

## Canadian Military History

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Volume 14 | Issue 3

Article 5

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4-16-2012

# The Technique of the Assault: The Canadian Army on D-Day: After-Action Reports by Commanders

Canadian Army Commanders

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### Recommended Citation

Canadian Army Commanders (2005) "The Technique of the Assault: The Canadian Army on D-Day: After-Action Reports by Commanders," *Canadian Military History*: Vol. 14: Iss. 3, Article 5.  
Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/cmh/vol14/iss3/5>

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# **The Technique of the Assault**

## **The Canadian Army on D-Day**

### **After-action reports by commanders**

#### **Comments on Operation Overlord by Major-General R.F.L. Keller, CBE, General Officer Commanding 3rd Canadian Infantry Division**

as given to Historical Officer, 21 June 1944

Nearly one year was devoted to the training and preparations of the Canadian assault division and to the formulating of the assault teams, right down to that of the smallest formation. One can cite, for instance, the use of mock-up craft, taped out, or built of galvanized iron, burlap screens and forms six foot folding, representing the starboard, port and keel benches of a Landing Craft Assault (LCA), the use of scrambling nets, the practice of getting from the deck of a Landing Craft Infantry (LCI) into a LCA, the marriage, so to speak, of the rece element of the beach groups (the speedy developments of the beaches to take vehicles, wheeled and tracked), and the assault brigades, the co-ordination of Forward Observation Officers (FOO) and Forward Officer Bombardment (FOB) so that artillery support both from what artillery had been landed and what artillery was still seaborne could be quickly brought down wherever the infantry might be held up.

There were four distinct phases of training, patiently and devotedly carried out:

(1) The preliminary phase, done mainly in South England; wherever the battalions or regiments were quartered, with mock-up craft, practice scaling ladders, small assault courses, etc.

(2) Basic training, i.e. combined operations in Scotland on a company, squadron and battery level.

(3) Brigade Group exercises with a naval force, with and without fire support.

(4) Even larger-scale exercises with full fire support against realistically constructed enemy beach sectors, stressing the practice, once ashore, of getting rapidly inland to widen the beachhead to that of a covering position.

It will be obvious that the third and fourth stages required close liaison – indeed the actual physical co-operation – of both naval and air components. Despite the current operational tasks of the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force, this was achieved.

At this time it was apparent that special assault equipment was necessary and this was indeed provided, e.g. on the Army side, self-propelled artillery, both field and anti-tank, Duplex Drive (DD) or “swimming” tanks, armoured assault engineers, i.e. Churchills with petards, bridges, fascines, etc., flails mounted on Shermans for the destruction of mines, assault ladders, mine detectors, special marking tapes and signs, shaped charges, waterproof covers for certain weapons, including the rifle, the waterproofing of vehicles to enable them to wade in the surf and still not destroy their electrical circuits. The Royal Navy produced the rocket craft, and the seaborne multiple mortar or bombard, known as the “Hedgerow”. By patient trial and experiments, and under varying conditions of sea, tide, light, etc., proficiency in shooting the self-propelled artillery and Royal Navy fire support craft from the sea was attained. Wireless sets, sometimes carried by hand and sometimes mounted on light go-carts, were also fitted with devices to sustain immersion in seawater. Even special sea-sick pills for personnel were produced, tried and found of value. All assault personnel were taken



Photo by Frank L. Duberville, Library and Archives Canada PA 115544

Major-General R.F.L. Keller addresses personnel of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division, Normandy, 6 June 1944.

to sea and kept at sea in all weathers in order to make them seaworthy and conversant with naval procedure. In fact, by May 1944, 3 Canadian Division could well have been described as being “web-footed.”

Throughout these arduous months the highest team spirit was engendered in the assault force, not, repeat, not in water-tight compartments, such as infantry, artillery, naval crews, etc., but on the principle that all members of the team help each other, and that all teams assist other teams, with the rough objective, first that every fighting soldier be landed with his arms, ammunition and equipment on the enemy’s shore, and secondly, that he got across the beaches quickly to the designated objective or objectives.

In the actual assault the weather was far from ideal and the distance to be travelled in the dark with a considerable sea running caused certain elements of craft carrying Armoured Vehicles Royal Engineers (AVRE) and DD tanks to get into the wrong swept channels westward of the main assault force. By cool and skillful instructors the Commodore commanding Force J recovered these lost craft, but this caused them to be rather late in touching down; consequently, fewer obstacles were cleared away on the beaches than was hoped, as by this time the tide rose and

covered them. The DD tanks, of whom only less than half swam in (the rest were carried in and landed on the beaches direct from Landing Craft Tanks (LCT)) were also slightly late in touching down and slightly less than half of those that swam were drowned or otherwise lost.

