brigadier replied, “There’s just field artillery between you and Southampton.”⁴³

In mid-July 1944, the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division joined the 3rd, and the II Canadian Corps was activated. Henceforth, the burden of combat was shared rather than carried alone by the 3rd Division. In addition, more supervisors from the auxiliary services had landed on the continent by July’s end, which meant that they could reach a greater number of soldiers, especially since each supervisor had a truck which they continuously packed and repacked with all manner of magazines, pens, paper, snacks, and sporting equipment.⁴⁴ Far behind the lines, supervisors with the Salvation Army and the Canadian Legion were equipped with power generators and film projectors so they could host movie nights. On more than a few occasions troops packed into makeshift theatres to watch Ida Lupino star in the 1943 film *The Hard Way* or the 1944 hit *Standing Room Only* starring Fred MacMurray and Paulette Goddard.⁴⁵ The Knights of Columbus also put on several comedic shows to entertain the troops before the larger specialized entertainment unit arrived on the continent.⁴⁶ As a testament to the importance of the auxiliary services and their provision of extra-curricular activities, Captain Bryson Kearns of the HLI explained that they should have been allowed to

⁴³ W. Boss and W. J. Patterson, *Up the Glens: Stormont, Dundas, and Glengarry Highlanders, 1783-1994* (Cornwall, ON: Old Book Store, 1995), 105-106.

⁴⁴ Young, *Red Shield in Action*, 108.

⁴⁵ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15199, File No. 744, WD – RR, Log Entry, 23 and 31 July 1944; Young, *Red Shield in Action*, 108-109.

⁴⁶ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15169, File No. 753, WD – QOR, Log Entry, 16 July 1944.

frequent the front line more often instead of remaining in the rear, and that the system should have been specially adapted in cases where a single division was committed for long periods of time.⁴⁷

Coping, Culture, and Comradeship

One of the most important means of killing time between combat actions was



Photo 8: Canadian soldiers relaxing outside their slit-trench. LAC, Credit: Lt. Ken Bell, PA-162647

comradeship and social interaction.

Conversation was not only a means of coping, but also a necessity of human interaction. With few outlets for entertainment, soldiers relied on their comrades to fill the void. Some particular friends had a knack for entertaining their peers with jokes or funny stories, as Captain Harold MacDonald wrote of his batman Dickie Knowles, “He’s a comical cuss

and good for morale.”⁴⁸ Others could become the centre of attention because of different talents. In a photograph taken by Lt. Ken Bell outside Caen on 10 July, three unidentified Canadians were relaxing in front of their freshly dug slit trench. One had managed to scrounge a guitar and was strumming a tune for his friends who look on with weary, but appreciative expressions. The importance of friendship at the sharp end

⁴⁷ LAC, RG24, Vol 10450, “BEQ #122, Capt. Bryson Kearns. HLI of C ”

⁴⁸ MacDonald and MacDonald, “In the Heat of Battle: Letters from the Normandy Campaign” 37.

was perhaps expressed best by Sgt. R. J. Duncan in his poem, “God Bless my Friend To-night”:

When shadows fall at close of day
 And in your quiet room you kneel to pray
 Will you remember me, and gently say
 ‘God Bless my friend to-night’
 Dark days when heavy lies your load of care
 It brings solace, to know that there,
 Through tears and heartache someone is saying
 ‘God Bless my friend to-night’
 Each Day new problems brings in its train
 Perplexity, doubt, grave fears and pain.
 Please God, help us to bear the stress and strain.
 God Bless my friend tonight.⁴⁹

As Sgt. Duncan’s poem implied, the presence of friends enabled soldiers to cope with the strain and anxieties of their situation. This was because soldiers were in close contact, spending most of their time in slit trenches, where privacy was a long-forgotten luxury of civilian life. In doing so, they endured similar experiences, emotional extremes, and material depravity, which influenced their common perceptions of campaigning and also helped them cope with the gruesome and terrifying reality of life at the sharp end.

This fact has led some American and British scholars to trumpet the importance of the soldier’s primary group – usually consisting of the section or platoon – in maintaining high morale. This theory owes its origins to the American historian S. L. A. Marshall and his mass interviews with American soldiers during and following the Second World War. In analyzing and documenting their combat experiences, Marshall discovered that the most effective and motivated soldiers were quite often those who

⁴⁹ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15037, File No: 734(400), WD – Can Scots, *The Tommy Cooker*, Vol. 1, No. 22, 2 July 1944.

identified with and felt strong attachment to the group.⁵⁰ Although significant discrepancies exist with Marshall's methodology, other scholars such as S. A. Stouffer and Anthony Kellett have also attached considerable importance to the primary group. As Kellett noted, the sheer terror and uniqueness of front-line action intensified bonds of loyalty and friendship between soldiers and the simple presence of familiar personalities, who outwardly appeared capable of withstanding the strain, could bolster the foot-slogger's fighting spirits.⁵¹ In other words, if a comrade could keep on going, so could you. Thus, the soldier's primary group provided him with the incentive to continue fighting by balancing personal instincts of self-preservation with an affinity to the group, and thereby enforcing standards of behaviour that challenged each member of the group to persevere through situations in which an individual might normally have given up.⁵²

The officers and NCOs who dominated the soldiers' primary groups encouraged this affinity by actively caring for the welfare and comfort of the men under their command. This required them to pay close attention to their troops' mental and physical health as well as their material well-being.⁵³ In this fashion the junior officer and NCO became something akin to a surrogate parent, as they were required to investigate complaints from their men and ensure that tasks were equally divided so that favouritism

⁵⁰ S L A Marshall, *Men Against Fire The Problem of Battle Command in Future War* (New York William Morrow and Company, 1968, 1st ed 1947), 56, 75-76

⁵¹ Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 97-100

⁵² S A Stouffer et al *Studies in Social Psychology in World War II, Vol 2 The American Soldier Combat and its Aftermath* (Princeton Princeton University Press, 1949), 130-131, F M Richardson, *Fighting Spirit A Study of Psychological Factors in War* (London Leo Cooper, Ltd , 1978), 171-174

⁵³ As the pamphlet, *Infantry Section Leading* (1938), explained "The good NCO is always in evidence after a really tiring day While the indifferent leader of men will probably be busy seeing to his comfort, the good leader will be looking after the comfort of his men " CWM, *Infantry Section Leading* (1938), 1-2, quote from 4, DHH, 93/26, Brock Chisholm, *Morale A Platoon Commander's Responsibility for the Morale of his Men* (Toronto The National Committee for Mental Hygiene, n d), 4-5

was not apparent, as this could fracture the corporative spirit of the unit.⁵⁴ In combat this was doubly important, because the visibility of officers and NCOs helped to reinforce confidence in troops pushed to the limits of endurance. As Captain Harold MacDonald explained while concluding a letter to his wife:

Shall have to close up shop 'cause can't see in trench now. Still got to go the rounds and see my guys in the trenches. Dislike running around lines after dark and dropping every few feet! A guy works up a sweat, but got to look after the men and inspire all confidence and certainly can't do that if one hangs behind and they get the idea you dislike and won't go around checking.⁵⁵

These actions helped inspire confidence and solidified the officer as a focal point of combat motivation since his soldiers sought to emulate his calmness under fire, effort, and endurance.⁵⁶ Therefore, a good leader sought to remain a visible part of his men's daily lives in order to ensure that they all remained in an optimal fighting condition.

The close bonds of comradeship were also developed through daily social interaction between all ranks. Although no scholar will ever be able to accurately reconstruct the vast number of conversational topics discussed between comrades, anecdotal evidence suggests that the subjects of rest, food, sports, home, girlfriends, the war's end, and mail were common themes. A by-product of continual conversation were rumours. In the First World War, rumours were a fact of life at the front, and some gained such currency as the war continued that they often took on mythic tendencies.⁵⁷ However, during June and July, rumours were considerably less celebrated and less well-travelled. Instead they appear to have remained insulated within battalions or the

⁵⁴ CWM, *Infantry Section Leading* (1938), 1-2; CWM, *The Officer and His Job: Morale and Fighting Efficiency* (Great Britain: War Office, 1940), 2, 7-8.

⁵⁵ MacDonald and MacDonald, "In the Heat of Battle: Letters from the Normandy Campaign" 36.

⁵⁶ Richardson, *Fighting Spirit*, 171-174.

⁵⁷ Cook, *Shock Troops*, 184-186.

soldiers' primary groups and therefore were of a much more practical nature, focussing on things such as the timing of the next operation, the arrival of mail, and most especially, when the unit would be pulled into reserve.⁵⁸ Of course there were exceptions to this rule. The attempted assassination of Adolf Hitler on 20 July 1944 prompted serious speculation and gossip that spread like wildfire throughout the lines and an entire column of *The Tommy Cooker*, the Can Scots' battalion newspaper, reported on what little facts were known and passed on the rumours – no matter how far-fetched.⁵⁹

Conversations about current events also occurred frequently and, in the summer of 1944, the election victory of Tommy Douglas and his Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) in the Saskatchewan provincial election was one of the biggest news stories. The defeat of the incumbent Liberals and the emergence of this left-wing social-democratic party prompted "many heated friendly discussions" between soldiers "[when] detailed results of the C C F. victory in Saskatchewan were published" overseas.⁶⁰ The CCF victory and its activities were also widely reported on by the various media outlets available to the soldiers. The 3rd Division's newspaper, *The West Wall Climber*, published regularly from July onwards, helped to keep soldiers apprised of events in Saskatchewan (and the rest of Canada). In several of its issues, it reported on the appointment of CCF cabinet ministers and their lower salaries, the public

⁵⁸ LAC, RG24, Vol 15037, File No 734(400), WD – Can Scots, *The Tommy Cooker*, various issues, July 1944, LAC, RG-24, Vol 15270, File No 752, WD – SDGs, Log Entries, various dates, June 1944

⁵⁹ LAC, RG24, Vol 15037, File No 734(400), WD – Can Scots, *The Tommy Cooker*, Vol 1, No 32, date illegible

⁶⁰ LAC, RG24, Vol 15037, File No 734(400), WD – Can Scots, Log Entry, 3 July 1944, Lewis H Thomas, "The CCF Victory in Saskatchewan, 1944," *Saskatchewan History*, Vol 34, No 1 (1981) 1-16

takeover of power lines in Saskatchewan (so energy would be provided everywhere), and also the intentions of the CCF to run 225 candidates in the next Dominion election.⁶¹

The Tommy Cooker also had a story on the Saskatchewan election and quoted Tommy Douglas's answer to the all important question of veterans' rehabilitation: "Don't think that we can give you an entire new society. Under our constitution there are some things that only the Federal Government can do."⁶² Veterans' rehabilitation was another hot topic and some news stories were published to keep soldiers up to date on its developments. In one edition of *The West Wall Climber*, soldiers were informed that about 25,000 acres of Alberta farmland was purchased for the Veterans Land Act. In a subsequent issue that story was followed up with one that informed soldiers of Alberta Premier Ernest Manning's plans to give a half-section of land rent and tax free to any veteran wishing to be a farmer for the first three years, followed by a rental increase of 1/8 of the farm's annual production for the next seven years.⁶³ Furthermore, a speech by Dr. D. Mould, the General Chairman of Rehabilitation, was summarized in which he reassured soldiers that they would be able to make a decent living upon their return home because "the hope for individual and international happiness lay in the provision of jobs for returning servicemen."⁶⁴ Soldiers were also informed about the preparations being made in other countries for rehabilitating returning veterans. On 24 June, *The Tommy Cooker* reported that US President Franklin Roosevelt had signed the G. I. Bill into law, which provided "pensions, bonuses, protection against unemployment, etc. etc.

⁶¹ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15037, File No: 734(400), WD – Can Scots, *The West Wall Climber*, various issues, July 1944.

⁶² Ibid, *The Tommy Cooker*, Vol. 1, No. 23, 3 July 1944.

⁶³ Ibid, *The West Wall Climber*, Issue #16 and #23, 21 and 28 July 1944.

⁶⁴ Ibid, *The West Wall Climber*, Issue #18, 23 July 1944.

for veterans of over 90 days service” when discharged from the American armed forces.⁶⁵

By informing discussion, battalion newspapers became the facilitator of cultural identity and helped link meaning to experience. This was particularly the case in the June-July period, as the famous and widely circulated *Maple Leaf* newspaper had not yet been established in France, and therefore the unit publications had to fill the void.⁶⁶ Since battalion newspapers both reflected and wielded considerable influence within the social and cultural expression of the soldiers they therefore deserve greater analysis. Battalion newspapers are the long-lost cousin of the First World War’s trench newspapers. Trench newspapers have received growing attention from Great War historians as they provide insight into the socio-cultural dynamics of the infantry who fought in that conflict. Throughout 1914-1918 these trench newspapers became extremely popular amongst the troops, many of whom contributed to them regularly. Moreover, some trench newspapers were mass produced, a remarkable feat given the lack of printing machines and shortages of ink and paper. Probably the largest and most successful example was the 7th Battalion’s *The Listening Post* which circulated some 20,000 copies during the course of the war.⁶⁷ As historian Tim Cook explained, these newspapers were primarily an outlet for soldiers to express concerns and grievances to officers through a safe medium of communication. They were therefore filled with a variety of jokes, stories, poetry, songs, and parodies which often had pointed meanings directly connected to the experience of life in the trenches. News about the wider war

⁶⁵ Ibid, *The Tommy Cooker*, Vol 1, No 15, 24 June 1944

⁶⁶ Barry D Rowland, *Herbie and Friends Cartoons in Wartime* (Toronto: Natural Heritage/Natural History Inc., 1990), 20-99, Richard S. Malone, *A World in Flames 1944-1945: A Portrait of War, Part Two* (Toronto: Collins, 1984), chapter 5, Jonathan F. Vance, *A History of Canadian Culture* (Toronto: University of Oxford Press, 2009), 326-329

⁶⁷ Cook, *Shock Troops*, 184-190

effort was not a prominent feature, but soldiers were kept up to date with a number of daily newspapers supplied to them in rear areas.⁶⁸

Although the battalion newspapers of the Second World War harkened back to earlier traditions, they also were different from their predecessors. In the first instance, the practice was not widespread. Very few battalions appear to have published a newspaper prior to June and July and only a handful were created during that time. Found in battalion war diaries, they were as follows: NNSH's *The Fish Billie Express*, the Can Scots' *The Tommy Cooker*, the QOR's *The Big 2 Bugle*, the 23rd Field Ambulance's *The Reveille Rag*, the HLI's *The Section Post*, the 3rd Division HQ's *The West Wall Climber*, and a few individual publications from the Intelligence (or "I") Section of the RR's BnHQ resembling a newspaper. The limited number of battalion newspapers resulted from a variety of complications inherent to their production. Not only did the battalion CO have to approve the idea, since Routine Orders published by the Canadian Military Headquarters in London (CMHQ) made him responsible for all regimental publications, but precious resources and time had to be devoted to their creation. Depending on the CO, this may or may not have been worth the extra effort, especially considering the shortages of paper supplies in June, the lack of an existing media infrastructure (which the Germans possessed in Caen), and the difficulty of finding consistent editors and writers, given the heavy losses.⁶⁹ Thus, while *The*

⁶⁸ According to Tim Cook "no more than 20 percent" of the subject matter of trench newspapers was devoted to news about the wider war effort. The vast majority of each edition focused on either unit-specific stories or whatever else the soldiers could contribute. The author would like to thank Dr. Cook for his insight into this subject.

⁶⁹ LAC, RG24, Vol. 6640-6641, RO #1263: "Publications, Regimental – Journals, Magazines, or Newspapers" *Canadian Army Overseas Routine Orders, Vol. I, II, III* (London: CMHQ, 20 August 1943).

Listening Post enjoyed a prolific print life, the battalion newspapers, such as *The Tommy Cooker*, enjoyed a modest circulation of about 25 copies per edition.⁷⁰

The second major difference between the First and Second World War unit newspapers was the preponderance of news about the wider war effort in the latter. War news from around the globe dominated each edition of battalion newspapers and the stories, jokes, and parodies common to trench newspapers occupied comparatively less space in their Second World War counterparts. This major difference was a product of technological developments in the first half of the twentieth century and the resulting growth of radio broadcasting that only intensified from 1939 onwards.⁷¹ As Brigadier Richard Malone, the head of the Canadian Army Press and Psychological Warfare services explained, technology had revolutionized the media's coverage of war. In the Great War there was a reliance on print media which had caused an absence of hard, accurate, and up-to-the-minute information. However, during the Second World War that wide gulf was attenuated by the press which often broadcasted "eye-witness" accounts of operations over the radio on the same day.⁷² Thus, the widespread usage of radio broadcasting prior to and during the war had socialized an entire generation of soldiers to be accustomed to easily accessible information and news about the wider world.

By 1944, and especially once the Allies had landed in France, greater effort was made to inform the troops of worldwide events and therefore battalion newspapers owed their origins to the daily news sheets and updates written by the "I" Section at BnHQ,

⁷⁰ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15037, File No. 734(400), WD – Can Scots, *The Tommy Cooker*, Vol. I, No. 16, 25 June 1944.

⁷¹ A. E. Powley, *Broadcast from the Front: Canadian Radio Overseas in the Second World War* (Toronto: Hakkert, 1975), preface.

⁷² Malone, *A World in Flames*, Chapter 6, specifically 90-91.

which in turn received its information from the radio broadcasts of the British Broadcasting Company (BBC). Whether a battalion possessed a newspaper or not efforts were always made to keep the soldiers informed.⁷³ The experience of HLI in this regard offers a representative example. As scarce paper resources prevented the inauguration of a newspaper in June, the “I” Section resorted to typing out and mimeographing BBC



Photo 9: An unidentified soldier of the HLI reading what appears to be a newspaper. Note the size of the slit trench. July 1944. LAC, RG24, Vol. 15076, File No. 754, WD - HLI, July 1944.

news broadcasts whenever the Germans were unable to jam the radio frequencies. The “I” Section then distributed the copies to the companies as best as possible. This was a practice followed in most battalions.⁷⁴ Most significantly, the HLI’s “I” Section kept a large map of Normandy up to date and “several times a day C[ompany] C[ommanders] [got] their maps marked in detail to show the t[roops].” According to the war diarist, this was not the ideal situation, but the men appreciated the effort as their

⁷³ Many officers discussed the importance of news or information about other fronts as being critical factors in maintaining high morale: LAC, RG24, Vol. 10450, “BEQ, #31 Capt. R. V. Malone, QOR”; Ibid, “BEQ, #80 Lt-Col. D. B. Buell, NS”; Ibid, “BEQ #84 Maj. G. E. Lockwood, NS”; Ibid, “BEQ #113 Maj. Norman G. Wilson-Smith, RWR”; Ibid, “BEQ #120 Capt. Polzin, HLI”; Ibid, “BEQ #173 A/Capt/ G. C. Watt, RWR”; Ibid, “BEQ #269 A/Maj. Donald Hogarth, QOR”; Ibid, “BEQ #271 Maj. R. D. Medland, QOR.”

⁷⁴ For two examples see: LAC, RG24, Vol. 15026, File No.: 184(733) WD – CH of O, News Sheets, various dates, June 1944; LAC, RG-24, Vol. 15271, File No. 752, WD – SDGs, News Sheets, various dates, July 1944.

craving for news was satiated through these means.⁷⁵ By July, their work had culminated in the inauguration of a unit newspaper, *The Section Post*, which provided the battalion with a standardized news update.⁷⁶

Keeping the soldiers informed about the war, both around the world and on other fronts in Normandy, was crucially important to the morale of young men who expected the news or enjoyed hearing about distant Allied triumphs. Battalion newspapers therefore played an important role in supporting and defending the morale of Canadian soldiers.⁷⁷ On the battlefield, information and misinformation can be as powerful as an artillery barrage, mainly because high morale was often sustained or shattered by what the troops believed to be true. In Normandy, Canadians had to contend with expert German psychological warfare tactics that had been perfected by three years of heavy fighting in Russia. One particular German propaganda leaflet found in the HLI's and CH of O's war diaries informed its readers that the American army was being massacred in the fight for the Cotentin Peninsula. It stated that the Americans were calling for German doctors near St. Lo and suggested that "perhaps you may be in the same desperate situation tomorrow."⁷⁸ Although the HLI's war diarist noted that such blatant propaganda assaults were amusing, the diarist, being stationed at BnHQ, was relatively well apprised of events on other fronts. The situation was quite different for the exhausted soldier a few hundred metres forward, as he knew very little about anything

⁷⁵ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15076, File No. 754, WD – HLI, Log Entry, 15 June 1944.

⁷⁶ Ibid, *The Section Post*, various dates, July 1944.

