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Battalion Leadership in the Essex Scottish Regiment and the 4th Canadian
Infantry Brigade During the Second World War

by:

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Bachelor of Arts in English and History, University of Calgary, 1997

THESIS

Submitted to the Department of History
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in History

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John Maker
September 2004

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Preface

This thesis project began with the general idea of examining leadership at the battalion level in the Canadian Army during the First World War. After having been brought to my attention some time later, the Essex Scottish Regiment during the Second World War piqued my interest. This unit received the highest number of casualties of any Canadian unit throughout the Second World War, yet I had not heard or read anything significant about it. I had read gallant histories of the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry and the Black Watch, of the Regina Rifles and the Calgary Highlanders; none of these units, however, had experienced either the level of casualties or the level of historiographical poverty that the Essex had. Indeed, the Essex Scots had a head start on most other Canadian units by the beginning of the Normandy Campaign, in terms of casualties, since they had landed on the main beaches of Dieppe with their sister battalions the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry (RHLI or Rileys) and the Royal Regiment of Canada (RRC or Royals), who landed at Puys. I found myself asking what it was about the Essex Scots that made them lose so many men. Why was it that this particular regiment, that had so often been committed to battle alongside its more “successful” sister battalions, suffered more than another? What factors can account for the varied battlefield performance of the three regiments that constituted the 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade? Was it leadership, circumstance, luck, or something else? Consequently, the original idea of examining leadership at the battalion level became subsumed in this myriad of possibilities.

After consultation with Terry Copp, it became clear that the best way to go about answering these questions is simply to study the 4th Brigade, with an emphasis on the Essex Scottish Regiment. This paper, therefore, will examine the varied battlefield performance of the battalions of the 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade from the Dieppe raid in August 1942 through the Battle of Verrières Ridge in July of 1944. It will attempt to answer several questions, including: what

effect did Dieppe have on these battalions? Was there a long-term residual memory of failure around Dieppe as the 4th Brigade went into battle in Normandy? Was their reconstitution in the aftermath of Dieppe, and the subsequent re-training, adequate preparation for battle in Normandy? Do the various 4th Brigade battles in Normandy reveal why the Essex Scottish was less successful than its sister battalions? Can battalion leadership, or lack thereof, account for the Essex's record in the Normandy campaign? If not, what can?

I decided to look the battles of Dieppe (August 19, 1942) and Verrières Ridge (July 20/21, 1944) because those two engagements were devastating for the Essex Scottish Regiment and so provided good brackets within which to examine the questions above. Furthermore, within these brackets, I thought the period of reconstitution and re-training that took place might help in providing answers to these questions. This period of re-training is very instructive in that a good level of standardization was achieved among the three 4th Brigade battalions. If, therefore, the battalions performed differently when they again met the enemy in Normandy, it would become possible to claim that different factors (other than training) might account for the varied levels of success or failure. These other factors included issues of circumstance and leadership on the battlefield.

In a historiographical sense, I have found that the majority of histories on the Normandy campaign have dealt primarily with Corps, Division and Brigade level documents. As a result, these histories tend to view these battles through a higher command lens. Consequently, historians have accepted Brigadiers' and Divisional Commanders' assessments of battles and why things went wrong or, indeed, why they did not. Such analyses do not delve too deeply into what the men actually went through and how the Commanding Officers (COs) at the battalion level practiced their craft. I believe that battalion-level leadership is of the utmost importance because such officers actually went into battle with their men, unlike some (some might say most) Brigadiers and higher

commanders. We therefore have a canon of literature in which we view battalion commanders as their superiors did, which is perhaps not actually reflective of such men's performance. As a consequence of the above outlined trend, Canadian historiography of the Normandy campaign specifically, and of the Second World War generally, has suffered.

I wished to examine the Essex Scottish Regiment very closely because of the sense of failure that surrounded the unit. As mentioned above, the regiment has virtually no historiography specifically devoted to its part in the war. When the unit is mentioned, in larger studies of Dieppe or the Normandy Campaign, they are almost inevitably tied to a sense of failure that exists in the literature around these two engagements. There is little, if any, historiography that looks closely into the unit's experience and what factors may have contributed to the failed attacks in which they were involved. I therefore wanted to examine the battalion in depth so as to determine if this sense of failure was well founded. Did the Essex fail? If so, why? Further, I felt it might be possible to apply my findings to the Normandy Campaign in terms of lessons learned by higher commanders, through the (often devastating) experiences of their battalions.

This approach necessitated extensive use of the Essex Scottish War Diary which, although very rich in its detailed account of daily life in the regiment, contained certain biases that generally tended to look favourably upon the Essex Scots' experiences. As I read through the Diary I found myself becoming very fond of the unit and its personnel. In a historical sense, this can be problematic as I might become influenced by the biases in the Diary. Therefore, I kept such issues in my mind at all times when researching and writing this project so as to provide as fair and unbiased an account as possible. Some of the other sources used contained very clear biases, such as the MacDonald Papers. Again, much care was taken in the handling of such documents so that I would be able to create a close approximation of the "truth" that was as unbiased and objective as possible.

Finally, by examining what happened on the ground, and how battalion leaders dealt with situations, I hope to provide a more accurate picture of what happened and why it happened that way. By examining the battalions of the 4th Brigade, their training and their battles, I hope to provide answers to the above questions.

Chapter I:
The 4th Brigade at Dieppe

Even before the first Canadian and British troops touched down on the French coast, the dominos began to fall. All of the careful planning that must inevitably be devoted to the execution of an operation, such as the one at Dieppe in August of 1942, all came down to one thing: surprise. It was to preserve the element of surprise that the commanders, under notable protest from Vice-Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, decided to forgo a sustained initial air bombardment of Dieppe and the surrounding defensive positions. It was hoped that the absence of such a bombardment would ensure that the first troops of the 4th and 6th Canadian Infantry Brigades, who were tasked with carrying out the raid, would catch the German defenders off guard. It was additionally feared that a sustained pre-raid bombardment would so damage the area in and around Dieppe that the troops and, more importantly, the tanks would not enjoy the freedom of movement that was believed necessary for success. The element of surprise, it was further hoped, would offset the dangers inherent with an amphibious assault against an undamaged and undisturbed defensive force. Furthermore, and unfortunately not commensurate with the maintenance of surprise, the Royal Navy insisted that the flank attacks, which were to be carried out by the Royal Regiment of Canada and elements of the Black Watch to the east of Dieppe and by the South Saskatchewan Regiment and the Cameron Highlanders of Canada to the west, must be delivered a full half-hour before the assault on the main beaches fronting the town itself so as to avoid congestion of landing craft.¹

The main frontal attack, scheduled to land precisely one half-hour after the flank attacks touched down, was to be carried off by the Essex Scottish Regiment on the left, at Red Beach, and the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry on the right, at White Beach. Unfortunately, the half-hour warning

¹ Colonel C.P. Stacey. *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War: Volume I: Six Years of War, The Army in Canada, Britain, and the Pacific.* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationary, 1955). p. 346.

that the entire German defensive system would receive as a result of the flank engagements would most likely eliminate the element of surprise that both the Essex and the RHLI counted on. Indeed, the German defenders had manned their machine-gun and mortar positions in time to meet the two southern Ontario regiments.

It should not be assumed however, that the raid was doomed from the start; but by examining the degeneration of Operation Rutter into Operation Jubilee (the Dieppe Raid), one begins to get that sense. The raid was originally codenamed Operation Rutter. This was, as a paper document, much more impressive than Jubilee. Rutter called for paratrooper assaults on Berneval and Varangeville, an intense pre-raid aerial bombardment, and a greater emphasis on the flank attacks at Puys and Pourville, which would include armoured support. The operation's name changed to Jubilee after Rutter was cancelled in July. The cancellation led to Canadian and British troops openly discussing the raid in pubs and on the street; after all they did not foresee this raid going ahead since it had apparently been "cancelled" and not merely "postponed". It was felt that by renaming the raid Operation "Jubilee", the Germans would be confused and would certainly not expect the British and Canadians to actually carry out an attack whose secrecy had been compromised. Nevertheless, once Jubilee had begun, and the dominos began to fall in the Germans' favour, the probability of success had been substantially reduced.

Despite this, it wasn't even the attempted flank landings that initially alerted many of the Germans on August 19, but a chance encounter at sea. The preliminary CMHQ report outlining Operation Jubilee, completed one month after the operation took place, states that the flank attack at Berneval, which was to be carried out by No. 3 Commando, commanded by Lt.-Col. Durnford-Slater, met with an unfortunate accident that jeopardized the entire operation. At 0300 hours the landing craft ferrying this force ashore, which was scheduled to land at 0450 hours, encountered

“five or six enemy armed vessels which were acting as escort to a tanker.”² These German vessels engaged the landing party, dispersed them, and delayed their arrival on the coast. Most importantly however, both the preliminary CMHQ report, as well as the final German report on the raid, claim that this brief naval engagement “unquestionably” resulted in the German coastal defenders being placed on high alert.³ This was the first domino to fall since surprise had been denied not only to the main force landing at Dieppe, but now had also been denied to at least one of the flank attacks: that being conducted by the Royals.

Only a portion of the commando that were to land on the left flank at Berneval did so and were therefore unable to take their objective: an enemy gun battery. This coastal defense battery was therefore able to harry the Royal Navy lying offshore and the assault force motoring inshore aboard their landing craft. Thus, No. 3 Commando’s failure to secure the battery constitutes the second domino. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the commando was able to pester the Germans manning the battery with small arms fire and thereby hampered their ability operate effectively.⁴

The offshore encounter with the German convoy also affected the progress of the first of the 4th Brigade units to land that day: the Royal Regiment of Canada. The Royals were to deliver an attack at Puys. Their objective was to secure the headlands east of Dieppe. These headlands, along with the ones to the west of the town, commanded the main beach fronting the town. Like No. 3 Commando, the RRC were scheduled to touchdown at 0450 hours. As a result of either forming up problems, or the naval engagement, the Royals were delayed by some twenty to thirty-

² CMHQ Report no. 83. Appendix “A” p. A-7. Directorate of History and Heritage (DHH).

³ CMHQ Report no. 83. Appendix “A” p. A-7 and CMHQ Report no. 116, Para 24 (English translation of German source). DHH.

⁴ CMHQ Report no. 83 p. A-7. DHH.

five minutes.⁵ Moreover, the enemy garrison manning the machine guns and mortars at Puys had apparently been placed on alert by the action at sea. A CMHQ report of 17 December 1943, which refutes the contention that the Germans had any foreknowledge of the raid as a result of "loose talk", does not refute the fact that an alarm was given at Varengeville at around 4:00 "in all probability due to the unfortunate encounter of No. 3 Commando with the enemy coastal patrol."⁶ Varengeville lies at the extreme west end of the attacking area and was No. 4 Commando's operational area. Most importantly, Varengeville lies on the *other side* of Dieppe from Berneval. Thus, it is possible to claim that since an alert was raised at Varengeville the word could have been passed down the coast from Berneval at around 0330, to Puys, to Dieppe, to Pourville and finally to Varengeville, which was alerted at around 0400. This refutes the claims of those historians that surprise had not been compromised by the naval encounter and that the defenders at Dieppe were unaware the main force would be landing as the ramps dropped. The report quoted above claims further that the alarm was not given at the Casino (which was situated on the main beach) until 0500.⁷ This would refute my supposition that the alarm was passed down the coast from Berneval to Varengeville from 0330 to 0400. Other sources also seem to indicate that the extreme right, Varengeville, was not alerted by the naval engagement, which would help account for the fact that No. 4 Commando successfully landed, carried the enemy battery that was its objective, captured prisoners, destroyed the guns and their ammunition dumps and withdrew on schedule.⁸ General McNaughton's cable to CMHQ on August 20 implies that while Varengeville was not alerted, every other section of the defensive zone was.⁹ Nevertheless, there is little doubt that the defenders at

⁵ CMHQ Report no. 83. Appendix "A" p. A-7. DHH.

⁶ CMHQ Report no. 109. Para 17, Sub-Para i. DHH.

⁷ CMHQ Report no. 109. Para 17 Sub-para iii. DHH

⁸ Cable from CGS McNaughton to "Defensor", Serial no. 6602. 20 Aug 1942 and Cable to McNaughton from "Defensor", Serial no. 6766. National Archives of Canada (NAC), RG24 Vol. 12300 3/DIEPPE/1.

⁹ Cable from CGS McNaughton to "Defensor" Serial no. 6602. Dated 20 Aug 1942. NAC, RG24 Vol. 12300 3/DIEPPE/1.

Berneval and Puys were alerted to the raid. Furthermore, even if the alarm was not raised until 0500 in Dieppe, the German defenders still had a crucial twenty minutes to get to their posts before the first elements of the Rileys and Essex touched down. Clearly, on the main beaches and at Puys, all of which the battalions of the 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade were to attack, surprise had been compromised.

In fact, the lodestone of success may well have been removed even before the Canadians took to their ships in the south of England. Not only had the secrecy of Operation Rutter been compromised, as mentioned above, but German defenses in the west were coming to a heightened state of readiness just as the Dieppe raid was mounted. There are numerous reasons for this, one of which has to do with the fact that German intelligence was reporting greater British naval activity in the Channel, coupled with the fact that a minor raid had already taken place on St. Nazaire on March 28, 1942.¹⁰ Hitler's July 9th directive suggested that British raids were likely "in the first place, the Channel coast, the area between Dieppe and Le Havre, and Normandy, since these sectors can be reached by enemy fighter planes and also because they lie within range of a large portion of the ferrying vessels."¹¹ Thus, the Germans began to bolster their western defenses. Furthermore, German defenders in these areas of the French coast were ordered to expect a major raid, or some other form of Allied activity. German commanders, being good at their craft, understood that raids were more likely when "moon and tide were favourable for landings" and so particular attention was of course paid during these periods.¹² The G.O.C.-in-C. Fifteenth Army (which guarded that part of the French coast upon which Dieppe lies) therefore "issued an order calling attention to three such periods: 27 July – 3 August, 10 – 19 August, and 25 August – 1

¹⁰ Stacey, P. 350.

¹¹ Adolf Hitler. Quoted in Stacey, P. 351.

¹² Stacey, P. 356.

September.”¹³ Clearly, therefore, the units of the 4th and 6th Canadian Infantry Brigades, whose attack went in on August 19, were sailing towards an operation that can at best be described as problematic.

The task facing the Royals, the Essex and the Rileys was, by the time they touched down and so much had already occurred, a daunting one. The Royal Regiment, whose attack at Puys (Blue Beach) was to be delivered one half hour before the main beach assault, experienced some confusion on forming up for the run inshore.¹⁴ Therefore, the assault craft had to motor in faster than planned. As a result, two landing craft, each containing 100 men, and four assault craft could not keep up; those craft left astern touched down later one-by-one. The slow progress of some of these craft can almost certainly be attributed to the naval engagement, which had badly shaken the men who felt that “all security had gone.”¹⁵ Despite the increased speed, the first craft to touch down did so between twenty and thirty-five minutes late. By this time (0510 – 0525), dawn had arrived and the Germans were able to cover the beach with well-aimed machine-gun fire.

The Royals came under MG and rifle fire even before landing, some men being hit at that stage.¹⁶ As the Royals began to disembark near the shore, a horrendous torrent of MG fire opened, virtually annihilating the first wave. The troops

met intense and unexpectedly heavy MG fire from a number of posts on the wall, sustaining very heavy casualties as they left the ALCs (Assault Landing Crafts). The survivors, who attained the comparative cover of the wall itself, were pinned to its face by enfilade fire from well-concealed positions on the flanks.¹⁷

The small beach at Puys was perfectly suited for the defence. Towering cliffs flanked the beach, upon which were situated pillboxes and houses that had been converted into sniper nests and MG

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Stacey. p. 364.

¹⁵ Eric Maguire. *Dieppe: August 19*. (London: Johnathan Cape, 1963). p. 89.

¹⁶ CMHQ Report #83 “Preliminary Report on Operation ‘Jubilee’ (The Raid on Dieppe), 19 Aug 42.” Appendix A. p. A-7. DHH.

¹⁷ Memorandum of Interview with Capt. G.A. Browne, RCA FOO attached R. Regt. C. Taken at CMHQ, London. 20 Oct, 1942. Report no. 89. DHH.

posts. Sniper posts also dotted the cliffs and the hilltops themselves. At the head of the beach was a seawall, on top of which was a dense thicket of an almost impassable mixture of bundled and concertina wire.¹⁸ Furthermore, the top of the 12-foot high seawall was expertly covered by a concrete pillbox, concealed in a summer house, situated on top of the cliffs of the east headland. Unlike the other beaches assaulted during Operation Jubilee, which were the scene of their own obscene slaughters, there was absolutely nowhere to hide on Blue Beach.

Lance Corporal Ellis, who landed with the Royals' Able Company in the first wave, recalled reaching the seawall and turning to watch his comrades attempt to join him, only to be cut down "chiefly by machine-gun fire which was now sweeping the beach."¹⁹ Those who did reach the wall found no relief as one of the German machine-gun posts, sited on the east headland, was able to effectively enfilade the seawall. L/Cpl Ellis found shelter only by struggling through the wire obstacle with the help of Captain Sinclair, also of Able Company, who blew a partial way through using a Bangalore Torpedo. Ellis spent approximately half an hour on the German side of the wire, but never saw an enemy soldier, except for maybe a machine-gunner's face in the distance from which tracer fire was emanating toward the beach. Ellis sniped at this "face" and believed he hit and silenced it. After climbing to a position from which he could survey Blue Beach, Ellis witnessed a scene of severe devastation... a rout. Ellis managed to make it back to the water, after being thrice wounded by booby traps, but was obliged to swim out to sea, while being sniped at, for one and a half to two hours before losing consciousness. A dinghy, which was searching for survivors, eventually picked Ellis up. This NCO's tale is unique in that he is thought to be the only RRC soldier that made it past the seawall at Blue Beach and to return to England that day. He offers unique insight into the raid at Puys as he was able to survey the entire beach, and then make it

¹⁸ Memorandum of Interview with B-66984, Cpl. L.G. Ellis, D.C.M., Royal Regiment of Canada, at CMHQ, London, 20 Oct. 1942. Report no. 89. DHH.

¹⁹ Ibid.

back down to safety in the Channel. The Royals' attack was repulsed; the regiment devastated; the objective not secured. The guns on the East Headland were not silenced and as a result, were able to bring fire to bear on the main beaches. Another domino had fallen.

The Essex and the Rileys arrived at the main beaches more or less on time and set about carrying out their orders to the best of their ability. Regardless of whether the defenders received twenty minutes or one hour's warning, mortar bombs began to burst around the Essex landing craft while they were still 100 yards from shore.²⁰ Immediately upon landing, as at Puys, machine-gun fire opened. A survey of the ground at Dieppe reveals that the Essex, unlike the Rileys to their immediate right, had no significant buildings to use as cover from which to launch a further assault into the town itself. As a result, most Essex infantry found themselves pinned to the seawall, directly below the esplanade fronting the town itself. Traversing the pebble-covered beach from the point of landing up the seawall was a hazardous enterprise. Many men became casualties of the incessant mortar and machine-gun fire at this early stage.

Private Maier, an anti-tank rifleman with Baker Company, and Private Fleming, a member of Charlie Company who landed in the first wave, both separately recall being pinned down quite effectively at the wall.²¹ Private Maier's landing craft (LCT 4) apparently touched down on time and landed three tanks and a scout car, along with a number of troops. However, as the scout car was being offloaded the LCT (Tank Landing Craft) was hit by mortar fire; the car was set ablaze and had to be towed off by a tank. As a result of the mortar hit, the LCT pulled back offshore without having offloaded all of the infantry. It swayed about apparently out of control before heading back in. In the meantime, approximately ten troops jumped over the side and tried to swim ashore.

²⁰ Memorandum of Interviews with Personnel of the Essex Scottish Regiment Repatriated from Germany, at Canadian Military Headquarters, 4 November 1943. Para 1. DHH.

²¹ Memo of interviews and Appendix "D" Memo of Interview with A-21509 Private Maier, J., DCM Essex Scottish, at CMHQ 29 December 1942. Para 4. DHH.

Private Maier recalls that only five succeeded in doing so, the rest apparently either drowned or were hit in the water. The tanks landed by LCT 4 floundered on the beach and were subjected to heavy enemy fire that succeeded, as it did throughout the raid, in immobilizing much of the armour by knocking of its tracks.