But, by and large, the mechanics of the assault and the lines along which we had trained, did work, i.e., the DD tanks touched down and remained touched down, hull-down in sea, and engaged by direct fire what beach guns they could see. Approximately fifteen minutes later (i.e., ten minutes late) the AVRE teams in LCTs touched down (H-hour) and straightaway began to make for and prepare selected exits. At the same time Royal Marine Armoured Support Squadron (RMAS) and special obstacle-clearance sappers, together in LCTs, touched down. The RMAS had a Centaur tank, mounting a 95 mm gun, designed to give the infantry close support until such time as the self-propelled artillery was able to land. This was expected to be 1.5 to 5.5 hours later. The little Royal Navy hedgerows, just prior to this, were to release their bombs, so as by blast to create a lane through the beach obstacles, but in some cases the sea was too rough for them. The assaulting infantry companies landed from LCAs – five such craft being allotted to each company – three assault companies to the west of and including Courseulles-sur-Mer and two assault

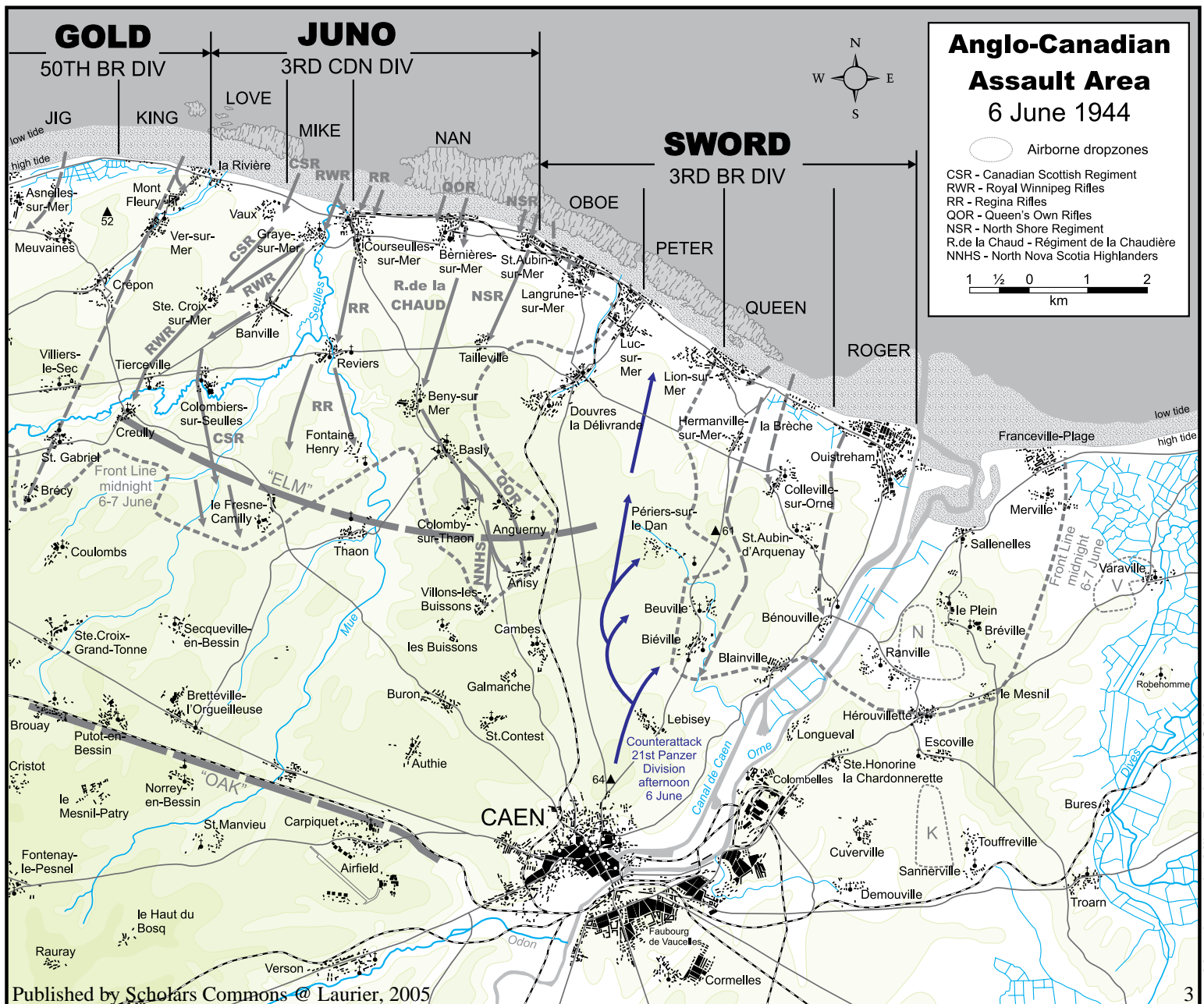
companies immediately east of Courseulles-sur-Mer; on the left brigade sector two companies opposite Bernières-sur-Mer and two companies again on their left.

During the run-in the Royal Air Force gave us 100% fighter cover. The effects of the previous night-bombing were visible during the darkness on the morning of D-Day and well after first light. Naval destroyers and gunfire gave accurate and sustained fire support. The self-propelled artillery put on the best shoot that they ever did on the four areas pre-selected for them, firing from roughly 10-9,000 yards out until they were 3,000 yards off-shore. The rockets fired from 3,500-3,000 yards off-shore, creating a

devastating effect on those areas of the beach on which their fire fell. All of the assault infantry of 7 and 8 Brigades were carried in LCAs with Battalion Headquarters in LCHs. The reserve brigade was carried complete in LCI(L)s and 4th Special Service Brigade, less No.3 Commando, in LCI(S)s.