⁷⁷ In one of the only studies of British Army newspapers in the Second World War, historian S. P. MacKenzie discussed the importance of newspapers, such as *The Eighth Army News*, *Crusader*, and *Union Jack*, in building and sustaining morale amongst British troops stationed in the Western Desert. See: S. P. Mackenzie, "Vox Populi: British Army Newspapers in the Second World War" *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Oct., 1989): 665-681.

⁷⁸ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15076, File No. 754, WD – HLI, Log Entry, 24 June 1944; LAC, RG24, Vol. 15026, File #: 184(733), WD – CH of O, German propaganda leaflet, June 1944. See Appendix I.

beyond his immediate surroundings. However, this did not mean that soldiers went about their work without the slightest proclivity for more information. Thus, it became imperative to keep soldiers abreast of accurate news and events from around the world and especially on other fronts in Normandy.

With this objective in mind all battalion newspaper contained extensive and sometimes surprisingly detailed information about the Allied war effort. Under various headings, including: Italy or Italian Front, Russian Front, Pacific Front, Home Front, In the Air, Japan, and France or the Second Front, soldiers learned about news relating to these particular theatres. At the very least, all battalion newspapers provided a basic overview of events from around the world which helped to positively reassure soldiers about the progress of Allied operations. Although demonstrably vague with the details in comparison to other newspapers, the 19 June edition of *The Fish-Billie Express* exemplifies this trend towards a broad and positive synthesis of the Allied war effort:

Normandy Front: - The American 9th Division have cut off the Cherbourg peninsula and are now covering from three to four miles off the West coast of it. There is no big change on the rest of this front. The prisoners now taken total over fifteen thousand with more coming in all the time. Gen Montgomery says that the Allies hold fifty-two miles of the Normandy coastline now.

Italian Front: - The Eighth Army are now 80 miles North-East of Rome and are still moving forward. The Fifth Army on the coast are keeping up with the Eighth in the advance.⁷⁹

Other newspapers proved to be more effective in providing details for the soldiers' consumption. The staff at *The Tommy Cooker* was intent on providing place names and specific details relating to events from around the world and in Normandy in order to add greater legitimacy and flavour to the news it was reporting. Moreover, the news also

⁷⁹ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15122, File No. 734, WD – NNSH, *The Fish-Billie Express*, Vol. I, No. 9, 19 June 1944.

took on a triumphant tone as they continuously informed troops of obstacles that were overcome, territory gained, local victories achieved, and casualties were never mentioned. The 21 June news update from *The Tommy Cooker* illustrates this point:

Western Front

American Forces have stormed their way on to the ridge overlooking Cherbourg. In doing this they drove a wedge 2 miles deep into the defences. Their advance guards were last reported close to OCTEVILLE about 1¼ miles south of the Harbour . . . On the left of the Allied line, British & Canadian forces continue to hold down some of the best German Infantry and Tank units around TILLY and CAEN. The weather has improved, and yesterday we got more supplies ashore after being hampered by 3 days of storm.⁸⁰

Thus, the distribution of accurate information and news played a powerful role in upholding unit morale. While the most dominant of all news stories were those relating to the Second Front, soldiers were informed with a basic understanding of Allied progress around the world which greatly attenuated the impact of German psychological warfare tactics, as these countermeasures allowed soldiers to differentiate between any accurate or subversive information they confronted. Battalion newspapers therefore became an important instrument for defending the soldiers' morale.

In addition to news about the wider war effort, editors often reported on news specific to the battalion – which was almost always of a comical nature. The QOR's *Big 2 Bugle* offers a particularly interesting example as it had a designated "war correspondent" named "Ike" Gregory, who reported on various things directly related to the QOR. In his first special cable entitled "Hash Notes From Bretteville" he described the "snack bar" at BnHQ, which he called Moe's Hash House, and explained that this was where the "unit cook dreams up the weird and wonderful dishes which haunt the

⁸⁰ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15037, File No. 734(400), WD – Can Scots, *The Tommy Cooker*, Vol. 1, No. 15, 24 June 1944.

dreams of any unfortunate soldier who should chance to wander this way at meal times.” The proprietor, Al Moss (who may or may not have been the cook), also suffered through a fair amount of friendly banter, especially about his actions under fire: “[Al Moss] holds the unit title as the fastest man into any slit trench during a shelling, and also claims to be the only man to have ever seen the same shell twice – once when it passed him and again when he passed it.”⁸¹ In his second and final special dispatch for July, Gregory reported from the 11th Canadian General Hospital and informed his readers about those QOR who were recovering from wounds. “Ike” took special interest in the famous Dalton brothers, the two highly respected company commanders who led the two assault companies on D-Day. He reported that, “the ‘fighting Daltons’ are both here and from what I can make out are still fighting – mostly with each other!”⁸² Although comradeship could develop most intimately at the section and platoon levels, news stories about the unit did help foster the growth of unit pride and comradeship on a battalion-wide level, as the troops were kept informed about the activities of others within the unit.

The RR might not have possessed a battalion newspaper during the June-July period, but the unit’s “I” Section decided to take matters into its own hands. Sometime in late June it circulated an update on the support company’s two mascots, Donald and Doris Duck. This example offers the perfect microcosm for understanding how the ORs utilized unit publications to cope with the hardships and challenges of war and also express their cultural identity. Their idea was to get an author from the support company

⁸¹ Both quotes from: LAC, RG24, Vol. 15169, File No. 753, WD – QOR, *The Big 2 Bugle*, Vol. II, No. 2, 1 July 1944.

⁸² Ibid, *The Big 2 Bugle*, Vol. II, No. 25, 16 July 1944. The Daltons had received considerable media attention and the nickname “Fighting Daltons” appears to be a reference to Ralph Allen’s *Globe and Mail* article on them and the QOR’s D-Day actions. LAC, RG24, Vol. 15168, File No. 753, WD – QOR, *Globe and Mail: Two Toronto Brothers Lead Raid on Ramparts*, by Ralph Allen, 8 June 1944.

to write a paragraph of news to publish at the bottom of Battalion Orders so that each company would receive an update about the ducks on a daily basis. Though it was not explicitly stated, this was an obvious attempt to promote the ‘adoption’ of Donald and Doris as the battalion’s mascots since the publication discussed the ducks’ adjustment and travel from England to Normandy and their experience bore remarkable resemblance to their human comrades.⁸³ True to their word, the “I” Section searched high and low for a willing writer from the support company and then published short notices about the ducks in the following issues of Battalion Orders. Under the heading “Out of Bounds” everyone was notified that the duck pond behind “A” Echelon was out of bounds to Donald as it was reserved solely for “lady-ducks.” Apparently he attempted to mate with Doris and henceforth “mixed bathing” was strictly forbidden.⁸⁴ However, on 30 June the charade ended abruptly. The Battalion Order issued that day noted a “Strength Decrease” and reported to the soldiers that Doris was missing and “believed consumed by art[iller]y,” while the whereabouts of Donald was still unconfirmed.⁸⁵

Of course, it is also entirely possible that Donald and Doris never actually existed. When seen in this context, the personification of the ducks opened up a safe medium for communicating pointed meanings about life at the front, while also allowing soldiers to cope and identify with the subtle cultural references woven into the tragedy. For example, placing the duck pond out of bounds to Donald was done through the same mechanism (Battalion Orders) used to put towns and places out of bounds to Donald’s human comrades. The fact that this publication was issued in the last week of June, seems to imply that the authors were taking aim at the stricter disciplinary standards

⁸³ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15198, File No. 744, WD – RR, News Update, Donald and Doris Duck, France 1944.

⁸⁴ Ibid, Battalion Order, n. d.

⁸⁵ Ibid, Battalion Order, 30 June 1944.

being enacted at all levels of command at that time.⁸⁶ Moreover, the authors expressed a number of other concerns. A central theme of the initial publication was the ducks' diet. In England, Rfn. L. M. Klughart of 4 Platoon had acted as their "dietician" but following D-Day Rfn. Chabluk had filled in. According to the story, the two men had to work closely with the QM in order to get the appropriate packages of "hard-tack" for the Ducks to eat. Thus, the authors were able to cleverly intertwine the ducks' dietary plight with that of the infantry, as Doris was quoted in an interview complaining about ration quality, "Doris takes a poor view of the 'D' type of compo pack but favours the 'A' type. She says a girl can hardly keep up appearances without the necessary fruit in her diet."⁸⁷

Moreover, the authors also used the ducks to address complaints about army life inherent to the fighting in Normandy. As Donald Duck reportedly told a Canadian Press representative in an interview shortly after arriving in Normandy:

They [the army] never tell you what is going to happen next, and then, suddenly you find yourself in the middle of some German-held defensive area with snipers all around with their eye on you for a nice duck-supper. I don't trust these Germans, though – and it's not safe to wander very far away from this here "A" Echelon as they call it.⁸⁸

Other aspects of the soldiers' experiences in Normandy were addressed, such as the prevalence of rumours on the front lines which was mentioned in a short anecdote about the apparent promotion of Donald to the rank of corporal. However, Lt-Col. Matheson had reportedly quashed those rumours by telling Donald that he needed more experience and had to recruit other ducks before he would get promoted – which may have also been a subtle reference to the reinforcement situation. In ascribing human experiences to

⁸⁶ See Chapter 3 for further details.

⁸⁷ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15198, File No. 744, WD – RR, News Update, Donald and Doris Duck, France 1944.

⁸⁸ Ibid, News Update, Donald and Doris Duck, France 1944.

these animals the authors were expressing their version of a culture reflective of the events, living conditions, discipline, and other circumstances influencing the men's everyday struggle for survival.

The Donald and Doris update may not have been associated with any battalion newspaper, but it was representative of some wider trends in most daily rags. Although creative control was in the editors' hands, they constantly encouraged soldiers to submit contributions. In other words, the editors were keenly aware that without the participation of the soldiers they lacked legitimacy. As the *Tommy Cooker*'s slogan aptly reminded its readers: "You Make the News – We'll Print It." To promote participation and contributions, editors often organized contests with a variety of prizes. During the week after D-Day, the 23rd Field Ambulance held a unit-wide contest for naming its newspaper. To encourage as many suggestions as possible, the 23rd Field Ambulance's Orderly Room announced that a prize of two chocolate bars and two packs of cigarettes would be awarded to the winner. On 15 June the "Suggest a Name Contest" ended with Sgt. L. L. Langford declared the winner for his suggestion of *The Reveille Rag*.⁸⁹

In the Can Scots, matters proceeded slightly differently, as Sgt. L. G. Woodcock (the "Printer, Publisher, and Ed." of *The Tommy Cooker*) accepted suggestions from all ranks but coined the title himself, and Lt-Col. Cabeldu approved on behalf of everyone. Although in the inaugural issue it was pointed out that the name would change if something better was suggested, it never did as the troops probably appreciated the reference to their rudimentary ration cookers.⁹⁰ In early July, *The Tommy Cooker* held a unique contest that encouraged soldiers to submit a 100-word piece on the subject of

⁸⁹ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15894, file 768, WD – 23rd Field Ambulance, Battalion Order, 11 June 1944, and *The Reveille Rag*, 15 June 1944.

⁹⁰ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15037, File No. 734(400), WD – Can Scots, *The Tommy Cooker*, 16 June 1944.

their favourite slit trench. Surviving evidence suggests the newspaper received two poems for the contest. The winning submission was made by Cpl. W. H. Knight and entitled “The Old Slit Trench.” His efforts won him a whopping 100 cigarettes, but sadly he might never have finished them as he was killed five days later in the heavy fighting for Caen.⁹¹ These types of naming and contribution contests were critical to the legitimacy of battalion newspapers, as the editors intended their work to reflect the soldiers’ interests, attitude, and culture and therefore the titles and content had to be created by the troops themselves.

In coaxing the men to contribute and participate in the newspapers, the editors were encouraging the development of a vibrant social and cultural environment, in which some of the more articulate took the opportunity to express themselves in writing about the dominant facets of their lives. Most of their contributions highlighted concerns and displeasure about living conditions, combat, and campaigning. In doing so, they relied heavily on humour, poems, and songs to make light of their unenviable situation and precarious hold on life. Most battalion newspapers openly joked about death and injury, combat, slit trenches, digging, discipline, food, the federal government, or whatever else tickled their fancy. Therefore, an analysis of these jokes not only reveals how humour was utilized as a coping mechanism, but it also sheds light on what aspects of experience dominated the collective interpretation of contemporary developments. The QOR’s *Big 2 Bugle* was particularly aimed at providing soldiers with comical material about death and injury. In one cartoon a soldier is shown lying in a hospital bed, completely covered in gauze from head to toe. One of his legs is missing, the other leg

⁹¹ The other poem was entitled “My Slit Trench” by Pte. K. J. Branscombe. He was also killed in the fighting for Caen. Ibid, Appendix XIV and *The Tommy Cooker*, Vol. 1, No. 24, 5 July 1944. See Poems 1 and 2 in Appendix I

and left arm are raised, and his right arm is in a sling. Sitting next to him is a completely unscathed soldier-friend who asked his horribly wounded companion: “Had any fun with the nurses?”⁹²

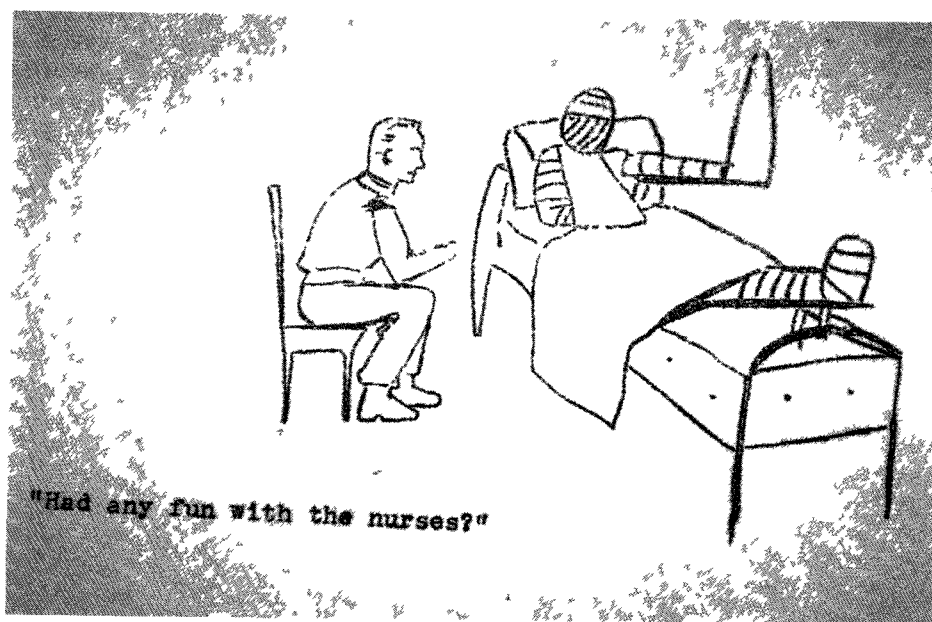


Photo 10: Cartoon from *The Big 2 Bugle*. LAC, RG24, Vol. 15169, File No. 753, WD – QOR, July 1944.

Combat was the most widely ridiculed subject. Editors utilized jokes, parodies, stories, and sarcasm to keep the men laughing about this difficult experience. For example, in describing the combat-related developments in Normandy, the editor of *The Tommy Cooker* sarcastically commented that, “German resistance has been stubborn, especially on the eastern side of the peninsula, but in general the enemy have been leaving only small groups of men with a few mortars to cover their withdrawal (don’t we know it.)”⁹³ To mock combat the editors of *The Big 2 Bugle* created a rather humorous collection of one-liners published in a section entitled: “Famous Last Words.” Some jokes addressed the prevalence and fear of German artillery and mortar fire, such

⁹² LAC, RG24, Vol 15169, File No 753, WD – QOR, *The Big 2 Bugle*, Vol II, No 21, 12 July 1944

⁹³ LAC, RG24, Vol 15037, File No 734(400), WD – Can Scots, *The Tommy Cooker*, Vol I, No 9, n d

as: “The barrage is over.” “Its okay, its only a dud.” “Don’t worry boys, they are just shooting at the tanks.”⁹⁴ While the first two examples are somewhat self-explanatory, the last example probably had a *double-entendre*, as it not only spoke to the effectiveness of German anti-tank and artillery fire, but it also might have been directed at the fact that the infantry were almost always the spearhead of any operation.⁹⁵

Moreover, the famous German six-barrelled mortar, the *Nebelwerfer* nicknamed “Moaning Minnie” (because of its bombs’ distinctive sound), was also the subject of repetitive verbal lashings. As “Ike” Gregory reported from the 11th Canadian General Hospital:

The other day they had a recording on the radio of old “Moanin’ Minnie” and so ‘elp me it made me a little homesick. The nurse got awfully mad tho when “Minnie” moaned her way through the ward. It took her and six orderlies half an hour (with clubs and Tommy Guns) to coax us from under the bed.⁹⁶

Other “Famous Last Words” implied additional aspects of experience: “Come on in here, they didn’t have time to booby-trap” and “Look what the Jerry left behind” were jokes obviously aimed at the thoroughness of German booby-trapping.⁹⁷ The line “You may smoke” was also probably directed at the prevalence of snipers in Normandy seeking the tell-tale sign of a cigarette’s cherry and smoke.⁹⁸ In *The Tommy Cooker*, they also published a set of “Famous Last Words” in one late-July edition. Of the dozen or so sarcastic remarks, one stood out in particular as it was obviously directed at the

⁹⁴ LAC, RG24, Vol 15169, File No 753, WD – QOR, *The Big 2 Bugle*, various dates, July 1944

⁹⁵ Engen, *Canadians Under Fire*, Chapters 4 and 5

⁹⁶ LAC, RG24, Vol 15169, File No 753, WD – QOR, *The Big 2 Bugle*, Vol II, No 25, 16 July 1944

⁹⁷ Ibid, *The Big 2 Bugle*, various dates, July 1944

⁹⁸ Ibid, *The Big 2 Bugle*, Vol II, No 22, 13 July 1944 Many war diaries note the use of snipers. For example, in the RWR they called patrols for snipers “Anti-Vermin” patrols. LAC, RG24, Vol 15233, File No 934/1, WD – RWR, Log Entry, 9 June 1944. Another account of continuous sniper activity is found in the Can Scots’ war diary. LAC, RG24, Vol 15037, File No 734(400), WD – Can Scots, “Thirteen Platoon’s Actions in the Counter Attack on Putot-en-Bessin” n d, 1-3

low quality of reinforcements and their lack of training with infantry weapons: “How does this grenade work?”⁹⁹ Other “Famous Last Words” were directed at new replacements or the overly curious and adventurous: “Let’s see what’s down the end of this road?” and “Let’s kick it and see?”¹⁰⁰

Soldiers also crafted songs which expressed their combat experiences. They often based their lyrics off popular songs at the time, but changed the words to reflect their situation and help them cope with its hardships and challenges. Riflemen A. F. Keller and J. L. Wager of “C” Company in the QOR prefaced their song, “On The Road to Carpique,” with: “The singing of Kipling’s ‘Road to Mandalay’, in a stuttering attempt to calm the nerves, suddenly seemed to come out with different words, with words that we know.” The song itself is worth reproducing in full as it provides another window into which the experience of combat can be analyzed:

Verse 1:

Over Normandian wheatfields / From the sea to heights of land,
We’ve been fighting bloody battles, / And we’re fought them hand to hand;
Just-a-dodgin’ running sweatin’ / As the Jerry cracks a burst;
And the waitin’ cussin’ fumin’ / How a man can raise a thirst!

Chorus:

On the Road to Carpique / Where the moanin’ minnies play,
And the guns flare up like thunder / From the gully ‘cross the yay
On the Road to Carpique / Where the moanin’ minnies play,
And the dusty men go marchin’ / Where the waitin’ snipers lay

Verse 2

He may have his whin’ mortars / And his blastin’ “eighty eight”
But they won’t stop guts and courage / And a shield of bitin’ hate
We’ve longer roads before us / And bloodier battles yet,
But the Jerries not seen all of it / Nor paid his final debt!¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15037, File No. 734(400), WD – Can Scots, *The Tommy Cooker*, Vol. 1, No. 33, 25 July 1944.

¹⁰⁰ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15169, File No. 753, WD – QOR, *The Big 2 Bugle*, various dates, July 1944.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, *The Big 2 Bugle*, Vol. 2, No. 25, 16 July 1944.

Writing songs provided the Canadian foot-soldier with an outlet to express his thoughts, concerns, artistic talents, and sense of humour with the rest of his comrades and therefore it acted as an important means of coping with the realities of combat especially since they were almost always written by several individuals working together.