As is probably already becoming obvious in the foregoing paragraphs, the Essex Scottish, commanded by Lt.-Col. J.K. Jaspersen, who was first out of his boat urging the men on pistol in hand, and the RHLI, commanded by Lt.-Col. R.R. Lobbatt, faced a formidable defensive system that morning. Not only were the buildings fronting Dieppe filled with snipers, but there were mortar positions and machine-gun pillboxes sited to sweep the beach with fire from the front. Additionally, the entire beach was bracketed by both the west and the east headlands that commanded a perfect view of the entire length of the landing area. The Germans had made good use of these headlands. They had placed heavy guns at the tops of these features that were ranged on the beach. The headlands were also pitted with caves along its base and all over its face. These caves were also filled with mortars, machine-guns and heavier guns all designed to enfilade the entire length of the beach, and which could be rolled back inside the cave should they come under fire.²² There was also an old French tank turret cemented into the harbour mole to the east of Red Beach. This bristling coast provided ample opportunities for the German defenders to acquire some target practice. So after being attacked in the sea and mauled on the beach, most of the Essex infantry found themselves clinging to the sea wall, which was one of the only features that could afford any effective defilade from enemy fire. In front of them, just above the wall, was a thicket of barbed wire that had to be cut before the Essex could move forward as per their orders. Private Maier remembers that all three of the tanks from his LCT 4 made it past the first wire obstacle, but had been immobilized before being able to climb the seawall and clear the barbed

²² Terrence Robertson. *Dieppe: The Shame and the Glory*. (Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1962). p. 307.

wire there, which was about 6-10 feet deep.²³ Other groups of wire cutters also went to work making crossings for the men.²⁴

All of the soldiers' accounts of these first minutes of the raid speak of how troops were being wounded on all sides. The 4th Brigade intelligence log reveals that commanders off shore were receiving numerous confused and frankly bleak messages.²⁵ Most messages received from the troops first informed of heavy casualties and were quickly followed by requests for either aerial assistance or assistance from other units onshore. Both the RHLI and the Essex repeatedly attempted to raise the RRC on their wireless sets, but never received a response. Many Essex soldiers began to gather at the seawall and defended this position. During this defence, all accounts make mention of the fact that heavy mortar fire rained down incessantly. Private Maier described the situation as "quiet", except for constant mortar fire."²⁶ The Essex War Diary mentions that by 0545 (some twenty-five minutes after landing) casualties were "not as great as might be expected."²⁷ Nevertheless, it is estimated that 30-40% of those onshore had, by this point, become casualties. While holed up in his position at the seawall, Private Maier's comrades pointed out snipers and machine-gunners for him, at which he sniped with his anti-tank rifle and, by his own account, silenced several. Lieutenant W.H. Scott joined Maier's party and organized the men into five-minute watches so that they could maintain observation across the seawall, towards Dieppe. Maier and his party did not move from this initial position and he claims that he did not see anyone actually cross the seawall or attempt to organize an attack across it. "Any such attempt would, (he stated), have been suicidal."²⁸ Only after Maier himself and the majority of his party had been killed

²³ Memo of interviews and Appendix "D" Memo of Interview with A-21509 Private Maier, J., DCM Essex Scottish, at CMHQ 29 December 1942. Para 3. DHH

²⁴ Essex Scottish War Diary. Appendix VI. Aug 1-31, 1942. NAC. (Essex WD).

²⁵ HQ 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade. NAC. RG24, Vol. 14090, Reel T-11142. (4CIB).

²⁶ Ibid. Para 7.

²⁷ Essex WD Aug 1-31, 1942. Appendix VI.

²⁸ Ibid. Para 9.

or wounded as a result of the incessant mortar fire, were they ordered to evacuate, which they did, having breached no further than the seawall.

Despite Maier's claim that no attempt was made to cross the wall, several attempts *were* made. Maier, however, was landed slightly later than the first flight of landing craft, and was therefore unable to testify to any action that would have occurred before he arrived, by which time the battalion's numbers had been reduced by what appear to have been organized attempts to breach the seawall.²⁹ Maier was right about one thing though: they were indeed suicidal.

Sufficient of the battalion had now reached the sea wall to attempt scaling it and attacking the pillboxes on the esplanade... Smoke cover was put over by the 2-inch mortars and the crossing of the sea wall was attempted (assumedly before Private Maier landed or perhaps out of his view). This crossing was met with intensive gun and mortar fire as well as L.M.G. fire and almost all of the assaulting troops were killed or badly wounded. The Companies were reformed and despite the loss of some officers started a second assault under cover of smoke. By this time some of the 2-inch mortars had been destroyed or damaged by enemy fire and the second attack suffered (a) similar fate to the first. By this time, the wireless sets had been largely destroyed... The enemy continued to shell the beach with heavy mortar fire and M.G. fire on the flanks causing many casualties. A third attempt on a reduced scale was made to cross the wall and was met by a hail of fire causing most of the personnel to become casualties.³⁰

It is estimated that after having been ashore for just over an hour, the Essex had received about 75% casualties. Accordingly, they were unable to continue organized operations. Offensive action was continued from behind the seawall, in the form of sniping at pillboxes, windows and "anywhere the enemy showed themselves," by soldiers like Private Maier and Lieutenant Scott.³¹ Many of the tanks that made it ashore were immobilized either by enemy fire, or by the pebbly nature of the beach. The tanks that were only immobilized, as opposed to destroyed, were able to keep firing at the enemy and, by most accounts, greatly reduced the number of Canadian casualties taken that

²⁹ Essex WD. Aug 1-31, App 12, p. 14.

³⁰ Essex WD. Aug 1-31, 1942. Appendix VI. p. 2.

³¹ Ibid. p. 3.

day. Additionally, a number of tanks eventually made it up onto the esplanade, but the various obstacles the Germans had erected denied them access to the town itself.

Private Fleming recalls that, although no organized attacks made it over the wall, some individual soldiers did. He himself made it over and into the town, along with Corporal Grondin, as did several other men he met while there. Historian Terrence Robertson maintains that 15 men made the mad dash with Fleming, and were led by Company Sergeant-Major Stapleton. In Fleming's own account however, he maintains that while approximately nine soldiers began the dash with him, seven were hit on the esplanade and so only he and Grondin got into the houses facing the promenade. Only after arriving at the town did he meet a second small party that had made it across the esplanade independently of Fleming and were indeed led by CSM Stapleton. These two groups formed one and operated together in an attempt to reach Charlie Company's objective, which they apparently did. Fleming also recalls that the group disposed of several enemy snipers, and that he himself exploded an enemy ammunition dump. Once at the objective, Private Fleming was wounded and ordered back to the beach to evacuate. On his way back he was again wounded. Eight evacuation boats arrived at around 11:00 at Red Beach. Within minutes, six of them had been destroyed, but two were able to ferry their exhausted and wounded cargo to safety.³² As Fleming and another wounded Essex soldier approached the beach, the one remaining LCT was blown up and sank. Fleming was taken prisoner and gained no further knowledge of what happened to his party.

Meanwhile, Lieutenant-Colonel Jaspersen had remained at the seawall and unsuccessfully tried to organize attacks. The CO's biggest problem arose from the fact that his radio sets had been smashed and his signalers killed within twenty minutes of landing. Most movement along the seawall was suicidal. The Essex Scottish were literally and figuratively cut off from the world.

³² Stacey, p. 384-385.

Jasperson was barely able to contact Bob Labbatt, the Riley CO on White Beach to his right. Indeed, when the order to evacuate finally came from General Roberts, a runner had to deliver the message to Jasperson.³³

To the Essex' right, the Rileys experienced a similar fate, although came off slightly better than both of their sister battalions. Most accounts relate that the Rileys came under somewhat less fire from both Machine-guns and Mortars as their assault craft approached the beach.³⁴ After landing, the Rileys were able to capture the Casino, a large structure located on the esplanade that offered a good deal of shelter to the men. From this location they were able to send several men into the town in an attempt to carry out the planned objectives. At about 1030, the Rileys were joined at the Casino by elements of the Fusiliers Mont-Royal, the reserve battalion that had been landed at the wrong beach, because General Roberts had received deceptively positive messages that the Essex had occupied several buildings fronting the esplanade. As we have seen, those Essex Scots that had made it into the town could hardly be considered an "occupying force". Roberts ordered the FMR's into Red Beach to assist the Essex who were supposedly breaking through, but they instead, owing mainly to smoke screen cover, were landed on White Beach. As they advanced up the beach, those Rileys pinned to the seawall watched in amazement as more Canadians walked to their deaths in a now-hopeless enterprise. Most FMRs became casualties within a very short period of time after they landed.

The 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade's part in Operation Jubilee was an honourable one. The men of the Rileys, the Essex and the Royals (as well as those of the 6th Brigade) were landed on beaches that were perfectly suited to the defence and were alive with German defenders. The Royals were virtually wiped-out on Blue Beach as there was nowhere to hide; even the seawall did

³³ John Mellor. *Forgotten Heroes: the Canadians at Dieppe*. (Toronto: Methuen, 1975). p. 83.

³⁴ Essex WD. Appendix 12, p. 8.

not offer protection to these men whose only hope of survival was to breach deeper into enemy territory through a virtually impenetrable defensive system. The Rileys and the Essex were landed at the main beaches and were subjected to well-aimed and constant mortar, artillery and small arms fire. With twenty minutes of landing, these battalions were virtually cut off from radio communications with their commanding officer, General Roberts, and from each other. The two battalion commanders found that they were only able to exercise command and control over those men within shouting distance. Nevertheless, the men, both spurred on by their COs and often on their own initiative, repeatedly attempted to cross the seawall. Elements of the Essex Scottish and the RHLIs did indeed make it into the town against all odds. Once there, they were able to wreak considerable havoc before being killed, wounded, captured, or returning to the beach for evacuation. Most of those that did make it back found evacuation impossible, especially on Red Beach because "so few boats were available."³⁵

The men of the 4th Brigade had fought honourably, by their own account, and courageously, by the enemy's account. Unfortunately they were sent on an operation whose successful conclusion was, perhaps, compromised even before they set foot in their landing craft. The almost total lack of surprise achieved at Dieppe, and the surrounding areas, along with the overwhelming firepower superiority of the enemy, sealed the fates of those men. It can be said therefore, that while the operation was a failure, it cannot be attributed to a failure of either the men, or the officers who landed. Clearly, the Canadians that landed at Dieppe were overwhelmed by superior firepower from an alert enemy in strong defences, which is something that neither the men nor their leaders at the battalion level could have done anything about. At Dieppe, the Canadians failed to achieve their objectives because the circumstances on the ground made success virtually impossible.

³⁵ Memo of interview with Pte Fleming. Para 7. DHH.

It should be noted however, that the Allied armies drew some valuable lessons from Dieppe that helped them to develop a successful formula for the invasion of Normandy two years later. Perhaps the most fundamental lesson that the unfortunate Canadians of the 4th and 6th Brigades taught Allied invasion planners was:

... the necessity for fire support in any operation where it has not been possible to rely on the element of surprise. This fire support must be provided by heavy and medium Naval bombardment, by air action, by special vessels or craft working close inshore, and by using the fire power of the assaulting troops while still sea-borne.³⁶

As the world would witness on June 6, 1944, the Canadians at Dieppe had, perhaps unwittingly, done a great service to the Allied cause in the Second World War.

The 4th Brigade had been virtually wiped-out on August 19, 1942. However, it was acknowledged that a second front would at some point in the future be opened in France. How would the battalions of the 4th Brigade be prepared for such a monumental task, after just having their guts ripped out? Simple: they would start again from scratch...

³⁶ CMHQ Report no. 128. p. 2. DHH.

Chapter II: Reconstitution and Retraining

The Essex Scottish War Diary entry for August 20, 1942 states that “(c)ook houses worked overtime and stood in readiness to receive the tired men from FRANCE but only several men began to straggle back from Southern England ports.”³⁷ It must have been a sad day indeed back at the battalion home in Middleton-on-Sea. The War Diary also mentions how proud the reserve battalion must be that the Essex were involved in the “glorious attack on DIEPPE.”³⁸ Following the somber announcement that only several men were straggling back, the diarist bleakly adds that “(r)umours filtered through that casualties were high.”³⁹ The Royal Regiment’s official history offers a similarly sad account that speaks of a hot meal being prepared for 500 men on the evening of August 19 that was ready in the early evening. When the first two men came in at 2100, the meal had stood untouched. For the remainder of the evening men returned in ones and twos. “Before midnight it had become obvious that the Royal Regiment of Canada had virtually ceased to exist as a unit.”⁴⁰ The same is true of the Essex Scottish Regiment and, to a lesser degree, the RHLI. Therefore, as things stood on August 20, 1942, the entire 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade had also ceased to exist as a fighting formation.

Immediately the Essex Scottish Regiment set about reconstituting itself. Having lost approximately 75% of its numbers, including Lieutenant-Colonel Jaspersen, who was taken prisoner along with Lt.-Col. Labbatt of the RHLI, and Lt.-Col. Catto of the Royals, as well as Brigadier Southam, reconstitution would be a daunting task. The 4th Brigade had also lost Brigadier Sherwood Lett who was wounded by mortar fire while still at sea. On the main beaches, the Essex

³⁷ Essex WD. August 1-31, 1942. Aug 20.

³⁸ Ibid. Aug 19.

³⁹ Ibid. Aug 20.

⁴⁰ D.J. Goodspeed. *Battle Royal: a History of the Royal Regiment of Canada, 1862-1962*. (Toronto: Royal Regiment of Canada Association, 1962). p. 402.

had lost 530 men and the Rileys 480. In total, the main beaches claimed 2085 officers and soldiers killed, wounded, captured or missing.⁴¹ Total Canadian casualties amounted to 3367 all ranks, of which 907 were fatal.⁴²

The process of rebuilding began at once. On August 21, the Essex took on strength several officers from the reserve battalion, including Major J.H. Mothersill. August 22 saw thirteen Other Ranks join the battalion with rumours of more to come in the ensuing days. Regimental dismay is clear in the Diary. The diarist remarks dourly that “(the Essex Scottish Regiment) gives silent tribute to... (our) comrades who have fallen decisively that the Allies might gain experience and confidence in the opening of the oft-mentioned Second Front.” The diarist adds, in capital letters: “THEY HAVE NOT DIED IN VAIN.”⁴³ This officer further gives vent to his anger and frustration by commenting that “the weakened (battalion) is ready to offstand a German reprisal raid with full vengeance. It is not likely that in the event of any such raid that there would be many German prisoners taken – such is the regimental anger.”⁴⁴ This entry was made on the same day that the first of the memorial parades and services were held for those killed at Dieppe. This officer’s dismay and anger are quite understandable.

It was on that same day, August 23, that the battalion received its first significant reinforcement draft as one hundred and twenty eight other ranks came on strength. By August 24, five days after the raid, training was resumed “so far as possible,” as was battalion organization.⁴⁵ This same day, however, it was again noted that the regiment needed every available man “badly”.⁴⁶ 2nd Canadian Infantry Division, to which both the 4th Brigade and the Essex belonged, arranged for the transfer of NCOs from the 5th Brigade’s Black Watch and the Calgary Highlanders

⁴¹ CMHQ Report no. 108. July 12, 1950. DHH.

⁴² CMHQ Report no. 108. July 12, 1950. DHH.

⁴³ Essex WD. Aug 22, 1942.

⁴⁴ Essex WD. Aug 23, 1942.

⁴⁵ Essex WD. Aug 24, 1942.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

who were attached to the Essex for one month to assist in the organization and initial retraining of the unit. Such low-level commanders were among those who experienced the highest proportion of casualties at Dieppe, as is usually the case, and the fact that such men were often invaluable trainers made the acquisition of 5th Brigade NCOs a great step forward for the unit.

Major Mothersill received a promotion and took command of the Essex Scottish as Lt.-Col. on August 26. In the last days of August the depleted ranks were busily engaged in Vickers training and comprehensive reorganization. Those on strength were kitted out by month's end and on August 30, Mothersill called an officers meeting to outline training and administrative policy. On the last day of that awful month, the War Diary noted that "training started in all seriousness."⁴⁷ All men in the battalion were tested in small arms usage, including cooks, batmen and orderlies. The War Diary goes on to mention that such men could now be seen on parade for an hour before going back to their normal employment. The Essex were, by the end of the month, slowly but surely rebuilding. It was, however, quite impossible for them to be trained in anything more than at the individual level. Most of the new men seemed to be raw recruits and had to undergo a full complement of Basic Training.⁴⁸ The full-scale exercises of July and August 1942 were a thing of the past. The same can be said of the Royals and the Rileys.⁴⁹ However, the level of reorganization achieved so shortly after the Dieppe raid is nothing short of astounding. The Essex determination that shone through on the beaches at Dieppe was again showing itself in its disheartening aftermath.

Essex training continued apace throughout the fall of 1942. However it is clear that the battalion was engaged in very low-level training at this time. All of September was devoted to small arms, light machine-gun, grenade, field craft, first aid, anti-gas, map reading, anti-tank rifle, mess

⁴⁷ Essex WD. Aug 31, 1942.

⁴⁸ Essex WD. Oct 7, 1942.

⁴⁹ D.J. Goodspeed. *Battle Royal*. p. 406.

tin cooking, route march, organized sports, and even bayonet instruction.⁵⁰ By the last week of September, the Field Return of Officers indicates that the battalion was in need of only eight more officers.⁵¹ Likewise, the Field Return of Other Ranks reveals that the regiment had grown to 504 men by September 4, with approximately 280 other ranks still being required to fill out establishment. Again, significant progress was made in this regard because by September 18 the battalion had grown to 604. Some of these men were transferred over from other battalions, most notably the Black Watch. By contrast, the RHLI, who had suffered somewhat fewer casualties at Dieppe, had grown to only twenty-two officers and 486 other ranks by the end of August.⁵²

On October 2, when the Essex ranks had further swelled to 660 other ranks, the Canadian Minister of National Defence, J.L. Ralston, inspected the 4th Brigade. The Essex formed up at 0730 hours that morning and began the ten-mile march to Arundel Park, the RHLI camp location, and to which the Royals also marched for inspection.⁵³ The War Diary proudly proclaims that with the previous day's march, in which Able and Baker Companies made a 17-mile route march, elements of the battalion will have marched 37-miles after returning to Middleton-on-Sea, the Essex Scottish encampment area in England. This was the first long march the battalion had made since the Dieppe raid and was an obvious source of pride. However, although it should be rightly celebrated in the face of such adversity, that such a march was seen as cause for significant comment indicates that the battalion still had a long way to go. Nevertheless, the Minister heaped praise upon the men who stood proudly on the left flank, next to the RHLI, rounded out by the Royals on the right, as the HQ flags fluttered "proudly in the brilliant sunlight."⁵⁴ In the days following the inspection, in which Ralston complimented the Essex for "the fine spirit shown by the (battalion),"

⁵⁰ Essex WD. Sept. 1-30. Training Syllabus. App. 3.

⁵¹ Essex WD. Sept. 1-30. Field Return of Officers.

⁵² Brereton Greenhous. *Semper Paratus: the History of the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry (Wentworth Regiment), 1862-1977*. (Hamilton : RHLI Historical Association, 1977). p. 220.

⁵³ Essex WD. Oct 2, 1942.

⁵⁴ Essex WD. Oct 2, 1942. Appendix B.

Brigade honours were announced. Of particular note here are Lance Corporal Ellis of the Royals, and Private Maier of the Essex Scottish, both of whom were awarded the D.C.M.

The officer training program that had begun anew in September was stepped up in October as the Essex' new officer corps were sent on training exercises. Lt.-Col. Mothersill, along with his Company Commanders, attended a Brigade-level tactical map reading exercise on October 2.⁵⁵ On the 4th, Mothersill, the Company Commanders, and Lieutenant F.A. Tilston attended a T.E.W.T on Defence; on the 5th Mothersill and Major H.J. Kennedy were involved in a tactical exercise on the 2-pounder Anti-Tank gun. As October continued the Essex officers were engaged in similarly in-depth and frequent exercises. Clearly, if the battalion itself were to be made battle-ready again, training would have to start with the officers. An important addition was made to the battalion's officers on October 9 when Major B.J.S. MacDonald joined the Essex as Second-in-Command (2 i/c).⁵⁶ In civilian life, MacDonald was a solicitor and barrister in the regimental home at Windsor, Ontario. MacDonald was later to have a profound impact on the future of the Essex Scottish Regiment.

While the officers enjoyed their in-depth training regimen, the other ranks were still being fed on a hearty diet of small arms, field craft, L.M.G., and bayonet training. The War Diary claims that, in terms of training since the reorganization, "there is nothing out of the ordinary in method."⁵⁷ Platoon Commanders were ordered to inform the men that, the sooner Basic Training was completed, the sooner they could move on to Battle Training. It is further evident that the men were "anxious to leave basic training behind."⁵⁸ Accordingly, battalion training began moving from the elementary to Battle Drill on October 19. This new training included Anti-Aircraft, Field Formations,

⁵⁵ Essex WD. Oct 2, 1942 and *Semper Paratus*. p. 221.

⁵⁶ Essex WD. Oct 9, 1942.

⁵⁷ Essex WD. Oct. 7, 1942.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Section Drill, Fire and Movement, and the Assault. Apparently the proficiency of the men at this new level of training satisfied the instructors as it was continued throughout the month. On October 16, 77 other ranks were taken on strength. On October 27, those men singled out for honours were transported to London where the King gave them their medals. The October 30 Field Return of Officers reveals that, with thirty-six officers on strength, the battalion did not require any more officer reinforcements. On the same day, the battalion included 763 other ranks, which was virtually up to establishment. A Brigade inspection on November 2 demonstrated that although the regiment had much left to do, "many favourable comments" were made on smartness of equipment, state of equipment and smartness on parade.⁵⁹ In the afternoon the regiment conducted tactical exercises with an emphasis on the platoon as the sub-unit. Thus by the beginning of November 1942, a mere nine weeks after the Dieppe raid, the Essex Scottish Regiment was back up to fighting strength, had generally moved past Basic Training and into Battle Training, and acquitted itself favourably during inspections. Taken as a whole, this should be considered a remarkable accomplishment.

Throughout the balance of the year, the Essex Scots trained regularly. Of course, all was not toil and sweat as the War Diary makes frequent mention of YMCA dances and film screenings for other ranks, including "the bewildering picture 'The Maltese Falcon'."⁶⁰ Sports were also a very common activity for the Essex Scots, especially ice hockey in the winter months. Most gratifyingly, "(The Essex Scottish) played HQ 4th Cdn. Inf. Bde. drubbing them 6-0 in an Ice Hockey Game at the Sports Palace in Brighton..."⁶¹ Women, as one would imagine, also occupied the thoughts of the men. A local dance in honour of those who returned from Dieppe "was a very good affair, plenty to eat and drink and a good number of agreeable dancing partners, as well."⁶²

⁵⁹ Essex WD. Nov 2, 1942.