Even with the inevitable things going wrong – which was expected – the mechanics of the assault did work according to plan and the immediate beachhead objectives, which were the beach lateral roads from excluding la Riviere to include St. Aubin-sur-Mer, were secured by 1000 – 1030 hours.

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**Comments by Brigadier H.F. Foster,  
Commander, 7th Canadian  
Infantry Brigade**

as given to Historical Officer, 22 June 1944

**7 Canadian Infantry Brigade  
in the Assault and the  
Achievement of its Objective**

1. The weather was most unkind and very nearly disastrous to the mounting of the assault. There were two major results of this inclemency:

(a) the terrific devastation which was to have been caused by bombing of the coast defense on either side of the River Seulles did not materialize. The only damage visible from the sea was that effected by our self-propelled artillery fire from LCAs. It was, therefore, all the more remarkable that casualties on the whole were so few and that the immediate objectives were secured as quickly as they were. The rapid capture of Courseulles-sur-Mer by the Regina Rifles was especially impressive.

(b) Engineers in AVREs were intended to skin off the beach obstacles as the tide rose; another party was to prepare the landing exits. These sappers were not able to land in time and arrived, in some cases, up to an hour or an hour and a half late to find a beach crowded with milling men, tanks and recce cars of the Inns of Court Squadron, unable to proceed further inland.

2. Thus, owing to the presence of mines in the water several LCTs were damaged and their vehicles unable to land from them. Some LCAs were blown up as they approached the beach. The LCA carrying Brigadier Foster narrowly missed striking a mine suspended from a post. It became impossible to manoeuvre the craft without running into it. He and his party therefore climbed over the stern into a foundered LCT and leapt from its bow into the waist-deep surf to get to the shore.

3. On the beach itself, quite apart from the systematic reduction of the strong points by the

infantry, fully two hours were spent preparing exits, in the absence of the sappers. In his own sector, Brigadier Foster observed, men of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles with their own sappers, assisted later by AVRE personnel, succeeded by dint of great toil in preparing a road through the boggy ground beyond the dunes, even making use of paling flung over a tank which had sunk far into the muck. By driving heavy vehicles over it a firm foundation was provided and a primitive but usable exit was constructed.

4. Once the tanks were able to leave the beach and move inland they fought fiercely and were of enormous help to the infantry. New to battle as they were, the performance of the tank crews was gallant rather than brilliant, but their sheer courage made them formidable and they profited quickly from hard-gained experience.

5. The timing as planned had been too fast, as Brigadier Foster had always expected. In actual fact the immediate beachhead was secured about H+4, the intermediate objective from H+10 to 12 hours, and the final objective on D+1 with astonishing speed. The Royal Winnipeg Rifles were first to reach their final objective, which was Putot-en-Bessin, 9072; they were followed by Regina Rifles in Norrey-en-Bessin, 9270.

6. Enemy counterattacks now began. On the afternoon of 8 June 1944 the Royal Winnipeg Rifles were overrun, chiefly owing to the fact that one assault company had been practically obliterated on the beach and the gaps in its ranks had had to be replaced by reinforcements of all sorts, some not even infantry. There had been no time for re-organization. A new counterattack by the 1st Battalion, Canadian Scottish Regiment succeeded in regaining the ground however, and occupied Putot, with Royal Winnipeg Rifles in reserve. The Scottish remained there for a week of almost incessant shelling and mortaring.

7. The Regina Rifles occupied the Bretteville area, 9271, with one detached company forward at Norrey, 9270. This forward position was too exposed and Brigadier Foster more than once suggested it be withdrawn. The battalion commander, Lieutenant-Colonel F.M. Matheson, and the commander of the company in question protested vigorously, arguing that they would only have to recapture the village later. They were allowed to remain. The town was a ruin



Juno Beach on the afternoon of D-Day. This is the sector at Courseulles-sur-Mer where 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade, supported by the tanks of the 1st Hussars, landed.

and the stench of hundreds of German dead added to its unpleasantness. The enemy delivered two counterattacks against the Regina Rifles every night, their Panther tanks even entering Bretteville to the very doors of the Battalion Headquarters.

8. The German attacks were launched without any semblance of tactical sense. The flanks of the battalion were exposed and the position almost isolated. In such a case, where a carefully conceived flank attack might have been deadly, the enemy flung himself straight against the strongest points and utterly failed to exploit the undoubted weakness of his opponent's position. All his attacks were beaten off.

9. Soon 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade entered the Bray area to close one gap and 49th British Division occupied the Brouay area on the right to close the other. On 16 June 1944 as a result of the success of 147 Brigade on the right, the Royal Winnipeg Rifles pushed southwards and occupied le Mesnil-Patry, 8970. Although they met no opposition, it proved to be most uncomfortable to hold, since it lay in a hollow and was dominated by the high ground of the Cheux feature to the south. After some days it was deemed that a

much-deserved rest was in order. Therefore, on the night 18-19 June 1944, one of the shortest of the year, 7th and 8th Canadian Infantry Brigades exchanged areas in the face of the enemy, and without incident.