Poetry also provided psychological relief for the author and his comrades, who could presumably decipher the meaning and identify with the subject matter. However, poetry was also deeply personal, as it was not written to borrowed rhythms or in groups. It was composed by individuals seeking to express profound emotions, events, and hardships which they had endured. One poem entitled “C’est La Guerre” by Jock McAuger of the Can Scots illustrates this point as it speaks to the physically and psychologically exhaustive experience of the infantry in June and July:

I think that I will never see / A trench that ever will suit me
 It may be long, it may be deep / But what the H---, you cannot sleep
 Have you ever dug one beside a tree? / If so, I’m sure you will agree,
 With roots and stumps and rock and stuff / You’ll just sit down and say
 enough / C’est la guerre
 But cheer up boys, when the war is won / We can talk of all the things we’ve
 done / Of weather, folks and “compo stew” / That miracle food for me and
 you. / When the mortars fall / And bullets whiz around, / Just dig in, boys /
 And hold your ground / C’est la guerre.¹⁰²

After combat the most-discussed subject was digging and slit-trenches. It did not take Canadians long to see the value in a good slit trench and almost out of reflex and fear, soldiers would dig in very quickly once shelling commenced. Battalion newspapers often chided this reaction. *The Fish-Billie Express*, recounted for its readers one particularly hilarious example in its section, “Other News & Humour.” The editor had obviously overheard a group of soldiers recounting their experiences at Les Buissons in

¹⁰² LAC, RG24, Vol. 15037, File No. 734(400), WD – Can Scots, *The Tommy Cooker*, Vol. 1, No. 19, n. d.

an informal reverse-macho contest as “each [soldier was] trying to outdo the others in expressing his fears on the first night of being bombed and shelled.” One soldier came forward with the winning story, no doubt severely exaggerated:

Let me tell you guys – the way I dug into my slit trench each time a shell burst was something to see. I was so scared I kept digging deeper and deeper into that hole. Well, when things quieted down, I heard a voice above me. It was my Lieutenant yelling down: “Thompson! Thompson! If you dig two inches deeper, I’m going to charge you with desertion.”¹⁰³

Notwithstanding the prospects of living in cramped sleeping arrangements, amongst the earthworms, and exposed to the elements, mud, stench, and resulting garbage and waste from cooking and bodily functions, slit trenches were an appreciated element of front-line existence.¹⁰⁴ In-ground living offered soldiers safety, and battalion newspapers were quick to publish the sentiments of the troops. In a “post-war drama” written by a member of the Can Scots who aspired to be a playwright after the war, *The Tommy Cooker* published his short three-scene comedy, titled “Home from Home” in which two Canadian soldiers returned to England from France and were looking for a pleasant room to spend the night:

Scene 1: [Hotel Lobby]

1st Soldier: Landlord, have you a nice room, with twin beds, soft sheets, and a double-spring mattress?

2nd Soldier: AND a couple of blondes.

Landlord: Well, gentlemen, just over from France, eh? Canadians too? . . .

Yes I can provide everything but the blondes . . .

1st Soldier: Good show, we’ll take it.

Scene 2: [Bedroom – lights out]

1st Soldier: I can’t sleep here, how about you.

2nd Soldier: Me too. Let’s go.

Scene 3: [Backyard – blackout]

¹⁰³ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15122, File No. 734, WD – NNSH, *The Fish-Billie Express*, Vol. 1, No. 9, 19 June 1944.

¹⁰⁴ LAC, RG-24, Vol. 15270, File No. 752, WD – SDGs, Log Entries, 30 June 1944.

1st Soldier (yawning): Nothing like a good deep slit-trench huh?
 2nd Soldier: You said it. Lucky we brought the pick and shovel with us.
 Both: Good night.¹⁰⁵

The fact that slit trenches figured prominently in the soldiers' own written work and also in their conversations highlights the emergence of a new type of lifestyle with its own unique culture and habits. George Blackburn discovered this to his own great amusement while sitting on a "compo-box toilet" wondering whether he could sum up the courage needed to jump into the latrine if shells began bursting around him. At that very moment he was also reading *The Maple Leaf* newspaper and stumbled upon a cartoon depicting that very conundrum he was contemplating.¹⁰⁶ The battalion newspapers (and later *The Maple Leaf* newspaper) provided substance and legacy to the soldiers' unique lifestyle, as the stories, jokes, parodies, poems, songs, and news reflected their experiences.

Two other subjects also dominated newspaper content: discipline and the German enemy. The officer and his orders were often ridiculed by the newspapers, especially in *The Big 2 Bugle*. Individual officers were hardly ever singled out, but their status and the redundancy of discipline were common targets:

RCE Officer: "There's an unexploded bomb buried here, probably weighing more than a ton. Just keep an eye on it and blow your whistle if anything happens."

"O.K.?" replied the private, "but do I blow it going up or coming down?"¹⁰⁷

Officer: "If anything moves you shoot."

Moe: "Yes, sir. And if anything shoots, I move."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15037, File No. 734(400), WD – Can Scots, *The Tommy Cooker*, Vol. 1, No. 35, 29 July 1944.

¹⁰⁶ Blackburn, *The Guns of Normandy*, 225-230.

¹⁰⁷ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15169, File No. 753, WD – QOR, *The Big 2 Bugle*, Vol. II, No. 26, 17 July 1944.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, *The Big 2 Bugle*, Vol. II, No. 25, 16 July 1944.

Moe: "I saw a girl in a cafe near CAMILLY drinking rum the other afternoon."

Gus: "Jamaica?"

Moe: "Hell, no, she was with an officer!"¹⁰⁹

Even the senior NCOs were not immune to verbal lashings. Since NCOs were the foul-mouthed, rugged, and crass veterans responsible for ensuring that the soldiers carried out their officers' orders, they were easy targets. One humorous exaggeration about CSM Chivers (of the QOR) and his angry outburst at an insolent subordinate, who obviously had other plans for the day, made the news on 24 July: "CSM Chivers, bellowing to a rifleman: The afternoon off! The afternoon off! What the (censored) do you think you are – a human being?"¹¹⁰

Some satirical commentary was surprisingly pointed and even openly hostile towards officers as one particular gag about the court martial of a sergeant and a private who assaulted a colonel demonstrates:

A Sergeant and a private were court-martialed for kicking a colonel just as the latter was stepping into his car. The sergeant, asked for an explanation, said the colonel had stepped on his most sensitive corn, that he lost control of his reflexes and had kicked the colonel unintentionally. That seemed logical to the Board of Inquiry. They called on the private for his explanation. He just shrugged. "I guess" he said, "I ain't got no excuse. I saw the sergeant kicking him and I thought the war was over."¹¹¹

Although this story was fictitious, the fact that it was published demonstrates that some type of resentment or tension existed at times between officers and ORs, as the story implied that since the "war was over" kicking an officer would either be part of some victory celebration or a much desired activity once the importance of rank was removed by the return to civilian life. It seems likely that officers put up with the indignities and

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, *The Big 2 Bugle*, Vol. II, No. 35, 28 July 1944.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, *The Big 2 Bugle*, Vol. II, No. 31, 24 July 1944.

¹¹¹ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15037, File No. 734(400), WD – Can Scots, *The West Wall Climber*, Issue #23, 28 July 1944.

sarcastic commentary because it was a sign of solidarity with the ORs. Forbidding or censoring their publication would be akin to rejecting the culture and experience of the front lines. This made little sense to officers who were often locked into the same putrid living conditions and desperate circumstances. Providing a safe outlet for the ORs to express their concerns and culture helped to show that they were not alone in their grumbling. Another reason for their leniency was pragmatic: for front-line officers taking a little bit of ribbing while allowing their troops to construct meaning from their situation made more sense than clamping down and dealing with the inevitable resentment and anger that would ensue.¹¹²

The German enemy also frequented the headlines, and they were often the subject of many jokes and songs. The treatment of the Germans in battalion newspapers had an intended contradiction. Almost every edition of the newspapers were filled with songs, poems, jokes, and most especially news, which reflected a very gruesome and devastatingly horrific reality – a reality directly related to effective and brutal German resistance, tactics, and weaponry. Yet, despite this, the Germans were always satirized as a defeated enemy on the verge of surrendering. Soldiers could laugh at this irony; there was still plenty of fight left in the ‘defeated’ enemy. In one edition of *The Big 2 Bugle*, editors mocked the lengths that German commanders had to go to camouflage defeats from superiors:

The world’s gentlest bad-news breaker is easily Captain Ludwig Sertorius, German Military commentator. Describing an action in SICILY he said: “The enemy’s violent effort to hamper the Axis disengagement and interrupt our systematic advance to the rear was successfully repelled.”¹¹³

¹¹² For a discussion of this in the First World War context, see Cook, *Shock Troops*, 184-190

¹¹³ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15169, File No. 753, WD – QOR, *The Big 2 Bugle*, Vol. II, No. 23, 14 July 1944.

In *The Tommy Cooker*, the stark reality of persistent German resistance and their propensity to *not* surrender easily was satirized so that Canadian soldiers read stories about the German *willingness* to surrender, even in instances where they outnumbered Canadians. One particularly dramatic story was reported on 21 June, under the heading “Secret Weapon”:

Normandy – Tuesday. Lieut. A. C. Peck of Vancouver found a German rifle. He strapped it to his bicycle and rode to the front. Then it dropped off. Peck swore loudly. And four Germans jumped out of a ditch and surrendered.¹¹⁴

Another related theme surrounded the unquestioned belief in Allied victory. This triumphant tone was not only reflected in the news that was reported, but it was also found in lyrics. One especially popular song amongst the troops in Normandy serves as an example. Originally coined by two anonymous soldiers in “D” Company of the Can Scots, the song “Luger Luggin’ Ludwig” (based on the hit song Pistol Packin’ Mama) quickly caught on and was reproduced in the 7th Brigade’s “I” Report and even made its way into the *Daily Telegraph* back in England. Highly celebratory, the song could be heard cheerfully whistled and hummed by Canadian soldiers throughout July 1944.¹¹⁵ It went something like this:

Slugging Jerry left and right / Havin lots of fun
Till one night we caught him right / Now he’s on the run
Lay that luger down, kid / Lay that Luger down.
Luger Luggin’ Ludwig, / Lay that Luger down
We Licked you on the beaches, / Chased you through the towns,
You’re not safe, if we reach you, / So lay that Luger down
We’ll push you cross the rivers / And through the fields of grain /
You’ll wish that you had never heard of the Normandy Campaign.
We’ll blast you through the day / And Huss you up at night
When we get through with you, kid / You’ll be an awful sight
Lay that Luger down, kid, / you haven’t got a chance,

¹¹⁴ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15037, File No. 734(400), WD – Can Scots, *The Tommy Cooker*, Vol. 1, No. 16, n. d.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, Log Entry, 3 July 1944 and *The Tommy Cooker*, Vol. 1, No. 30, 14 July 1944.

Luger Luggin' Ludwig, / You're all washed up in France.¹¹⁶

In addition to providing an outlet for coping, battalion newspapers offer insight into the socio-cultural identity they helped nurture. In particular, that cultural identity was centered upon the civilian-soldier self-image – which was perhaps an accurate reflection of the 3rd Division's composition of pre-war militia units. Among the long-serving veterans, strong attachment to home and especially to the communities which raised the original units was a powerful influence on this dual identity. As CSM Charles Martin explained in his memoirs, the QOR were from the Toronto region and the original members were fiercely loyal to this civilian and regional heritage. The three platoons in his company may have been denoted by a number (7, 8, and 9 Platoon), but to the soldiers each platoon represented much more than that:

7 Platoon were mostly from Geraldton, so they were miners. 8 Platoon was from the heart of old downtown Toronto, some pretty tough neighbourhoods, so they were the Cabbagetowners. My old 9 Platoon, drawn mostly from Toronto West, were dubbed the Farmers. This all provided some great rivalry, maybe in the beginning a bit overdone, but in tough training mean spirits do not last long, and in combat that's doubly so. And we came to appreciate one another's specialties.¹¹⁷

The content of the soldiers' written work also reflected certain civilian ideals that one might not immediately associate with warriors. The soldiers exhibited a fair amount of open-mindedness in their acceptance and support of the contributions made by fellow comrades, who might not have been professional writers and were expressing profound emotion in verse. This created a culture that promoted expression and precipitated further contributions in subsequent editions. Moreover, within many of those poems, songs, jokes, parodies, and even the news stories they heard, the soldiers expressed a

¹¹⁶ Ibid, *The Tommy Cooker*, Vol. 1, No. 22, 2 July 1944.

¹¹⁷ Martin, *Battle Diary*, 51.

pride in their civilian roots and accordingly references to Canada, home, loved ones, or civilian professions were common themes in their work, especially the poetry.¹¹⁸ Yet in addition to being proud civilians, their work also reflected and celebrated their profession of arms. Although the fighting was tough, unforgiving, and deadly, the soldiers' written work remained quite optimistic about victory and the future, which demonstrated a high morale and degree of confidence, both in themselves, their leadership, and their craft, as they were able to laugh in the face of their own misfortune and possible demise. A distinct socio-cultural dynamic was established through the open dialogue that battalion newspapers provided. Humour, verse, and experience became enmeshed to construct identity and meaning, which in the end helped soldiers cope with, and continue to persevere through, the physical pain and psychological strain infused into every moment of their lives.

¹¹⁸ See Poems 1 and 2 in Appendix I.

CHAPTER 3

MORALE AND BATTALION HEADQUARTERS

High morale is defined as: endurance and courage in supporting fatigue and danger. In other words, the quality which makes men go forward in an attack and hold their ground in defence. It is the quality without which no war can be won.¹

Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery

Unfortunately in most military books, strategy and tactics are emphasized at the expense of administrative factors . . . I should like you always to bear in mind when you study military history or military events, the importance of this administrative factor, because it is where most critics and many generals go wrong.²

Field Marshal Archibald Wavell

Despite the relentless and costly nature of the fighting in Normandy, the morale of Canadian soldiers in the 3rd Division remained substantially high throughout June and early July. According to a special June CMHQ censorship report based on the review of 2,821 letters written by soldiers wounded in France, morale remained high and it also found that most wounded soldiers were eager to return to their units and see action again.³ This theme is particularly evident in the personal correspondence of Major G. T. MacEwan and his commander, Lt-Col. Fred Cabeldu. Writing from his hospital bed on 15 June, MacEwan informed Cabeldu of his fractured right forearm and shrapnel wounds, but he also expressed some regret for being wounded so quickly, “Sorry to have dropped out so soon . . . I feel very fortunate but a bit guilty to be away at this time after

¹ DHH, 81/289, *Morale in Battle: Analysis*, foreword.

² Quoted in: CWM, *Infantry Training Part I: The Infantry Battalion*, 1.

³ Morale did fluctuate from unit to unit, those battalion war diaries which mentioned morale indicated that it remained substantially high during this period. Two examples are found in: LAC, RG24, Vol. 15076, File No. 754, WD – HLI, Log Entry, 25 June 1944; LAC, RG24, Vol. 15198, File No. 744, WD – RR, Log Entry, 18 June 1944. The special censorship report covered the period 16-28 June 1944. DHH, 312.023 (D1), Field Censors CMHQ Units, Vol. II (1944) “Special Report on Mail from Canadian Military Hospitals on the invasion of France,” 2-4. Another CMHQ censorship report based on the review of 10,381 letters from all Canadian forces in Europe during the period 6 to 20 June, also noted an increase in morale and a renewed sense of purpose at the news of D-Day. DHH, 312.023 (D1), Field Censors CMHQ Units, Vol. II (1944), 6-20 June 1944, 2-4; Copp, *Fields of Fire*, 118-119.

so few days . . . If there is anything at all that I can do for you or any of the others, please do not hesitate to ask. This would make me feel in some slight measure that I was still serving the battalion.” Moreover, despite his injuries MacEwan was “very cheered to hear reports from our wounded coming in . . . that we had taken the objective [Putot] that night and were holding it.”⁴

In the Canadian context, it is tempting to attribute this high state of morale to the influence of comradeship and the soldier’s primary group, especially considering the vibrant social and cultural environments in each battalion and the fact that many surviving veterans had spent the bulk of their war training in England as relatively cohesive and homogeneous units.⁵ However, it is unwise to over-emphasize the importance of comradeship and the primary group – especially in the June and July period – as a number of limitations become apparent upon closer examination. Most significantly, the heavy casualty rate suffered by the infantry in the opening weeks of the Normandy campaign obscures and complicates the pillars of morale.⁶ The ferocious nature of the fighting decimated the 3rd Division’s manpower and under such circumstances the cohesion of the soldier’s primary group was seriously jeopardized. This situation meant that soldiers often went into battle with complete strangers by their side and it was also not uncommon for new replacements (officers and ORs alike) to be killed or wounded before their veteran comrades could learn their names – let alone

⁴ LAC, RG24, Vol 15037, File No 734(400), Major G T MacEwan to Lt-Col F N Cabeldu, 15 June 1944

⁵ As CSM Martin pointed out, “We had all joined up in 1940, had trained together, had lived together, and had just been together every day of the last four years ” Martin, *Battle Diary*, 4.

⁶ For critique of primary group theory and an account of the role of training and discipline in sustaining morale, see Hew Strachan, “Training, Morale and Modern War” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol 4, No 2 (2006), 211-214

grant them respect.⁷ Thus, if morale was totally dependent on the immediacy of comradeship and familiar social relationships, then severe casualties amongst the primary group should have seriously impaired any willingness to continue fighting – but clearly this was not the case.

Furthermore, an added complication of high casualties was the changing balance of experience in rifle companies. The constant turnover of personnel required BnHQ to monitor the level of experience within each subordinate company. In Normandy, experience was a treasured commodity, especially as the quality of each draft of replacements fluctuated. Numerous Battalion Orders were issued reminding soldiers to not take any unnecessary risks or forbidding them from loitering in open fields or laying in the grass to watch “aerial activity.”⁸ The regulation of transfers and appointments within the battalion offered the CO an ability to balance experience throughout the various units under his command. If a particular company was decimated or in need of greater experience, a CO could simply transfer veteran officers or NCOs to that unit to fill the void. This happened often and quite liberally throughout June and July as every unit’s Battalion Orders possessed whole sections (sometimes whole pages) informing everyone which soldiers were being reassigned and where.⁹ This meant that even if a primary group was not destroyed by battle it could be dismantled to cover losses elsewhere in the battalion.

Given these limitations it is obvious that other factors helped buttress the impact of comradeship to sustain morale in combat. As Anthony Kellett explained, loyalty and

⁷ Blackburn, *The Guns of Normandy*, introduction, specifically xii.

⁸ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15233, File No. 934/1, WD – RWR, Battalion Order, 26 June 1944, LAC, RG24, Vol. 15198, File No. 744, WD – RR, Battalion Order, 23 June 1944

⁹ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15169, File No. 753, WD – QOR, Battalion Order, various dates, July 1944.

association with a wider entity greatly supplemented the commitment to the primary group.¹⁰ For Canadian soldiers, attempts to link this affinity with the brigade or division were not as successful as the affinity generated for the infantry battalion. Consisting of approximately 40 officers and 812 ORs, the battalion was akin to the soldier's extended family. Each battalion consisted of four rifle companies of 5 officers and 122 ORs, split between three platoons and a headquarters section. The battalion also had a support company consisting of 7 officers and 185 ORs, divided between four platoons: the mortar, the carrier, the anti-tank, and the pioneer. These five combat elements were held together and commanded by a lieutenant-colonel, his BnHQ staff, and the associated Headquarters Company (HQ Coy).¹¹ Although soldiers knew their sections (consisting of one senior NCO and seven ORs) best, troops gained acquaintances and friends beyond the confines of their primary group, especially while in England waiting for action. This increased familiarity between individuals and expanded social networks throughout the battalion – cementing an *esprit de corps*. As Cpl. Jim Parks of the RWR explained: “You might not have known their names – seven hundred or eight hundred people, you don’t know all their names – but you know them to see them.”¹²

This chapter explores the pillars of morale outside the context of comradeship. Although the surviving nucleus of the soldiers’ primary group could stimulate morale and help the individual cope with his difficult situation, the morale of Canadian soldiers was also buttressed by much more coordinated and complex arrangements that were

¹⁰ This affinity was almost always consciously propagated through discipline, training, recruiting, shared social activities, distinctive traditions, symbols and emblems, and routines which personalize the community. Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 321-322

¹¹ CWM, *Infantry Training Part I: The Infantry Battalion*, 3, Copp, *Fields of Fire*, 18-19, Terry Copp, *The Brigade: The Fifth Canadian Infantry Brigade in World War II*, (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole, 1992), xiv, 33-34. See Table 3 in Appendix I.