⁶⁰ Essex WD. Nov 11, 1942

⁶¹ Essex WD. Nov 19, 1942.

⁶² Essex WD. Nov 20, 1942.

December 1st, 1942 brought official word that basic training was completed. Further steps were taken to standardize training at the battalion level, on a Brigade-wide scale. In late 1942, the 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade Battle School was opened to units of the Brigade. The object of the school was to “train officers and NCOs as instructors for battalion battle drill training” and “to ensure a common standard of battle drill, and sub-unit tactics within the Brigade.”⁶³ Further testament was paid to the training efficiency of the Essex Scottish when Major B.J.S. MacDonald was selected to be Chief Instructor of this school.⁶⁴ The Battle School was also responsible for the publishing of numerous training pamphlets including: *Notes on Map Reading, Military Conventional Signs, Enemy Weapons, the German Army in Pictures, German Forces in the Field, German Infantry in Action, German Armoured Formations in Action, Notes on the German Army, and Guide to the Identification of German Units.*⁶⁵

The end of 1942 brought an inspection by Maj.-Gen. J.H. Roberts, G.O.C. 2nd Canadian Infantry Division. Again the Essex Scots outdid themselves and the General “beamed his approval”.⁶⁶ As Christmas approached, Lt-Gen Harry Crerar sent a message to all commanders in I Canadian Corps stating that “we know, within ourselves, that we have not wasted the time at our disposal. The days and weeks of hard training which all ranks have experienced in 1942 have fitted the Corps, in convincing manner, for the vital part it will someday play. We are better soldiers, inside and out, than we were a year ago.”⁶⁷ Finally, 1942, that long and arduous year, came to a close leaving “many an Essex Scot wondering what was in store for the unit for the year 1943: Battle? Nearly a certainty. The finish of the war – we hope so but don’t forget dear God we like a

⁶³ 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade Operational Instructions. NAC. Microfilm Reel T-11143.

⁶⁴ Essex WD. Dec 3, 1942 and 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade Operational Instructions. NAC. Microfilm Reel T-11143.

⁶⁵ Essex WD. Dec 3, 1942 and 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade Operational Instructions. NAC. Microfilm Reel T-11143.

⁶⁶ Essex WD. Dec 30, 1942.

⁶⁷ Letter from H.D.G. Crerar to all commanders I Canadian Corps. 19 Dec 1942. NAC. Reel T-11143.

scrap, we Canadians, for a just cause (Some might say for just any cause).⁶⁸ Apparently, the Essex Scottish regiment was beginning to chomp at the bit.

1943 began with the continuance of battle training. Both the RHLI and the RRC were involved in similar training at this time also.⁶⁹ Virtually every day in January was taken up by either physical, skills, or weapons training or by lecture and film presentations on topics such as the camouflage of vehicles, security, and German paratroopers.⁷⁰ The battalion's companies took turns attending the Brigade battle school, which allowed them to train with other companies from the Brigade in higher-level battle exercises. Such activity, it was hoped, would standardize 4th Brigade training and make it into a more seamless fighting unit that could more easily be commanded by the Brigadier. Indeed, Brigadier Penhale often spent time at the battalions of the 4th Brigade discussing training and administration. The Brigadier also appears to have spent a good deal of time at the Brigade Battle School. The 4th Brigade War Diary also mentions that Major B.J.S. MacDonald spent much time at Brigade HQ in his capacity as Chief Instructor.⁷¹

Back at battalion, the men were constantly learning about weapons, radio sets, intelligence gathering, gas warfare, semaphore, mortar firing, fieldcraft, and signaling, to mention only a handful of the diverse array of topics in which the men were trained on a virtually continuous basis. This, of course, was always interspersed with physical training (P.T.), which included almost daily marches ranging from nine to twenty-seven miles in length. Cross-country running with rifle and light webbing was also a common P.T. exercise for the Essex Scots. Brigade inspections of the regiment, such as that conducted on January 15, 1943, always came back as "very satisfying".⁷² Nevertheless, Brigade was always looking for deficiencies, and some did exist. For example, 4th

⁶⁸ Essex WD. Dec 31, 1942.

⁶⁹ Royal Hamilton Light Infantry War Diary (RHLI WD) and Royal Regiment of Canada War Diary (RRC WD). January 1943.

⁷⁰ Essex WD. Jan 8, 1943.

⁷¹ 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade War Diary (4CIB WD). January 1943.

⁷² 4CIB WD. Jan 15, 1943.

Brigade ordered that, insofar as Company-level training was concerned, all three battalion COs must closely supervise Company Commanders since these junior officers, despite showing promise, were not yet experts at their craft. Apparently the companies were not working sufficiently as teams and this, stated Brigade orders, needed attention.⁷³ Penhale further observed that COs were not following standard training policies, such as those they were trying to achieve at the Brigade Battle School. So on January 22, the Brigadier ordered that COs "in every case, will prepare standard exercises and direct their conduct on the ground chosen. All (companies) should be passed through the same exercises in order to ensure uniformity of instruction."⁷⁴ Penhale further ordered that the CO or 2 i/c must be physically present to direct all such training. The battalions were directed to ensure that *at least* two company exercises were carried out each week. With Divisional and Corps level exercises on the horizon, Penhale apparently wanted to ensure that his Brigade would acquit itself favourably. He closed these orders by making it clear that the COs of each battalion were personally responsible for training efficiency.

I again wish to reiterate and emphasize my remarks made at a recent C.O.s conference regarding the personal responsibility devolving upon C.O.s in regards to (training). Only by making (training) his chief concern and by giving to it inspired direction will the Unit under his (command) respond to his effort, and become a well balanced fighting organization. Personal influence is necessary. The Unit invariably becomes the mirror of the capacity, knowledge and personality of the Commanding Officer. Drive is essential at all times. C.O.s will fail in their duty if they do otherwise than keep these considerations naturally before them.⁷⁵

As a result, Brigade training instructions for February called for the battalions to "practice (companies) as combat teams," to "practice (the battalion) as a team in (cooperation) with (support) arms," and "to raise the standard of individual (training for) all ranks."⁷⁶ Brigade reiterated that "the standard of (training) among junior leaders has improved but still leaves much to be desired." The

⁷³ 4CIB WD. Jan 6, 1943

⁷⁴ 4CIB WD. January 1943. Appendix 2B. January 22, 1943.

⁷⁵ 4 CIB WD. Appendix 28. January 22, 1943.

⁷⁶ 4 CIB WD. Appendix 29. January 28, 1943.

Brigade ordered that “all personnel and equipment will be brought to the highest state of efficiency.”⁷⁷

January saw an increase in the number of larger scale exercises. Battalion Headquarters participated in the divisional exercise *Pickwick*, the object of which was to exercise battalion HQ in signals procedure generally, and in particular the new phonetic alphabet. This training was also designed to exercise battalion HQ in operational moves and to practice the issuing of orders in the field.⁷⁸ Additionally, 125 all ranks took part in ten days training in Rothesay, Scotland in assault landing. All four rifle companies (of all three battalions) took turns in undergoing “Island Exercises”, which involved one platoon of the company protecting a “mythical” island while the remainder of the company invaded the island.⁷⁹

February saw the continuance of intensive training for all battalions of the 4th Brigade.⁸⁰ Enemy bombing raids, such as the one carried out against Bognor Regis on February 5, occasionally punctuated the training routine. The Essex War Diary maintains that “the raid was short but the effects will be felt for some time. Buildings were badly damaged and windows in most stores in Bognor were broken. These hit and run raids are getting to be a common occurrence these days but are more of a nuisance than anything else.”⁸¹ Such raids reminded the Essex Scots that a war was still on, but the fact that German raids were more of a “nuisance” than anything else was beginning to mirror events in the war as a whole in early 1943. Despite minor raids on England, the Luftwaffe had essentially been checked and the island itself was no longer under siege; the invasion scare of 1940 had long since passed. On January 31, 1943, the German Sixth Army under General von Paulus surrendered after having been surrounded by the Red Army at

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Essex WD. Jan 19, 1943.

⁷⁹ Essex WD. Jan 18, 1943.

⁸⁰ Syllabi of Training. Essex WD, RHLI WD, RRC WD. February 1943.

⁸¹ Essex WD. Feb 5, 1943.

Stalingrad. This marked the Wehrmacht's first major setback of the war in Europe. In North Africa, Rommel's *Afrikakorps* had been checked and was in retreat; its rear was further threatened by the Anglo-American invasion of Morocco and Algeria.⁸² 1942 had seen two great American naval victories in the Pacific theatre at the Battle of the Coral Sea and the Battle of Midway, the cumulative effect of which changed the tone of the war in Asia and set the Japanese on the defensive. Mid-1943 was to see the successful Allied invasion of Sicily in Operation "HUSKY", in which the 1st Canadian Division played a major role. Hitler's dream of world domination and German ascendancy was turning into a fight for survival. Nevertheless, these Allied victories were on the periphery of what everyone knew must soon become the main event: a cross-channel invasion of Fortress Europe. Only such an invasion would satisfy Soviet demands for increased Anglo-American support in Europe and, if successful, would undoubtedly hasten the end of the war. It has also been supposed that greater Allied sacrifice and an increased contribution to the continental fighting would assure the United States and Great Britain (and her allies) an equal place among the victors at war's end.

As is well known, the invasion would come about in the form of Operation "OVERLORD". The 2nd Canadian Division had been selected as a "Breakout" unit in this operation. That is, once General Keller's 3rd Division's initial task of invading the French coast and setting up a bridgehead had been completed, the 2nd Division would be inserted into the line to break out of the bridgehead.⁸³ Thus, much 2nd Division training in 1943 was devoted to preparations for such a role, beginning with Exercise *Punch*. The purpose of *Punch* was to practice movement in the approach march, deployment, attack, patrols, withdrawal, and occupation of a defensive position.⁸⁴

Significantly, the Essex Scottish would need to call upon every aspect of this training during its first

⁸² Greenhous. *Semper Paratus*. p. 223.

⁸³ Goodspeed. *Battle Royal*. p. 408.

⁸⁴ 4 CIB WD. Feb. 1943.

actual encounter with the enemy in the post-Dieppe period when they would take part in the attack on Verrières Ridge on July 20, 1944. During *Punch*, the entire battalion, less a minimal rear party composed of “over age” and medically unfit personnel, began marching over the hilly terrain near Middleton-on-Sea, and were accompanied by “bren guns mounted on bicycles which moved along the column stopping at intervals and taking up A.A. defense positions.”⁸⁵ After one night’s sleep out on the ground, the Essex Scots were awoken at 0445 hours for the second day of *Punch*. The battalion crossed their starting point at 0630, and made contact with the “enemy” at 0730. The Essex were slowed down by “enemy action” but succeeded in “bounding” forward. That is, the carriers would move forward by several hundred yards and would wait for the companies to reach and consolidate their positions. At this point, the carriers would again move forward. At 1300 hours the Essex were held up by enemy action and it appears that a “lack of information” hampered the battalion’s progress in this exercise.

It seemed that everyone was fighting the enemy on his own and not as a (battalion or unit). However, we must not overlook the fact that this was the first exercise the (battalion) as a whole had been on since Dieppe. It takes time for new men to understand all things necessary to make these exercises a success.⁸⁶

The battalion then made a “couple” of unsuccessful attempts to capture their objective, but were finally ordered to bed down for the night. The battalion was up early again the next day and at 0810 the CO reported a successful attack and consolidation. Thus, Exercise *Punch* ended with the Essex having captured their objective, but with difficulty. The War Diary makes clear that the men were not properly up to the task initially as problems abounded on the first day of the assault. Nevertheless, the battalion succeeded in capturing its objective and could take pride in the fact that its first proper exercise in the post-Dieppe period had come off successfully. Clearly, it was the type

⁸⁵ Essex WD. Feb. 16, 1943.

⁸⁶ Essex WD. Feb. 17, 1943.

of lessons learned in such exercises that would eventually prepare the unit for battle in Normandy. At the same time, the Essex' sister battalions were also taking part in these exercises. As we shall see shortly, Intra-Brigade cooperation was becoming more intricate as the months passed and the units became more battle-ready. The Royals put in their own successful attack on February 19 "around sunset and the position was carried although the C.O. was 'killed' when victory was in sight."⁸⁷ Like the Essex, the Royals were successful in their first full-fledged exercise, but suffered their own setbacks.

In the days, weeks and months that followed, the battalions of the 4th Brigade continued training according to the schedules laid out by their Commanding Officers. Such training was standard throughout the Canadian Army in England and, when not on exercise, occupied the men most of the time. The schedule included Close Order Drill and Inspection, Route Marches (most often 9-miles for the Essex Scots), Gas Training, Specialist Training, P.T., Battle Drill, Maintenance, Weapons Training, Semaphore, and lectures. All of these types of training were quite flexible and allowed trainers and company commanders to train and test the men in a multitude of different activities. The day after the Essex Scots returned from *Punch*, February 19, the battalion sent Company 2 i/c's, CSMs, QMs and guides out to recce the area for Exercise *Elm*: a divisional exercise. There was to be no rest for the Essex Scots!

After packing up again on the 20th, the battalion moved out for the exercise on February 21st in two separate blocks. Exercise *Elm* was to exercise the battalion in the approach march, deployment and the contact battle. By 1600 hours the Essex marching column had reached the assembly area. An 'O' Group was held that evening, guards were posted and the first night of *Elm* passed quietly.⁸⁸ The next day dawned mild and clear. The Essex were in reserve and so had little

⁸⁷ RRC WD. Feb 19, 1943.

⁸⁸ Essex WD. Feb 21, 1943.

to do in the opening stages of the exercise. Nevertheless, "messages came pouring in telling how our forward troops were fairing with the enemy."⁸⁹ Finally the move order came at 1639 hours. After supper the battalion moved to another position, but apparently did not see any action. On the 23rd, the Essex were issued orders to go into the attack. They moved off to a new concentration area, with Able Company in the lead, but upon reaching their new position, a cease-fire was called "and the war was over."⁹⁰ Although the Essex never made contact with the enemy during this exercise, it was acknowledged that the battalion had, during the course of both *Elm* and *Punch*, gained valuable practice at being ready to move at a moment's notice. Indeed, such knowledge was valuable, but the real test (that of being scored on actual confrontation with the enemy) was yet to come. As regards *Elm*, the unit had been trained in the approach march and deployment, but not yet in the contact battle. The Royals gained similarly valuable, but incomplete experience, since they never closed with the enemy on *Elm*. Nevertheless, "it was reckoned that the rifle (companies) had marched very close to 100 miles since starting on exercise PUNCH five days previous."⁹¹ Taken as a whole, it can be stated fairly that in the six months since Dieppe, the Essex Scottish Regiment and the other 4th Brigade battalions, had undergone an almost complete reconstitution and were well on their way to being re-trained and battle ready units. Clearly, however, more training was yet necessary.

Insofar as Brigade-level training is concerned, the Essex Scots, when on exercises, were in constant contact with their sister battalions, the RRC and the RHLI⁹². The Brigadier emphasized that there was to be a common Brigade standard of training and overall quality among all three battalions. Such direction can be seen in the orders and directives issued by Penhale to his

⁸⁹ Essex WD. Feb 22, 1943.

⁹⁰ Essex WD. Feb 23, 1943.

⁹¹ RRC WD. Feb. 23, 1944

⁹² Essex WD, RHLI WD, and RRC WD. Feb and March, 1943.

battalion commanders, as was seen above. The Brigade Battle School was also intended to create training standardization, but at the same time happily resulted in a common *Brigade* affinity among the troops that went higher than battalion loyalty.⁹³ Such Brigade-level allegiance was fairly rare among Canadian units in the Second World War; the battalion was normally where the men's hearts belonged. The men of the 4th Brigade battalions also cared more for their individual units, but the very frequent exposure that each man had to other units, through company exercises conducted with other sub-units from sister battalions, created an affinity for the higher formation also. The Battle School also facilitated such an attachment to the Brigade, as did the fact that the men from each unit were billeted very close to one another and often spent time together in the local town. There were frequent inter-battalion sporting events and competitions, and while on exercises, the units all moved together, taking it in turns to be the lead battalion... the one that might bump into the enemy first. The battalions had suffered very similarly at Dieppe. Although it should be noted that the majority of the men that now made up the Brigade were brought on strength after the raid. Nevertheless, there existed a cadre of officers and other ranks in each unit that remembered the raid and what the entire Brigade went through. The new 4th Brigade was forged in the fire of Dieppe and as 1943 began, letters received by any single unit from Dieppe POWs were shared amongst all three battalions, signifying that *everyone* in the Brigade cared how RHLI, RRC, and Essex Scottish POWs were faring in Germany.⁹⁴ The 4th Brigade, because of Dieppe, and because of the unity developed by both the Brigadier and the COs, was becoming a cohesive fighting formation.

⁹³ Such loyalty can be seen especially during inspections when the Brigade was to form up as one unit. The War Diaries of all three battalions often comment proudly on the Brigade's accomplishments, as opposed to only focusing on battalion achievements. See Essex WD, RHLI WD, and RRC WD. Feb. 1 – March 10, 1943.

⁹⁴ See letters and Postcards in RHLI WD. Feb. 1944.

The Essex Scottish, as well as many other Canadian units, was finally given the opportunity to gain more in-depth training in the contact battle because on March 1st, Exercise *Spartan* began. *Spartan* was held under the direction of G.H.Q Home Forces, it involved ten divisions, and "more Canadians participated in it than in any other exercise of the war."⁹⁵ This was also the first post-Dieppe exercise in which the 4th Brigade truly fought as an entity under a single command. The Essex Scottish Regiment arrived at its concentration area by 0115 hours on the morning of March 1. All companies immediately established their headquarters and guards were posted as per routine. As quickly as the men could complete their routine jobs, they bedded down under the stars. Reveille was at the comparatively late hour of 0730 hours and the CO, Lt.-Col. Mothersill, conducted an inspection of the unit, checking camouflage, fire positions, and sanitation (the latter being focused on mainly because the battalion's Medical Officer accompanied Mothersill on this inspection). A Brigade 'O' group was held at 1400 hours. After the CO and IO reconnoitered a new area, they returned to the unit at 1840 hours, at which time Mothersill wrote up his orders. As much as possible, a sense of realism was sustained for this exercise as sappers had to establish a Brigade water point. A Brigade salvage point was also set up. "No bits of paper, cigarette cartons, etc. will be left around areas, which might disclose information to (the) enemy."⁹⁶ Wireless silence was strictly maintained, but the companies were able to set up good "line" communications. Of course, the battalion's vehicles were constantly being maintained and were said to be in good shape for any move.

After another move on the evening of March 2-3, battalion HQ was established at 0305 hours. By 0630, the battalion was again up and about. Most Essex Scots watched the sunrise that morning as they shivered through a cold wash and a quick breakfast. Later in the morning,

⁹⁵ D.J. Goodspeed, *Battle Royal*. p. 406. See also John A. English. *The Canadian Army and the Normandy Campaign: a Study of Failure in High Command*. (New York: Praeger, 1991) for an overview.

⁹⁶ Essex WD. March 1, 1943.

battalion lookouts brought in two “suspicious” looking men, who had been lurking around Charlie Company’s area. Their credentials were not sufficient to clear their actions or excuses, and as a result, these men were sent back to the divisional HQ prisoner cage.⁹⁷ Later that day, the men were issued their first “Compo” ration supper. This consisted of corned beef, bacon, beans, jam, tea, sugar, milk, and hard tack. With the issuing of such a meal, the War Diary maintains that “conditions on Exercise ‘SPARTAN’ were becoming more actual all the time and all we lacked now was live ammunition and the enemy to fire at.”⁹⁸ That same evening, March 3, an actual air raid was raised but the All-Clear was sounded without any bombs having fallen.

During this exercise, it seems that the battalion was constantly on the move, despite being continually told by Brigade that no move was imminent. During another move on the afternoon of March 4th, the 16th Canadian LT A.A. Regiment fed into the Essex lines and provided them with some real Anti-Aircraft protection. All went well on the move until around 2200 hours when, after having moved a total of 36 miles, the advance was held up by a bridge that had been demolished by the enemy. The battalion was obviously held up while engineers set about repairing the bridge. As the Essex Scots took up a “hedgehog” position and a recce party was sent out to find a suitable consolidation area, all ranks tried to get some sleep in the “wicked” cold and damp.⁹⁹ At 0345 hours the recce party returned and the battalion pushed on, reached the new position and parked its vehicles. No sooner had the men arrived that they received orders to move again. The troops marched all through the day and received no breakfast, lunch or dinner. Such privation, they were however told, should be expected in the field. Indeed, in July 1944, the Essex Scots would fight a desperate battle on empty stomachs. The unit kept receiving orders and messages throughout the exercise, one of which informed them that the Régiment de Maisonneuve had been “wiped out”

⁹⁷ Essex WD. March 3, 1943.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Essex WD. March 4, 1943.

and that the Essex were to take their place, thereby coming under command of 5th Brigade; this was another aspect of battle that they would have to contend with in July 1944.