10. To sum up his observations, Brigadier Foster said that 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade had carried out its task according to plan though rather late in schedule. The lateness was due to lack of air support and the failure of the AVREs, both these circumstances in turn being attributable to foul weather.

11. In respect of the soldier's personal assault equipment, he was of the opinion that even the little carried was too much and that steel helmet, mess tins, weapon and bandolier of ammunition were sufficient.

12. The outstanding features of the assault were, first, the admirable spirit of the men, and second, the excellent fire support of the artillery. No request for support went unanswered, and many infantry professed to understand for the first time that the gunner's role was something other than to block traffic.

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## Comments by Brigadier K.C. Blackader, MC, ED, Commander of 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade

as given to the Historical Officer, 24 June 1944

### 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade in the Assault

1. Brigadier Blackader prefaced his remarks by the statement that all the special training of the previous eight months had been carried out along thoroughly sound lines and had very well fitted the division for its task. Weapons and equipment so generously made available were all that could have been asked for. To these two facts, together with the excellent spirit of the assaulting troops, could be attributed our success.

2. The decision to embark on the operation in spite of the bad weather forecast greatly affected 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade, as the first hurdle to be crossed was the obstacles about which information was not complete, even granting the excellence of Intelligence work. Of the three possible days on which the operation could be undertaken (5, 6 and 7 June 1944) the state of the tides on 6 June 1944 gave the least opportunity for clearance of these obstacles. The rough water slowed down the incoming LCIs with the result that the troops were approximately a half hour late in touching down. This delay meant that the engineers lost the sole half hour available

to them to clear the obstacles before they were submerged, in which state they were, of course, most formidable. Thus all the landing craft on the first tide had to beach as best they could and risked running on to mined obstructions.

3. During the night 19th Canadian Field Regiment had become lost, but, fortunately, was recovered in the morning just 5 minutes before their fire was to commence.

4. Another result of the bad weather was that visibility was poor. On the left battalion front (St. Aubin-sur-Mer) neither the RAF heavy bombers, the rockets, nor the self-propelled artillery actually covered the main strong point and the North Shore Regiment engaged it without the assistance of heavier arms until some time later. A considerable time was therefore spent in reducing it.

5. Brigadier Blackader pointed out here that it was only the experience gained on many exercises of a similar nature that gave the troops confidence to deal with the situation, in the absence of the expected support.

6. A particularly fine job was done by the Royal Navy who, under unfavourable circumstances, made their landings exactly at the right spot, even to the company level.

7. The immediate beachheads in Bernières-sur-Mer and St. Aubin-sur-Mer were both established within the first two hours. At this time the reserve battalion (Régiment de la Chaudière) was on Bernières-sur-Mer beach, as it had hoped it could be, and proceeded through to its assembly area according to plan. It was then joined by its squadron of tanks. The Brigadier and his artillery group commander had now landed. By 1025 hours the self-propelled artillery was ashore and the reserve battalion was ready to move forward. All had gone as per plan thus far.

8. The first three self-propelled artillery vehicles of 14th Canadian Field Regiment had just pulled off into a field at the right of the road and the detachments were preparing the gun position, when a hidden 88 mm gun fired on them hitting all three vehicles in a matter of less than a

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A group of Canadian soldiers, likely from le Régiment de la Chaudière, grab a bite to eat during the first days of the Normandy campaign. 8-9 June 1944.



Photo by Ken Bell, Library and Archives Canada PA 140850

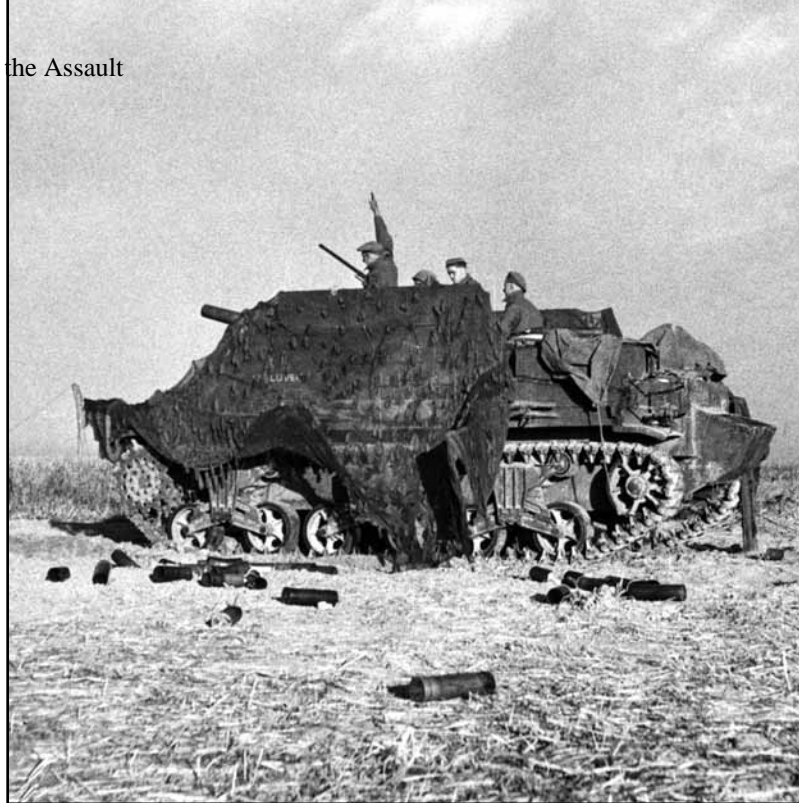
A "Priest" 105 mm self-propelled howitzer, the mainstay of the Royal Canadian Artillery regiments that landed on D-Day