¹² As quoted in: Goddard, *D-Day Juno Beach*, 121.

consciously propagated by the efforts of wider social, structural, and administrative authorities, namely: BnHQ and its vital HQ Coy. For Canadian troops in Normandy, the role and responsibilities fulfilled by their respective BnHQs and HQ Coys were the critical other pillars of high morale. BnHQ and the HQ Coy regulated almost every aspect of a soldier's daily life in the field and did so in a variety of ways, both tangible and intangible to the troops under their command. They provided decisive leadership by managing and organizing the battalion's human and material resources with efficiency, precision, and resilience. They operated the logistical and administrative infrastructure which ensured that soldiers received all the essential supplies and personal necessities needed for survival and combat operations. Finally, they defended unit morale by enforcing standards of discipline and modifying battle procedures, all the while actively documenting the battalion's combat record for future training and historical purposes. In doing so, BnHQ and the HQ Coy created a solid foundation that buttressed the foot-soldier's morale.

Leadership

Although the members of the primary group and the personalities that dominated it exercised an immediate control over a soldier's attitude and material possessions, other individuals unassociated with that group exercised profound influence over morale as well. Therefore the maintenance of high morale also depended on the actions of a diverse number of individuals within the battalion who occupied positions of authority and consequence. The role of the battalion's padre serves as a poignant introduction to this line of reasoning. Under the rank of Honorary Captain (H/Captain) and attached to

BnHQ, the padre was responsible for maintaining his unit's spiritual strength. His most common duties included church parades, confession, providing guidance, assisting the medical staff, and burial ceremonies. The padre's influence cannot be overstated. Surrounded by death and depravity, religion often occupied an important role amongst the troops as it provided them with hope and comfort. In a letter to his parents Sgt. Tom Carney, a veteran of the Can Scots, described the importance he attached to the church parade:

[The] church parade, which is very informal here under the bursting shells, is a place and moment for one to find peace and quietness, even though the heavens seem to burst open and the earth rock back and forth, a place that you can find comfort, a place to pray for your loved ones, for men who have paid the supreme sacrifice, for the wounded who didn't know how to groan or to complain of the terrible wounds they received. Yes and you also pray that this hatred that seems embedded in us and the enemy be wiped out of our systems.¹³

Such strong opinions were probably inspired by Sgt Carney's unit padre, H/Captain Robert L. Seaborn who, by all accounts, was one of the most important individuals within that battalion. Seaborn's remarkable wartime experience is legendary. Despite shrapnel wounds suffered upon leaving his LCA on 6 June, he distinguished himself both on D-Day and days later at Putot by tending to the wounded, providing last rites to the dying (no matter where they fell), and caring intensely for the spiritual well-being of the survivors. For his actions he was awarded *La Croix de Guerre* by the French government and the citation concluded that: "He is a true Christian and is admired by the whole battalion for his fortitude and gallantry."¹⁴

¹³ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15037, File No: 734(400), WD – Can Scots, newspaper clipping, Sgt Tom Carney to parents, 19 July 1944.

¹⁴ LAC, MG31 F18, Robert Lowder Seaborn and Family Fonds, Army Journal. Entry for 6 June 1944. Quote from, Ibid, File No.: 14: Chaplaincy Papers – 1942-1993 (Army and Ecclesiastical Official Documents, 1942-1993), citation and newspaper cut outs, n. d

Against army regulations, Seaborn kept a small pocket diary throughout the war (which he miraculously survived). Written partially in shorthand, the diary was a log of his activities with the occasional impression of his personal experience – which provides an immensely intriguing portrayal of the role that all padres fulfilled in combat. According to Seaborn one of his most important contributions to the unit was burial duty, as his 13 June entry makes clear, “The burial ends takes up some time, but I try to look at it as something I can do for the men and it does not bother me too much.”¹⁵ Seaborn was utterly meticulous in this endeavour and devoted an entire diary to keeping record of every soldier he buried from D-Day to V-E Day. Recorded were the name, rank, serial number, and home address of the deceased and buried soldier. He also recorded the date of death and the date on which he wrote the family a next-of-kin letter.¹⁶ His actions were extremely beneficial to morale. In a world where death and fear were constant companions, it was important for the soldiers to know that their remains and their personal effects would be cared for and looked after should the unthinkable happen.

In addition to caring for the dead, Seaborn also cared for the living. He made it a point to see as many of the men in the battalion as often as possible. To help keep their spirits up, he spent time with them, gossiped and joked, shared meals, provided church services, gave Holy Communion (even though he was Anglican), and in one particular case, he was specially requested to help console a soldier who found out that his wife

¹⁵ Ibid, Army Journal, Entry for 13 June 1944.

¹⁶ This diary also contained a number hymns and a set of clear instructions on burial and identification procedures. There were an estimated 400 entries Ibid, File No. 16: Army Notebook - Burials and Next of Kin, (31 August 1943 – 2 Aug 1945, July 1943 – 29 May 1944).

had died in Canada.¹⁷ Moreover, it appears that Padre Seaborn drew his strength and energy from the soldiers to whom he ministered. An unmistakable element of paternal guidance dominated all his interactions with the men, as he was older than most of them and conscious of the fact that he was a potential role model. The importance of the padre was obvious to the officers and ORs alike. Writing after the war, Major (then Lt-Col.) Wightman, noted that in addition to helping secure food from the locals, the Padre was “a tower of strength to all the troops.”¹⁸ Therefore, each unit’s padre became a welcomed and honoured member of the battalion. Being responsible for the unit’s spiritually often motivated him to become an informal pillar on which morale rested. The padre was well outside the foot-soldiers’ primary group – as Seaborn’s diary entries show he spent no more than a few hours in the same location per day – yet he remained firmly embedded into the fabric of high morale and his soldiers’ lives. Thus, the role and function of the battalion’s padre exemplifies the tangible influence of wider social, structural, and administrative authorities that stimulated morale.

There were several other individuals in the battalion who remained largely disassociated from the primary group, but occupied positions integral to the maintenance of high morale. The CO and his staff played a central and distinct role in administrating and controlling the environment in which the subordinate units operated. Although junior officers and NCOs were more integrated into the lowly privates’ world than the CO, he still possessed considerable influence within it. The daily issue of Battalion Orders provided the CO with an outlet through which he could administer and regulate his subordinates’ lives. These orders established the pace of life at the front and dealt

¹⁷ Ibid, Army Journal, Entries for 6, 13, 16-19 June 1944.

¹⁸ DHH, 145.2C4 (D4), “Battle Narrative Putot-en-Bessin Counter Attack – June 8th, 1944 and the Move to Rots,” Lt-Col C. M. Wightman, 7.

with a variety of problems inherent to combat, such as, casualties and transfers, promotions/demotions, looting, venereal diseases (VD), sanitation, discipline, mail, pay, and courts of inquiry. Thus, the CO's influence over morale manifested itself in less direct ways, as subordinate officers would enforce his instructions and orders. Sometimes a CO would oversee this process, but not very often, as there were many other daily responsibilities that required the bulk of his energy and time. These included a mass of meetings and briefings, either at BdeHQ or the battalion's rest area and logistical centre known, respectively, as "A" and "B" Echelon, at which time he and his staff received their orders and planned the next day's schedule or combat operations.

It was through Battalion Orders that the CO established and adapted the daily routine. This was central to morale, as soldiers tended to prefer routine and structure to the uncertainty of something new, even if that sudden change was potentially for the better. As George Blackburn recalled, sudden changes often aroused suspicion among the troops and any variations to the routine (no matter how miserable or boring) could have a demoralizing effect.¹⁹ Thus, a balanced schedule mixed with constant reminders, provided a crucial foundation for morale as it eliminated unnecessary anxiety and provided a guise of efficiency and transparency that soldiers appreciated. Each battalion commander approached this in different ways. Some COs, like Lt-Col. J. G. Spragge of the QOR and Lt-Col. F. M. Matheson of the RR, issued Battalion Orders as frequently as possible, sometimes more than once a day.²⁰ Other COs, such as Lt-Col. J. M. Meldram of the RWR and Lt-Col. G. H. Christiansen of the SDGs chose to issue only a few

¹⁹ George Blackburn, *Where the Hell are the Guns? A Soldier's Eye View of the Anxious Years, 1939-1944* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1999), 335-337.

²⁰ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15168, File No. 753, WD – QOR, Battalion Orders, various dates June 1944; LAC, RG24, Vol. 15198, File No. 744, WD – RR, Battalion Orders, various dates June 1944.

during the course of June and July.²¹ Whether he gave his orders on paper or verbally, it was important for the CO to craft the battalion's routine to meet the needs of those he led or else they would lose confidence in him and suffer a drop in morale. Thus, it was imperative for the CO to keep himself apprised of unit affairs, the soldiers' behaviour, and the requirements of his subordinate officers.

Though certainly the CO's influence on morale was exerted most powerfully indirectly, a good commander took steps to earn his troops' respect by ensuring his visibility at the sharp end.²² Most COs established their HQs within relatively close proximity to their troops and lived in similar conditions. George Blackburn described the first BnHQ he ever entered and was stunned to discover that it was nothing more than a U-shaped trench dug into an open field.²³ Moreover, this not only meant that BnHQs were positioned close to the front line but, like everyone else, were in constant danger of artillery and mortar fire. This was particularly evident on 26 June, when the Can Scots' BnHQ took a direct hit from an 88-mm shell, killing the Signals Officer (SO) and a few other personnel, severely wounding the Intelligence Officer (IO), the battalion's Adjutant, Major Wightman, and slightly wounding Lt-Col. Cabeldu.²⁴ Thus, the CO's visibility and physical proximity to his soldiers made him more in tune with battlefield conditions, gained him the respect of his men, and also cemented himself atop the battalion's social hierarchy. Most soldiers would have recognized him, and he most

²¹ More than likely these commanders issued orders verbally and not in writing and it is also possible that the unit war diarist did not collect Battalion Orders. However, the war diary logs do continuously note the activities of the CO and his orders: LAC RG24, Vol. 15233, File No. 934/1, WD – RWR, Log Entries, various dates June 1944; LAC, RG-24, Vol. 15270, File No. 752, WD – SDGs, Log Entries, various dates June 1944.

²² DHH, 81/289, *Morale in Battle: Analysis*, 7-9

²³ Blackburn, *The Guns of Normandy*, 94-100.

²⁴ As the war diarist of the 14th Field Ambulance noted: "All casualties were evacuated except [Cabeldu] who is remaining. A most unfortunate affair happening to a unit which has done such good work to date." LAC, RG24, Vol. 15,877, File No. 967, WD – 14th Field Ambulance, Log Entry, 26 June 1944.

certainly established strong rapports with all the long-serving and senior NCOs, in addition to all the majors, captains, and lieutenants under his command. In his memoirs, CSM Charles Martin recalled numerous meetings and discussions with Spragge. One of those occasions (the night of 6-7 June) stands out in particular as it illustrated the obvious bond of trust and friendship that existed between the two men, one a senior NCO and the other a high-ranking officer:

In this midnight blackness somebody lit up a smoke. I shouted at him: 'Put out that cigarette!' In the darkness I let him know he was lucky to be alive. Then I saw it was [Spragge]. I gave him plain hell . . . I told him he should be back at Battalion HQ, not up at the front with us . . . He was too good and too necessary to be killed or wounded. He gave me one of those looks that anyone who ever knew Jock Spragge would recognize and said, 'Charlie, its such a sad day. We've lost so many good men.' He said goodnight and turned away, but not before I saw tears in his eyes.²⁵

Greatly increasing the battalion commander's visibility was the added mobility provided by the jeeps and Universal carriers under his command. At any given time, he could utilize his personal carrier to visit each of the companies and platoons in his battalion. The frequency of his movements were often recorded by his unit's war diarist, as many wrote down daily comments on where the CO was going and what his activities were for the day.²⁶ Thus, most COs remained in a state of constant activity and in personal contact with all of their subordinate units. This ensured that he became a rallying point for morale, as his presence in battle often acted as a means of reassurance. For example, the war diary of the NNSH recorded one such incident during an early morning German attack north of Buron on 9 June, "the Commanding Officer, [Lt-Col.]

²⁵ Martin held Spragge in high esteem, as he later commented: "Jock Spragge was all man. He was not one of those spit 'n' polish professional types, but as a fighter he was the best. To listen to him give instructions at our "O" Group was a real uplift." Martin, *Battle Diary*, both quotes 16.

²⁶ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15270, File No. 752, WD – SDGs, Log Entries, various dates June 1944, LAC, RG24, Vol. 15076, File No. 754, WD – HLI, Log Entries, various dates June 1944

C Petch, then stepped from his slit trench and shouted to the men ‘O K fellows, we’ll take them when they come ’ It was great inspiration to the men and at this time the forward troops were given the order to fire ”²⁷ The importance of strong and visible leadership at all levels was an extremely important factor in the maintenance of high morale and a number of 3rd Division officers commented on this fact in their Battle Experience Questionnaires Captain W R Burnett, one of Petch’s subordinate officers in the NNSH, reported that the “retention of officers or NCOs who have gained the confidence of the men” was a critical element in improving morale Moreover, several other officers referred to the importance of “leadership” or “good admin[istration] within the unit” when answering the same question on morale ²⁸

The CO’s influence on morale also manifested itself in other tangible ways As the pamphlet, *Morale in Battle Analysis* (1947), pointed out, high morale was impossible if soldiers did not respect themselves and, in cases where it was sagging, it was up to unit officers to take the necessary steps to restore their soldiers’ confidence and self-respect ²⁹ Junior officers and NCOs often receive the credit for this responsibility, but the CO deserves some recognition as well Two particular examples serve to illustrate this point On 11 June, about 110 soldiers of the QOR’s “D” Company were involved in the disastrous attack on Le Mesnil Patry and suffered an astonishingly high 88 casualties, 55 of them were fatal ³⁰ In his memoirs, CSM Martin recounted how badly shaken his men in “A” Company were over the disaster As he explained, a number of the senior NCOs, platoon officers, and even the company commander (Major J N

²⁷ LAC, RG24 Vol 15122 File No 734, WD – NNSH, Log Entry 9 June 1944

²⁸ LAC, RG24, Vol 10450, ‘BEQ #274, Captain W R Burnett NNSH’, Ibid, “BEQ #113 Major Norman G Wilson Smith, RWR”, Ibid “BEQ #80 Lt-Col D B Buell NS”

²⁹ DHH 81/289, *Morale in Battle Analysis* section 6

³⁰ Barnard, *The Queen’s Own Rifles of Canada 1860 1960*, 201 203

Gordon), were “A” Company originals who had been promoted and transferred to “D” Company when it was created in England.³¹ These casualties were dear friends to Martin and his troops in “A” Company, and they felt the losses very keenly. Evidence found in the QOR’s war diary supports Martin’s remarks and suggests that the problem was much worse than he explained. Apparently, the whole battalion was reeling from the attack and soldiers stopped leaving their slit trenches, which meant they were sleeping and defecating in the same places. On 13 June, Lt-Col. Spragge was forced to issue a sanitation order, instructing everyone that they had to dig and use proper latrines so that the spread of “filth diseases” would not become an epidemic. In doing so, Spragge was forcing his soldiers to respect themselves and their living environment by encouraging a minimum of human dignity. His basic orders sought to ensure that morale would not drop any further.³²

In other battalions facing similarly high casualty rates, COs issued Battalion Orders to enforce higher standards of dress and appearance. On 8 June at Putot, the RWR were nearly annihilated by a German attack and spent the balance of June recovering from the losses. Sagging morale among the veterans forced Lt-Col. Meldrum to issue orders detailing proper standards of deportment. Despite the rigours of campaigning, soldiers were to maintain “a standard of smartness” and make every effort to be properly dressed at all times. Steel helmets were to be worn when on duty, blouses were to be buttoned except for collar hooks, trousers were to be buttoned down or tucked into boots, and skeleton webbing was to be worn at all times.³³ The strict dress code was designed to rebuild a level of self-respect by forcing veteran soldiers to re-

³¹ Martin, *Battle Diary*, 72

³² LAC, RG24, Vol 15168, File No 753, WD – QOR, Re Sanitation, 13 June 1944

³³ LAC, RG24, Vol 15233, File No 934/1, WD – RWR, Battalion Order, 26 June 1944

familiarize themselves with the standard benchmark of appearance that had obviously been relaxed during the bloodletting at Putot. Thus, the regulation of dress and appearance, even at the height of combat, illustrates how pervasive an influence the CO possessed within the soldiers' lives and daily routines.

However, the CO could not accomplish much without the support of his HQ staff. Any discussion of the role and function of the CO in maintaining morale must also include reference to his HQ staff and therefore the structure, composition, and function of BnHQ and the HQ Coy are worth exploring in greater detail. The headquarters of a Canadian infantry battalion was comprised of two separate but inter-related organizations: BnHQ and the HQ Coy. BnHQ was the unit's nerve centre as it authorized all decisions and actions. It was rather small, consisting of only the CO, the 2IC, the IO, the MO, the Adjutant, the scout platoon, the Regimental Sergeant-Major (RSM), and a few other clerks and signallers – about five officers and 45 ORs altogether. The HQ Coy was much larger, consisting of some four officers and 91 ORs, and was responsible for all the battalion's logistics, communications, and administrative duties. The HQ Coy was also subdivided into two platoons, the Signals Platoon and the Administrative Platoon, which provided greater flexibility and efficiency in carrying out the orders of the CO as duties were divided and fulfilled by each individual part with minimal duplication of effort.³⁴

Though there is considerable debate among historians surrounding the combat efficiency of the Canadian command structure in Normandy, this debate has only focused on the tactical and operational handling of units in the field. However, judging

³⁴ CWM, *Infantry Training Part I: The Infantry Battalion*, 3, Copp, *The Brigade*, xiv, 33-34. See Table 3 in Appendix I. The author would like to thank Dr. Doug Delaney for his insight into the intricacies of battalion bureaucracies.

the battalion's efficiency with reference to only its combat operations ignores that this was just one of many responsibilities carried out by BnHQ and its vital HQ Coy. One of the most critical functions of the CO and his staff was the administration and management of the battalion's human resources. In this regard the efforts of the Adjutant is of particular interest, as it was his responsibility to oversee the entire battalion's bureaucracy, administering everything from service records to casualty lists, but most especially the planning, printing, and distribution of Battalion Orders.³⁵ It was also the Adjutant's duty to ensure that all paperwork and orders were crafted identically each time. Such standardized operating procedures or "drill" allowed the BnHQ and HQ Coy to function smoothly and automatically while in the field. Furthermore, this concept was applied to every task and responsibility of BnHQ and the HQ Coy and all personnel were trained in them until it became a second nature. For example, every BnHQ was arranged in an identical manner (as circumstances allowed), always including an office area, a rest area, and a transport area. Though it depended on shelter and location, the headquarters itself was also organized in the same way, so that when a new HQ was established operations could continue without interruption. Moreover, every officer and NCO at BnHQ was instructed on what the "normal" lay-out was so that there would be no confusion.³⁶ Years of waiting in England might not have allowed for realistic battle training or extensive combat experience, but it did provide HQ staff with extensive and detailed administrative and organizational experience.

³⁵ Almost every war diary has stacks of Battalion Orders signed by the Adjutant but dictated by the CO. See: LAC, RG24, Vol. 15169, File No. 753, WD – QOR, Battalion Orders, various dates July 1944.

³⁶ There was even someone on battalion staff whose task it was to locate a new forward position most appropriate for the headquarters and also to ensure that BnHQ was laid-out in an identical manner. He was to be meticulous in his job and assisted by a signals representative since a BnHQ position was often determined by its suitability for communications. CWM, *Infantry Training Part I. The Infantry Battalion*, 2, 4-8.

BnHQ and the HQ Coy were constantly undertaking initiatives to improve the combat effectiveness and morale of its soldiers. Here the influence of the IO was most prominent as it was his section's responsibility to collect and synthesize all forms of intelligence in the field for the CO and carry out any special reconnaissance patrols if necessary.³⁷ Within ten to sixteen days after D-Day, some IOs at BnHQs began publishing special documents and orders which synthesized their recent combat experience with an eye towards improving training, drill, and tactics through discussion and improvisation.³⁸ In other battalions conferences were held at which the CO, the 2IC, the IO, and company commanders exchanged ideas and experience to improve strategy and tactics.³⁹ Moreover, the QOR's war diary possesses a series of intelligence summaries which, as the campaign in Normandy wore on, grew substantially more sophisticated and detailed. This shows that not only was the intelligence staff at 3rd Division HQ improving their craft, providing forward battalions with more useful information (such as German unit histories), but that they in turn were receiving better intelligence reports and information from IOs at BnHQs and BdeHQs.⁴⁰ By the end of June, IOs at all levels of command in the 3rd Division were becoming highly proficient in the dissemination of information, while the provision of copious amounts of intelligence to BnHQ inspired a semblance of confidence and reassurance when planning operations.⁴¹

³⁷ Ibid, 11.