On March 6th, the 6th day of the exercise, the Essex were up and marching again at 0700. By 1230 they were again under command of the 4th Brigade and finally, at 1400, received their first meal in 44 hours.¹⁰⁰ The Essex lads were soon to find out that they really needed to be under command of their home Brigade if they ever wanted to be properly fed! After resting up a bit, the battalion was again on the march at 2000 hours. At 0230 the battalion reached their next concentration area at Christmas Commons, which the reconnaissance party had surveyed in advance. Now, they were told, they were in close proximity to the enemy and so defensive positions were carefully taken up and all precautions were taken to ensure there were no “slip ups.”¹⁰¹ Again, the Essex Scots were exposed to so-called “battle conditions”: “within the next hour or so orders were changed three or four times and everyone was in a dither. However we were learning that these were the sort of things we should have to be prepared for in actual action.”¹⁰² Indeed, as we shall see, the Essex were obliged to deal with just these kinds of problems during their first actual engagement in Normandy. Before the day was out, the entire Brigade group was on the move together with the RHLI and the RRC forward. Indeed, these first days of *Spartan* appear to have been marred by communication and organization problems, most of which seem to have been the responsibility of either divisional, army, or corps staff officers. Nevertheless, as we can see, the 4th Brigade’s units were learning once again how to work together as a larger formation.

¹⁰⁰ Essex WD. March 6, 1943.

¹⁰¹ Essex WD. March 7, 1943.

¹⁰² Ibid.

As the Brigade moved forward the Rileys came into contact with the enemy and “knocked out” their Crusader tanks.¹⁰³ The Essex were hastened forward on carriers and tanks and completed a successful action; once again, the unit pushed forward until darkness. The following day saw plenty of action after very little rest for the Essex Scots. The unit was ordered to move in the direction of their objective, “Huntingdon”. On the way, news came through that 5th Brigade had encountered the enemy and that formation put in a successful attack beginning at 1900 hours. The Essex Scottish, along with the Rileys and Royals, were subsequently ordered to advance and take an area of high ground at Ashendon and further to occupy a spur nearby “with all possible speed.”¹⁰⁴ Again, such orders and moves ring very familiar when one examines the July 1944 attack on Verrières Ridge. The unit secured the high ground and spent another night with little sleep.

On March 9th, 1943 the Essex Scottish finally proved their mettle in mock combat. Again, one cannot stress enough the similarities between what the Essex practiced on this exercise, insofar as what they were expected to achieve with full and proper support, and what they were expected to achieve when they contacted the German 272nd Infantry Division in July 1944. Here on Exercise *Spartan*, however, the Essex worked in tandem with their sister battalions of the 4th Brigade with the full support of the Brigadier, who spent the entirety of the attack at the Essex Scottish HQ (that unit constituting the lead element), planning and directing this Brigade-level attack. On this day, the Essex were leading the Brigade as it moved forward, with Able Company up front. Forward patrols spotted an enemy artillery observation post just moving into position, which they attacked and captured. More patrols were sent forward to recce the forward areas as the Brigadier arrived to coordinate the actions of all three battalions. H-Hour was set for 0415 and

¹⁰³ RHLI WD. March 7, 1943.

¹⁰⁴ Essex WD. March 8, 1943.

at H minus 5-minutes, “intense (artillery) concentrations (were) laid on our objective, and the Canucks really went into action.”

The (battalion) had quietly moved into position for the assault. A whole enemy battalion on the hill and a (Brigade) HQ. We caught them sleeping soundly. One poor enemy patrol will take weeks to get over their surprise of suddenly being surrounded in the darkness, by Canucks, with fixed bayonets. Then shots, thunderflashes and shouts until our C.O. sent up two green very-lights, our success signal, at 0618 hours.”¹⁰⁵

It quickly became clear that the Essex, along with the Rileys and the Royals, had captured an entire enemy battalion; one of Britain’s finest, the Black Watch. As first light dawned, the Essex Scots collapsed exhausted and wondered what was more important to them: food or sleep. When Compo rations were finally brought up, the men began to tuck in, only to learn that an intense counter-attack was being launched against them. Again, this closely foreshadows the Battle of Verrières Ridge.

Seventy-two enemy guns began a theoretical pounding of the Essex position and a Brigade-sized counterattack developed from the northwest. This foreshadowed in some detail the German counterattack of July 20, 1944. All Essex companies, along with the Rileys and Royals in their positions, hurried to meet the counterattack and the mortars went into action. Very shortly thereafter, the umpires declared: “Counterattack repulsed”.¹⁰⁶ Again, the starved and exhausted men returned to their bacon and beans, shaved and tried to rest. Then again, with true Wehrmacht-like determination, an armoured counterattack developed. These tanks had been under observation all day and so the battalion was ready to meet them. “Roads were blocked and anti-tank guns were all set to blast away.”¹⁰⁷

When the enemy struck, however, they struck hard with one armoured regiment, one motorized battalion, and one “lorry-borne” infantry regiment.

¹⁰⁵ Essex WD. March 9, 1943.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Essex WD. March 9, 1943.

Tanks crashed through hedges, fences, fields, etc, and everywhere they were met by our troops. (Battalion) HQ was in the battle too and captured enemy tanks. It was a hectic battle and there was action aplenty: after the battle was over the umpires declared we had suffered 30% casualties and had lost part of Ashendon and the N.E. spur. We learned that the 4th (Brigade) had been chosen to make a break through and attack the main enemy forces while "Andy" did a left flanker. Suicide (Brigade) all right!¹⁰⁸

So now the Brigade was to launch a counterattack of their own. The Essex CO called up every available man, including cooks and drivers, for the assault. The attack was launched in three waves and, again, the Essex Scots achieved surprise. They gained their objective but were informed that they had sustained another 30% casualties. The men then completed consolidating their positions 78 minutes after the attack started.¹⁰⁹ But again, the umpires informed the Essex that they were under artillery fire and that two tank regiments were about to attack them and "they were sorry to inform us that we were out of action. The whole (Brigade) out of action."¹¹⁰ The Royals' War Diary maintains that all along the Brigade front, the three Ontario regiments were facing "two armoured divisions and four mobile infantry Brigades."¹¹¹ The Brigade was, quite simply, overwhelmed by superior firepower. This was the end of the road for the Essex Scots, and the 4th Brigade, for the rest of *Spartan*. It can be seen here, however, that the 4th Brigade Battle School was reaping rewards as, by all accounts, the three battalions worked well together and were becoming, both as individual units and as a Brigade, more coordinated and more effective. It is also clear that, while acting together in such exercises, and suffering very similar fates under a single command, the men began associate themselves with their own unit, as well as with the Brigade itself.

On the following day, after a good night's rest, the divisional commander paid his compliments to the Essex Scots for the fine show the unit had put on. The battalion spent the rest

¹⁰⁸ Essex WD. March 9, 1943.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

¹¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹¹ RRC WD. March 9, 1943.

of *Spartan* out-of-action, and did not seem too upset either since they were able to eat and sleep regularly again. The Essex War Diary makes clear, however, that the men felt they had done exceptionally well given their tasks, and despite being knocked out of action, took pride in the fact that they repeatedly captured their objectives and were only annihilated after putting in a hastily ordered counterattack, while they were already down to 65% strength. Indeed, the 4th Brigade did exceptionally well on *Spartan*, capturing an entire enemy battalion, repelling one infantry counterattack, partially repelling an armoured counterattack, and succeeding in a counterattack of their own, before succumbing to apparently well-aimed artillery fire. They had every reason to be proud of their accomplishments. Although the forgoing account of the Essex Scots' experience during Exercise *Spartan* may be lengthy and detailed, it is hoped that once the reader sees the detail and level at which the unit was trained, they will understand that the Essex Scots were indeed equipped to deal with their first battle in Normandy. Regardless of how McNaughton handled the Corps as a whole, the 4th Brigade, notably the Essex Scottish, performed admirably in this fight.

Spartan concluded on March 12th. On the 13th the unit was up at 0200 and made the 13.5-hour march back to their billet area. Once there, the regular training syllabus was resumed day-in and day-out. On March 15th, a Pte O'Reilly was accidentally shot while drawing a loaded pistol from a haversack. The bullet entered his left groin and so he was rushed to a nearby civilian hospital for treatment. O'Reilly died on the morning of March 18th. This incident was held up as an example to all the men to take special care with their weapons. Later in March, the Brigade was involved in Exercise *Dig*. The Essex Scots found this a very fitting name as they were engaged in plenty of entrenching activity. One soldier was heard to remark, "We have no excuses to make as we were

warned that this was Exercise 'Dig'.¹¹² Again the unit was involved in an attack for this exercise, which came off successfully. At the end of the exercise, the men resentfully refilled the pits they had dug the previous day as it seemed that all their muscle work had been for naught.

Regular battalion training was resumed in April which, aside from the continual training, passed uneventfully. May 3rd saw the start of the Divisional Exercise *Beach*. This exercise embodied the attack in hedgehog formation, and the defence of such a formation. Apparently, the troops showed keen enthusiasm throughout the whole exercise, in which the Essex Scots succeeded in capturing an enemy CO and several other prisoners. Lt.-Col. Mothersill felt that the battalion learned a great deal about hedgehog defense.¹¹³ Two days later the Brigadier showed up for an inspection, the most thorough one the Essex had heretofore undergone. The inspection lasted all day, and the Brigadier indicated his approval. Nevertheless, the Essex War Diarist noted that "inspections are considered necessary it seems, but will always be a soldiers 'HATE'. However, it's May and it's spring cleaning time so the Brigadier's inspection served two purposes – satisfied his curiosity and we cleaned house."¹¹⁴

On May 11, the unit was marched out for a demonstration of "the PIAT a new anti-tank weapon (that) looked very formidable in this demonstration. It looks life-like and is a real tank 'BUSTER'."¹¹⁵ On the same day, battalion trainers took the opportunity to stage training attacks amongst the Essex companies. May continued with syllabus training. The unit lost 36 Other Ranks who were released from service because they were either medically unfit or were "over age". May 17th brought news that the Essex were soon to move to their summer camp at Halnaker. After lamenting that the unit would miss Middleton-on-Sea, the diarist, in an obvious jab at the constantly

¹¹² Essex WD. March 24, 1943.

¹¹³ Essex WD. May 5, 1943.

¹¹⁴ Essex WD. May 7, 1943.

¹¹⁵ Essex WD. May 11, 1943.

changing orders coming down from Division and Brigade, commented “tentative move for the Essex, 8 Jun 43, and the unit will be the last to move. Of course we will move first and either eight days sooner or later!”¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, the battalion seems to have anticipated the move with little apprehension. The Essex were looking forward to a longer period of everyone actually being together, and being able to train together, at full establishment. All throughout the preceding months, various officers and other ranks were away at special training sessions, and were providing guards for various duties along the coast in the battalion’s operational area. But it seemed that with the move to Halnaker, the battalion would again be trained as a full and complete unit “with Major MacDonald in charge of the training (we will) watch the unit climb to a new height.” Indeed, Major MacDonald is always mentioned in light of training and seems to have taken a more active role than Lt.-Col. Mothersill. Training in close proximity to the men forged a bond between MacDonald and the Other Ranks who, we will later find out, grew very attached to this man whom they considered more than a commander; he was their leader.

On May 25th, Major Reade (who was in charge of preparing Halnaker Camp in anticipation of the move) returned to the unit and informed them that there was still no definite word on when the move would occur. “It looks like the normal TARFU,” commented the War Diary.¹¹⁷ Training continued as normal throughout May and the 26th brought word that D-Day for the move to Halnaker would be May 28th, a full eleven days ahead of schedule: “TARFU was correct – unit moves – final instructions given and the unit moves first instead of last.”¹¹⁸ So the move was conducted on the 28th May, a day which brought another significant adjustment: change of command. The following passage from the War Diary is quoted at length as it illustrates the

¹¹⁶ Essex WD. May 17, 1943

¹¹⁷ “Things Are Really Fouled Up.” Of course one could substitute some more colourful language in this acronym, but the diary does not make entirely clear what was meant. Essex WD. May 25, 1943.

¹¹⁸ Essex WD. May 26, 1943.

difficulties involved with training a battalion, while dealing with higher command, and also illustrates the level of confidence that the Essex Scots had in B.J.S. MacDonald, their new CO:

To-day word was received that Col. Mothersill was to vacate command of the regiment w.e.f. 26 May 43 and Major B.J.S. MacDonald will take over command of the unit w.e.f. 27 May 43... Col. Mothersill now has had command of the unit since DIEPPE and has experienced just about every difficulty imaginable, new officers, new other ranks from top to bottom and a consequent lack of qualified (company commanders). He had to contend with the short-sighted policy of higher (formation) who insisted that the (battalion) would have to re-organize and at the same time would carry out an operational role on the coast in a location that was undeniably difficult as the unit was distributed along the coast, in a civilian area whilst control made things a bit difficult and awkward. In spite of these difficulties he has made a good job of re-organizing the unit and it is rather rubbing it in to have the unit move to such a set up as Halnaker Camp, a move he has advocated from the beginning, just as he has to relinquish command of the (battalion) because of the inevitable over-age, something no one can do anything about. It is with great relief that the command is to be passed to an Essex Scot and to one such as Major MacDonald, who is well qualified to take over the (battalion). There is little doubt that the unit will continue to improve, aided greatly by Lt.-Col. MacDonald's knowledge of training methods and his varied experience.¹¹⁹

Clearly, the Essex Scots were pleased with their progress and were also pleased that MacDonald was to become their Commanding Officer; a man whom they knew and trusted. Another benefit of the move to Halnaker was the close proximity the battalion now found itself in to the mortar and rifle ranges, which were quite badly needed so that the men could become more proficient at using the mortar. "Probably now the 2" Mortar will become known to all instead of being a foreign weapon," another step forward for the Essex Scottish Regiment.¹²⁰

Not to suggest that Lt.-Col. Mothersill was derelict in his command of the battalion, but immediately upon taking command, MacDonald appears in the War Diary with much greater frequency than his predecessor. In June, MacDonald was very active in attending training programs and demonstrations. He also spent much time in organizing both battalion and Brigade training; perhaps as a holdover from his former role as Chief Instructor at the 4th Brigade Battle

¹¹⁹ Essex WD. May 28, 1943.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

School the previous winter. More and more one notices that instead of writing "Col. Macdonald" in the Diary, the diarist affectionately substitutes "Col. Mac". Perhaps this has more to do with the diarist's own relationship with his CO, but it certainly seems indicative of the unit's overall impression of their new Lieutenant Colonel. As June progressed, training continued normally and MacDonald put in a great amount of effort to ensure that the unit's training was effective and varied. MacDonald also seems to have increased the frequency of parades and sub-unit inspections. His motivation for this was, it seems, to improve discipline and pride of unit, which it was noted had been lacking since Dieppe. Consequently, in a farewell dinner for Lt.-Col. Mothersill, a toast was offered for all ranks lost at Dieppe, either killed or taken prisoner. "Most of the words spoken... alluded naturally to the regiment, its traditions and the grand spirit of pride of unit and the loyalty that the (battalion) had prior to Dieppe."¹²¹ Now that the unit was well on its way to being retrained, Lt.-Col. MacDonald it seems, was keen to also rebuild the intangibles of a proud and strong regiment.

Drills, training, parades and inspections marked the rest of June. The unit received 112 reinforcements on June 17th who still required much training as they had only received one week's worth "on this side of the ocean. They are a likely lot but their (training) will have to be concentrated upon to improve their standard. With them came much to everybody's chagrin a couple of real 'Southern Highlanders' (negroes)."¹²² On June 23, the unit's training involved watching the film "Sex Hygiene" in the morning, followed by syllabus training. That day also saw, much to everyone's surprise, the arrival of the new Mk. 4, No. 1 .303 Lee Enfield rifle and work immediately and excitedly began on zeroing the weapons. The battalion used the rifle ranges all day and evening for that purpose. Fred Tilston, the diarist, seems to have drawn much pleasure in these summer

¹²¹ Essex WD. June 10, 1943.

¹²² Essex WD. June 17, 1943.

months from loading the War Diary with dry humour and sarcasm. On recording training exercises on June 25th, Tilston records, "a sufficient number (of men) were found to proceed on a 15-mile route march which was very neatly broken up so as the marching wouldn't become monotonous, by a 2 (hour) digging exercise."¹²³ The remainder of June was taken up by continuous training and, it appears, frequent movie watching in the evenings.

The unit began preparing for Exercise *Outburst* on July 12th by practicing drill for the use of assault boats to cross rivers, due to an anticipated river crossing. That same afternoon they moved to the concentration area. The entire Brigade had to make an assault crossing of the River Arun, which "proved a difficult obstacle to cross."¹²⁴ Nevertheless, the Brigadier, who watched the attack on July 20, 1943 (an auspicious day for the unit), was so pleased that he said "'Thank You' to the men with a smile."¹²⁵ The requisite river crossing was also completed.

As was also true for the Rileys and the Royals, the summer of 1943 was marked by men coming and going on various courses and postings.¹²⁶ Some officers were involved in the nasty business of defending and prosecuting soldiers for various offences. July 25th was taken up by the hurrying about of officers in preparation for the courts martial of the following day. Pte. Black, who shot himself in the foot, and Pte. Shaw, an absentee of 15 months, whom Littlehampton police picked up in civilian dress, were two of the men under arrest (Shaw escaped Essex custody three days later). The balance of July was taken up by these legal proceedings; and of course, the inevitable and ubiquitous training.

Exercise *Pickaxe* began for the Essex on August 10th. Apparently it was "not a very interesting scheme. Perhaps because we are reserve (battalion). In any case all we get over the

¹²³ Essex WD. June 25, 1943.

¹²⁴ Essex WD. July 13, 1943.

¹²⁵ Essex WD. July 20, 1943

¹²⁶ Essex WD, RHLI WD, and RRC WD. June-July 1943.

wireless is what the RHLI are doing."¹²⁷ On the following day, MacDonald almost became an exercise casualty as "he went on a recce and came under enemy fire but scuttled out and away before the umpires could count him out."¹²⁸ The Essex put in a successful attack on the 12th and it appears that the previous boredom with the exercise was passing because "to the troops 'Pickaxe' is becoming most involved."¹²⁹ On the same day, *Pickaxe* came to a close. Like the past several months, syllabus training, movies in the evenings, lectures, and sports filled up the rest of August, except for Exercise *Harlequin*, which occupied the end of August and the beginning of September. During this time also, an examination of the RHLI and RRC War Diaries reveals that Brigade training was indeed becoming quite standardized. All three units were involved in almost identical syllabus training and, as we have seen, whenever the units went out on exercise, they did so with their sister battalions. A common level of training was being achieved.¹³⁰

On August 27th the Rifle Companies and the Pioneer Platoon moved off to pier 40 at Southampton docks for assault landing training. The troops boarded HMS *Duke of Wellington*, which carried a number of LCAs. The Rifle Companies landed at Stanswood Bay, stormed the beach and captured Stone Farm to establish a beachhead. "It was all part of a deception designed to make the Germans believe that the Allies were going to invade in force... the enemy was not deceived."¹³¹ On Monday, August 30th, it was back to P.T. training. The men were back at Halnaker on the September 9th. As the month progressed administrative and training duties continued as normal, punctuated by the occasional inspection. In anticipation of such inspections, the Essex shrewdly sent the R.S.M. as "an interested and unnoticed observer at the G.O.C.s inspection of the

¹²⁷ Essex WD. Aug 10, 1943.

¹²⁸ Essex WD. Aug 11, 1943.

¹²⁹ Essex WD. Aug 12, 1943.

¹³⁰ Please see the Essex WD, RHLI WD and RRD WD for the period Aug 1-31, 1943.

¹³¹ Brereton Greenhous. *Semper Paratus*. p. 230.

Royal (Regiment) which he attended in order to learn what pit-falls to avoid.”¹³² The G.O.C.’s inspection of the Essex Scots followed on September 17th ... except that Major-General Burns did not show up and so Brigadier Sager conducted the inspection in his stead. This was a rather interesting inspection in which the Brigadier cross-examined certain NCOs about their men. Each correct response elicited greater and greater joy from the Brigadier. Since all of the barber’s duties had not been properly completed before the inspection, the barber brought his clippers with him and finished his hair-cutting at the opposite end of the regiment than that which was being inspected. Shoe brushes were brought also and passed down the line during the inspection to ensure that everyone made their last minute touchups. The results of the inspection were undeniably positive.

The Essex Scots’ cricket team was beaten by the “Amazons” of the ladies cricket team in late September, a game in which the battalion’s outstanding officer, Lt. Hodges, “who with the combined tactics of stopping several balls with his shins and his eye-closed batting, put on a stellar performance.”¹³³ Shortly thereafter, the unit was on the move again because on September 29th they moved to their winter camp at Slinfold, near Horsham in Sussex. October followed and syllabus training was the order of the month. P.T. training seems to have intensified during this time also. Exercise *Prodder*, a practice in withdrawal, began on October 21, 1943. The battalion appears to have set up very good defensive positions and when, as planned, enemy activity on their front increased, the unit was forced to withdraw. They did so effectively, whilst “mobile combat teams” held the enemy in his original position.¹³⁴ The battalion used anti-tank guns and battalion artillery to successfully defend their positions over subsequent days. The War Diary records that *Prodder* “although accompanied by most disagreeable weather did work out well tactically and was

¹³² Essex WD. Sept. 15, 1943.

¹³³ Essex WD. Sept 22, 1943.

¹³⁴ Essex WD. Oct 22, 1943.

enjoyed.”¹³⁵ October ended with the continuance of training, but the cancellation of P.T. due to the winter season, much to the muted joy of most ranks.