minute. They burst into flames and the huge quantity of ammunition carried on them (in addition to 105 mm ammunition, this included extra ammunition and mines for other arms) commenced to explode. The detonations lasted over an hour and made the area an exceedingly dangerous one. As a result of this incident the tanks were loath to leave cover and advance up the grassy field leading the infantry.

9. It was then decided to move the infantry forward along the road. But here they came under machine gun crossfire. It was impossible to locate either gun in the long grass and it therefore became necessary to delay the advance until scouting or recon parties could pinpoint this opposition so that it could be dealt with. This was finally achieved by siting the artillery in another section of Bernières-sur-Mer and directing their fire on to a presumed position. By this means, and under cover of machine gun fire delivered by Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa, our infantry was infiltrated up the road.

10. This delay of approximately two hours was very costly because it slowed down the forward movement of 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade following in reserve. Eventually, however, the brigade got under way and proceeded to its other tasks; demolishing the gun position to the right and capturing Beny-sur-Mer, Basly, Colomby-sur-Thaon and Anguerny. By evening both the Queen's Own Rifles of Canada and the Régiment de la Chaudière were established on the brigade objective on the high ground in the vicinity of Anguerny.

11. The North Shore Regiment, meanwhile, having cleared St. Aubin-sur-Mer to the extent that the commanding officer considered success assured, then launched a company to capture the strongpoint at Tailleville. This proved to be a much tougher nut than expected but it was eventually cracked in good order. The battalion then proceeded north to engage the famous Radar station near Douvres, but before coming to grips with it, was forced to attack and clear the wood northeast of it which was found to be honeycombed with trenches, shelters and



tunnels, and was unable to accomplish more on D-Day.

12. The next day, D+1, they were again compelled to clear the wood, the enemy having infiltrated himself into it once more. They then tested the defences of the Radar Station. After doing this all day without much success they were ordered to by-pass it at night and join the brigade in their allotted area on the final objective. It should be stated that the widespread operations of the North Shore Regiment, which included forming a wide flank for the Commandos, maintaining a firm left flank for the brigade and continuing to move forward at the same time, made matters very difficult for them, so that their performance, under the circumstances was most creditable.

13. Brigadier Blackader added that the wide front on which the assault was made and the stress which had been laid on advancing inland with all possible speed had prevented a thorough search and any mopping up being carried out between the various axes of advance. This subsequently necessitated elements of the brigade being employed for two days on clearing certain villages to track down snipers and small parties left behind. The enemy everywhere very tenaciously and bravely stuck to his post and slowed the advance.

14. The operation proved that planning had been sound as to administration arrangements.



Assault scale transport had been properly loaded to provide the immediate essentials during the early days. No one went short of ammunition, tools, food or water.

15. The work of the medical services was of the very highest standard. Nothing but praise could be given to them, from stretcher-bearers, Medical Officers, to higher levels, for all had done their utmost.

16. With regard to intercommunication, Brigadier Blackader said that, despite the large number of wireless sets and the mass of frequencies in use, communications throughout could be considered better than on many exercises. Moreover, line was laid to all battalions by the night of D-Day.

17. There was absolutely no doubt in Brigadier Blackader's mind that one of the largest contributing factors to the success of the early stages of the operation, at least in 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade, was the fine spirit of co-operation built up during the months of training between the Captain G J2 and his staff (RN) and the staff and battalions of the brigade. The two services worked together harmoniously and perfectly exemplified the term "Combined Operations."

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### **Comments by Brigadier D.G. Cunningham, DSO, Commander of 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade**

as given to the Historical Officer, 26 June 1944

#### **The Action of the Reserve Brigade**

1. 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade was reserve brigade in the assault on the French coast 6 June 1944. All the rifle companies of its three Highland battalions were borne across the Channel in a flotilla of 10 LCIs manned by personnel of the Royal Canadian Navy.

2. The brigade was landed without mishap about 1100 hours on Nan White Beach at Bernières-sur-Mer, instead of being spread over Nan White and Red as had been planned. Casualties on the beach were few and in the advance inland through

8th Canadian Infantry Brigade sniper activity constituted the sole opposition.