³⁸ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15168, File No. 753, WD – QOR, Lessons Learned, 17 June 1944.

³⁹ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15233, File No. 934/1, WD – RWR, Log Entry, 23 June 1944.

⁴⁰ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15168, File No. 753, WD – QOR, 3rd Division Intelligence Summaries, various dates June 1944, specifically 10 June (#3), 14 June (#6), 19 June (#12), and 26 June (#14).

⁴¹ Admittedly, morale often depended on the accuracy of the data, as good intelligence could eliminate surprises and lead to a successful operation, while bad intelligence could cause failure and damage morale. DHH, 81/289, *Morale in Battle: Analysis*, section 8.

Furthermore, BnHQ also authorized several adaptations to the battalion's structure and drill to meet a variety of challenges and necessities caused by combat operations. For example, on 19 June one senior QOR NCO from each company was appointed "Patrol Master." His role was to oversee and coordinate all his company's patrolling activities and then report them to the IO at a prearranged meeting the next morning. This greatly streamlined paper work while still ensuring that a coherent collection of information was disseminated.⁴² Other battalions resorted to different systems. Most used extensive patrol reports, typed up at BnHQ after the patrol's commander relayed the information obtained or the details of any encounter with the enemy.⁴³ Furthermore, small changes to the battalion's war establishment were made in the field. In the case of the SDGs, they centralized the battalion snipers into one section under BnHQ's command, rather than distributing them amongst the rifle companies as was originally done.⁴⁴ This made good sense, as snipers were proving their worth on the battlefields of Normandy, both in harassing the enemy and in supporting the scout platoon with special reconnaissance activities.

The RR's BnHQ appears to have been one of the most efficient in terms of manpower management. Within days of the landing, Lt-Col. Matheson also recognized the importance of snipers and ordered the creation of a battalion sniper school. In his first official issue of Battalion Orders on 10 June, he instructed each rifle company to submit the names of their personnel already trained as snipers and the names of two additional personnel suitable for sniper training. The program was continued throughout

⁴² LAC, RG24, Vol. 15168, File No. 753, WD – QOR, Patrol Masters, 19 June 1944.

⁴³ Many patrol orders exist in the NS and NNSH war diaries: LAC, RG24, Vol. 15127, File No. 742, WD – NS, Patrol Reports, various dates June 1944; LAC, RG24, Vol. 15122, File No. 734, WD – NNSH, Patrol Reports, various dates June 1944.

⁴⁴ LAC, RG-24, Vol. 15270, File No. 752, WD – SDGs, Log Entry, 19 June 1944.

the month and included live target practice.⁴⁵ The RR's BnHQ and HQ Coy also initiated another successful training program, establishing a school for new NCOs. The NCO school was an ingenious countermeasure to the battalion's heavy casualty rate in the weeks after D-Day. By 22 June, the battalion had lost approximately 17 officers and 360 ORs, which amounted to a casualty rate of roughly 44 percent.⁴⁶ Given this phenomenal casualty rate, it became necessary to provide instruction to the vast number of newly promoted or transferred NCOs.

On 28 June, a Battalion Order was issued instructing those soldiers selected to report to Major C. T. S. Tubbs at BnHQ on the following day. The men were told to bring steel helmets, weapons, notebooks, and pencils for the three-day course which taught them the role and responsibilities of an NCO.⁴⁷ Such an initiative was an excellent way to familiarize these new NCOs with the traditions, "drill," and reputation unique to the battalion. Moreover, training the NCOs in this manner ensured cohesion within the chain of command, as they were acclimatized to the types of instructions and routines dictated by the CO.⁴⁸ Unit morale stood only to benefit from this initiative, as the NCOs were prepared to lead their respective primary groups in accordance with the expectations of BnHQ and the CO. The creation of the NCO and sniper schools, in such close proximity to the front, and so quickly after D-Day, should be lauded as an excellent example of the efficiency with which BnHQ managed its human resources.

⁴⁵ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15198, File No. 744, WD – RR, Battalion Order, 10 June 1944, Log Entry, 22 June 1944.

⁴⁶ Assuming the war diarist was accurate and that the battalion was at full-strength at the time of D-Day. Ibid, Log Entry, 22 June 1944.

⁴⁷ Ibid, Battalion Order, 28 June 1944, Log Entry, 29 June 1944.

⁴⁸ In *The Brigade*, historian Terry Copp commented on similar steps taken by the Black Watch at the outbreak of war. They created a Provisional Officer Training Scheme (POTS) in order to indoctrinate new officer recruits with the storied reputation and traditions of the unit. The scheme ended in 1942. Copp, *The Brigade*, 21-22.

Not only were new reinforcements indoctrinated into the battalion, but they were also receiving instruction derived directly from the RR's battle experience.

Another example of BnHQ's effective human resource management was the steps taken to care for the battalion's casualties. The battalion's MO was responsible for dealing with the unit's casualties at the Regimental Aid Post (RAP), which was always located near BnHQ and clearly marked so everyone knew its position. At the RAP the MO was the first doctor to examine the wounded, and he had the grisly job of triage – deciding which casualties required immediate attention or surgery, which should be evacuated to a Field Ambulance, and which would not survive.⁴⁹ The critical hinge in the provision of medical treatment was transport. Between the RAP and Field Ambulances transport was provided by jeep or truck, but in forward areas this was not practical.⁵⁰ Thus, the walking wounded had to make it to the rear on their own, but those seriously wounded had to rely on the industry of the stretcher bearers, who braved bombs and bullets to retrieve the screaming, wounded soldier wherever he fell. Stretcher bearers worked tirelessly under the MO's supervision, and carried rudimentary medical supplies (such as: bandages and dressing for all wounds and burns, a large water bottle, evacuation tags, and perhaps some morphine) to administer first aid and ready the wounded man for the turbulent expedition back to the RAP on the gurney.⁵¹ As noted by Major S. M. Lett, the 2IC of the QOR, the work of the stretcher bearers was incredibly

⁴⁹ CWM, *Infantry Section Leading, 1938*, 17-18

⁵⁰ William Feasby, *Official History of the Canadian Medical Services, 1939-1945, Volume 1* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1956), 86.

⁵¹ On 14 July as the RR were recovering from the heavy fighting for Caen, a Battalion Order was issued instructing each company to select three possible candidates for the role of stretcher bearer and those nominated were to report to the MO for an interview by 14:00 hours on the following day. LAC, RG24, Vol 15199, File No. 744, WD – RR, Battalion Order, 14 July 1944; Bouchery, *The Canadian Soldier in North-West Europe*, 31-32.

important, but very arduous, terrifying, and dangerous – so much so that many of the QOR's battle exhaustion casualties were stretcher bearers.⁵²

Despite the overwhelming number of casualties suffered in the weeks after D-Day, the MOs and their staff developed a very positive and celebrated reputation amongst their battalions that helped bolster morale.⁵³ For the troops it was a comforting feeling to know that if one was hit, no matter how badly, he would receive the best treatment possible under the circumstances of battle. This feeling was reflected in Battle Experience Questionnaires, as some officers noted that prompt medical attention and detailed administrative arrangements for casualties were two important factors in sustaining morale.⁵⁴ Moreover, individual stretcher bearers were also singled out for their efforts. As a collective report from No. 17 Platoon in "D" Company of the Can Scots stated, "Pte. [R. H] Rideout D Co[mpan]y stretcher bearer was indefatigable and faced [machinegun] fire during [the attack on Putot] in order to attend to and cheer our wounded." Pte. R. H. Tutte added in his report, that Rideout was the only stretcher bearer to survive the 8-9 June counterattack, and that he "worked all night and all [the] next day often under fire of snipers."⁵⁵ Other individuals realized the importance of the stretcher bearers' work and took it upon themselves to take over after they were all killed or wounded. The heroic actions of Pte. W. L. Nicol, of the HLI's "B" Company, at Buron on 8 July provides one amazing example of this initiative – which was

⁵² DHH, 145.2Q2011(D3), "Memorandum of Interview with Maj S M Lett, 2IC, QOR" 15 July 1944, 2.

⁵³ Reginald Roy, *Ready for the Fray (Deas gu Cath): The History of the Canadian Scottish Regiment (Princess Mary's) 1920-1955* (Vancouver: Evergreen Press, 1958), 217.

⁵⁴ LAC, RG24, Vol. 10450, "BEQ #81, Lt-Col. P.W Bennett, Essex Scottish Regiment"; Ibid, "BEQ #84, Major G. E. Lockwood, NS."

⁵⁵ Quotes from: LAC, RG24, Vol. 15037, File No: 734(400), WD – Can Scots, "Counter Attack on Putot-en-Bessin on 9th June 44 and the Subsequent 24 hrs at the Bridge" Collective Report by 17 Pl. "D" Coy, C.Scot.R., n. d., 1; Ibid, "The Advance, Occupation, and Holding of the Bridge at Putot-en-Bessin As I Saw It" Pte R H. Tutte, 1.

celebrated and encouraged by the Military Medal (MM) he was awarded. The citation read:

As all the company stretcher bearers had been killed or wounded he left his position and carried on their work. Under fire which covered the whole area, he dragged his wounded comrades to a small shallow ditch behind a hedge row. He showed utter disregard for his own person, taking first field dressing from the dead and patching up the wounded. He started to do this at approx 0830 hrs and continued the rest of the day to act as [stretcher bearer] to the Co[mpan]y, making his way in the open over the fire swept fields. Through his courage and industry in tending to the wounded, he is credited with being personally responsible for saving the lives of eight men that day.⁵⁶

The issue of neuropsychiatric or battle exhaustion casualties also demanded effective human resource management, which the medical personnel of the entire 3rd Division handled with care and diligence. As Terry Copp and Bill McAndrew have discussed in their book, *Battle Exhaustion* (1990), each Canadian division was assigned a unit psychiatrist to manage a separate casualty system for Canadians suffering from exhaustion. Dr. Robert Gregory was appointed to the 3rd Division in March 1944 and quickly won the confidence of his superiors, the battalion MOs, and many officers in the attached Field Ambulances. Energetic, gregarious, and colourful, Gregory prepared the Division well for battle exhaustion casualties as he established a hybrid system based on the American model.⁵⁷ Gregory's system employed both centralized and decentralized methods for evacuating and treating exhaustion cases. Severe cases or those in which a total breakdown had occurred were generally concentrated at a single designated Field Ambulance (in this case, the 22nd Field Ambulance), where Gregory personally

⁵⁶ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15076, File No. 754, WD – HLI, Award Citation, Pte. W. L. Nicol, 8 July 1944.

⁵⁷ Copp and McAndrew, *Battle Exhaustion*, Chapter 6, specifically 110-120. Moreover, he was able to arrange for officers from the Field Ambulances to attend courses at the American School of Psychiatry which greatly helped them prepare for treating exhaustion casualties. Terry Copp, "The Anatomy of Courage: The Canadian Infantryman in Normandy" Paper presented at the Canadian Historical Association, University of Guelph, June 1984, 6-7, n18.

assessed each patient to determine whether they should be returned to England.⁵⁸ On the whole, centralizing only the worst cases seems to have functioned well throughout June, as Gregory reported only 213 exhaustion cases within the 3rd Division in the first 15 days after D-Day, of which 124 recovered. By the end of the month, the 3rd Division was boasting a 64 percent return rate amongst its exhaustion casualties, and the success carried on into July, as the 1st Canadian Exhaustion Unit (activated with the II Corps in mid-July) reported only 103 severe cases that month from the 3rd Division, far fewer than other formations in the 21st Army Group.⁵⁹

However, these numbers represent only a partial reflection of reality, as Gregory's system only centralized the serious cases and placed considerable flexibility in the hands of BnHQ (and more specifically the MO) when diagnosing the severity. Mild exhaustion cases were handled within the battalion itself. However, what constituted a "mild" case was left to the discretion of the MO and the junior officers or NCOs linked to the exhausted soldier's primary group. Since each MO possessed some control over the diagnoses of severe and mild cases, inevitably there were differences in opinion from unit to unit. In the QOR, A/Major J. I. Mills found that strict discipline was the only key to handling exhaustion since any favouritism on the part of an officer toward one soldier would cause an increase in requests for rest from other soldiers and morale would plummet accordingly.⁶⁰ In other battalions officers took a more innovative and

⁵⁸ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15892, file 766, 22nd Field Ambulance (RCAMC), Log Entry, 10 June 1944 LAC, RG24, Vol. 15877, file no. 967, WD – 14th Field Ambulance, Log Entries, various dates June 1944

⁵⁹ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15661, file 700, WD – ADMS, Log Entry, 26 June 1944. The aggregate numbers were extremely "light" in comparison to the 2nd Canadian Division's exhaustion casualties in July. The 1st Canadian Exhaustion Unit admitted 391 patients from the 2nd Division that month alone. LAC, RG24, Vol. 12631, File: 11/Psychiatry/5, "Quarterly Report – 1st Canadian Exhaustion Unit (1 Jul-30 Sep 44)" Appendix II, October 1944. See also, Copp and McAndrew, *Battle Exhaustion*, 126.

⁶⁰ LAC, RG24, Vol. 10450, "BEQ #36, A/Major John Irvin Mills, QOR."

substantially less draconian approach to treating exhaustion. As Major J. G. Stothard, DSO of the SDGs explained:

Mental fatigue is something which off[ice]rs and NCOs should watch very carefully. Certainly there are positions where they cannot do a great deal to remedy a case but in many instances they can do much to forestall it. Putting a new man with a steady experienced man immediately when he comes forward is definitely the best way to start him off. Getting the affected man out for a good sleep or rest for 24 hrs at A or B ech[elon] will often save a man who otherwise might break under the strain.⁶¹

Stothard's comments seem to reflect the general consensus amongst the 3rd Division's battalions. Gregory's system placed considerable importance on each battalion's leadership as MOs were instructed to rely on reports and recommendations from unit officers and NCOs about potential exhaustion cases, as these men were in close proximity to the soldiers and had the best chances of observing early symptoms.⁶² Those cases deemed to be severe enough (but not serious enough for transfer to the 22nd Field Ambulance) were withdrawn to "A" Echelon. "A" Echelon was often referred to as "Happy Valley" as it was the battalion's rest area. Under the command of the HQ Coy commander, "A" Echelon was where all the LOB (Left Out of Battle) personnel were stationed, along with all the vehicles not in use. Moreover, it also acted as a forward training center for reinforcements and other battlefield specialists. In effect, it was the crossroads of battalion personnel – everyone who was departing from or arriving to the battalion passed through "A" Echelon.⁶³

It was there that soldiers exhibiting signs of low morale or exhaustion were given 24 to 48 hours of rest, a chance to get cleaned up, and a hot meal. As Major Clifford

⁶¹ LAC, RG24, Vol. 10450, "BEQ #205, Major J. G. Stothard, DSO, SDGs."

⁶² LAC, RG24, Vol. 12631, File: 11/Psychiatry/5, "Psychiatric Problems Amongst Canadian Troops in Normandy," 1 August 1944; Copp and McAndrew, *Battle Exhaustion*, 111.

⁶³ Barnard, *The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada, 1860-1960*, 201.

Chadderton explained, exhaustion cases in the RWR were housed in “the tent” where the patient received rest and was encouraged to discuss his experience with others. In many instances this system was “often enough to restore the courage to go back and take part in a dangerous and deadly existence” and according to him the process was always done without official records so the troops did not have to worry about any adverse consequences or accusations of cowardice.⁶⁴ Even though a safe and quiet rear area did not exist in June (as the beachhead was too narrow), a soldier’s state of mind was markedly improved if he was withdrawn from the immediate causes of his exhausted or nervous state. This was especially true if a commanding officer could rotate an entire section, platoon, or company to the reserve position for a quick rest.⁶⁵

Thus, the battalion’s entire leadership and administration had to exercise great care and efficiency in managing the movement of soldiers to and from the frontlines. Unfortunately, apart from one casualty report in the Can Scots’ July war diary, no definitive statistics on mild battle exhaustion cases exist.⁶⁶ The lack of evidence is related directly to Gregory’s system. With the severe time constraints caused by the exigencies of combat and the emphasis on handling mild cases in-house, it seems likely that the MO diagnosed his patients with minimal paperwork, often relying on informal discussions between himself and the relevant officers or NCOs, as well as a visual inspection before approving or rejecting a visit to “Happy Valley.” However, what is

⁶⁴ Chadderton, *Excuse Us!*, 85-88, quote 86.

⁶⁵ LAC, RG24, Vol. 12631, File: 11/Psychiatry/5, “Psychiatric Problems Amongst Canadian Troops in Normandy,” 1 August 1944. As the HLI’s war diary explained: “Corps has now set up a rest area in the rear to which coys are going to be able to send one man each every four days. It is thought that any man who is beginning to feel the strain may be saved from becoming a battle exhaustion case if sent back for a few days rest. Here he can get baths, wash his clothes, see shows and partake of other organized recreation. It is expected that this will be expanded to take in more men as time goes on.” LAC, RG24, Vol. 15076, File No. 754, WD – HLI, Log Entry, 30 June 1944.

⁶⁶ Copp and McAndrew, *Battle Exhaustion*, 117-118, n57.

certain is the fact that a significant number of personnel were continuously being transferred from the front to the rear, and between companies in the battalion, which provides some indication of the efforts made by BnHQ to manage its manpower deployments and provide a change of scenery to those who may have needed it.⁶⁷

Logistics

In addition to managing its human resources efficiently, BnHQ and the HQ Coy also admirably managed its material resources and logistical infrastructure. The responsibility of logistics fell under the purview of the HQ Coy's Administrative Platoon. The platoon's two officers (one being the QM and the other was the Adjutant) and 51 ORs performed one of the most vital and underappreciated tasks of any combat unit. From bullets to mortar bombs and razor blades to writing materials, their job was to document all supplies and keep tabs on the expenditure of resources.⁶⁸ If soldiers lacked sufficient quantities of fighting materials, rations, and personal necessities, high morale could not be sustained. The supply of essentials (such as ammunition, water, or food) ensured a basic umbilical cord of survival and fortified morale given that an efficient logistical infrastructure was something soldiers could depend on and trust.⁶⁹ In addition to the essentials, the supply of other materials (including tobacco, mail, paper, and razor blades) helped to bolster an individual's personal morale, by infusing an otherwise gruesome and depressing existence with a small amount of human dignity. Thus, an

⁶⁷ The movement of personnel was listed under various headings: "Casualties Other than Battle" "Postings" "Transfers" "Strength Increase" and "Strength Decrease." See: LAC, RG24, Vol 15169, File No. 753, WD – QOR, Battalion Orders, various dates, July 1944.

⁶⁸ LAC, RG24, Vol 12582, File: 11/Conf QM/1, "Minutes of QM & Dispensers Meeting," 28 July 1944, 1-5.

⁶⁹ DHH, 81/289, *Morale in Battle: Analysis*, 11. Some officers specifically described unit administration or other logistical requirements as beneficial to unit morale. LAC, RG24, Vol. 10450, "BEQ #181, Major J Pender Mollison, 1 Cdn Scots."

efficient logistical infrastructure was an asset to morale, as it provided the means and tools to conquer the physical and psychological horrors of combat and campaigning.

The supply of ammunition was central to combat effectiveness since without it soldiers could not continue fighting and morale would fail completely. Strict and efficient “drill” was established to ensure that the battalion was never without sufficient supplies of ammunition. The CO and company commanders kept tabs on the expenditure of ammunition through their respective RSMs, CSMs, and Company Quartermaster Sergeants (CQMS) whose ammunition and supply reports were an “automatic” part of their duties. As the most senior and respected NCOs within the battalion, the RSM, CSMs, and CQMSs, were very important individuals as they provided officers with a critical link between themselves and their men’s material well-being. Normal procedures dictated that CSMs and company 2ICs would discuss the unit’s supply situation with the CQMS, who would then formulate a daily report of all the company’s needs and forward it to the QM and the Administrative Platoon.⁷⁰ Once ammunition requests were received from the rifle or support companies, it was the duty of the Administrative Platoon to ensure that their demands were processed up the chain of command promptly and that some type of shuttle system was established to distribute the ammunition within the battalion once the RCASC units arrived with the supplies.⁷¹ It is also worth noting here that the CQMS’s daily reports were forwarded to the battalion CO by the QM as they were essential instruments for planning combat operations since they kept the CO apprised of the limitations and capabilities of his subordinate units.

⁷⁰ Gordon Brown and Terry Copp, *Look to Your Front ... Regina Rifles: A Regiment at War, 1935-1945* (Waterloo: LCMSDS, 2001), 90.

⁷¹ CWM, *Infantry Training Part I: The Infantry Battalion*, 15-17.