November commenced with normal training, but with an increased emphasis on range firing, battle inoculation, battle drill, lectures, PIAT firing, street fighting, night training and patrolling, compass patrols, mine laying, breaching a mine field, wiring, and listening patrols.¹³⁶ Night training was mainly conducted over a one-week period, which ended on November 16th. These night training directives came down from Brigade and both the RHLI and RRC were involved in virtually identical exercises during this week also.¹³⁷ The Essex' sister battalions were, in fact, conducting very much the same types of training throughout this period in general. November 23rd was a busy day for the battalion's junior officers as “the senior officers are 100% absent today. The C.O. is in Scotland on a combined ops course. 2 i/c away for the day on a mortar demonstration and T.E.W.T. (Jordan river crossings) all company commanders also attended the mortar demonstration, leaving the (Adjutant) as major-domo of the (battalion).”¹³⁸ Unfortunately, shortly thereafter, “a minor tragedy hit the camp... the (Adjutant), Captain F.A. Tilston had acquired a ‘hound pup’ over the week-end. For some reason it had been ailing ever since arriving in camp. Care and medicine were of no avail and even aspirin and whiskey failed to fix it up last night. At noon today a council was held and the ‘pup’s’ fate decided. It was shot at approximately 1330 hours and buried by the (Adjutant’s) batman without military honours.”¹³⁹ Further mortar and range firing was conducted in November, which sometimes resulted in poorer scores than the Essex Scots were used to. These lower scores resulted from the fact that recently trained personnel were firing the weapons, however, the War Diary wisely comments that “if you want qualified reserves,

¹³⁵ Essex WD. Oct 23, 1943.

¹³⁶ Essex WD. Nov 1 – 15, 1943.

¹³⁷ RHLI WD and RRC WD. Nov 9 – 16, 1943.

¹³⁸ Essex WD. Nov 22, 1943.

¹³⁹ Essex WD. Nov 23, 1943.

they must be trained, there is no use in letting only best shots fire for the purpose of making a good score.”¹⁴⁰ Several officers also took the 18-sets out for an artillery shoot in which the officer would first indicate a target, then a FOO would bring artillery down on it, and then the officer that indicated the target would also try to bring his own artillery fire down upon it. Evidently, this training was designed to test the battalion’s officers in their forward observation skills, and to compare their skills with those of the actual FOOs. Reports indicated that “some” of the officers managed to get fire on their targets.¹⁴¹ Such training, as it turned out, would be of essential importance in Normandy as FOOs would often either be killed, wounded or unable to contact the unit concerned. Thus, the battalion’s officers would need to call in their own artillery shoots. On November 30, the CO, 2 i/c, and the Company Commanders went to Brigade Headquarters for a meeting on the upcoming Exercise *Allways*, for which they were all to act as umpires.

As December began the battalion was preparing itself for Exercise *Allways* as well as for Exercise *Frosty*, which constituted Combined Ops training in Scotland. On December 6th the CO held a meeting of all officers to discuss *Frosty* and also reviewed “the principles of the advance to contact phase of battle and the action demanded upon first bumping the enemy.”¹⁴² The Essex Scots moved out on Exercise *Allways* the following day. During *Allways*, the Essex ran into the enemy and engaged them. “Both attacks were put in quickly and (were) well executed, so much so that almost no casualties resulted. Proceeding southward more opposition was encountered... but the CO wasted no time, his recces were fast and orders snappily given.”¹⁴³ At one point, rain made it difficult to reach the top of a hill that was their objective, but a good area was found for the

¹⁴⁰ Essex WD. Nov 24, 1943.

¹⁴¹ Essex WD. Nov 26, 1943.

¹⁴² Essex WD. Dec 6, 1943.

¹⁴³ Essex WD. Dec 8, 1943.

vehicles to support a further advance; Baker and Charlie companies therefore consolidated on the feature. This was another successful training exercise for the battalion.

On December 13, the entire battalion boarded trains and headed up to Inveraray, Scotland for Exercise *Frosty*. During the trip the CO “stuck his head into every compartment ensuring that the men were as comfortable as possible.”¹⁴⁴ In Scotland, all three battalions of the 4th Brigade practiced “landing with assault equipment, making a quick approach march, and then delivering a set-piece attack.”¹⁴⁵ The 2nd Division now being designated as a breakout formation, less emphasis was placed on assault landing, than on simply landing with such equipment into an already Allied-occupied beach. Consequently, the units of the 4th Brigade were shown such films as “Beach Organization” to help them recognize the signs and signals that they should expect to see when landing on a prepared beach, such as those in Normandy.¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, the men were given a lecture on “Landing Tables and Scales”.¹⁴⁷ They practiced landing in “vessels large enough to carry a (Company) at a time and are the type we may be expected to use as a follow-up division.”¹⁴⁸ On December 21, the Essex succeeded in landing on a prepared beach, marching toward their objective, and encountering the enemy whose position was on the high ground. An artillery concentration was brought down on the enemy, whose heads were kept down, and when it lifted, the final assault was successful. Two days later, the Rileys also embarked on landing craft and “...a wet landing was made. A skeleton beach organization had been set up and the troops moved from the different beach areas inland to the assembly areas. All dug in and prepared to defend the locality.”¹⁴⁹ Throughout *Frosty* many other similar exercises were conducted and training was obviously now being directed precisely toward the kind of operations that the battalion, brigade and

¹⁴⁴ Essex WD. Dec 13, 1943.

¹⁴⁵ D.J. Goodspeed. *Battle Royal*. p. 409.

¹⁴⁶ RHLI WD and Essex WD. Dec 15, 1943.

¹⁴⁷ Essex WD. Dec 16, 1943.

¹⁴⁸ Essex WD. Dec 17, 1943.

¹⁴⁹ RHLI WD. Dec 22, 1943

division were expecting to deal with when they landed in Normandy. On Christmas Eve, 1943, the battalion's pipers led the men from the train station back to the Slinfold camp at Horsham. The unit's last Christmas Day in England passed pleasantly with the "spirit of Christmas in the air".¹⁵⁰ As per tradition, at 1700 hours, the officers and NCOs served the men Christmas dinner. As it turned out, the holidays of 1943 were "the best Christmas in England for the (regiment)".¹⁵¹ Perhaps, also, this had been the best year for the unit so far: their reconstitution had been completed, re-training had moved from the elementary to the advanced, esprit-de-corps had risen significantly (by no small measure the work of the new CO, Lt.-Col. Bruce Macdonald), and they were now actively preparing for their role in the fast approaching invasion of the continent. Fred Tilston's words are perhaps the most appropriate here:

And so a most interesting year in the life of our regiment ends, a year in which, under two C.O.s we completely recovered from the disaster of Dieppe. We face 1944 realizing how portentous it will be for us but with complete confidence in our own ability and that of our comrades to face any test or perform any task given to us, with credit to the finest and best traditions of the (regiment).¹⁵²

1943 ended very similarly also for the Rileys and the Royals; both units enjoyed a pleasant Christmas, followed by the almost immediate resumption of normal training.¹⁵³

The first day of training in the new year, January 3rd, was slow to start as most Essex Scots were reluctant to abandon their holiday mood. The War Diary notes, however that "the spirit of 'Get on with the job' is in the (battalion), and the coming months should be packed to the full with (training) for 'D' day."¹⁵⁴ Indeed, that was correct. The new year began with many sporting events within and amongst the 4th Brigade's battalions. The perpetual frost of those early January days seems to have persuaded the trainers that simply keeping the men warm and exercising would

¹⁵⁰ Essex WD. Dec. 25, 1943.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² Essex WD. December 31, 1943.

¹⁵³ RHLI WD. December 25-28, 1943

¹⁵⁴ Essex WD. January 3, 1944.

suffice. Nevertheless, syllabus training was continued as usual, if on a slightly reduced scale. The men also spent much time with the neighboring American unit. They had boxing matches with them, which the Canadians lost, and the officers spent time in the American mess hall, occasionally enjoying “delicious large steaks.”¹⁵⁵

Esprit-de-Corps was also bolstered in these cold days as several post-Holiday parties were held for all ranks. Beer was available for all, and the men amused themselves by playing music and singing. “God Save the King was played at midnight.”¹⁵⁶ Intra-Brigade sporting events were common, which helped to build a Brigade identity in tandem with those being developed individually within all three units. The RHLI War Diarist was not shy in proclaiming that “the hockey team defeated the Essex Scot team in the Bde semi-finals by a score of 4 to 3.”¹⁵⁷ As usual, Essex Scots were coming and going on all sorts of training courses: street fighting, waterproofing, sniping, etc. MacDonald was away on January 10 to Divisional Headquarters for an unknown reason. Upon his return he informed the unit that he had gone to meet the new G.O.C. 2nd Canadian Infantry Division, Maj.-Gen. Foulkes. The Essex Scots were not happy to see General Burns leave “because of the capable manner in which he has reconstructed the (Division)... he has earned the respect of everyone.”¹⁵⁸ The Diary further notes, however, that many officers of the battalion had a high opinion of the new G.O.C.’s capabilities.

The second half of January marked the beginning of a spate of inspections. The January 14 War Diary entry offers some interesting insight into the inspection style of Lt.-Col. MacDonald during a battalion inspection. Clearly, he intended to train the unit in such a way as to make it a flexible and cohesive whole. “The C.O. checks dress, haircuts and hands for cleanliness, and then

¹⁵⁵ Essex WD. January 5, 1944.

¹⁵⁶ Essex WD. January 6, 1944.

¹⁵⁷ RHLI WD. January 6, 1943

¹⁵⁸ Essex WD. January 10, 1944.

has each (platoon) exercised in drill by the (officer), then by several (private) soldiers. During the day not one (private) made a failure of his effort... the RSM then examined weapons and small packs and even he could find very little at which to level criticism."¹⁵⁹ MacDonald clearly wanted to ensure that all ranks, not just officers, could make command decisions in the absence of higher authority, thereby creating a more thinking and independent battalion. The new divisional commander inspected the Royals and the Rileys on January 17th, which was followed by an inspection of the Essex on January 18th.¹⁶⁰ One wonders if the Essex' RSM was again sent to the Royals' inspection this time. The Essex Scots' own Divisional inspection went off without a hitch. The new G.O.C. addressed all officers and stressed "the responsibility of the (platoon commander) and his necessity for establishing himself as the leader. All our work now is our final rehearsal for battle and with such an object in mind, we must have one aim only, and that is to become the best in fitness for battle."¹⁶¹

It was beginning to become clear to all, what with speeches about being battle-ready, and D-Day, and inoculation parades, that the unit, brigade and division were all starting to get prepared for action. Rifle company training was ramped up in late January (and thereafter) as platoon drill in attack and defense was a more common exercise than before. Inter-platoon "competitions" also took place with more frequency beginning at this time. "Each company commander is making sure his (platoons) are letter perfect."¹⁶² Live-firing was becoming a much more common experience for the men also. This type of training was intended to improve the maneuverability and independence of the platoons. Lt.-Col. MacDonald was usually on hand to oversee such exercises. The RHLI and RRC Diaries reveal that all units of the Brigade were undergoing such training also: "the subalterns'

¹⁵⁹ Essex WD. January 14, 1944

¹⁶⁰ RRC WD and RHLI WD. Jan 17, 1944.

¹⁶¹ Essex WD. Jan 18, 1944.

¹⁶² Essex WD. Jan 19, 1944

class covered the assault course which had been specially prepared with special booby traps and explosive charges, as a battle inoculation.”¹⁶³ As February came, Essex platoons and companies were often sent away to conduct special training with other Brigade sub-units.

February 2 was a big day for the 2nd Canadian Corps as Lt.-Gen. Guy Simonds was introduced as its new commander. The General addressed all officers of the Corps at Brighton. The next day saw Simonds and Foulkes visit the 4th Brigade for a more intimate inspection and address. Simonds stressed that “we must not underrate our enemy. However, with excellent (training) behind us and our own natural cunning, combined with a confidence in both our leaders and one another, we have no doubt as to the outcome of our invasion of the continent.”¹⁶⁴ On February 17, Simonds returned to make a surprise training inspection of the Essex Scottish Regiment. “Lt. Martin’s (platoon) was doing an attack and the (General) after watching it commented favourably and then offered a few points of constructional criticism. It was rather an occasion to have such a high ranking officer inspect (Company and Platoon training), and Gen Simonds gives one the impression of an (officer) of exceptional keenness and military ability.”¹⁶⁵ Although Simonds’ inspection came off well, one wonders if this surprise was sprung at least partially because Lt.-Col. MacDonald was on leave that week, and would therefore be unable to forewarn and prepare the unit. Of course, while in the area, the General also visited the Rileys and the Royals, and took in some Company training exercises.¹⁶⁶ It is to the entire Brigade’s credit that Simonds was reasonably impressed with what he saw.

The Essex continued to train and train and train throughout the late winter of 1944. As mentioned above, platoon-level battle training was now a common occurrence. Range firing with

¹⁶³ RHLI WD. Jan 22, 1944.

¹⁶⁴ Essex WD. Feb 3, 1944.

¹⁶⁵ Essex WD. Feb 18, 1944

¹⁶⁶ RHLI WD. Feb 17, 1944

rifle and mortar were also very common during the first months of the year. On February 26, the Essex received very welcome word that

(Brigadier) Sherwood Lett, who led (the 4th Brigade) at Dieppe, is again Brig of (4th Brigade) replacing Brig Sager who has another appointment. Brig Lett has the reputation of being a very able soldier and those who knew him at Dieppe all agree that the (Brigade) has a very capable leader.¹⁶⁷

That same evening G.O.C. Foulkes and Brigadier Lett stopped by the Essex' camp and attended a party at the Sergeants' mess. Those in attendance treated Lett to a raucous ovation.

February 28 saw the resumption of P.T., which elicited "moans and groans as reveille blew".¹⁶⁸ Following Physical Training, MacDonald informed the men that training in March would be directed towards the heightening of the men's physical fitness, which he informed them was necessary; what a perfect time then to resume P.T.! February closed with Brigadier Lett leading parade drill and put the whole Brigade through the ceremonial march, which was to be used the following day for General Montgomery's inspection. When the unit returned to Slinfold camp that evening, MacDonald informed them that they had not shown their usual smartness on parade that day and, consequently, put the battalion through further marching exercises; like Lett, MacDonald wanted the next day's inspection to come off without a hitch. Thankfully for all, the inspection came off well for all three units of the 4th Brigade. After the formal inspection, General Montgomery addressed the men of the Brigade from his jeep. He expressed his wish "to know the men who were going to be fighting with him in the coming Second Front. In knowing them he would have confidence in them and they, in turn, would, he hoped, have the same confidence in him."¹⁶⁹ One

¹⁶⁷ Essex WD. Feb 26, 1944.

¹⁶⁸ Essex WD. Feb 28, 1944

¹⁶⁹ Essex WD. March 1, 1944.

week later, the last of the big inspections around this period occurred when King George VI inspected the Division, during which the RHLI proudly provided the Royal Guard of Honour.¹⁷⁰

Training continued unabated throughout March. Clearly now, training was geared toward breakout from a bridgehead. There was now very little amphibious assault training, except in river crossing. Training now revolved, as it had started to for months, around street fighting, clearing up resistance nests, storming pill-boxes, night-fighting, night river crossings, woods clearing, assaulting all manner of enemy positions and other such exercises. On March 10 the rifle companies moved out of the encampment for some very Normandy-like training:

In the morning A Coy supported by 2 (batteries of artillery) and 2 (sections) of mortars moved forward under a creeping barrage, past objective I, 'Intermediate Ridge' and on to Objective II, 'Far Ridge'. The barrage was well laid down and the attack went in well. Then followed a short period of digging in after which the 'enemy' counter attacked and Maj Thomson called down Arty fire on a DFSOS task. A few of the shells fell to the right of the area and all personnel used the slit trenches to fullest advantage. Fortunately the arty FOO immediately stopped the fire and no accidents occurred. A valuable lesson was learned however; and the lads will likely not have to be encouraged in their digging so much in the future.¹⁷¹

Again we see here, as will become clear in the next chapter, that much of the Essex Scots' training, from Exercise *Punch* in February 1943 right through to the last months before moving to France, was geared toward exactly the type of action they would see on their first engagement in Normandy. During this time also, Lt.-Col. MacDonald continued to build *Esprit-de-Corps*, and was also active in ensuring that his company commanders knew their roles as "leaders". "He stressed the great responsibility that every officer has when he leads his men into battle."¹⁷²

On March 21, Exercise *Push* was underway for the battalions of 4th Brigade. Several daylight engagements were conducted during this scheme. Again, the general impression of this exercise was that a great deal was learned. On March 27, Exercise *Night* got underway. This

¹⁷⁰ RHLI WD. March 9, 1944.

¹⁷¹ Essex WD. March 10, 1944.

¹⁷² Essex WD. March 14, 1944

exercise was intended to practice the battalions in the night attack, with live artillery and mortar support. As we have seen, the Essex Companies had already been working on this aspect of their craft and so were well prepared for *Night*. March ended as it had begun, with intensive training based mainly at the sub-unit level with intra-battalion and intra-Brigade attacks being very commonly conducted. Indeed, the 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade was gearing up for action.

On April 3, the Brigade was once again training as a unit as all three battalions moved off for Exercise *Step*. Once again, the Brigade was involved in “pushing westward to break out of the (bridgehead) formed by (50 British Division and 30 British Division).”¹⁷³ If anyone in the Brigade had misunderstood their upcoming role in the second front, few of them could have now doubted what they would be tasked with in Normandy. *Step* was in fact a divisional exercise: 6th Brigade took the lead position in the advance, followed by the 4th, then the 5th. The 4th and 6th Brigades put in the main attack in this exercise and did so successfully. *Step* ended on April 7.

That the 4th Brigade was becoming a cohesive unit above and beyond the battalion level can be seen in that throughout most of 1943 and up to this point in 1944, every move the unit made while out on exercise was conducted alongside both of its sister battalions. This had been so since before *Spartan*, and it becomes clear that with the 4th Brigade Battle School and the very frequent exercises in which the Brigade acted as one, right up to July 1944, the Essex Scots, the Rileys and the Royals were becoming very used to one another. An examination of the War Diaries of all three battalions reveals that individual and Company training was, especially as time went by, conducted very similarly within each battalion.¹⁷⁴ This certainly had much to do with the fact that former Brigadier Penhale was intent on creating Brigade unity. The battalions certainly saw enough of each other while marching past on their way to and from rifle ranges and mortar ranges, etc. At

¹⁷³ Essex WD. April 3, 1944.

¹⁷⁴ Essex WD, RHLI WD, RRC WD, Syllabus of Training and Main Diary Entries. April 1-10, 1944.

any rate, the result was that, by the spring of 1944, the three sister battalions were being trained in very similar ways and in much the same methods. This Brigade was one in which all three units had undergone standardized and cohesive training that provided them all with the same (or at least very similar) tools to get the job done once faced with the enemy.

It is clear that the Brigade, and the Army itself, was beginning to ramp up for the Normandy invasion by this time also. For the Essex Scots, all leaves were cancelled in April and mail censorship was tightened. All battalions of the 4th Brigade were to move to their final encampment in mid-April. The heightened sense of security was, however, plain to see: "Security must be good for while a move is expected, not even the batmen or the habitués of the local pubs can tell us the location of our new area."¹⁷⁵ The Royal Regiment moved to their new area near Eastry in Kent, "where it went under canvas" on April 19.¹⁷⁶ The RHLI moved to their new area at Wootton Park, also in Kent, on April 20; they too went under canvas.¹⁷⁷ The Essex left Slinfold Camp, their home of seven months, on April 19. They were also going to Kent and were naturally stationed near their sister battalions in the Brigade. The Essex were at Denton Park. This last area before crossing the channel was uninspiring for men and officers alike. Their new camp was "strictly in the open, the (battalion) is split in three areas. Canvas is limited... the scale of canvas puts eight men or four (officers) into a tent. We have running water (cold only) open air ablution rooms and NO showers."¹⁷⁸ As a result, the Essex and the other two battalions were roughing it.

The day after arriving at Denton Park, the Essex began practicing the use of assault boats for crossing a river in preparation for Exercise *Kate*. The Brigade was to cross the river Trent in Lincolnshire and so the trip up took two days. The trip was uneventful, except for on the second

¹⁷⁵ Essex WD. April 14, 1944.

¹⁷⁶ D.J. Goodspeed. *Battle Royal*. p. 410.

¹⁷⁷ RHLI WD. April 20-22, 1944.

¹⁷⁸ Essex WD. April 19, 1944.

night, when camped out, “apparently the sheep with their numerous lambs who also occupy this field don’t understand, for half way thru our meeting, they insist on stampeding back and forth around us, letting out numerous plaintive BAAS of what we consider to be sheep cries of distress.”¹⁷⁹ *Kate*, a cunningly disguised acronym for “Crossing a Tidal Estuary,” was intended to provide extensive training in assault river crossing tactics.¹⁸⁰ This was supposed to accustom the 2nd Division to the problem it was expected to face in the crossing of the Seine above Le Havre. In fact, the training instructions stipulated, not that the men be trained in an existing method, but that this exercise should help them to “decide the best way of carrying out this task (crossing a tidal estuary).”¹⁸¹ Only secondarily was the exercise meant to “familiarize all ranks with the mech and tactics of this task.”¹⁸² The Essex Scots began bright and early on the opening day of *Kate* practicing man-handling and launching storm boats on the River Trent. Scores of drills were conducted during the exercise, which lasted a grueling four weeks. The Essex Scots packed up their vehicles and headed back to Denton Park on May 20th. At Denton, training continued as usual but clearly things were being squared away in the knowledge that action was not far off. Physical exams were conducted and inspections focused on ensuring that the men were well kitted-out for battle, complete with webbing, packs, et cetera. Transportation and vehicles were constantly being inspected for maintenance and cleanliness. An officer from “Movement Control” arrived and addressed all Essex officers. “He explained what would happen in the concentration area, marshalling area and embarkation (point).”¹⁸³ Meanwhile, the Companies continued their attack

¹⁷⁹ Essex WD. April 25, 1944.