3. By nightfall, however, the first enemy counterattack composed of recce elements, was met by the North Nova Scotia Highlanders and 27th Canadian Armoured Regiment in Villons-les-Buissons. This engagement signified the brigade's first encounter with serious resistance. The Highland Light Infantry of Canada, Stormont Dundas and Glengary Highlanders and Brigade Headquarters were in Basly.

4. D+1 saw the advance guard (North Nova Scotia Highlanders and 27th Canadian Armoured Regiment) moving swiftly forward, extending its foremost elements throughout Buron into Authie. They were met here by a severe enemy counterattack by elements of 21st Panzer Division. Enemy tanks swept in from St. Contest and Gruchy and inflicted heavy casualties in men and tanks, two-thirds of a company of infantry being lost.

5. Late in the afternoon the North Nova Highlanders on the orders of the Brigade Commander withdrew through Stormont, Dundas and Glengary Highlanders into the brigade fortress at Les Buissons. They had suffered numerous casualties, including three company commanders. Out of twenty officers of the original rifle companies only eight remained.

6. Undoubtedly the courageous defence of Authie and Buron absorbed the force of the enemy counterattack and prevented a penetration of similar dimensions into the Les Buissons area. 27th Canadian Armoured Regiment had accounted for at least thirty of his light half-track recce cars and is believed to have knocked out as many of his tanks. Our own tank losses, while considerable, were fewer.

7. This battle was the first one of major proportions on 3rd Canadian Division's front. Attacks on a comparable scale were not met by 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade until the following day, and then both Royal Winnipeg Rifles and Regina Rifles were in defence positions.

8. An interesting example of enemy ingenuity is afforded by the skill of a German wireless operator whose set was functioning on the brigade link to 27th Armoured Regiment, and

who quickly adopted our wireless procedure, even to such details as "Report my signals" and "Say again all after..." His cleverness was annoying at the most, since it became difficult to know if wireless messages were being received, but his skill at mimicry was such that by the end of the day he could imitate the voice of Colonel Gordon, Officer Commanding 27th Canadian Armoured Regiment.

9. During the day personnel of Brigade Headquarters, moving forward, had taken about 200 prisoners of war driven out of Tailleville by the North Shore Regiment.

10. On the night of 7 June 1944 weaker infantry and armoured blows were delivered at the but lately consolidated brigade area and were repelled by the Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders and 27th Canadian Armoured Regiment with the artillery support of 12th and 14th Canadian Field Regiments.

11. The brigade was now disposed as follows: Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders and

the remnants of North Nova Scotia Highlanders in Les Buissons; Highland Light Infantry of Canada in Villons les Buissons; and Brigade Headquarters in Colomby-sur-Thaon. Subsequent lesser attacks and intermittent shelling and mortaring have been withstood by North Nova Scotia Highlanders and Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders. Reinforcements arriving on D+4 brought the depleted ranks of North Nova Scotia Highlanders up to strength.

12. Brigadier Cunningham pointed out that the brigade had worked out in combination with 27th Canadian Armoured Regiment a scheme for a completely mobile brigade, which was introduced for the first time on 6 June 1944 and proved most successful on that and the following day. Three companies of North Nova Scotia Highlanders were carried on tanks and the balance in unit vehicles; in the other battalions, one company each was borne in unit transport, the others riding light bicycles (airborne pattern). These bicycles, though slight in construction, have very well withstood wear and tear and are still in use.

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Troops from the 9th (Reserve) Brigade come ashore at Bernières-sur-Mer on the afternoon of D-Day. Note the bicycles being carried ashore to give increased mobility to the Brigade.



**Extract from Second Canadian Armoured Brigade, Operation Overlord: The Assault on the Beaches of Normandy, 6-11 June 1944, Sequence of Events and Lessons Arising Therefrom.**

**Lessons Arising from the Operation**

**Intercommunication**

1. The 38 and 18 set not for tank-infantry intercommunication did not prove successful. This may be attributed in part to confusion in the initial stages.
2. In future tank-cum-infantry operations it is desirable that an infantry officer should ride in the squadron leader's tank with the spare 19 set on the infantry battalion frequency. In any case this set should always be so netted when operating with infantry.



Photo by Frank L. Duberville, Library and Archives Canada PA 115534

3. The installation of a phone for infantry on the outside of the tank is essential. Until this is done the only substitute is a hand-set passed out through the pistol port.
4. Crew commanders must NOT lean out of tanks to speak to personnel on the ground. The target so presented is ideal for snipers.

**19 Set in Sherman VC Tanks.**

5. It has been found that the 19 set in Sherman VC's has a tendency to drift off net when the 17-pounder gun is fired. This should be investigated with a view to finding some remedy.

**Enemy Direction Finding on Netting Calls**

6. Instances have been reported of enemy shellfire coming down on tanks immediately following a group netting call. This may be coincidence, but the possibility of enemy Direction Finding should not be discounted.