More often than not this shuttle service was provided by the CQMS's designated truck, but at times the battalion's Carrier Platoon fulfilled this role. Often acting as the battalion's logistical lifeline, the Carrier Platoon was used to transport supplies forward during combat operations. For example during operation *Windsor*, the 4 July attack on the airfield at Carpiquet, the QOR's Carrier Platoon proved its worth by transporting all the necessary supplies and ammunition forward to the embattled rifle companies, while



Photo 11: Riflemen J. R. Ramage and W. H. Maharg, of the QOR, testing the supply of fresh water that has just arrived at their positions, Bretteville, 20 June 1944. LAC, Credit: Lt. Frank Dubervill, PA-190900

it also assisted in extricating casualties to the rear.⁷² However, quite often normal procedures were too slow and the RSMs and CSMs were encouraged to take matters into their own hands, as the pamphlet, *Infantry Training Part I: The Infantry Battalion* (1944) instructed, initiative was to be taken at all times since “it is better that there should be too much ammunition than too

little.”⁷³ Accordingly, RSM J. Stothard of the Can Scots recalled one instance shortly after D-Day when his battalion needed ammunition, “I commandeered a 60-cwt [truck] and went back to the beach. The driver (Jimmy Hassel) and I took as loaders, Pte. ‘Bud’

⁷² Barnard, *The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada*, 207-209.

⁷³ CWM, *Infantry Training Part I: The Infantry Battalion*, 15-17, quote from 16.

Tweedhope and Piper Alex Waterton. We also took two prisoners with us.”⁷⁴ Such actions were often the norm in combat, especially during June, and according to most Battle Experience Questionnaires the system operated very well.⁷⁵

The supply of water was also one of the most difficult tasks the Administrative Platoon faced, as water was needed in abundance and with pressing regularity. No soldier in combat could survive long periods without water, as it prevented dehydration and sickness. Thus, careful and deliberate planning went into the provision of water and the standard “drill” developed was largely dependent on the cooperation of the Administrative Platoon, the QM, the company commanders, and the CO. The system was largely decentralized as fresh water was constantly being transported forward by the RCASC to specific “water points” where platoons or companies could send carrying parties to bring jugs of water back for the rest of the unit. Battalion Orders were used to instruct officers where these locations were established and when they could be accessed. Moreover, decontamination tablets were also issued to soldiers so that local water supplies could be consumed whenever needed, though such water was used only as a last resort.⁷⁶ Overall, the system functioned well given the circumstances and challenges of combat and was a noteworthy pillar of morale according to Major G. E. Lockwood, a company commander in the NS.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Roy, *Ready for the Fray*, 229.

⁷⁵ Perhaps Major A.M. Hamilton summarized the logistics of ammunition supply best when he answered “Yes. Splendidly during early days” to the question: Did this system work efficiently? LAC, RG24, Vol. 10450, “BEQ #35, Major A. M. Hamilton, SDGs.”

⁷⁶ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15233, File No. 934/1, WD – RWR, Battalion Orders, 23 June 1944 and 29 June 1944, LAC, RG24, Vol. 15169, File No. 753, WD – QOR, Battalion Order, 11 July 1944, LAC, RG24, Vol. 15037, File No. 734(400), WD – Can. Scots., Battalion Order, 24 June 1944.

⁷⁷ LAC, RG24, Vol. 10450, “BEQ #84, Major G. E. Lockwood, NS.”

The supply of food was another important logistical requirement. Although soldiers were often trained to go for long periods without food (and often did in battle), this obviously was not an ideal situation. The CO, the QM, and the Administrative Platoon were constantly searching for new or more efficient methods of feeding the troops. Normal procedures, developed during the Italian campaign, dictated that the QM would request ration supplies (normally 72-hours in advance) and RCASC units

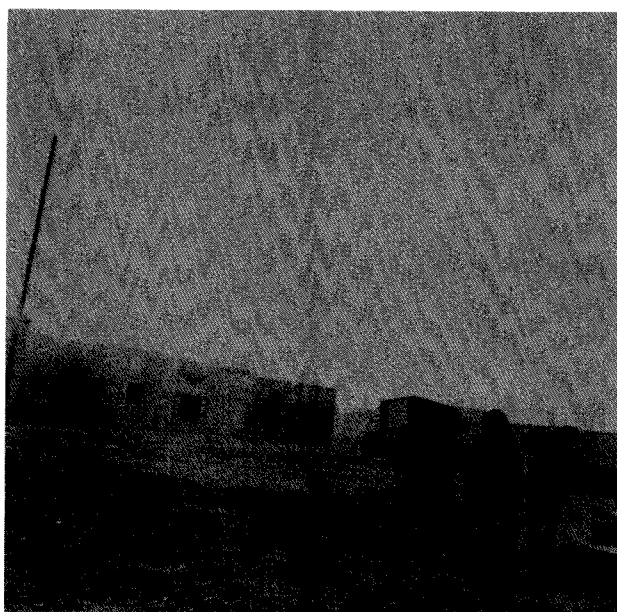


Photo 12: A rare photograph of a carrying party. Note the boxes of compo rations and the jugs of water.
LAC, RG24, Vol. 15199, File No. 744, WD - RR, July 1944.

(attached to the Brigade) would transport the supplies to “B” Echelon. Usually located near the Brigade or Divisional HQ, “B” Echelon was commanded by the battalion’s QM and was the unit’s all-purpose storage facility. From there the rations were distributed to the company areas where platoons could send carrying parties to pick them up.⁷⁸ However, in Normandy this system could not be

implemented initially, as the Allies controlled little territory, possessed a limited number of serviceable roads, and lacked forward supply depots. Normal lines of communication could not be established, and as a result service personnel off-loading supplies on the beaches resorted to packing any vehicles heading inland with as much as possible. As

⁷⁸ LAC, RG24, Vol. 12750, File: 24/Episodes/7, “Feeding an Army,” n. d.; Barnard, *The Queen’s Own Rifles of Canada*, 201.

the battle progressed, the logistical system was streamlined and RCASC personnel transported (often under heavy fire) the needed ammunition or other supplies directly into battalion or company areas where carrying parties distributed them. Only after the lines stabilized north of Caen by mid-June, and once a supply depot was established (near Thaon), could regular procedures involving “B” Echelon be resurrected.⁷⁹

As long as the QM could efficiently distribute the rations throughout the battalion soldiers received a very basic dietary minimum which they often supplemented with local produce. However, while the continuous supply of food to front-line units ensured that soldiers could remain effective, ration quality was far from delicious. A suggested supper serving included such delicacies as “meat blocks” for stew, biscuits or hard tack (a bread substitute), tea, and sweets. The suggested recipe for “meat stew” was equally delightful, “crumble [meat] blocks finely into mess tin with any broken biscuit left over. Stir in water gradually to make wettish paste. Add meat cubes, if any left. Heat while continuously stirring, add water as needed.”⁸⁰ Therefore, an especially industrious QM or astute junior officer was never fully satisfied with the food situation and was always searching for improvements in order to prevent soldiers from leaving their positions in search of fresher fare. The static nature of the fighting north of Caen attenuated the situation somewhat, as local animals (especially cows) were often caught in the crossfire or wandered into booby traps or company defences. When such incidents occurred, battalion cooks and other personnel from the Administrative Platoon were rushed forward to collect and store the carcasses before they rotted. However, it would seem that the average soldier did not always enjoy in the feast when this occurred. For

⁷⁹ Warren, *Wait for the Wagon*, 280-285.

⁸⁰ LAC, RG24, Vol. 12633, File: 11/Rations/3/2, “24 HR Ration Pack,” 22 January 1944, 1.

example, the NNSH war diarist repeatedly commented on how often BnHQ staff ate beef dinners, while soldiers at the sharp end ate their meat stew and compo rations. As a result, it appears that in some cases the HQ personnel were not alerted to dispose of the carcasses and company or platoon officers took the initiative to secure the fresh meat for their own unit dinners.⁸¹

The supply of other personal necessities was also central to morale. The QM was responsible for storing and distributing all forms of equipment and supplies for the entire battalion. Most significantly, it was his role to ensure that all troops received a continuous supply of new uniforms, haversacks, entrenching tools, and all other types of equipment that each soldier required to perform his role in the giant machine of modern war. Without this steady supply it is doubtful that a material incentive to continue fighting would have developed or been sustained.⁸² Furthermore, life on the front offered little luxury and therefore soldiers took great comfort in small pleasures, such as razor blades and shaving cream, cigarettes, reading material, chocolate, and most especially, mail. In the field, these items and other types of personal comforts did not just materialize in soldiers' hands. In some cases, donations from community organizations or the auxiliary services provided them, but shipments were irregular. However, soldiers could rely on a stable supply of such inexpensive items from the QM, and in the case of razor blades they could be purchased at a cost of five blades for three

⁸¹ As the NNSH war diarist noted, "B" Company hosted a dinner of steak, potatoes, cabbage, tomato juice, and fruit on the 25 June 1944. BnHQ only learned of this after the CO and the IO were invited for the dinner. LAC, RG24, Vol. 15122, File No. 734, WD – NNSH, Log Entry, various dates June 1944, specifically 25 June 1944.

⁸² The importance or occasional failings of the QM was ridiculed on more than one occasion in the soldiers' newspapers. For example see: LAC, RG24, Vol. 15271, File No. 752, WD – SDGs, *The West Wall Climber*, Issue No 17, 22 July 1944 and another Undated Issue.

pence.⁸³ Thus, the QM outfitted all soldiers in the battalion with all the supplies they needed to both remain effective in combat and sustain morale.

Cigarettes were a favourite release from the physical and psychological exhaustion of combat. Practically every man smoked in battle, as Trooper W. Gibson of the 27th Armoured Regiment (The Sherbrooke Fusiliers) wrote of his experience in Normandy, “A fellow smokes a terrific number of cigarettes when in action in a tank – it helps relieve his nerves.”⁸⁴ Moreover Ernie Pyle, the famous American war correspondent, observed that, “A guy in war has to have some outlet for his nerves, and I guess smoking is as good as anything.”⁸⁵ Normandy was a stressful place to be in the summer of 1944 and evidence suggests that even the tobacco companies in Canada under-estimated consumption rates as they were deluged with orders for cigarettes after D-Day. By September 1944 most companies were three days to three and a half weeks behind in their orders.⁸⁶ While soldiers did receive cigarettes in bulk from family members after writing home their requests, smokes could be obtained through other avenues. Fags were available within each compo ration, they could be purchased from the auxiliary services, and they were often shared amongst friends.⁸⁷

⁸³ On 26 June the Queen’s Own Rifles received a donation of 772 packages of razor blades from the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire (IODE) which were to be distributed through the QM. LAC, RG24, Vol. 15168, File No. 753, WD – QOR, Battalion Order, 26 June 1944. Each supervisor with the Knights of Columbus possessed 500 razors as well. *War Services of Canadian Knights of Columbus, 1939-1947: A History of the Work of the Knights of Columbus Canadian Army Huts*, 138; LAC, RG24, Vol. 6640-6641, RO #2131: “Razor Blades” *Canadian Army Overseas Routine Orders, Vol. I, II, III* (London: CMHQ, 20 August 1943).

⁸⁴ As quoted in: Serge M. Durflinger. *Fighting From Home: The Second World War in Verdun, Quebec* (Toronto: UBC Press, 2006), 63.

⁸⁵ Quoted in: Ernie Pyle, *Brave Men* (New York: Holt & Co., 1944), 447; Ellis, *The Sharp End of War*, 294-295.

⁸⁶ LAC, RG24, Vol. 6640-6641, Routine Order (RO) #5098: “Gift Cigarettes from Canada” *Canadian Army Overseas Routine Orders, Vol. VII* (London: CMHQ, 30 September 1944).

⁸⁷ LAC, MG30 E538, File No.: 2, Peter R. Griffin Fonds, Letter to Marg, 6 July 1944; LAC, MG30 E462, Elmer Harold Atkinson Fonds, Letter to Parents, 19 November 1944.

The auxiliary services also provided other field comforts to the soldiers, as arrangements were made for the distribution of chocolate and reading materials for the soldiers' pleasure when rotated out of the line or recovering in hospital.⁸⁸ By late July, 50 lbs. bags of magazines and newspapers were being shipped to the front via air mail, and soldiers could peruse the headlines in *Macleans Magazine* or the "new streamlined" copies of the *Montreal Standard*, *Winnipeg Weekly Free Press*, and the *National Home Monthly*.⁸⁹ As the campaign in North-west Europe continued, and as factories in Paris and other major cities fell into Allied hands, the Canadian auxiliary services began to coordinate the distribution of Coca Cola to Canadian forces on the continent.⁹⁰ Although the auxiliary services and parcels from home were the main sources of many field comforts, BnHQ and the HQ Coy still played an important role in their provision, as the CO and his staff were responsible for coordinating and communicating the battalion's location and needs to the auxiliary services during pauses in battle.⁹¹ Thus, BnHQ and the HQ Coy acted as a critical link in the provision of field comforts, as it regulated when and where the auxiliary services would visit the unit.

⁸⁸ LAC, RG24, Vol 10137, File No.: 23/Chocolate/1, "Canadian Auxiliary Services Chocolate" June 1944, LAC, RG24, Vol 10137, File No.: 23/Chocolate/1/2, "Canadian Auxiliary Services Chocolate" July and August 1944; Young, *Red Shield in Action*, 106-110.

⁸⁹ LAC, RG24, 10134, File No. 23/Book/1/6, "Auxiliary Services: Current Reading for 21 Army Group" 13 July 1944; LAC, RG24, 10134, File No.: 23/Book/1/6, "Forwarding Current Periodicals" 10 July 1944; LAC, RG24, 10134, File No.: 23/Book/1/6, "Current Reading by Post to France: Suggested Drill" 11 July 1944.

⁹⁰ LAC, RG24, Vol. 10138, File No.. 23/Cola Con/1/3, "Provision of Coca-Cola in 21 Army Group" 26 September 1944; LAC, RG24, Vol. 10138, File No.: 23/Cola Con/1/3, "Cola Drinks for Cdn Forces in France" 14 November 1944; Scott Young, *Red Shield in Action*, 106-110

⁹¹ CWM, *Infantry Training Part I: The Infantry Battalion*, 18

The Administrative Platoon also played a similar supportive role in regards to mail. In effect, it was the hub through which all the soldiers' mail passed to and from the front. Mail was a constant preoccupation of the foot-soldier, as it was his only medium of communication with loved ones back home in Canada and parcels filled with all manner of personal necessities greatly augmented his standard of living. Although mail was censored and distributed to soldiers at the unit level, and postal units handled its



Photo 13: Unidentified infantryman of the 9th Canadian Brigade writing a letter, 8-9 July 1944. Note the paper and writing implement. LAC, Credit: Lt. Frank Duberville, PA-132800

delivery to the battalion, BnHQ and the Administrative Platoon assisted the postal services in a variety of ways. In the first case, they disseminated information through Battalion Orders which often included instructions about censorship regulations or updates on mail deliveries.⁹² In other units, battalion newspapers were also utilized to keep soldiers apprised of mail deliveries or, as was more often the case, joke at the

lack thereof.⁹³ Secondly, the HQ Coy also acted as the collection point and distribution centre for all of the battalion's mail. Company HQs were ordered to collect the censored mail from platoon commanders and forward it to the QM, who would arrange to send it

⁹² LAC, RG24, Vol. 15198, File No. 744, WD – RR, Battalion Order, 10 June 1944.

⁹³ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15122, File No. 734, WD – NNSH, *The Fish-Billie Express*, 13 June 1944; LAC, RG24, Vol. 15037, File No. 734(400), WD – Can Scots, *The Tommy Cooker*, specifically issue #6, #12, and #16, June 1944.

to the attached postal units and the QM was also responsible for distributing mail to all the companies upon delivery.⁹⁴ Thirdly, BnHQ and the Administrative Platoon also worked with the auxiliary services to ensure that stocks of paper were available for letter writing. Accordingly, soldiers often wrote home on paper provided by the auxiliary services or on the battalion's own letterhead.⁹⁵ Finally, the QM and BnHQ were also responsible for supplying the soldiers with writing implements and ink, as *The Tommy Cooker* humorously chided the arrangement: "If you want ink for writing letters, get your Pl[atoon] Sgt. to see your Pl[atoon] Officer to see your Co[mpany] Com[mander] to tell your CSM to have your Co[mpany] Clerk inform the runner that one bottle per Co[mpany] is available at BnHQ, O.K?"⁹⁶

Discipline

The soldiers' daily lives and morale were often defined by the provision or absence of weapons and ammunition, rations, and other personal necessities. It was the role of the Administrative Platoon to regulate and manage the material resources of the battalion. In doing so, that logistical infrastructure provided soldiers with a material culture that acted as an important platform on which morale could be maintained. Thus, the actions of the Administrative Platoon ensured that the foot-soldier received at least a

⁹⁴ Censorship regulations for the infantry were as follows. No picture postcards, no reference to location except country ("Somewhere in ____"), and descriptions of personal experiences could only be discussed if 14 days had passed, if no mention of location, dates, or casualties was made, and if no unit details were discussed LAC, RG24, Vol. 15198, File No. 744, WD – RR, Battalion Order, 10 June 1944; LAC, RG24, Vol. 15168, File No. 753, WD – QOR, Battalion Order, 13 June 1944; DHH, 87/151, *21 Army Group: Unit Censorship Instructions*, n. d.

⁹⁵ For example, the private letter collection of Patrick Fletcher was written on paper with the emblems of the Knights of Columbus, the Legion, and his Regiment, Private Collection, Patrick Fletcher Letters Collection and Family Fonds, Courtesy of Mrs Pat Fletcher and the Fletcher family.

⁹⁶ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15037, File No. 734(400), WD – Can Scots, *The Tommy Cooker*, issue # 13, 23 June 1944.

basic minimum of supplies that kept him as healthy as possible. Their efforts supported morale by providing a basic material incentive to continue fighting. However, on the battlefield logistical arrangements were far from certain. Owing to weather conditions, combat operations, distance, inexperience, and human error, supply problems were a constant irritant. Accordingly, soldiers looted to offset any shortages or to augment the basic minimum provided. This was problematic as looting could threaten unit discipline



Photo 14: Personnel of the QOR milking a cow, Bretteville, 20 June 1944.
LAC, Credit: Lt. Frank Dubervill, PA-190901

provided the basic minimum for sustaining morale, than discipline regulated the maximum.

Regulating the maximum of material possession made good sense, as soldiers lived in constant uncertainty. Unsure of whether they would survive or not, soldiers were inclined to live in the moment and indulge themselves whenever possible. Placed in the context of depravity, horror, and agonizing tension, looting can be rationalized in part, as soldiers desired both a release from the strain and an increase in their standard of living.

and morale. Therefore, the CO and his subordinate officers were obliged to rigorously enforce standards of discipline to regulate their soldiers' behaviour and material possession, so that unit morale would not fluctuate too severely during periods of shortages or surpluses. In doing so, logistics and discipline became joined and provided the parameters within which morale fluctuated. If logistics

The creation of more elaborate slit trenches with greater shelter from the elements made good sense to any soldier battling geography and weather as much as the enemy. Moreover, the endless hunger pains of soldiers fed up with an unappetizing diet of meat stew and hard tack provided ample incentive to continuously scrounge for food and drink. Throughout history armies have always lived off the land they conquer and in Normandy this was no different. As the fighting moved inland and turned the countryside into a desolate and destroyed landscape, much of the local population migrated from the region. This meant that looting became much more extensive as soldiers had greater time and access to local property and food sources. Cows, goats, and chickens were the most desired as they provided fresh meat, milk, and eggs. As the HLI's war diarist noted when his battalion occupied the deserted village of Les Buissons on 12 June, "The men spent hours feeding and watering [the animals]. Many chickens found their way into the stew pot in the next couple days. And of course the cows were milked. After three weeks of compo rations you can be sure the farmers' potato patch and onion patch took a beating." To justify the actions of the men, the war diarist added, "but there was little argument you could use against them as they had hundreds to counter it 'they would only be taken anyway' etc. etc."⁹⁷

Moreover, since field comforts and other personal necessities were not always available, soldiers looted mattresses for sleeping on and sheet metal or barn doors to create roofs for their slit trenches. All manner of other items that augmented or maintained a minimal standard of living were also secured by scrounging soldiers. CSM Charles Martin explained that his company liberated a cast iron cooking pot and whenever ration supplies were low the soldiers would gather up "all the odds and ends

⁹⁷ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15076, File No. 754, WD – HLI, Log Entry, 12 June 1944.

we could find around the village” and toss them into the “makeshift super-cooker” that could feed the entire company.⁹⁸ In that regard, looting was of a practical nature, geared towards securing fresher food and increasing miserable living conditions to something approaching their time in England.⁹⁹ As the HLI’s war diarist explained, when the battalion finally moved from its positions at Les Buisson on the 21 June, the complicated nature of what to keep and what to leave behind became a primary concern and the sight of all ranks packing up their equipment and loot was good entertainment:

No one could refrain from laughing when they saw the [battalion] on the move. D Co[mpan]y moved complete with their twelve cows, several chickens, a few push carts, etc. Most [companies] had their cows trailing behind their bicycles – and of course they were careful not to trot them too hard – it does something to the milk they say. The sig[nal]s had a little calf – “who would starve if they didn’t take it along” so it was hoisted bodily, bawling lustily into the back of their truck. The I. O. drew the line when the I sec[ti]on requested permission to bring all the horses with them, although the I sec[ti]on and sig[nal]s had been making all their runs between [companies] for weeks on horse back. If ever there was an army on the move the HLI least resembled an army that day.¹⁰⁰

Some soldiers also adopted pets. In one case, the HLI’s war diarist mocked his friend Captain G. D. Sim, and his pet rabbit named Wilbur, “Wilbur was only a half grown rabbit and his extreme youth probably was the reason for the strange antics he used to go through as [Captain Sim] chased him through the cabbage patch just before the unit left Les Buissons.” Luckily, Captain Sim caught Wilbur but once in Anguerny the rabbit disappeared for good – and was possibly eaten.¹⁰¹ Thus, in most cases looting was a common and accepted practice since it offered material and psychological relief.