¹⁸⁰ D.J. Goodspeed. *Battle Royal*. p. 410.

¹⁸¹ 4CIB WD. “BdeTrg Instr No. 1”. and Essex WD. App. 5. April 1944.

¹⁸² *Ibid*.

¹⁸³ Essex WD. May 26, 1944.

and defense exercises within the battalion and night fighting continued to be a focus. The May 28 Protestant church service seemed to hold "a greater significance than any preceding one."¹⁸⁴

May 29th brought the division's last important inspection before action. On that day, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Allied Commander, arrived to inspect the formation. Like General Montgomery, Eisenhower addressed the troops from his jeep, with everyone gathered around. He stressed the "importance of the job ahead, but with a team spirit not only in the units themselves but between units and higher formations. He felt certain that it would not take long to bring the job to a successful conclusion."¹⁸⁵ Three days later the Essex War Diary begins, "Another month has begun, a month which will perhaps go down in history as a most important one for the United Nations, and perhaps for the (regiment)."¹⁸⁶

Finally, after months of speculation D-Day arrived. However, no codeword was passed down to the Essex Scottish; the unit was obliged to find out the news on its own:

Around 1030 hours an inquiry was made at (battalion HQ) from C coy concerning a radio broadcast which had been heard at 1000 hours. Gen Eisenhower had announced that the Allied forces had invaded France early in the morning. On calling 4 Cdn Inf Bde HQ no official word concerning D Day could be obtained. Excitement ran high and at noon (officers and other ranks) gathered in the NAAFI tent to hear the BBC. At last it is really 'D' Day. The reports are most encouraging and our (troops) seem to have encountered less difficulty with the coastal defences than had been expected.¹⁸⁷

The RHLI, on the other hand, *did* receive confirmation. Their War Diary records, "Code word 'ADORATION' received, signifying that the Second Front had been opened as of 0200 hrs 6 Jun 44."¹⁸⁸ Maj.-Gen. Foulkes inspected the Brigade on June 7. The General, as was normal, addressed the troops after the inspection and stressed the need for security, and added that if all

¹⁸⁴ Essex WD. May 28, 1944

¹⁸⁵ Essex WD. May 29, 1944

¹⁸⁶ Essex WD. June 1, 1944

¹⁸⁷ Essex WD. June 6, 1944.

¹⁸⁸ RHLI WD. June 6, 1944.

went well, the war might end in 1944.¹⁸⁹ Training continued throughout June at an even higher tempo. The War Diary makes frequent mention of news from the front, as all ranks were excited to learn what was happening to their 3rd Division comrades in Normandy. The men were ordered to turn in their excess kit and any extraneous gear was stowed away. A move appeared to be on the horizon. Inspections and parades were now always carried out in battle order, with battle dress and all anti-gas equipment. Lt.-Col. MacDonald was busily preparing for the impending move to France, but he also spent much time with the men going over the need to look after themselves and each other. In this last month before the unit saw action, they became well acquainted with larger caliber weapons as they were trained on the use of the 6-pounder anti-tank gun and the 3" mortar. Battle drill, live-fire exercises, PIAT firing and battle inoculation were common at this time also.

June 13 saw the distribution of booklets containing information regarding France, its people, "dos and don'ts in behaviour to inhabitants, (and) a vocabulary of English-French words."¹⁹⁰ Training in forest fighting was also a focus in June. In a flash of regimental pride, it was decided on June 19 that the Essex Scots would wear "Rob Roys" until contact with the enemy necessitated the change to camouflage hats. Paint was issued so that the troops would cover up any brass coloured equipment. Lt.-Col. MacDonald, knowing that his men were naturally becoming anxious, stressed to his company commanders that the men must be kept occupied. He ordered that the training for the last weeks before departing for France should stress inter-company sports, presumably to relieve tension. Of course, this did not mean that battle training was abandoned, just that sports were more highly emphasized, if anything, battle training was now at its most intensive pace of the entire war. The Essex received their move orders on June 29, and next day the unit prepared to move, after an address by MacDonald in which he outlined the proposed schedule for

¹⁸⁹ Essex WD. June 7, 1944

¹⁹⁰ Essex WD. June 13, 1944

the move. The unit packed up and moved to its marshalling area on July 3. At 0900 on July 4, the Essex Scottish "boarded American vessels for the journey to France".¹⁹¹ At long last the wait was over. Finally, the boys of the Essex Scottish Regiment, and the entire 4th Brigade, would get the opportunity after nearly two years of re-building and intensive training, to redeem themselves for the disaster at Dieppe; a disaster that was not forgotten, but was seen as being in the past. This Essex Scottish Regiment would do itself proud.

¹⁹¹ Essex WD. July 4, 1944.

Chapter III:
Operation Atlantic Up to Verrières Ridge

Following the D-Day invasion, the British-Canadian forces had fought a series of battles to consolidate and secure a bridgehead. By the end of June, the Canadians had fought their way to the northern and western outskirts of the city of Caen. According to British strategy, in July 1944 the British-Canadian forces on the eastern flank of the Normandy Bridgehead would conduct a series of Bite-and-Hold operations towards the south, east of the River Orne, supported by heavy armour and air support, in an effort to draw and hold a good deal of German weight in that sector. Such a strategy would thus enable the American forces on the western flank greater freedom of movement. The combined result, it was hoped, would be the encirclement of the German forces in Normandy. II Canadian Corps, as part of 2nd British Army, had been in the line along an 8000-yard front in the Caen sector and was tasked with joining the southward attack.¹⁹² The Corps included the 2nd and 3rd Infantry Divisions, 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade, and 2nd Army Group, Royal Canadian Artillery. In the 2nd Division, as before, was the 4th Brigade represented by the RHLI and the Royal Regiment, to be joined later by the Essex Scottish who were being held in reserve.¹⁹³

On July 18, the 2nd Division went into the attack for the first time since Dieppe. As mentioned above, according to Montgomery's plan, the Americans were expected to break out in the West. This had to be facilitated by the Anglo-Canadian armies holding the Germans in the east. However, the German army still occupied positions north of the River Orne as well as on the dominating high ground to the south of Caen, most notably at Verrières Ridge, which offered them at least a measure of security that might allow the Germans to transfer more troops and tanks to the western flank. In order to prevent such a transfer, 2nd British Army intended to make a series of thrusts down the east bank of the Orne in a southerly direction towards the German-held high

¹⁹² Brereton Greenhous. *Semper Paratus*. p. 241.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

ground. This operation, termed “Goodwood Meeting” (the Canadian portion being called “Atlantic”), was generally designed to clear the Caen area east and south of the Orne and at the same time draw enemy formations away from the First U.S. Army front.¹⁹⁴ The entire operation was to be assisted by a major aerial bombardment before the ground attack went in. II Canadian Corps was to bridge the Orne, capture Faubourg de Vaucelles, and then prepare to exploit to the high ground at Verrières.¹⁹⁵ In the first phase, the 3rd Division was to capture Colombelles and Vaucelles. 2nd Canadian Division, on the right flank, with the support of one armoured regiment, was to cross the Orne if possible and exploit to the south to secure the area around Iles and St. André-sur-Orne. 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade (minus the Essex Scottish) was ordered to complete the first stage of the divisional operation by destroying the garrison at Louvigny on the northwest bank of the river. Completion of this task, would allow both the 4th and 5th Brigades to cross the river, joining those elements of 2nd British Army already attacking south on the far side of the Orne, and to establish a bridgehead. On the eastern bank of the Orne, they were also to link up with the 3rd Canadian Division as it attacked southwest through Vaucelles. The 4th Brigade attack on Louvigny, if successful, would provide right flank protection for the 5th Brigade in order to facilitate its crossing of the Orne as it moved toward its St. André-sur-Orne – Iles objective.¹⁹⁶ From the bridgehead thus established on the eastern bank of the river, the Brigades of the 2nd Division would then be able to advance south into the Caen plain, while securing the Division’s western boundary with the 43rd British Division.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ CMHQ Report no. 131, p. 57. DHH

¹⁹⁵ CMHQ Report no. 131, p. 58. DHH

¹⁹⁶ RRC WD. July 18, 1944

¹⁹⁷ D.J. Goodspeed. *Battle Royal*. p. 419

The Royal Regiment of Canada moved forward on the morning of July 18th to reconnoiter the objective at Louvigny.¹⁹⁸ "Although the day was fine, visibility was nil by reason of the clouds of dust which had been caused by the heavy bombing of FAUBOURG DE VAUCELLES..."¹⁹⁹ The regiment's first engagement since Dieppe started out well. The first Royal troops crossed the wheat fields northwest of Louvigny with relative ease that same evening. The regiment's initial objective was an orchard to the north of the town itself. Dog Company was the first to cross the wheat fields and reach the orchard. The supporting artillery and MMG program opened as the infantry moved forward.²⁰⁰ However, Dog Company was stopped just inside the orchard. Able Company, who were set in motion after Dog Company, arrived to find that Dog Company's commander and 2 i/c had been killed. Nevertheless, Dog Company reorganized and led the attack deeper into the orchard, supported by Able Company and now Baker Company also. Very shortly thereafter, all wireless sets failed and communications with battalion HQ were cut.²⁰¹ A mortar platoon attached to Dog Company was able to lay down a smoke and high explosive shoot north of the orchard, along with some artillery, which had considerable effect on the German defenders.

At this point, owing to the lack of communications, the Royal's CO and Brigadier Sherwood Lett, who had been injured at Dieppe, came forward to assess the situation. Very shortly thereafter, Brigadier Lett was again wounded by mortar fire. Lt.-Col. C.M. Drury temporarily replaced Lett, "and Lt.-Col. F.A. Clift of the South Saskatchewan Regiment acted thereafter until July 24, when Lt.-Col. J.E. Ganong took command of the Brigade."²⁰² Fierce fighting, including hand-to-hand combat, ensued in the chateau grounds (directly northeast of the town), and in the woods and orchard north of the town. The orchard was eventually cleared and the battalion reached the

¹⁹⁸ RRC WD. July 18, 1944

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Stacey, C.P. *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War: Volume III: The Victory Campaign: the Operations in North-West Europe, 1944-1945.* (Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationary, 1960). p. 172.

northern edge of the town proper. They also managed to gain partial control of the chateau grounds.

While the enemy was thus engaged by the Royals, "the 5th Brigade came into action and at 2215 the Black Watch of Canada began crossing the Orne from Caen into the western end of Vaucelles against light opposition."²⁰³ Therefore, the Royal Regiment of Canada's main objective had been achieved. They had engaged the enemy and thereby facilitated 5th Brigade's crossing of the Orne which, in turn, allowed the entire 2nd Division to reach its position for the next phase of the operation. Engineers were also able to begin bridging operations across the Orne that would allow the bulk of the 2nd Division to make the crossing north of Louvigny.

As night fell, Able Company Commander decided that the available troops would not suffice to clear the Chateau, the woods and the village itself (all of which were RRC objectives). Because of this decision, coupled with the knowledge that 5th Brigade had begun its crossing of the Orne, it was decided to focus on just the town itself.²⁰⁴ Through heavy enemy mortar fire, the Royals slowly advanced into the northern end of the town. After approximately half of the village was cleared, all progress was halted because of the mortar fire and, now, intense MMG fire coming from a well defended farmhouse. As darkness fell, it was further decided that, despite all of their night fighting training, the Royals would have an unduly difficult time clearing the village in the dark. They would therefore withdraw to a firm base in the orchard north of the village and would complete clearing the town in the morning, with artillery support.²⁰⁵ The constant rain of mortar fire descending on the half of the village the Royals had already cleared also factored into this decision. Major Whitley arranged an artillery fire plan for 0800 the following morning. Lieutenant Wilcox spent the night directing mortar tasks on the village and on the bridge across the Orne,

²⁰³ Ibid. pp. 172-173.

²⁰⁴ RRC WD. July 18, 1944.

²⁰⁵ RRC WD. July 18, 1944.

presuming that the enemy might be retreating across it. "The Royals' mortars... fired some 6000 rounds that afternoon and night. The next day the number of German dead in the vicinity of the bridge showed that this fire had been effective."²⁰⁶ As the Royals entered the village on the morning of July 19, they found that the Germans had indeed vacated across the Orne bridge during the night. Only mopping-up operations were required and the regiment reported that its task was complete at 0900.²⁰⁷ The attack on Louvigny cost the Royals 111 casualties, of which 34 were fatal. This was no small price, but the battalion's first engagement since Dieppe had, finally, resulted in a Royal victory.

The Division's next task was to capture the area directly south of Caen so as to consolidate the army's bridgehead on the east bank of the Orne. For this, 5th Brigade was to attack south and capture both Fleury-sur-Orne and Point 67, which was on slightly higher ground than the more northerly Fleury objective. The German 272nd Infantry Division had withdrawn to positions on the high ground along the crest of Verrières ridge, of which pt. 67 was the northernmost spur. Nevertheless, 5th Brigade was successful, despite suffering moderate casualties, in capturing Fleury and in digging in both the Calgary Highlanders and the Black Watch near pt. 67. Additionally, the Black Watch had succeeded in occupying Ifs before moving on to the northern reaches of the ridge around pt. 67. This was the state of affairs on the evening of July 19.

That night the 2nd Canadian Division received further orders to carry the advance southward and to establish itself on Verrières Ridge. For this task the 6th Canadian Infantry Brigade was brought forward, with the Essex Scottish under command, for an advance on the ridge the following day. Brigadier H.A. Young "an RMC graduate without previous combat experience"

²⁰⁶ Goodspeed *Battle Royal*. p. 423.

²⁰⁷ RRC WD. July 18, 1944.

commanded 6th Brigade.²⁰⁸ He was apparently confident in his ability to command the Brigade, but this was mainly because he (and 2nd Division G.O.C. Foulkes) had confidence in his superb battalion commanders.²⁰⁹

In the words of C.P. Stacey, the official historian of the Canadian Army in the Normandy Campaign:

Three miles or so south of Caen the present-day tourist, driving down the arrow-straight road that leads to Falaise, sees to his right a rounded hill crowned by farm buildings. If the traveler be Canadian, he would do well to stay the wheels at this point and cast his mind back to the events of 1944; for this apparently insignificant eminence is the Verrières Ridge. Well may the wheat and sugar-beet grow green and lush upon its gentle slopes, for in that now half-forgotten summer the best blood of Canada was freely poured out upon them.²¹⁰

The crest of the ridge runs in a more or less east-west direction and affords a commanding view to both the north and south. The ridge, while being held by the Germans, was an exceptionally advantageous position from which to view the Anglo-Canadian army's advancing from the north. It was also well suited to the placement of guns in reverse slope positions. The capture of this feature was absolutely essential to the continued success of 2nd Canadian Corps' southward advance and 6th Brigade, with the Essex Scots attached, were tasked with capturing it. Once in Canadian hands, the ridge would offer an almost identical advantage as that enjoyed by the Germans; only that the Canadians would be able to command a view south across the nearby village of Roqancourt, and slightly southeast towards Falaise. Tactically, the capture of Verrières Ridge was very important.

A substantial British attempt, by the tanks of the 4th County of London Yeomanry and a company of the Rifle Brigade, supported by the guns of 8 Corps Artillery, had tried to capture the ridge. British troops of the 7th Armoured Division approached the ridge from east of the Caen-

²⁰⁸ Terry Copp. *Fields of Fire: the Canadian in Normandy*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003). p. 141.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ Stacey. *The Victory Campaign*. p. 174.

Falaise road on the morning of July 20 and were moving through the area around Bras, Hubert-Folie, and Bourguébus. 6th Brigade, with the Essex, would attack the enemy position from Verrières village to the east to St. André-sur-Orne on the west flank, while “the British tanks would withdraw east of the (Caen-Falaise) road and support the Brigade’s advance with fire,” which was a decision made by II Canadian Corps Commander Lt.-Gen. Guy Simonds.²¹¹ Once it became clear that the 7th Armoured Division was not going to take the feature, and were ordered to withdraw, H-Hour for the Canadian attack was moved back from 1200 to 1500 hours. At that time, the battalions of the 6th Brigade would cross the start-line. British and Canadian artillery were to fire on targets in front of the infantry advance, while Typhoons from 83 Group were to attack targets of opportunity. The plan called for the Cameron Highlanders of Canada to advance on the right flank against St. André-sur-Orne, where they were expected to meet enemy armour, the South Saskatchewan Regiment to attack in the centre toward the crest of the ridge, and the Fusiliers de Mont-Royal were to advance on the left flank through Beauvoir Farm and Troteval Farm towards the village of Verrières, which was its objective, situated just below the summit of the ridge.²¹² The Essex Scottish Regiment were to advance along the same line as the South Sasks in the centre and set up a firm base behind the forward battalion. Unfortunately, these four battalions would receive only limited armoured support, especially in the centre where it was virtually non-existent. According to 6th Brigade’s plan, the Camerons on the right were given priority for mortar shoots owing to the belief that enemy armoured resistance would be strongest on their front.²¹³

At the end of the first phase of Operation *Atlantic*, Lt.-Gen. Richard O’Connor commanding 8 British Corps, wrote a critique of the British Army’s armoured doctrine. Essentially, he argued that

²¹¹ Stacey. *The Victory Campaign*. p. 174

²¹² HQ 6th Canadian Infantry Brigade War Diary (6CIB WD) July 1944. Appendix 7. “Confirmatory Notes Comds Conference 200200B HRS” NAC.

²¹³ Ibid.

attacks needed to be made on as wide a front as possible, ensuring that all villages and woods “are either actually attacked, engaged by fire, or masked by smoke.”²¹⁴ Infantry also had to be moved up with the armour and must be protected in carriers. As we shall see, these ideas were not implemented in the Canadian attack of July 20.

As the Canadian attack on Verrières Ridge drew nearer, O'Connor's 8 Corps was approaching the eastern end of Borguébus Ridge (or Verrières Ridge to Canadians) as II Canadian Corps descended upon the ridge's western end from the north. General Simonds called an “O” Group on July 19 to outline the subsequent day's attacks. This meeting was held in the immediate aftermath of 5th Brigade's successful capture of areas around pt. 67 and the town of Ifs. The British 11th Armoured Division had also just captured Bras and Hubert-Folie; consequently, the mood was upbeat.²¹⁵ By this point, however, O'Connor's 8 Corps had already lost around 270 tanks, “had been severely mauled and was preparing to withdraw.”²¹⁶ In its recently completed attack, 11th Armoured division had been nearly destroyed and was therefore relieved by the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division in the area around Bras and Hubert-Folie. “The original plan for Goodwood called for the Canadians to advance south to secure the western flank after the armoured divisions had won control of the high ground all the way to Breteville-Sur-Laize.”²¹⁷ As we have seen however, the British Armoured divisions of 8 Corps were in no position to seize such high ground, and certainly did not control it when the Canadian attack went in, ostensibly to “secure the western flank.” General Dempsey famously claimed that he did not want to get drawn into a costly infantry

²¹⁴ Richard O'Connor in Terry Copp's *Fields of Fire*. p. 144.

²¹⁵ Terry Copp. *Fields of Fire*. p. 147.

²¹⁶ John English. *Canadian Army in Normandy*. P. 228.

²¹⁷ Copp. P. 147.

battle, but did not correct Simonds in his view that, even without O'Connor's armoured divisions, he could take the western end of Verrières Ridge with a "fresh infantry division".²¹⁸

After dawn on July 20, the British 7th Armoured Division captured the town of Bourguébus. Some 7th Armoured tanks had even advanced as far as Beauvoir farm, one of the FMRs intermediate objectives on the left flank of 6th Brigade's soon-to-begin attack. "While they momentarily considered taking Verrières, choosing not to for reasons of relative strength, their presence may have reinforced the presumption by Simonds that 'opposition... was not great and that quick offensive action'" should break through the enemy defending the ridge.²¹⁹ Nevertheless, one is left to wonder why Simonds believed that an infantry Brigade, virtually unsupported by armour, could advance further than the withdrawing tanks of the 7th Armoured Division. Perhaps he believed that since the 7th Armoured were attacking the ridge after many hours of sustained action, that their attack could simply not be pushed home due to fatigue and battle losses incurred during the fight for Bourguébus. In that case, a fresh and ready infantry division would be able to succeed in a renewed attack, where a tired out armoured division had failed. Obviously, Simonds had not learned the same lessons as Richard O'Connor. In the end, 7th Armoured Division's tanks were withdrawn and "no tanks actually accompanied the attacking infantry" during 6th Brigade's advance on the ridge later that day.²²⁰

Nevertheless, there was some Canadian armoured support for this attack. "A" squadron of the 27th Canadian Armoured Regiment (the Sherbrooke Fusiliers) was to support the attack on St. André, C squadron was to support the FMRs on the left and B squadron was held in reserve back at the regimental HQ near Ifs.²²¹ Interestingly, the Sherbrooke's HQ was co-located with 6th

²¹⁸ Terry Copp. *Fields of Fire*. p. 147.

²¹⁹ John English. *The Canadian Army in Normandy*. P. 228.

²²⁰ C.P. Stacey. *The Victory Campaign*. p. 175.