**Passage of Information**

7. Passage of information both from rear to forward and from forward to rear was not good. What little that passed was slow and often very inaccurate. Information on immediate flanking formations was either too late to be of use or completely lacking. This contributed largely to the failure of the attack through le Mesnil-Patry on 11 June.
8. Information regarding our own minefields was sketchy in the extreme and several tanks were disabled on minefields laid by infantry with whom they were working at the time.
9. Our tanks shelled our own infantry in a forward locality on D+5. One company had been in that locality since D-Day but tanks had not been informed.
10. Too much stress cannot be laid on close personal liaison between all arms. This must never stop. It must continue at rest, training, planning and right through the actual operation. If information is not forthcoming through normal channels then "aggressive inquisitiveness" will root it out.

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Brigadier R.A. Wyman, commander of 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade, photographed in Bernières-sur-Mer just after he landed on D-Day.

### **Co-operation Between Different Arms**

11. Despite early training, there was evidence of lack of appreciation of the other fellow's role and his difficulties. This leads to misconceptions and unsound employment of forces.

12. From a tank commander's point of view, there seemed to be a general impression in the infantry that the main anti-tank weapon is the tank and moreover that a tank should be employed to destroy enemy anti-tank weapons. On several occasions tanks were asked to lead in attacks on manned anti-tank defences. This they did, in order to maintain the momentum of the assault, and suffered unduly high casualties in consequence. They were expected to remain on a captured objective for several days when they should have been withdrawn to rally and their place taken by artillery and infantry anti-tank guns. Whenever tanks threatened a defended locality our infantry often called for tanks to come forward instead of meeting the attack with properly-sited anti-tank guns. It is realized of course that conditions of war were by no means normal. It is felt, however, that these incidents should be brought to light so that acts dictated by exceptional conditions do not become a habit in more normal times.

A joint armoured-infantry briefing taking place between the Regina Rifles and the Fort Garry Horse prior to an operation in Normandy, 22 June 1944.

13. It is the policy of this brigade to give all possible assistance to the infantry whenever and wherever it can. Tanks will be in support and not under command of infantry below a divisional level. Tank commanders on all levels will co-operate with infantry to the full. At the same time it is their duty to advise on the proper employment of tanks. It will be rarely if ever that an infantry commander will try to insist on the misuse of tanks. Should he do so, however, the tank's commander will be in duty bound to refer the matter to his next higher commander.

14. The fullest co-operation can only be achieved by complete understanding of the equipment and functions of other arms. Each and every opportunity should be taken for tank and infantry personnel to train and live together. Wherever possible, simple tank-cum-infantry exercises should be laid on, based on operational experiences. This should be done after every action as the turnover of personnel, particularly infantry, will be continual. In rest areas squadrons and companies should harbour close to each other and all ranks be encouraged to mix and learn what they can of each other's habits, equipment and point of view generally.

### **Forward Observation Officers (FOOs)**

15. Armoured regiments have still much to learn regarding the employment of FOOs. Visits of two or three days to armoured regiments by FOOs would benefit both. FOOs would learn the type of targets that armour will ask them to engage





A Sherman VC (Firefly) of 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade near Courseulles-sur-Mer, 8-10 June 1944.

Photo by Donald I. Grant, Library and Archives Canada PA 131424

and armoured personnel would learn how to ask for fire and what the artillery is capable of giving them. Intercommunication between FOOs and tanks is not satisfactory and a sound working system must be tied up.

### **Mines and Booby Traps**

16. Here again armoured regiments are lacking in knowledge and experience. Close liaison with Royal Canadian Engineer personnel must be maintained and demonstrations of laying and lifting mines and booby traps arranged.

### **Village Fighting**

17. Tanks are not best suited for town or village fighting. Their field of manoeuvre is nil and they are an easy prey to sticky bombs, grenades and snipers. They will however be called upon at times to support infantry into built-up areas. This is normally done by support fire from a commanding position outside the town or village. If it is necessary to go right in, infantry must definitely lead. Not more than one troop should be employed in each thrust. Tanks should be inter-supporting and one tank in each troop

should be detailed to cover upper story windows and house tops. The rear tanks gun should cover the rear. Tanks should move close enough together to give each other support around bends in the road.

18. Tanks and infantry commanders should travel together and maintain the closest liaison.

19. All ranks, in particular crew commanders, will avoid exposing themselves unnecessarily as snipers are usually prevalent.

20. Types of Tanks best suited for village fighting.

(a) Sherman VC - unwieldy within a village. It

might be employed from a commanding position to destroy concrete and other masonry strong points.

(b) Sherman 75 mm - most suitable for assaulting a defended village.

(c) Stuart - too light and vulnerable for this type of work.

21. It should be remembered that artillery concentrations have little killing effect on built-up areas where observed tank fire may destroy located enemy positions.

### **Control**

22. When putting tanks into a large built-up area, control will be assisted by the use of a large-scale map and plans. Sectors should be picked out in planning with a view to clearing them up piecemeal in detail.

### **Speculative Shooting**

23. Crew commanders must be impressed with the value of controlled speculative shooting when searching ground. A few rounds of high

explosives on likely positions will often flush anti-tank and machine gun crews. It may be advisable to detail one tank per troop to search trees and upper storeys, also using speculative rounds.