⁹⁸ Martin, *Battle Diary*, 41-43, quotes from 50.

⁹⁹ Longden, *To the Victor the Spoils*, Chapters 10 and 11.

¹⁰⁰ LAC, RG24, Vol 15076, File No. 754, WD – HLI, Log Entry, 21 June 1944.

¹⁰¹ Although later promoted to Major, sadly G. D. Sim lost his life on 6 September 1944 LAC, RG24, Vol. 15076, File No 754, WD – HLI, Log Entry, 21 June 1944

However, looting also had a dark side. Despite its amusing and practical nature there were inevitably those who stole for extravagance, and did so mercilessly and sometimes with sinister intentions. Upon entering a village or town some Canadian soldiers turned into locusts. Troops pilfered civilian crops extensively, ruthlessly pulling up growing vegetables and destroying the entire harvest in their quest to feed themselves.¹⁰² The search for items of value or souvenirs also meant that Canadian



Photo 15: Cpl. N. S. McDonald of the HLI gathering eggs, 20 June 1944.
LAC, Credit: Lt. Ken Bell, PA-133114

soldiers ransacked houses – whether they were abandoned by civilians or not. As Captain C. R. R. Douthwaite, commanding officer of the 3rd Field Security Section explained in his 24 June security report, that civilians particularly hated the deliberate acts of vandalism and looting, such as “china broken, furniture broken up for fire-wood, dresses torn, etc.; gardens ruined by troops pulling up vegetables

and throwing them away because they are too small.”¹⁰³ In addition to targeting civilian sources, soldiers also pilfered military supplies whenever possible. Instances of soldiers cannibalizing destroyed or discarded military equipment were common. According to Battalion Orders from the QOR, knocked out tanks were frequent targets and anything

¹⁰² LAC, RG24, Vol. 16391, File No. 543, WD – 3rd Field Security Section, Field Security Report No. 2, 24 June 1944, 3; LAC, RG24, Vol. 15168, File No. 753, WD – QOR, Battalion Order, 16 June 1944.

¹⁰³ LAC, RG24, Vol. 16391, File No. 543, WD – 3rd Field Security Section, Field Security Report No. 2, 24 June 1944, 3.

not nailed down and in serviceable condition was removed and recycled, especially wireless sets and .30-calibre Browning machine guns.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, the theft of rations from army stores and other battalions occurred whenever the opportunity presented itself and the higher grade compo ration packs were always targeted.¹⁰⁵

One particular complication inherent to looting in Normandy was the abundance of calvados, a powerful spirit derived from apples, as nearly every farmhouse possessed



Photo 16: Pte. F. L. Galvert and L/Cpl. Gooding of the HLI milking a goat, 20 June 1944.
LAC, Credit: Lt. Ken Bell, PA-133117.

a cellar filled with alcohol. While French civilians had been quite generous with drink upon liberation, Canadian soldiers proved quite adept at uncovering other stores civilians had carefully concealed. For young soldiers facing their own mortality, drinking was a welcomed release. However, if left unchecked alcohol consumption posed a serious problem for unit morale, as drunk or hung-over

soldiers would not be as inclined to follow orders or be as effective in combat operations. Every BnHQ had to deal with this issue and utilized strict orders against alcohol abuse. As early as 10 June men from the NNSH found a 750 gallon keg of wine and soldiers queued for their share, but the “dirty new Adjutant” stopped them and placed it under guard. Already suffering from heavy losses during the fighting at Buron

¹⁰⁴ LAC, RG24, Vol 15168, File No 753, WD – QOR, Battalion Order, 22 June 1944

¹⁰⁵ Blackburn, *The Guns of Normandy*, 46-51, LAC, RG24, Vol 15169, File No 753, WD – QOR, Battalion Order, 22 July 1944, Longden, *To the Victor the Spoils*, 192-194

and Authie on the 7-8 June, the NNSH could ill afford the discipline problems of widespread alcohol abuse.¹⁰⁶ Similar actions were taken on 13 June by Lt-Col. Griffiths of the HLI, who ordered that all farms be placed out of bounds to prevent any looting and “ordered all sheds and wine cellars locked to put temptation out of the way.” As the war diarist concluded that this “was one way of ensuring that all men would be at all times in a fit state for fighting.”¹⁰⁷

Drunkenness was rampant in other parts of the line. On 18 June, the day before



Photo 17: Sgt. C. Orton of the HLI drinking pilfered cider, 20 June 1944.
LAC, Credit: Lt. Ken Bell, PA-133113.

the QOR was scheduled to move from Bray to Bretteville, some soldiers gained access to the nearly “inexhaustible supply” of alcohol in the town and drank well beyond their limits. In response, BnHQ put all liquor under guard and sent a patrol under Captain J. Price to round up all the remaining alcohol and his men confiscated about 130 bottles in total.¹⁰⁸ However, the 8th

Brigade was somewhat luckier than the 7th Brigade, which suffered three deaths linked to alcohol abuse.¹⁰⁹ On 22 June, the RR issued warnings against the consumption of wine and spirits because of their potential bacterial content, as numerous poisonings and

¹⁰⁶ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15122, File No. 734, WD – NNSH, Log Entry, 10 June 1944

¹⁰⁷ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15076, File No. 754, WD – HLI, Log Entry, 13 June 1944

¹⁰⁸ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15168, File No. 753, WD – QOR, Log Entry, 18 June 1944.

¹⁰⁹ LAC RG24, Vol. 15233, File No. 934/1, WD – RWR, Battalion Order, 23 June 1944

one death had been reported from contaminated alcohol. Moreover, a few days later it was also widely reported that a soldier in the division had “sampled a drink from a liquor bottle containing a corrosive liquid” and additional warnings were issued against the purchase of alcohol from locals.¹¹⁰ The issue of alcohol abuse prompted COs and their HQs to take greater precautions and institute even-stricter disciplinary standards as the fighting and dying continued in Normandy, culminating in a full-blown clampdown on discipline at the end of June.

From surviving evidence in battalion war diaries it is possible to chart the evolution of this disciplinary crackdown. Judging from Battalion Orders, it appears that the regulation of looting was not a major priority for BnHQs in the first part of June, notwithstanding its prevalence from the moment soldiers landed on D-Day. Apart from three Battalion Orders issued on the 10 and 15 June from the RR and QOR BnHQs, there were no other written orders outlawing looting published before 19 June.¹¹¹ The only other recorded attempt to curtail looting before late-June was an SDG “Orders Group” held by Lt-Col. Christiansen at which time the problem of theft and the use of force against civilians was addressed.¹¹² It would seem that an attitude of indifference initially prevailed among Canadian units and the war diarist of the HLI provides an example of this as he continually discussed the lighter side of looting when he recorded one humorous argument between two soldiers over a stolen cow:

The air was frequently rent by loud voices in the early morning. The centre of an excited mob would be a peaceful cow calmly chewing her cud and quite disinterested in the rabble about her. Two soldiers could be seen arguing furiously along these lines, “Where are you going with my cow”

¹¹⁰ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15198, File No. 744, WD – RR, Battalion Order, 22 June 1944, 25 June 1944.

¹¹¹ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15198, File No. 744, WD – RR, Battalion Order, 10 June 1944, 15 June 1944; LAC, RG24, Vol. 15168, File No. 753, WD – QOR, Battalion Order, 15 June 1944.

¹¹² LAC, RG-24, Vol. 15270, File No. 752, WD – SDGs, Log Entry, 13 June 1944.

“That’s not your cow, it is my cow” “Like Hell it is I’ve been feeding it for two days.” And henchmen hoping for a taste of bovine nectar would substantiate the arguments of both.¹¹³

However, the situation was drastically altered by the “Great Gale” that struck the Norman coastline on 19 June. The sudden onset of the powerful storm effectively halted the off-loading of supplies on the beaches. In order to support the Allied armies fighting inland, two artificial harbours (codenamed Mulberry) had been constructed and floated across the English Channel to handle Allied shipping requirements. However, while the British Mulberry harbour at Arromanches remained in operation following the storm, the American one at St. Laurent was irrevocable damaged. The impact of the storm cannot be overstated, as it threw Allied logistics into a tail spin. On 16 June along the Anglo-Canadian sector approximately 11,200 tons of supplies were unloaded, but that total dropped to a mere 2,700 tons by 21 June. Only on 25 June did total tonnage off-loaded (19,900 tons) reach levels superior to that of 16 June.¹¹⁴ Thus, shortages were expected and countermeasures had to be arranged.

The sudden onset of the storm forced Canadian units to conserve supplies to avoid crippling shortages. This meant that stricter controls over army property and the troops’ behaviour had to be enacted. Thus, in the days after the storm hit, and in line with the orders against surging alcohol abuse, anti-looting measures became a central feature of most Battalion Orders. On 22 June, Lt-Col. Spragge forbade his men to supplement their meagre rations through the purchase of bread from locals as future

¹¹³ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15076, File No. 754, WD – HLI, Log Entry, 12 June 1944.

¹¹⁴ DHH, CMHQ Report 147, J.R. Martin Series, “Canadian Participation in the Operations in North-West Europe, 1944. Part I: The Assault and Subsequent Operations of 3 CDN Inf Div and 2 CDN Armd Bde, 6-30 June 44” 3 Dec. 1945, 89-90.

shortages of flour were expected.¹¹⁵ Instances of looting must have become widespread within the 7th Brigade, as all three battalions (the RR, the Can Scots, and RWR) issued identical orders within days of each other. In all cases, the orders warned soldiers that looting property, animals, or any growing crops was a serious offense; that it was each soldier's responsibility to apprehend anyone seen looting, and (without identifying any possible punishments) it warned soldiers that severe disciplinary repercussions would be taken against any offenders. In the case of the RWR and the Can Scots, this warning was included in their first official issue of Battalion Orders since before D-Day.¹¹⁶ Other Battalion Orders designed to combat looting followed. On 23 June, soldiers in the RWR were warned against the unnecessary destruction of the local art, monuments, archives, and architecture with cultural or historical value to the region, (soldiers in the QOR received the same warnings on 3 July). Another RWR Battalion Order issued on 26 June placed all cow pastures out of bounds and added the milking of cows to the definition of looting.¹¹⁷ As the heavy fighting carried on into late July many battalion COs in the division followed suit, issuing orders that placed villages and other areas out of bounds in order to limit the soldiers' access to anything of value, instructing sub-unit commanders to establish court martials to try offenders, and to impress upon all ranks the seriousness of the crimes.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ LAC, RG24, Vol 15168, File No. 753, WD – QOR, Battalion Order, 22 June 1944

¹¹⁶ LAC, RG24, Vol 15198, File No 744, WD – RR, Battalion Order, 22 June 1944; LAC, RG24, Vol. 15037, File No 734(400), WD – Can Scots, Battalion Order, 24 June 1944; LAC RG24, Vol 15233, File No. 934/1, WD – RWR, Battalion Order, 23 June 1944.

¹¹⁷ LAC RG24, Vol. 15233, File No. 934/1, WD – RWR, Battalion Order, 23 June 1944, 26 June 1944; LAC, RG24, Vol 15169, File No. 753, WD – QOR, Battalion Order, 3 July 1944.

¹¹⁸ On 7 July the QOR's BnHQ even issued explicit instructions explaining the procedures and restrictions governing all villages placed out of bounds. LAC, RG24, Vol 15169, File No 753, WD – QOR, Battalion Order, 3 July 1944, 7 July 1944, 10 July 1944, 11 July 1944, 26 July 1944, and 28 July 1944.

The logic of the disciplinary crackdown was quite simple: if soldiers were busy looting and harassing the locals, they were not in the lines concentrating on killing the enemy. Moreover, if soldiers satiated their appetites and improved their living conditions through looting, their fighting spirit was threatened. As the pamphlet, *Morale in Battle: Analysis* pointed out, “Morale cannot be good unless it contains a quality of hardness. Hardship and privation are the school of the good soldier; idleness and luxury are his enemies.”¹¹⁹ If soldiers looted mattresses to sleep on and other materials to build roofs for their slit-trenches, why would they want to leave that luxury and risk their lives capturing the next objective? Idleness and luxury might make happy soldiers, but they did not make willing fighters. Though enforced by his subordinate officers and NCOs, the CO utilized discipline to control the material possessions of his soldiers. Discipline was thus used to rein in the soldiers and ensure that they were never fully satisfied and never fully comfortable, as that would entail the first step in the deterioration of unit morale.

The discipline crackdown was also necessary to help preserve the moral integrity of the Allied war effort. Although the Allied prosecution of the Second World War was not without its own blemishes and questionable conduct, the Allies were, for the most part, able to defeat the Axis powers in the fight for the moral high-ground. As historian Richard Overy explained, the Allied powers were able to successfully identify their cause with progressive and righteous values, and went to great lengths to propagandize their collective war efforts as essential to human progress.¹²⁰ However, when the Allies came ashore in Normandy, the savage looting and pilfering of civilian food sources and

¹¹⁹ DHH, 81/289, *Morale in Battle: Analysis*, 23.

¹²⁰ Richard Overy, *Why the Allies Won* (London: Pimlico, 2006), Chapter 9.

property was counter-productive to the progressive and virtuous self-image they had carefully crafted. Thus, it became necessary to regulate the soldiers' behaviour. This forced General Rod Keller, CO of the 3rd Division, on 11 July to issue a standing order that placed Caen out of bounds to all troops. After outlining his instructions the order concluded:

It is emphasized to ALL ranks that the people of CAEN have lived through hell during the past month and deserve every consideration. It is up to all Canadian and British soldiers to preserve discipline and to render assistance in every way to the Allied people, who have already shown their happiness at liberation. In conclusion it is further emphasized there must be NO LOOTING.¹²¹

In line with preserving the moral integrity of the Allied forces, efforts were also made to guard against profiteering. One particular Battalion Order issued by Lt-Col. Spragge informed the troops about General Dwight Eisenhower's "Price wages and Rationing Ordinance #1" which established commodity prices in the liberated areas of France. The price list was based off the approximate cost of cheese, milk, eggs, vegetables, and butter on 5 June and the order also instructed soldiers that they were not allowed to charge civilians more than those prices outlined.¹²² However, the order did little to control the emerging black market since most troops bartered with the locals, trading cigarettes, rations, chocolate, petrol, and other army equipment for local commodities and fresh food. As historian Sean Longden pointed out, the black market

¹²¹ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15169, File No. 753, WD – QOR, Battalion Order, 11 July 1944.

¹²² The Battalion Order outlined the following prices: Cheese – 7 Franks (F) 50 per pound; Milk – 4 F per litre; Eggs – 36 F per dozen; Vegetables – 10 F per kilo; Butter – 60 F per kilo. Ibid, Battalion Order, 3 July 1944.

only grew more elaborate as the campaign in Northwest Europe continued and no effective countermeasures were ever found to control it in any meaningful way.¹²³

Although the morale of Canadian soldiers could not have been maintained without comradeship or the peer pressure of their primary groups, it was also stimulated and sustained by wider social, structural, and administrative factors and facilitators. Through the provision of visible and dynamic leadership at all levels of command, progressive organizational initiatives designed to improve fighting efficiency and unit cohesion, the diligent administration of all logistical requirements, and the enforcement of proactive disciplinary standards, BnHQ and the HQ Coy helped reinforce and buttress the fighting spirit of the soldiers under their command. Often working behind the scenes and without much credit, the HQ personnel ensured that an efficient organization supported the soldiers whatever the circumstances or situation. Thus, the infantry battalion should be seen as an organic entity that evolved with combat operations to regulate the parameters within which morale fluctuated.

¹²³ DHH, CMHQ Report 149, A K Reid Series, "Canadian Participation in Civil Affairs/Military Government Part III France, General Historical Survey, July-October 1944" 18 January 1946, 6, Longden, *To the Victor the Spoils*, Chapters 4, 10, and 11

CONCLUSION

BEYOND D-DAY

The Normandy campaign is often described as a bloody battle of attrition. From the operational-strategic paradigm this conclusion requires an elaborate discussion of how the enemy was bludgeoned to death by greater quantities of manpower and material resources, force deployments, and operational tempo. Historians are quick to point to the tactics of Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, commander of the 21st Army Group, as evidence of the Allied propensity for attrition and the set-piece battle. Although greatly debated by historians after the war, Montgomery's operational strategy in Normandy developed along two general lines. On the eastern flank of the bridgehead, the Anglo-Canadians undertook a series of continuous offensives designed to grind down German armour and manpower resources, thereby shielding the western flank where American forces could breakout.¹ However, lost in this discussion is the impact of attritional warfare on the infantry, fighting and dying to fulfill Montgomery's strategic calculations. The grisly casualty rate provides some indication of its impact. Over roughly 76 days of heavy combat, total Canadian casualties from all formations amounted to 18,444, of which 5,021 were fatal.² That phenomenal number amounted to an approximate average of 2.8 fatal casualties per hour, or about 66 deaths per day throughout the entire campaign. Although not all of these battle casualties were from the

¹ Stacey, *The Victory Campaign*, 141-147. For a discussion of Montgomery's tactics and the post-war debate among historians, see: D'Este, *Decision in Normandy*, Chapter 28. For a discussion of Allied strategy in relation to manpower and material resources, see: John Ellis, *Brute Force: Allied Strategy and Tactics in the Second World War* (London: André Deutsch, 1990).

² Stacey, *The Victory Campaign*, 271.

infantry, the vast majority were, demonstrating the horrific outcome of attrition on the ordinary soldier at the sharp end.

Perhaps the full scope of attritional warfare and its impact on the individual is best reflected in the non-battle casualty statistics – chiefly in the prevalence or scarcity of disease. One of the most glaring absences from the disciplinary crackdown at the end of June and into July was the issue of venereal disease (VD). Apart from one 7 July Battalion Order issued by Lt-Col. Spragge there is little evidence to suggest it was a major concern of battalion commanders or even Major J. B. Cram, the VD Control Officer (VDCO) for the 3rd Division.³ Surviving records from the 3rd Division's ADMS and the 7th Field Hygiene Section indicate that a grand total of 57 confirmed cases were contracted by soldiers in the division from June to August, and the majority of those cases appear to have originated with the divisional troops in the rear and not the infantry. Moreover, in the June and July period the total number of VD cases (15 and 25 confirmed cases respectively) were outnumbered by the 44 cases of pediculosis pubis (pubic lice) and almost equal to the 41 cases of scabies over the same eight weeks.⁴ The total number of VD cases was “exceedingly low” given that only seven of the 25 confirmed cases in July were from the nine infantry battalions in the division, and considering that, as Major Cram reported, “Instructional work and training [on VD prevention] has been practically nil” and that “no prophylactic stations [were] operating” in the division's area as of 1 August 1944.⁵ The fact that VD was not prevalent in Normandy is a startling revelation given its epidemic proportions in later months. From

³ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15169, File No 753, WD – QOR, Battalion Order, 7 July 1944.

⁴ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15661, file 700, WD – ADMS, “Monthly Hygiene Report” by Major E. L. Davey, 7th Field Hygiene Section, 2 August 1944, 1-3 and Table I. See Table 1 in Appendix I.

⁵ Ibid, “Monthly VD Report – July 1944” by Major J. B. Cram, VDCO, 3rd Canadian Infantry Division, 2 August 1944, 1; Ibid, “Monthly Hygiene Report” by Major E. L. Davey, 7th Field Hygiene Section, 2 August 1944, 1-3, quote from 1.