²²¹ 6CIB WD. July 1944. Appendix 7. "Confirmatory Notes Comds Conference 200200B HRS." NAC

Brigade HQ and so coordination between the two Commanding Officers should have been relatively easy. The plan called for A and C squadrons to support the flanks with directed fire from rearward, hull-down positions, while keeping an eye on the South Sasks and Essex Scots in the centre. Brigade's plan obviously anticipated stronger armoured resistance around St. André primarily and Verrières village secondarily, the Cameron's and FMR's respective objectives. Any enemy armour that appeared in the centre was supposed to be dealt with by these formations that were primarily to assist the flanks, as well as by artillery concentrations fired on SOS tasks as necessary. 6th Brigade orders for this attack specified that the Sherbrookes were to "form the basis of counter-attack force".²²²

With regard to the enemy in front of 6th Brigade, both 2nd Canadian Infantry Division and 6th Canadian Infantry Brigade War Diaries and Intelligence reports clearly show that at both the Divisional and Brigade level, the Germans were underestimated prior to this attack. 6th Brigade states that the "presumption was that the opposition on our front was not great and that quick offensive action should break through readily the enemy screen."²²³ An even higher-level complacency also appears in the days before the attack. Intelligence messages sent from 2nd Division to 6th Brigade indicate a belief that the German 272nd Infantry Division, which held the front in the area Verrières - Fontenay le Marmion - St. André-sur-Orne, was inferior to the 12th SS Panzer Division and the 1st SS Panzer Division whom 272nd had recently relieved in this sector.²²⁴ "It is apparent that our immediate front is 'held' (quotes in original) by 272 Inf Div, the (formation) which has relieved 1 SS Pz and 12 SS Pz (divisions) of responsibility in this sector on both sides of the (River Orne). As late as 14 July this lower-grade (division) reported on its way from the south of

²²² Ibid.

²²³ 6CIB WD. 20 July 1944.

²²⁴ 2nd Canadian Infantry Division (2 CID) Intelligence Summary #4, July 19, 1944, Para 5.

France.²²⁵ That 2nd Division considered the 272nd Infantry Division as inferior can be clearly seen in that their occupying the area was not considered adequate grounds to say they really “held” the front. The quotation marks in this report imply that 2nd Canadian Division believed that the 272nd was incapable of holding such ground. While perhaps the 272nd was not of the same quality as the 12th SS or the 1st SS, they were soon to prove that they should not have been underestimated. Additionally, as would soon be discovered, the 272nd was supported by armoured battle groups, usually committed in groups of 5-12 tanks, of the 2nd Panzer and 1st SS Panzer Divisions.²²⁶

Around 1200 hours on July 20th, a squadron of British tanks and a company of motorized infantry attacked the ridge but had been stopped because opposition was too strong. Nevertheless, the Canadian attack went in at 1500 hours and the Camerons gained a foothold in St. André, reporting the codeword MAPLE at 1650, but suffered casualties as a result of repeated counter-attacks against their new position. The FMRs captured Beauvoir Farm and Troteval Farm but were subjected to heavy fire and were unable to move further up the slopes of the ridge. During the FMRs advance, both the enemy and the skies began to storm as German infantry came to life in Beauvoir farm (as well as across the entire length of the Brigade’s advance), and a torrential downpour began that severely limited visibility and communications. The storm affected both the efficacy of command and control, halted Allied air attacks against the enemy, and reduced visibility for the tank gunners. It was under these conditions that the Essex Scottish moved forward.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Terry Copp. *Fields of Fire*. P. 150.

Chapter IV:
The Essex Scottish and South Sasks at Verrières Ridge

Although this is an examination of the Essex Scottish at Verrières Ridge, it is impossible to create a clear narrative of the battle without discussing the South Saskatchewan Regiment's ordeal on July 20th. Such an analysis will help illustrate the problems both battalions had to contend with, often at the same time, from both the enemy at their front and their own higher commanders at their rear.

The Essex Scottish, whose line of advance was the same as the South Sasks, were to take up positions in rear of the South Saskatchewan Regiment and consolidate their area. The Essex had had little sleep and apparently no food all day since they were unable to begin moving into position for the attack until 0800 that morning. At 0115 hours, the battalion was ordered at 100% stand-to and were to prepare to move. Therefore, since they began moving at 0800, the Essex Scots had spent over six hours beforehand preparing to move by loading up their trucks and by squaring everything away. Consequently, as a result of 2nd Division's hastily ordered move, they had had little, if any, rest. Once arriving in the 6th Brigade area, the men received "a poor breakfast and little or no noon meal."²²⁷ The move supposedly needed to take place at that late hour because the Essex had to wait until the 43rd British Division relieved the 4th Brigade front before they could be released to command of 6th Brigade. As a result, the Essex Scots were not (according to the 6th Brigade) in their FUP until 1300 hours, a mere two hours before the attack began.²²⁸ According to the Essex Scottish War Diary, they arrived at the FUP and began to dig in at 1130 hours, which was *completed* by 1300. The Essex maintain that, in fact, at 1300 hours, the enemy began shelling their FUP. Such timing inaccuracies appear frequently in the evidence surrounding this attack, most inaccuracies appear to be erroneous at the Brigade level.

²²⁷ Essex WD. July 22, 1944

²²⁸ 6 CIB WD. July 20, 1944

At 1435 hours the artillery barrage began and all three 6th Brigade forward battalions crossed the start-line twenty-five minutes later.²²⁹ "It was a spectacular sight seeing this advance over a front of some 4000 yards."²³⁰ The attack started off well as all three forward units reported "FOREST"; the intermediate report line. As mentioned above, the Sasks' CO Lt.-Col. Clift had temporarily taken command of 4th Brigade after Sherwood Lett's wounding at the battle in Louvigny. Major George Matthews had therefore taken command of the South Saskatchewan Regiment. As the South Sasks moved forward they came into close-quarters combat with infantry of the 272nd Division and, as a result, lost the barrage. Still, attempts were continually made to keep the forward momentum going: "B Coy had pushed through D Coy at the double to catch up to our barrage... shortly after A Coy on our left encountered the first of many enemy posts."²³¹ The fighting at this very early stage was extremely intense: "I glanced back and saw a German who had popped up from a trench about 10 yards to my rear. He was raising his rifle to shoot me when Lt. Bob Pulley, who was coming up from behind, saw what was about to happen. He shot the German thus saving my life."²³² Nevertheless, despite this strong resistance from German infantrymen, elements of the unit did manage to reach their objective. There is some discrepancy in the sources, however, regarding the speed with which the S Sask R reached their final objective. The 6th Brigade War Diary, written after the battle, offers an orderly and well-timed account. The diarist claims that by 1700 hours, the South Sasks "reported" they had two companies on their objective.²³³ The message log for the day, however, tells a different story. At 1650, the Sasks reported they were still 200 yards from the objective and did not actually radio success until 1725,

²²⁹ Essex WD. July 20, 1944. Although it should be noted that the 6th Brigade War Diary maintains the attack opened simultaneously with the barrage at 1500 hours. 6CIB WD. July 20, 1944.

²³⁰ 6CIB WD. July 20, 1944

²³¹ Lt.-Col. John S. Edmondson. "Pawns of War: Personal Account and Study of Aspects of the Attack on Verrières Ridge by the South Saskatchewan Regiment on 20 July 1944." p. 8.

²³² Ibid., p. 7

²³³ Ibid.

when Able Company reported POPLAR. At 1732, Dog Company reported success also. These are the two companies that Brigade claims were on the objective at 1700. The Camerons sent back their codeword, MAPLE, at 1650. The 6th Brigade War Diary then states that, "the situation on the front of these two (battalions) was very satisfactory, consequently at about 1730 hours the Essex Scot were ordered to move to their (position) with all possible speed."²³⁴ The War Diary, therefore, suggests a much more orderly advance than appears to have been so, given an examination of the message logs.

According to the message log, the Essex were ordered forward at 1727, a mere two minutes after the South Sasks leading elements had reported POPLAR and *before* the S Sask R's Dog company was at the objective. Therefore, the War Diary's orderly account, in which the South Sasks reached their objective and were consolidating for a full half-hour, thereby allowing Brigadier Young time to properly assess the situation before the Essex were ordered forward, seems erroneous. The Essex were ordered forward only as the Sasks were reaching their objective, not *after* they had consolidated it. Brigade's decision to send the Essex forward appears to have been made without actually ascertaining that the situation was "very satisfactory". The actual two minutes that expired in the interim allowed virtually no time for a proper analysis of the situation at the front. It appears that all Brigade HQ could really have known was that the Sasks' Able Company had arrived at the objective. Incidentally, the South Saskatchewan Regiment's War Diary, although very detailed in its description of the battle, unfortunately does not record the times at which the forward companies reached their objectives. Corroboration of the timings is therefore unavailable at the battalion level.²³⁵ At any rate, had Brigadier Young waited a full half-hour after the Sasks *actually* reached their objective, the situation would have appeared much less

²³⁴ 6CIB WD. July 20, 1944.

²³⁵ South Saskatchewan Regiment War Diary (SSR WD). July 20, 1944. pp. 11-13.

satisfactory, for eighteen minutes after the two forward companies arrived, 6th Brigade received word that from the Sasks that "We are being attacked by tanks."²³⁶

The War Diary reports that the enemy "started to lay down heavy mortar and artillery fire accurately fired onto our positions."²³⁷ At that point the first enemy tanks appeared. "One tank came right into my left forward platoon driving right over top of people it didn't shoot."²³⁸ Then as this German counterattack began to develop, the Saskatchewan infantry went to ground in the waist-high grass as it offered visual protection from the Panzers that were now "roaming at will (and) machine gunning anything that moved."²³⁹ Enemy mortar fire continued and inflicted further casualties, including acting CO Major G.R. Matthews and battalion IO Lt. D.S. Padlow, both of whom "received an almost direct hit" in the battalion HQ carrier vehicle.²⁴⁰ This direct hit also knocked out most communications.

The beginning of a heavy rainstorm further complicated communication and observation but the battalion continued trying to consolidate. "The 6-pounders, mortars, carrier and pioneer platoon were ordered forward to help prepare a battalion 'fortress'."²⁴¹ Unfortunately, as mentioned above, before the battalion could dig in on the objective they were counter-attacked by enemy infantry and tanks appearing over the ridge from the southwest at 1750 hours. "The tanks attacked 'D' Company with HE and MG fire."²⁴² Then another enemy counter-attack developed from the southeast which overrun "B" Company and destroyed the antitank guns that were moving to their consolidation positions. "The tanks came right up to the crest of the hill and started to lay down

²³⁶ 6th Brigade Intelligence Log. Serial #41.

²³⁷ SSR WD. July 20, 1944. p. 12.

²³⁸ Lt.-Col. John S. Edmondson. "Pawns of War" p. 9.

²³⁹ Terry Copp. *Fields of Fire*. p. 150.

²⁴⁰ SSR WD. July 20, 1944. p. 12.

²⁴¹ Terry Copp. *Fields of Fire*. p. 150.

²⁴² SSR WD. July 20, 1944. pp. 12.

(heavy) HE and MG fire causing heavy casualties.”²⁴³ Then “the tanks, once they had no easy targets, sprayed the wheat fields with machine-gun fire and turned circles through the wheat in an effort to crush the men or flush them into the open so they could be fired upon.”²⁴⁴ The 6th Brigade message log paints a grim picture as the South Sasks sent bleak messages urgently requesting assistance both at 1750 and then five minutes later when they again pleaded: “We are being attacked by tanks. We need help from the tank counter attack coming from the SOUTH.”²⁴⁵ This was the last Brigade heard of its beleaguered battalion for over two hours. When the Sasks finally reestablished wireless communication, they simply reported that enemy shelling was inflicting further casualties.²⁴⁶ The battalion had been pounded hard and had lost the ability to communicate normally due to both battle losses and the rain. The Sask’s assistance requests therefore started pouring in only 23 minutes after the lead South Sask elements were on the objective, but before the Essex had reached their consolidation position. It would have been difficult for the Essex to carry out their orders, which entailed forming a firm base for the South Sasks, if they were not given adequate time to *create* a firm base before the Sasks were counterattacked.

The Essex Scots had started moving at 1727. They reported reaching their objective and that digging in had commenced at 1820; a full half-hour after the German counterattack had already started decimating the Sasks just several hundred metres forward.²⁴⁷ During the heavy counterattack against the South Sasks, one of their two surviving senior officers, Major L.L. Dickin, went back to inform the Essex CO, Lt.-Col. MacDonald, that the Sasks could not survive on the objective they had so recently occupied. As a result, they would retire behind the forward Essex positions, which were directly behind the South Sasks’ line of advance and were not yet fully

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ John Edmonson. “Pawns of War”. p. 10.

²⁴⁵ 6th Brigade Intelligence Log. Serial #42.

²⁴⁶ 6th Brigade Intelligence Log. Serial #50. July 20, 1944.

²⁴⁷ 6CIB WD. 20 July 1944.

occupied or consolidated. The two senior Saskatchewan officers then went to inform Brigadier Young of the situation at the front in hopes of receiving armoured or artillery support. Brigadier Young simply gave orders to both Major Dickin and Major Edmondson (who was also made acting CO) to hold their position on the slopes of the ridge, quite obviously disregarding Dickin's and Edmondson's assessment of the battalion's awful predicament. The two officers returned to the unit with orders to hold the position, but found that the remnants of the South Sasks were withdrawing through the forward positions of the Essex Scots all the way back to their Forming Up Place.²⁴⁸ Those that stayed on the slopes were, as before, pinned to the ground by enemy tanks that were given free reign to roam about the area. Many of the Saskatchewan troops that had "retreated" were obviously wounded or were, according to John Edmondson, withdrawing to more defensible positions. Staying up front would almost certainly have spelled annihilation for the South Saskatchewan men and the company commanders' decision to withdraw them from their obviously exposed and indefensible position was a decision that doubtless saved many lives.

According to the South Sasks War Diary and the 6th Brigade Intelligence log, the battalion's companies were in retreat *before* the Essex Scottish had even arrived at their consolidation area, which means that as the Essex Scots advanced, *before reaching their objective*, they encountered the scattered remnants of the South Sasks coming back through them.

The remainder of "B" (Company) then withdrew through the grain field through "C" (Company) area. Major J.S. Edmonson then reported the (position) of the line of the forward troops to (Brigade Command Post) at lfs. The Essex Scottish who were in reserve, then came forward and started to dig in... the remainder of the S Sask R then withdrew through the Essex Scottish, with the exception of some of the boys...²⁴⁹

This turn of events is also supported by the 6th Brigade message log, which indicates that the German counterattack on the S Sask R began a full half-hour before the Essex were ordered to

²⁴⁸ Terry Copp, *Fields of Fire*. p. 150.

²⁴⁹ SSR WD. July 20, 1944. p. 12.

move. Bravely, many South Sasks stayed with the Essex Scots to help mount a successful defence.

The Essex Scots were originally supposed to occupy the area more or less between Beauvoir Farm and St. André, where the gentle slope of Verrières Ridge begins to rise.²⁵⁰ As stated above, they were ordered forward at 1727 hours. Before reaching their objective however, the leading Essex companies encountered the retreating Sasks. The forward Essex companies saw the South Sasks' so-called withdrawal as an utter rout; it was a rout that they were now themselves getting involved in. The Saskatchewan troops retreated directly through the forward, and rear, Essex positions in what must have appeared to be a very confused and, perhaps, panicked state.

Believing the situation to be unsalvageable, the forward Essex companies, who were now also struck by enemy tanks and artillery, also began to withdraw as more enemy tanks approached. Verbal reports began to come in that some of Able and Baker Companies were seen coming back.²⁵¹ 6th Brigade received a message from the Essex at this point in the battle simply stating, "(Tanks) south of the (crossroads)."²⁵² Then, more ominously, "There are two tanks in front of our "D" (Company), We need (anti-tank support) immediately."²⁵³ D Company was one of the reserve Essex companies and this message suggests that the forward companies had already been overrun and, further, that the troops in the field had no way of dealing with this armoured counterattack unless assistance was provided from the rear in the form of artillery, armour, or anti-tank weapons. The Essex Scots were rapidly being hung out to dry.

²⁵⁰ Stacey. *The Victory Campaign*. p. 175.

²⁵¹ BJS MacDonald Papers. Letter to Maj-Gen Chas Foulkes. P.2. NAC. MG40 E480.

²⁵² 6 CIB Intelligence Log. Serial #48.

²⁵³ 6 CIB Intelligence Log. Serial #47.

There are only a couple of instances wherein tanks of the Sherbrooke Fusiliers' A and C Squadrons turned their attention to the centre. C Squadron reported trying to get into a good fire position near Beauvoir Farm but "things became too hot" so they withdrew.²⁵⁴ Sgt. Olivier of C Squadron, in a Firefly tank, maintains that he took up a position on the high ground overlooking St. André in support of the Camerons. Nevertheless, he observed three Panzers near Verrières and fired on them. He reports that there was poor visibility at that time due to the rain and smoke and so could not see if he hit any enemy tanks. He *did* notice the Panzers returning fire, however, so he moved his tank behind a hill under cover of smoke. After the smoke cleared he moved back up the hill but the "enemy had disappeared."²⁵⁵ Shortly thereafter Olivier was forced to withdraw for repairs. Olivier's fire however, appears to be one of the most significant instances of support near the centre all day, even though it was actually closer to the FMR's objective. In spite of the fact that 6th Brigade's pre-attack plan designated B Squadron as a counterattack force, no counterattack was ever made, or ordered, in the centre. The only time the reserve squadron moved out was to reinforce success on the right, behind the Camerons.

With regards to the Essex Scots' Able and Baker Companies, it is not clear that the manner in which they withdrew was out of control, as was suggested by 6th Brigade and by historians ever since. According to Lt.-Col. MacDonald and Capt. D.W. McIntyre, Baker Company commander, Baker Company had been unable to consolidate on their position at all, obviously because they had been ordered forward while a counter attack was occurring on their front. McIntyre then consulted with Able Company commander and they jointly decided to withdraw, chiefly because they were being attacked by mortar, machine-gun and tank fire, and had lost communication with battalion HQ. This echoes what happened between the South Sasks company

²⁵⁴ 27th Armoured Regiment (the Sherbrooke Fusiliers) War Diary. July 20, 1944. NAC. Microfilm Reel T-12758. (SF WD)

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

commanders who, it appears, consulted with each other about withdrawing and then jointly decided to do so. These are not the actions of men or officers who had lost their heads and panicked. MacDonald then ordered McIntyre to gather up his company and dig them in behind Dog company, who were one of the two reserve companies. Only a portion of Baker Company actually dug in as ordered because the balance had apparently gone back to the FUP at lfs in order to evacuate casualties. McIntyre actually ordered his men to evacuate casualties and so the fact that these men were later found in the rear cannot in reality be considered evidence that Baker Company retreated in a state of panic.²⁵⁶ "The B Coy withdrawal appears to have been well handled and controlled otherwise."²⁵⁷ MacDonald admitted under oath, however, that Able Company, having lost all of its officers and most NCOs, retreated in some disorder. It appears therefore that only parts of the Essex forward companies actually "broke" and "collapsed", while the remainder were withdrawn in an orderly and controlled manner. Much of the initial withdrawal, it appears, was carried out under orders from company commanders in the field who saw that the situation was hopeless.

MacDonald attempted to keep control of his battalion by ordering the lead (now retreating) companies to halt and dig in behind the reserve Essex companies, who would now act as the forward companies. At 2000 hours MacDonald toured these forward companies and tried to calm the men down. One can presume that the CO's presence was heartening to the men as they knew him well and had trained them for so many months to deal with situations just like the one they were now experiencing. The CO claims that he "talked to nearly every man. I satisfied myself with the positions held, the forward ones... I told the men they were now the forward companies and must hold on at all cost. Some were shaken a bit by the S Sask R and A and B Coy withdrawals,

²⁵⁶ Court of Inquiry, 2 Aug 1944. MacDonald Papers. NAC. MG40 E480.

²⁵⁷ BJS MacDonald Papers. Letter to Maj-Gen Chas Foulkes. P.2. NAC. MG40 E480.

but seemed reassured and steadied by my visit.”²⁵⁸ These two companies did as MacDonald ordered and held their ground just north (that is, just short) of their assigned objective. They did not allow further enemy penetration that night.

After his visit to the front, MacDonald returned to the FUP near Ifs to see if he could get some food and hot drinks to men in the forward areas. He also intended to find the men from Able and Baker companies who had withdrawn. On his way Brigadier Young informed him that 100 Essex Scots were at the FUP. MacDonald claims he was surprised to hear that so many men were out of the line, but was not surprised that a number of men were there. MacDonald understood that there had been plenty of casualties in Able and Baker companies and that McIntyre had detailed around 30 men to evacuate the wounded. Presumably a large proportion of those in the rear were walking wounded and so might appear to Young as simply being improperly out of battle. Also, those detailed to evacuate casualties may certainly have looked suspicious to the Brigadier.

After searching around the FUP, MacDonald found the men who numbered closer to 50.²⁵⁹ With the 30 men properly ordered out of battle, the walking wounded, and the Left Out of Battle (LOB) personnel, the number of men may well have looked large to the Brigadier. However, as we have seen, MacDonald had known they were there, those who were capable of fighting had been ordered back by McIntyre, and the LOB personnel were not expected to be in the fray at this point anyway. It is certainly possible however, that *some* of the men found at Ifs were members of Able and Baker companies who were simply frightened and/or in shock. The men MacDonald found were sleeping for the most part so he woke them and marched them to Brigade HQ so as to refit them for battle, as any responsible commander would. The party he found at Ifs were very low on ammunition and so MacDonald intended to make good these deficiencies. According to

²⁵⁸ BJS MacDonald Papers. Letter to Maj-Gen Chas Foulkes. NAC. MG40 E480.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

MacDonald, Brigade was unable to replenish the men at that point and, deciding therefore that they could not go back to the front without ammunition, MacDonald ordered them to return to where he found them, get a good meal and decent night's sleep, and to be prepared to return to the line in the morning, once Brigade HQ could re-supply them with ammunition. Brigadier Young appears to have again stumbled upon these men after MacDonald had tried to refit them and went to Division to acquire their ammunition and weapons. This was accomplished and the men were re-supplied at 0400 hours, complete with orders to return to the line now given by both MacDonald and the Brigadier.