### Target Indication

24. Verey Lights - Targets may be indicated effectively by infantry shooting in their direction with verey lights.

### Organization of Regiment and Employment of Sherman VC

25. As a result of experience gained in this campaign it has been decided to organize squadrons on a four tank troop basis. Each troop will have three 75 mm and one 17-pounder. The position of the troop leader will be left for units to decide. It has been suggested that the troop leader should ride in the 17-pounder tank, whose normal position would be back of the other three tanks. It is probably better, however, for the troop leader to lead in a 75 mm tank leaving his troop sergeant to cover the troop in the Sherman Vc. This tank should be so placed as to give the maximum support if the troop bumped into heavy armour.

26. It is felt that heavy tanks may be encountered at any time and anywhere. If our hard hitting 17-pounders are consolidated in one group it is unlikely that they would be immediately available when most wanted.

27. Whilst we gave at least as good as we took in the first six days of this operation, the vital necessity of seizing ground at all costs resulted in heavy tank casualties. All units are therefore down well below estimates and it will be some time before they can be built up again and a healthy reserve accumulated. In the meantime, regiments will be based on a strength of 49 Shermans as follows:

Regimental Headquarters (RHQ) – (4 tanks) and three

A 75 mm Sherman of the Sherbrooke Fusiliers.

squadrons, each having a squadron headquarters (3 tanks) and three troops of 4 tanks each.

### Enemy Equipment and Methods

28. The 88 mm still appears to be the enemy's most formidable anti-tank weapon. It is most effective against Shermans at ranges up to 3,000 yards. All his anti-tank guns are very well sited and full use is made of dummy guns as decoys. Snipers have been found dug in well forward of anti-tank gun positions. These force crew commanders to close down and limit their field of vision.

29. Tanks encountered so far have been Marks III and IV and Panthers. Tigers have also been reported but not confirmed. Mark IVs have been captured dressed up with light spaced armour to resemble the Tiger. The deception is hard to detect. It can be stated definitely that we are outgunned both by the long 75 mm and the 88 mm.

30. It has been noted that the Panther travels with the gun at 12 o'clock. It is not traversed until the

Photo by Donald I. Grant, Library and Archives Canada PA 129034





tank halts. One killing was made well up in our forward lines of 4 Panthers with guns actually strapped down.

31. The enemy appears to move in line ahead waiting until he bumps into opposition before deploying. Once deployed however he makes the best use of ground and natural cover such as hedges and bushes.

32. Snipers have been a constant menace taking a heavy toll of crew commanders.

### **Own Equipment and Methods**

33. Sherman VC – has proved a very effective anti-tank weapon and in view of the fact that we are outgunned, it is strongly urged that the proportion of those tanks in the squadron be increased as early as possible.

34. .50 Browning on Tanks – Differences of opinion have been expressed as to the value of this weapon mounted on tanks. Commanding officers may retain it or discard it at their discretion. The use of this gun on B Echelon vehicles should be explored before it is turned back to ordnance.

35. 2-inch Bomb – it has been suggested that the infantry 2-inch bomb projected from the tank bomb thrower would be effective against infantry in slit trenches and enclosed places such as orchards and farm yards. This possibility will be explored.

36. It is possible that so far smoke has not been used to the best advantage. It is suggested that squadron leaders may have been moving too close to their forward troops to be in a position to use it. Reports from Italy indicate that the 75 mm smoke shell is not reliable as it is impossible to control its bounce. Smoke grenades and the 2-inch smoke bomb were apparently found more effective.

37. Three important uses of smoke should be borne in mind:

- (a) Defilading observed fire from the flank.

- (b) Blinding weapons which high explosives cannot neutralize.

- (c) Cover for local withdrawal.

### **Use of Ground**

38. Proper use has not been made of ground in many cases. Tanks and squadrons must move tactically deployed when in enemy territory. The minimum number of tanks must be exposed to enemy fire and tanks must always be mutually supporting. Careful planning, good use of ground with mutual support means more kills for less casualties.

### **Use of Artillery**

39. Artillery properly employed is a factor contributing to the success of most operations. A pre-arranged fire plan is essential and commanders must consider and advise the gunners of the priority rating of suspected targets. When fire has been called for through FOOs, tanks must remember to wait for it to come down before advancing into the target area.

### **Infantry on Tanks**

40. Carrying infantry on tanks can be overdone. It is an excellent means of moving them quickly to a pre-arranged assembly area from the rear when the enemy is not likely to be encountered. In future infantry will NOT be carried on tanks in forward areas.

### **AFV Recognition**

41. The present situation is NOT satisfactory. It is difficult in this close country to recognize friend from foe at long but vulnerable ranges. Several instances of engagements between our own tanks have already come to light. A white star on the sides of tanks is an obvious aiming mark and will NOT be used by units in this brigade. The use of standard tank flags discloses our positions to the enemy and has proved more assistance to him than to us. Firing verey lights has been suggested as a possible solution and it is proposed to try this out in this brigade. It is hoped that some practicable system, common to all formations, will be laid down by higher authority.