October to December 1944 the recorded number of confirmed VD cases in the division was 304 – the majority of which were contracted in November after the Scheldt campaign and while the division was stationed in reserve near Ghent, a densely populated city in northern Belgium. As historian Jeffrey Keshen pointed out in *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers* (2004), the problem remained severe wherever Canadian units went thereafter.⁶

Apart from the smaller number of Canadian soldiers in Normandy at the time, this uniquely low trend in VD rates was a consequence of the concentrated and unrelenting nature of attritional warfare. The fact that the battle inland stagnated north of Caen in June and early July, meant that the destruction it caused became focussed in areas that were already sparsely populated. As the war engulfed these small villages, most civilians migrated away from the strife and danger, thereby decreasing the likelihood of widespread sexual fraternization between Canadian soldiers and the locals. This meant that soldiers occupied abandoned villages and had only sporadic encounters with Norman civilians as the latter passed through the lines looking for shelter and safety.⁷ Moreover, the destruction became so extensive in the Canadian sector that even the prostitutes left, and by 1 August it was still being reported that “no brothels are

⁶ Statistics taken from: LAC, RG24, Vol. 12,593, “Quarterly VD Report – Jan, Feb, and Mar 1945” by Captain H. E. Christie, VDCO, 3rd Canadian Infantry Division, 5 April 1945, Ibid, “Quarterly VD Report – Oct, Nov, and Dec 1944” by Captain R. B. Kay, VDCO, 3rd Canadian Infantry Division, 6 January 1945; Ibid, “Quarterly Report – 7th Field Hygiene Section, Oct-Dec 1944” by Major E. L. Davey, 1 January 1945, Jeffrey Keshen, *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers: Canada’s Second World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 252-255

⁷ As Major Cram explained the situation in June and early July, “only two cases of VDG [Gonorrhoea] in the [formation] are reported as traceable to sources of infection in [France] . . . A number of fresh cases of VDG have been reported in troops recently arrived from England, history of exposure took place in England” LAC, RG24, Vol 15661, file 700, WD – ADMS, “Monthly VD Report – July 1944” by Major J. B. Cram, VDCO, 3rd Canadian Infantry Division, 2 August 1944, 1

operating” within the division’s sector.⁸ The low VD rates persisted into late-July and August, but for slightly different reasons. Despite the rising number of civilians in the rear, caused by the capture of Caen and the expansion of the bridgehead, VD rates remained low since the battle evolved into a more mobile clash of arms.⁹ South of Caen, Canadian troops carried out a series of offensive operations designed to capture Verrières Ridge and Falaise. The demands of this mobile warfare ensured that soldiers never occupied any area for a prolonged period, limiting civil-soldier interactions throughout the newly liberated region.¹⁰ Furthermore, the especially low VD rates amongst the infantry were also a product of the heavy casualty rates incurred throughout this time. From June to August the 3rd Division was hardly ever out of contact with the enemy, and therefore its soldiers had little available time or opportunity to engage in promiscuous sexual activity. Coupled with the abhorrent casualty rates, many soldiers were not living long enough to either interact with the locals, or, if sexual encounters occurred, live long enough to display any symptoms or seek treatment.¹¹

The prevalence of disease, or lack thereof, not only illustrates the uniqueness and grinding brutality of the entire Normandy campaign in relation to later periods, but it

⁸ Ibid, “Monthly VD Report – July 1944” by Major J B Cram, VDCO, 3rd Canadian Infantry Division, 2 August 1944, 1

⁹ Major Davey’s report also outlined the total percentages of personnel rendered non-effective by VD, scabies, and pubic lice in the month of July. It peaked at 6.6 cases per 1,000 soldiers in the week after the capture of Caen and remained at a relatively constant rate of about 3.0 cases per 1,000 soldiers during the other weeks that month. Ibid, “Monthly Hygiene Report” by Major E L Davey, 7th Field Hygiene Section, 2 August 1944, 1-3. See Table 4 in Appendix I.

¹⁰ As Major R B Kay commented in his first report as VDCO for the 3rd Division in January 1945, “During the last quarter of 1944 VD became an acute problem in this [formation] for the first time since D-Day. Prior to the last quarter opportunities for acquiring VD were very limited due to the environment, continuous fighting, and movement.” LAC, RG24, Vol 12,593, “Quarterly VD Report – Oct, Nov, and Dec 1944” by Captain R. B. Kay, VDCO, 3rd Canadian Infantry Division, 6 January 1945.

¹¹ According to the Operational Research teams of the 21st Army Group, which established the criteria for “Intense Combat Days” and Terry Copp’s own calculations, over the period 6 June to 30 September 1944, the 3rd Division suffered through 31 days of intense combat averaging 298 casualties per day, and the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division endured 30 days with an average of 273 casualties. Copp, “To the Last Canadian? Casualties in 21st Army Group,” 3-6.

also highlights the distinctive and evolving nature of the human experience from June to August. In Normandy no disease threatened the Canadian soldier more than the epidemic of “mild dysentery” that ravaged all Canadian forces. Through an analysis of the weekly summaries for the sick, injured, and dead, it is possible to reconstruct the explosion of this horrible, soul-stealing plague within the 3rd Division.¹² Although living conditions remained dreadful in June and early July, the fact that Canadian units occupied the same positions throughout that time meant that there were opportunities for work parties and sanitation personnel to develop a rudimentary sanitation infrastructure while the stalemate north of Caen settled in. Coupled with the excellent physical fitness of the soldiers, gained through years of training prior to D-Day, this appears to have prevented any severe outbreaks of disease and only a modest increase in the number of “Other Sicknesses” was noted during the first half of the campaign. For the weeks ending, 10, 16, 23, 30 June, and 7 July there were 36, 70, 108, 118, and 120 “Other Sicknesses” treated for more than 24-hours, respectively: a total of 452 over the five-week period. Of that number, 52 cases were diagnosed under the catch-all heading of “Diseases of the Digestive System” later used to describe the epidemic.¹³

However, the physical and psychological strain of combat and the gruelling, continuous series of offensive operations south of Caen took their toll in the latter half of July and throughout August. Coupled with the division’s frequent movements, which “greatly handicapped” the work of the 7th Field Hygiene Section, the situation became

¹² These Weekly Summaries were compiled by the ADMS to keep track of how many casualties were being treated. Only those treated for over 24 hours were recorded LAC, RG24, Vol 15661, file 700, WD – ADMS, “Weekly Summary of Sick, Injured, and Dead” 10 June to 25 August 1944.

¹³ Ibid, “Weekly Summary of Sick, Injured, and Dead” 10, 16, 23, 30 June and 7 July 1944.

ripe for the spread of disease.¹⁴ By late-July and throughout all of August, an “epidemic of diarrhoea and mild dysentery attacked most of the tr[oo]ps in this [division]”¹⁵ The numbers were staggering. During the month of August alone a total of 1,330 “Other Sicknesses” were recorded as being treated for longer than 24 hours. Of that total, 648 cases were diagnosed as digestive diseases – almost all being severe bouts of diarrhoea or mild dysentery.¹⁶ Fortunately, most cases were not considered life threatening by medical authorities, as the most severe of all cases lasted no longer than 24 or 48 hours, and many battalion MOs were reporting that numerous patients were being treated and released in less time.¹⁷ However, this was of little consolation to the soldiers suffering through the horrible symptoms of that wretched disease: fever, cramps, convulsions, vomiting, repeated and uncontrolled bowel movements, and a complete loss of energy. Thus, not only does the analysis of disease provide some understanding of the conditions through which the common soldier suffered, but it also indicates that the experience of war fluctuated over time, encapsulating each month, day, or minute with its own distinction.

For the soldiers of the 3rd Division, the parameters of experience and morale evolved in other ways as the battle for Normandy wore on. The expansion of the bridgehead south of Caen allowed, for the first time, the establishment of a rest area

¹⁴ Ibid, “Monthly Hygiene Report” by Major E. L. Davey, 7th Field Hygiene Section, 3 September 1944, 2.

¹⁵ LAC, RG24, Vol. 12,593, “Quarterly VD Report – 7th Field Hygiene Section, Jul-Sept 1944” by Major E. L. Davey, 10 October 1944, 1.

¹⁶ LAC, RG24, Vol. 15661, file 700, WD – ADMS, “Weekly Summary of Sick, Injured, and Dead” 4, 11, 18, 25 August and 1 September 1944.

¹⁷ The summary for the week ending 18 August noted that many cases of diarrhoea were not being recorded because MOs were treating patients in less than a day. Such statements lead one to conclude that the actual numbers of soldiers suffering from diarrhoea (of varying degrees of severity) is much larger Ibid, “Weekly Summary of Sick, Injured, and Dead” 18 August; Ibid, “Monthly Hygiene Report” by Major E. L. Davey, 7th Field Hygiene Section, 3 September 1944, 2

large enough to accommodate an entire division – a substantial change from the improvised rotational tactics employed at the battalion and brigade levels during the June and early July period. Coupled with the arrival of II Canadian Corps headquarters, the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division, and the 4th Canadian Armoured Division, the entire battle weary 3rd Division was withdrawn from action at the end of July for a few days of rest, mostly removed from battlefield conditions.¹⁸ Furthermore, by that time other sophisticated logistical arrangements that provided field bakeries, entertainment units, and field kitchens had been established on the continent as well. These services were all present when the other Canadian formations were activated, so quite often the 3rd Division's unique experience without these elaborate rear services are obscured or ignored altogether by historians. However, the changing nature of experience in Normandy was not missed by the soldiers at the front. As the Can Scots' war diarist noted the impact and importance of "dry rations" (food "cooked in a rear area and . . . trucked up to the front in 'hay boxes'") after 50 days of compo rations:

It has been decided to alternate dry and compo rations from day to day. The cooks are given more scope in this case and can prepare more interesting meals. It has been noted, too, that complaints about cooking are quite rare now. We have all been cooking our own food up 'till this time and appreciate the incumbent difficulties.¹⁹

Therefore, as the campaign in Normandy continued, the dynamics of experience and the material culture of morale adapted to the tempo of operations and the expansion of logistical arrangements.

¹⁸ Ibid, "Battle Weariness – Fighting Troops" 26 July 1944, 1. For example see: LAC, RG-24, Vol. 15271, File No. 752, WD – SDGs, Log Entry, 31 July 1944.

¹⁹ Quotes from: LAC, RG24, Vol. 15037, File No: 734(400), WD – Can Scots, Log Entries 27 and 28 July 1944.

As much as the experience of war evolved on a monthly basis, there were also many features of that experience which never changed for the infantry – reinforcing a degree of continuity throughout the Normandy campaign. From D-Day until the closing of the Falaise gap in late August, the fighting remained an atrocious, brutal, and extremely costly endeavour and the demands on the infantry, especially, remained enormous. Not only were they always the spearhead of any major operation, but the infantry also had to confront and overcome the weather, terrain, disease, and a fanatical enemy, all while having to constantly dig, construct, or improve any position they occupied no matter what the situation. The physical toll of campaigning never relented and required momentous exertions to maintain and replenish the reservoirs of courage and stamina demanded of each individual to continually take part in the exhausting and deadly experience. Moreover, troops also had to endure the profound psychological strain which manifested itself in every painful moment. The assault on the senses and emotions, the destruction, death, strife, bewilderment, chaos, and intense shelling of battle, compounded a traumatic and transformative experience, haunting the survivors for the rest of their lives. However, the Canadian soldier proved himself to be a resilient and adaptive fighting man, as he overcame all the natural and man-made obstacles, hardships, depravity, and challenges to survive and defeat the enemy. At great sacrifice to themselves, the Canadian infantry played a crucial role in Allied victory.

The mechanisms, facilitators, and factors that sustained the experience of war and maintained the willingness to persevere through it, were also critically important especially during the deadly weeks after D-Day. The presence of comradeship, culture, and outlets for expression and conversation remained an important means of coping for the troops, as they allowed individuals to attach significance to their sacrifice, construct

an identity surrounding their occupation of arms, and especially, provide the needed peer pressure to entice continued exertion in the face of an overwhelming experience and frightfully low chances of survival. As casualties mounted in the soldiers' primary groups, the influence of wider social, structural, and administrative factors, provided by BnHQs and HQ Coys, helped sustain morale by developing the necessary leadership, discipline, and material incentive to continue fighting. Their efforts manipulated the environment in which the primary groups existed and galvanized the battalion as a corporative entity that greatly buttressed comradeship. Moreover, the rotation of individuals or entire units into the battalion's or brigade's reserve positions provided a temporary respite from the horror-show of front-line duty and allowed the strain of combat to be loosely managed. These were an essential element of the human experience in Normandy and provide some explanation for the strong resolve displayed by Canadian soldiers.

In a war of global dimensions ordinary individuals still mattered, for without them, the campaign in Normandy would never have been won. By placing the common soldier at the centre of attention, this thesis has revealed an innovative perspective on the Canadian participation during the first half of the Normandy campaign which has not always attracted attention from the scholarly community. If anything, this study has demonstrated and reinforced the importance of understanding the conditions and circumstances through which Canadian soldiers fought and defeated the Germans, and it is hoped that the author has, in some small way, adequately represented the magnitude of that accomplishment.

APPENDIX I: Textual Materials

Notifiable Diseases - July 1944						
1 Canadian Infantry Division, No. Of Cases Reported by Week						
Week Ending	July	July	July	July	Total	Total
	7	14	21	28	July	June
Dysentery	-	-	-	-	-	1
Leishmaniasis	-	1	-	-	1	-
Food Poisoning	-	-	-	1	1	2
Influenza	-	3	2	2	7	3
Jaundice	1	2	2	1	6	4
Mumps	-	-	1	-	1	-
Pneumonia	-	-	2	-	2	2
VD - Gonorrhoea	2	4	8	4	18	8
VD - Syphilis	2	-	1	2	5	6
VD - Other	-	1	1	-	2	1
Serbiae	9	2	6	5	22	19
Pediculosis - Capitis	-	-	-	-	-	-
Pediculosis - Corporis	1	-	-	-	1	-
Pediculosis - Pedis	4	6	3	1	14	30
Other Skin Diseases	120	195	150	207	672	375
Total	139	214	176	223	752	451

Note: The increase between June and July is "largely due to 'exhaustion' cases (VD) listed under Other Skin Diseases"

Source: CAG, 1944, Vol. 15661, File 700, WD - ADMS, "Monthly Hygiene Reports (Canada) - Epidemiological State" by 7th Field Hygiene Section, 20 July 1944, 1 p. 1944 E.

Table 1: Notifiable Diseases – July 1944

COMPARISON OF NUTRITIONAL REQUIREMENTS AND FOOD VALUES OF RATIONS										
	Calories	Protein	Calcium	Iron	Vitamin A	Thiamin (B1)	Riboflavin (B2)	Ascorbic Acid	Carbohydrates	Fat
		G.	G.	Mg.	I. U.	Mg.	Mg.	Mg.	G.	G.
Composite Ration	2700	92	0.9	-	4290	3.9	0.8	20	502	360
24 Hour Ration	3600	110	0.6	-	4500	2.5	1.3	56	435	152
Composite Ration	3000	70	0.8	12	5000	1.8	2.7	75	-	-

Note: The Standard Ration Value was based on a 70kg man, moderately active in a temperate climate.

Note: Composite ration food values were calculated on a per man/per day basis from the average of all seven

Source: CAG, 1944, Vol. 11633, File No. 11/Rations/3/2, "Food Values of 24 hour ration pack and composite (14 men) ration"

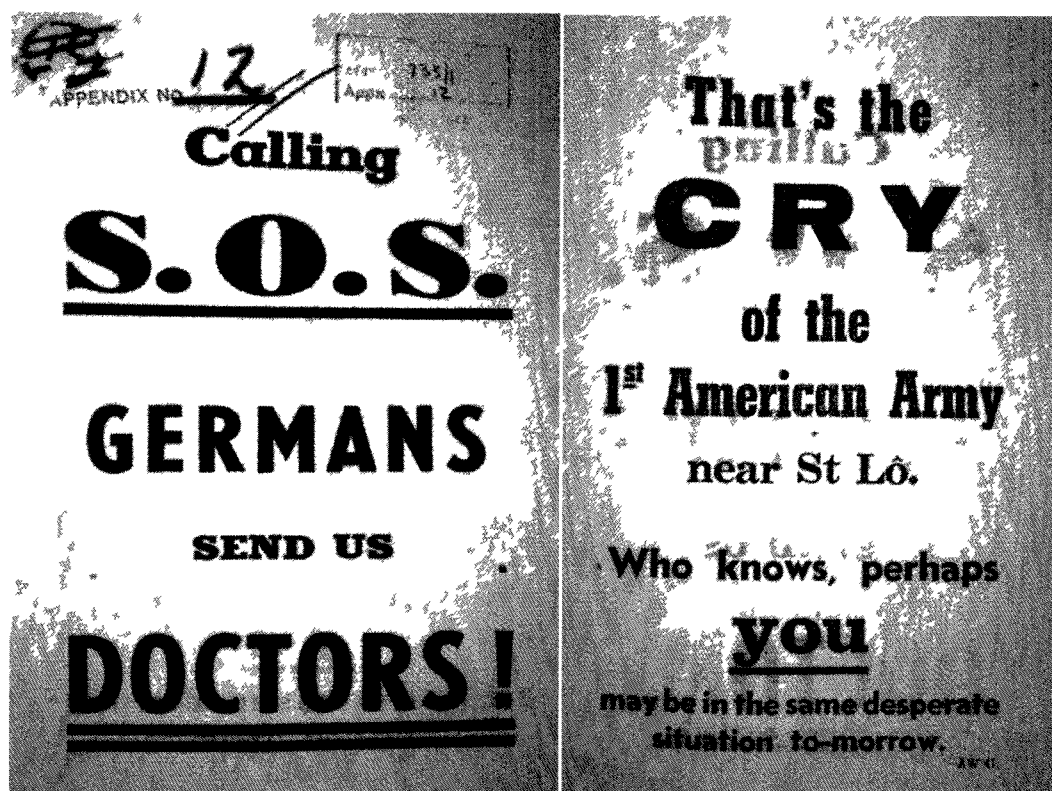
Source: CAG, 1944, Vol. 12624, File No. 11/Rations/5, "Army Nutrition: Notes for Medical Officers" 2.

Table 2: Comparison of Nutritional Requirements and Food Values of Rations

Week Ending	July	July	July	July
STD	7	14	21	28
VD	0.2	0.27	0.5	0.32
Scabies	0.5	0.1	0.3	0.26
Ped. Pubis	0.2	0.33	0.15	0.05
% Non-Effective	2.8	6.6	3	3.1

Source: LAC, RG24, Vol. 15661, file 700, WD - ADMS, "Monthly Hygiene Report (Sanitary & Epidemiological State)" by 7th Field Hygiene Section, 2 August 1944, 1-3, Table IV.

Table 4: Significant Weekly Rates – July 1944



German propaganda leaflet (front and back).

Found in two war diaries LAC, RG24, Vol 15076, File No 754, WD – HLI, Log Entry, June 1944 and LAC, RG24, Vol 15026, File # 184(733), WD – CH of O, June 1944

Poem 1:**My Slit Trench**

Pte. KJ Branscombe – No. 3 Section, 10
Platoon, Canadian Scottish Regiment

When it's spring time on the soils of France
And I'm ankle deep in mud
When the rain beats in my slit trench
With a dull and sudden thud
Once again I'll mutter loudly
That I'd sooner be in H_ _ _
As the rain soaks through my blanket
And my bloody clothes as well
One dark night upon the soils of France
Spring was rustling in the air
As I crawled into my slit trench
For some brew that wasn't there
I was blitzed, blotched and be-wildered
And a chilling filled my blood
When I landed in the middle
Of a pool of sticky mud
So please take your muddy France
You can put it you-know-where
In your shoes, your hat, your vest or pants
Quite frankly I don't care
Cause I'll trade the whole of France
And an extra six months pay
Just to-be with my Girl-Friend
In dear old Canada far away

Poem 2:**The Old Slit Trench**

By: L/Cpl. W.H Knight, July 3, "C" Coy 15
Platoon, Canadian Scottish Regiment

I'm a peace time loving carpenter
Stray'd far from my work and bench
And I'm learning now, midst the strife and
row
The value of a good slit trench

From Jerry's multi-barrelled mortar
With the moan of a maddened wench
We defy the 'lady' called sobbing Sadie
While deep in the ol' slit trench

We, have the spirit, to conquer
And a jolly thirst to quench ("damned good
thirst to quench" in published version)
The blood of the Hun will surely run
When we climb from out our trench

For Heinie has met his master
And with help from the fighting French
He soon should dance clear out of France
'Fore we're through with ye old slit trench

Then back to our homes and loved ones
Back to my hammer and wrench
Another thing too! No more compo stew
To cook in the ol' slit trench

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