Meanwhile, the men of the Essex Scots forward companies spent the night in their wet slit trenches as it poured rain and kept a watch on the blood soaked slopes of the ridge in front of them. During the night however, many of the battalion's weapons had become unusable owing to the rain, the mud and the enemy's non-stop mortaring. "The task of keeping weapons in working order became almost impossible. The men worked continuously on their (weapons), even tearing off their shirts for rags in a futile attempt to keep them in order."²⁶⁰

The next morning, at first light, eight enemy tanks were found in Charlie Company's (one of the forward companies) area.²⁶¹ With these tanks were German infantry and snipers. Both the German tanks and foot-soldiers kept the Essex Scots under constant machine-gun and small arms fire. MacDonald then returned to I/s, as he had received orders at 0930 to go back and see the Brigadier. When he arrived Young was absent, so he decided to acquire armoured support by himself. The tanks in Charlie Company's area "were so positioned that our (anti-tank) guns and PIATs could not get at them. There were many of our own tanks in the vicinity, but they did not appear to be taking any action. I asked one tank commander personally for help, but he flatly

²⁶⁰ Essex WD. July 21, 1944.

²⁶¹ BJS MacDonald Papers. Letter to Maj-Gen Chas Foulkes. P.2. NAC. MG40 E480.

refused.”²⁶² Indeed, the Sherbrooke Fusiliers’ War Diary for July 20 and 21 makes no mention whatsoever of ever supporting, or receiving orders to support, the battalions in the centre. The Diary is very scant for July 20, despite the fact that the regiment was in support of a Brigade-sized attack. Nevertheless, the Sherbrookes reported moving into position to support the Cameron’s attack on St. André at 1300 on July 20, and at 1800 they reported that B Squadron (the reserve squadron) was ordered into position behind A Squadron at St. André as additional support to counter a reported enemy armoured thrust on that right flank.²⁶³ By this time, the South Sasks had been suffering under the weight of an enemy armoured counterattack for at least ten minutes, yet Brigade decided to throw the armoured reserve into the attack on St. André, which was already being support by A Squadron. No mention is made in the Sherbrooke’s War Diary of giving support for the centre until 0730 the next morning when they report simply that they will be *moving forward* with the Black Watch attack planned for later that day (July 21).²⁶⁴ There is never any mention of the South Sasks or the Essex Scots *anywhere* in the Sherbrooke’s War Diary for this day, which suggests that their attention was elsewhere. Fault perhaps does not lie with the 27th Canadian Armoured Regiment as they directed their attention to the flanks, as per 6th Brigade orders. Additionally, while the South Sasks and Essex Scots were experiencing armoured counterattacks, it must also be borne in mind that the Camerons and the FMRs were also dealing with enemy tanks, troops and mortars. The July 20 War Diary recounts that there was a terrific tank battle in St. André and the Camerons were repeatedly and viciously counterattacked by both tanks and infantry.²⁶⁵ One should not take anything away from the terrible predicament that the other 6th Brigade battalions found themselves in. Nevertheless, Brigade committed two squadrons of tanks

²⁶² BJS MacDonald Papers. Letter to Maj-Gen Chas Foulkes. P.2. NAC. MG40 E480.

²⁶³ SF WD. July 20, 1944.

²⁶⁴ SF WD. July 20, 1944.

²⁶⁵ 6CIB Intelligence Log.

to the right, one to the left and none to the centre. The Sherbrookes were ordered to support the flanks, but to keep an eye on the centre, however, as it turned out, the Canadian tanks had their hands completely full repelling the armoured counterattacks on the flank; given the plan of attack, they could not help the Sasks or the Essex.

Nevertheless, much of B Squadron appears to have remained at battalion HQ near Ifs, or appear to have returned there after repelling the counterattack against St. André. The Sherbrookes report that they spent the 20th keeping "the high ground (presumably the ridge itself) under observation all day. Several enemy tanks were observed but the range was too great to successfully engage them."²⁶⁶ The Diary notes further: "As we were only the reserve squadron there wasn't much opposition except for an unknown number of 'Moaning Minnies' and mortars falling."²⁶⁷ Clearly, therefore, much of B Squadron sat near Ifs and watched the Panzers roaming around the ridge... perhaps they were unaware that those tanks were slaughtering their South Sask and Essex Scots comrades. Again, no mention is ever made of actually moving out from Ifs to get better range or to actually close with the enemy, despite the fact that the Sherbrooke's HQ was co-located with 6th Brigade HQ. Perhaps Brigadier Young intended to hold them back in a counterattacking role, but given the fact that the tankers observed enemy armour on the ridge (the South Sasks objective) maybe a counter attack might have helped the battalions in the centre at this time (July 20).

The Sherbrooke Fusiliers after-action report on the battle maintains that the enemy had a tank harbour south of May-sur-Orne. Tanks moving out from this position therefore would have moved laterally along the reserve slope of the ridge, west to east, on their way to counter A Squadron tanks supporting the FMRs. This would have taken them right through the South Sasks'

²⁶⁶ SF WD July 20, 1944.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

objective and a simple left turn would have allowed the Panzers to exploit the unsupported infantry in the centre. This appears to be what, in fact, occurred. It is no wonder that tanks kept appearing against the two centre battalions as this was the natural route they would have taken to get to the Sherbrooke tanks on the left flank. Opportunistically, the Panzers turned north and attacked the helpless Sasks and Essex Scots whom they, by simple geography, encountered first. The Sherbrookes' final assessment of the enemy was that "the Germans have a fair amount of Armour and Motorized Infantry in the area south of St. André. He is fighting a delayed action by strong counterattacks headed by armour and (self-propelled) guns."²⁶⁸ Such counterattacks, it was learned, needed to be stopped using armour, anti-tank guns, artillery, mortars, and infantry... not infantry alone.

As we have seen, at first light on July 21, Charlie Company found itself near eight enemy tanks plus supporting infantry. The enemy had used the cover of darkness to move into position for an armoured counter attack the next day. The reinforced enemy again struck at what must have obviously been the weakest point in the line, the 6th Brigade's shaken centre and the harried Essex Scots. It must always be borne in mind, in light of later disciplinary developments, that the original forward unit, the South Sasks, had completely (with the exception of some individuals still fighting with the Essex Scots) withdrawn from the field and that the Essex Scots, although beaten up, held the line all night long despite being under constant mortar fire. Nevertheless, the morning's attack caused even further Essex casualties but the remaining companies held the line until about 1430 that afternoon. There is, of course, some discrepancy about timing here also. However, it seems that the tanks in Charlie Company's area started harassing the forward troops at about 0900. The attack continued in the morning as more enemy troops and tanks arrived. During this attack, Charlie Company, #17 Platoon, and Battalion HQ, were all cut off completely from the rest of the

²⁶⁸ SF WD. July 20, 1944. Appendix E. p. 25.

unit. A good number of these men were taken prisoner and, in full sight of the rest of the battalion, were marched back into captivity. Battalion HQ was surrounded and some men were taken prisoner; some made it back on their own. "They made their way out as best they could. Lt. K. Jeanneret (sigs offr) tells of crawling a long distance thru a wheat field before finally being able to make his way back to the (battalion). The IO, Lt. W.C. Wilson plus his staff are missing, as are the COs batman and RCCS signalers."²⁶⁹

As a result of this enemy counterattack, some men started to retreat in the face of, again, superior firepower. Had MacDonald not been ordered back to Ifs by the Brigadier, he may have been able to help his battalion because, while he waited for Young to return, 6th Brigade received the following series of messages:

0940: "Being sniped and harassed by MMG"

1030: "Enemy MMG firing on our carriers on the (road) continually.

1035: "Carriers being fired on by enemy MMG, we have no way of neutralizing them. Also snipers in the vicinity.

1044: "Have no idea what situation is with my Sunray (MacDonald). I have 5 of my 10 men left with me.

1058: "Have you seen anything of our (troops) to-day?"

1110: "We cannot hear you so will just sent infm as we get it."

1124: "We are being heavily mortared. Truck cannot be moved. I have only half my men with me."

It seems that, for an unknown reason, the men from Able and Baker Companies, whom both MacDonald and Young had ordered to return in the morning, remained at the FUP until MacDonald took them back into the line late that morning. MacDonald later claimed that the Brigadier, or other authority, failed "to permit the men from A and B coys, (Young) complains of finding at his command post, to return to the line as ordered by me."²⁷⁰

Nevertheless, by 1430 hours on July 21, the situation at the front was becoming desperate. As mentioned above, Battalion HQ and at least one company had been cut off from the

²⁶⁹ Essex WD. July 21, 1944.

²⁷⁰ BJS MacDonald Papers. Letter to Maj-Gen Chas Foulkes. NAC. MG40 E480.

battalion, and it appears that many Essex Scots were withdrawing again in the face of an armoured counterattack against which they were not properly equipped to fight. Young ordered MacDonald to intercept the men who were coming out and reform them on an intermediate position. At this time the Brigadier also told MacDonald to take the men from Able and Baker Companies with him to start digging in on the intermediate position. This was a surprise to MacDonald because he did not know why the men of these two companies were still at Brigade HQ, instead of in the line as he had ordered. At any rate, the withdrawal from the front was not a case of men simply leaving the front, it was another instance in which the enemy used overwhelmingly superior firepower, as they had done the previous evening, to force the Essex Scots back. It should be noted, however, that although some Essex Scots were moving rearward, "elements of two (companies) were still in the forward area."²⁷¹ Although many were withdrawing, the battalion was still holding the line up front.

As ordered, the Essex CO formed the battalion on the intermediate position. He also got word through to the forward companies to withdraw to the intermediate position. The German counterattack, along with the Essex withdrawal to the intermediate position ordered by Brigadier Young, created a salient between the Camerons on the right and the FMRs on the left. The Essex held their new position and were ordered to secure and prepare a start-line for the Black Watch, who were to attack through the Essex in order to reoccupy the forward positions that had been occupied by the Essex all night long. At 1800 hours the Black Watch counter-attacked the Germans in the centre (this time with armoured support) and succeeded in recapturing the "lost" ground and the Brigade front was stabilized. The Essex remained in their intermediate position until 2200 hours that evening when the Royals relieved them. Verrières Ridge remained in enemy hands.

²⁷¹ 6CIB WD. 21 July, 1944.

But what happened to the Essex in their first engagement since Dieppe? Had their apparently successful reconstitution and retraining over the past two years failed them when it had counted the most? Brigadier Young did not think so and filed an adverse report claiming that the Essex CO, Lt.-Col. MacDonald, was to blame for the Essex retreat and casualties. So the question remains: why did the Essex suffer this defeat?

Chapter V:
Brigadier Young's Failure?

As with any event as confused and chaotic as battle, there are a number of factors that can explain success or failure. The attack of July 20/21 on Verrières Ridge can, as a tactical operation, be considered a failure. As so commonly happens in human affairs, when something fails or does not go to plan, someone is singled out for blame. For the failure of the Essex Scottish to take and hold their objectives that day, Lt.-Col. B.J.S. MacDonald was blamed. Although, since the Essex Scottish did reach and, for the most part, hold the line, one is left wondering why MacDonald was singled out for reprimand. Upon examination of numerous documents related to the attack, the answer that keeps coming to the surface is that Brigadier Young was more, or perhaps solely, culpable for the failure of the attack. Although it is perhaps not always right to level blame at commanders since battles often do not go according to plan, it is clear that in this case Young's actions during and after the battle were plainly incorrect. His attack plan was flawed and the battalion COs of both the Essex Scottish and the South Sasks knew it. Furthermore, since Young was intent on passing the buck for the failure of this operation, it seems only fair that in analyzing MacDonald's actions, one must necessarily examine how Young, his accuser, acted himself.

The most enlightening set of documents that can be used to sort out what happened and why it happened that way is the voluminous correspondence between MacDonald and G.O.C. 2nd Division Major-General Foulkes, and his Corps commander, Lieutenant-General Guy Simonds. Additionally, the 6th Brigade War Diary, the 6th Brigade Ops Log, the personal account of South Sask Major John Edmondson, the Essex Scot's War Diary, and the Sherbrooke Fusilier's War Diary are also of vital importance.

MacDonald very strongly protested the fact that Brigadier Young filed an adverse report that resulted in MacDonald being removed from command. Brigadier Young's report complained that MacDonald failed to exercise control over his unit while engaged with the enemy on July 20/21. Young further maintained that the Essex commander should have brought his battalion under more complete control in preparation for counterattacks the next morning. This complaint has to do with the men of Able and Baker Companies who did not return to the line until late morning on July 21. Even further, Young claimed that he found MacDonald in a state of nervousness unsuited to inspiring confidence in the men and that, basically, he had broken down in the face of this determined enemy counterattack. Based on these impressions, Young found that MacDonald was unsuitable for command in the field.²⁷² Foulkes and Simonds agreed and MacDonald was fired.

It is, however, clear that both the officers and other ranks of the Essex Scottish did not feel that their commander was to blame for the disaster and, further, that they continued to have confidence in his command abilities. Being naturally disturbed at Young's allegations, MacDonald asked his company commanders to find out if the other ranks were indeed lacking confidence in him. This survey resulted in the entire battalion signing a petition in support of MacDonald, apparently without his urging them to do so.²⁷³ The CO also maintained that many men of the battalion approached and reassured him that they continued to have confidence in him and to state "their feeling that I have been unjustly punished for something I could not help."²⁷⁴ Furthermore, the Essex War Diarist Fred Tilston's July 22 entry makes it clear that he blames Brigade for what

²⁷² BJS MacDonald Papers. Letter to Lt.-Gen. Guy Simonds. 12 Aug 44. NAC. MG30 E480.

²⁷³ BJS MacDonald Papers. Petition of Other Ranks and Officers Affirming their Confidence in Lt.-Col. MacDonald. NAC. MG30 E480.

²⁷⁴ BJS MacDonald Papers. Letter to Maj-Gen Chas Foulkes. P.2. NAC. MG40 E480.

happened on the 20th, not MacDonald. Tilston stops short of calling Brigade-level actions a “betrayal”, but one gets the sense that he indeed feels the Essex were hung out to dry.

It is not a pleasant picture to realize that so many of the (battalion) have been lost, especially when the action was not successful and many of the casualties could have been avoided by better planning and the observance of the procedure that our (training) had led us to believe would be followed before going into battle. All of the rules of man management were either violated or ignored, by the sudden move ordered after mid-night, the loss of sleep by all ranks, a poor breakfast and little or no noon meal before battle, and the general or detailed picture and plan, if known, was not given to the junior (officers) or troops.²⁷⁵

Tilston here is referring to the fact that higher command, not the battalion, was responsible for ordering the untimely moves, for botching “man management”, and for the total lack of intelligence sharing that might have assisted those at the sharp end. Indeed, as we have seen previously, the Essex Scots were experts at man-management and were repeatedly commended for their “good shows” during training exercises and parades. The untimely move resulted in the men going into the battle physically tired and hungry and, psychologically, this could not have been a positive thing. MacDonald got it right when he stated that “psychologically everything was wrong and as far from what might have been imagined as the proper preparation for their first battle.”²⁷⁶ Indeed, food and sleep are the most basic requisites of proper man-management prior to a battle, but this was denied the Essex Scots.

In response to Young’s allegations that MacDonald could not inspire confidence, the Essex CO curtly responded that “insofar as inspiring confidence is concerned I must admit that I lacked confidence in the (Brigadier’s) plan, which did fail to a large extent. Subsequent fighting and (casualties) have, I would submit, demonstrated the great difficulties of taking and particularly

²⁷⁵ Essex WD. July 22, 1944.

²⁷⁶ BJS MacDonald Papers. Letter to Maj-Gen Chas Foulkes. P.3. NAC. MG40 E480.

holding the areas originally assigned to S Sask R and Essex Scot.”²⁷⁷ In this regard, MacDonald is referring to the disappointing results of Operation Spring, which will be discussed shortly.

MacDonald claims that the main reason he may have appeared to lack confidence was because he did not feel the Brigadier’s plan was sound, and *not* because he lacked confidence in either himself or his abilities to lead the battalion. Even before the attack went in, MacDonald understood that Young’s plan was flawed. This is a sentiment echoed by officers of the South Saskatchewan Regiment. Lt.-Col. Clift, who was temporarily called away to replace Brigadier Lett of 4th Brigade after his wounding at Louvigny and who was therefore not in command of the battalion on July 20, stressed the importance of armoured support in this attack. “I had asked, and was granted, a tank squadron in direct support, because of the long assault, the rising ground at the objective, and the chances of a quick tank cum infantry attack by the enemy.”²⁷⁸ However, on July 19, the Acting CO Major Matthews informed his officers that the attack would now go in unsupported by armour. “The only support we could count on was indirect support of the Armour.”²⁷⁹ This change of plan is corroborated in 6th Brigade’s final orders issued prior to the attack.²⁸⁰ More to the point however, Clift later remarked that, “I put the blame on what happened to the S Sask R on Brig. H.A. Young who removed tank support.”²⁸¹ As Acting Commander of 4th Brigade, and later G.O.C 6th Brigade, Clift was certainly in a position to make such an assertion. The important point here is that Clift says plainly that Young “removed tank support”; this was a devastatingly poor decision that affected both the South Sasks and the Essex Scots.

MacDonald’s perspective on the battle is an interesting one. He cites five main reasons why the attack failed, all of which were, in his estimation, circumstantial factors that he could not

²⁷⁷ BJS MacDonald Papers. Letter to Maj-Gen Chas Foulkes. NAC. MG40 E480.

²⁷⁸ F.A. Clift Quoted in John Edmondson, “Pawns of War”. p. 3.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ 6CIB WD. July 20, 1944. “Confirmatory Notes Comds Conference 200200B HRS”. NAC.

²⁸¹ Edmondson. “Pawns of War”. p. 24.

control. First, there was a lack of communication from the outset. Second, both the South Sasks and his two forward Essex companies were forced to withdraw in the face of heavy enemy counterattacks, which, unlike both Canadian battalions, were supported by armour. Third, these enemy counterattacks resulted in considerable casualties among both the South Sasks and his forward companies. Fourth, the Brigadier (or other authority) refused to permit the men from Able and Baker companies, whom Young found at his command post, to return to the battle despite MacDonald's orders that they do so. Fifth, MacDonald claims to have received a series of contradictory orders from Young that made absolute compliance with his wishes next to impossible. With regard to the fourth point, MacDonald admitted that the men of the two forward companies had withdrawn as a result of the heavy German counterattacks, and that he was not surprised that they were missing from the line because of the heavy casualties they had suffered. As mentioned above, MacDonald had consulted with Baker Company commander Major D.W. McIntyre and ordered him to dig in behind Dog Company at an intermediate position. At any rate, MacDonald was quite unable to do anything about those men of Able and Baker companies that had returned to their FUP due to the lack of communications available to him and the fact that he was attempting to ensure that the reserve companies would stand and hold the line.

MacDonald, therefore, refuted Brigadier Young's remarks on several accounts. First, he admitted to not being able to exercise complete command and control over the troops during the attack, but argued that such control was virtually impossible to maintain given that he had lost most forms of communication and had to rely on word of mouth and runners. Furthermore, the level of casualties, the incessant rain, and the terrain made the exercise of command and control quite difficult. Second, Young complained that MacDonald should have brought the battalion under more control for a fresh attack the following morning. The CO maintained however, that he had indeed visited all the men of the broken companies, toured the men at the front line in their slit trenches

and calmed them down, made arrangements for them to be refitted, arranged for them to receive food and rest, had attempted to refit the men he found at the FUP, and had issued orders that those in the rear return to the front at "first light" so as to bring battalion numbers back up to strength in the line. It is clear that MacDonald was a commander that cared for his men. That he toured the front lines personally and tried to reassure them, that he tried to ensure they would receive a hot drink and some food, that he understood the need for those in the rear to get some rest, instead of returning to the line without ammunition, all of these factors are indicative of a leader that wanted the best for his men. In this way, the Essex CO was able to inspire confidence in the battalion and that, as the men told him, is what made him a valuable and effective battalion commander. Not only was his leadership style well-liked, MacDonald had built a strong reputation during the past two years as a soldier that knew his craft intimately and had been involved in the training of the entire 4th Brigade, not just his own unit.

Nevertheless, MacDonald recalls how he was repeatedly frustrated that the men of Able and Baker companies never returned as ordered on the morning of July 21. He seemed to believe that either the Brigadier, or some higher authority, prevented them from doing so. Although MacDonald never received an answer as to why these men would have been prevented from returning by the Brigadier, and there still seems to be no good reason why Young would have held them back at the FUP, other than to annoy MacDonald, but this seems unrealistic. Finally, Young told the CO to take the men with him at around 1100 hours on July 21, which was both surprising and frustrating to MacDonald, who believed they should have already been in the line as per his orders of the previous evening.

Lastly, Young accused the Essex CO of being nervous and uncontrolled. MacDonald strongly protested this remark in particular. He claims that after having been summoned to Brigade HQ at 0930, he arrived but waited around for the Brigadier until 1100. During this time, as we have

seen, the Essex Scots were under attack and were in need of, and were asking for, MacDonald.

Despite all that, he waited at Brigade HQ for Young to return. MacDonald had had:

... no food for a day and a half, practically no sleep for two nights and had been soaked to the skin with water and mud for 5 or 6 hrs, and was consequently thoroughly chilled and cold. I was indignant at the lack of tank support, the casualties from artillery fire, the lack of food and drink, the men from A and B coys who still had not reported, and concerned about the fighting condition of our weapons. I felt that unless something could be done, we would have difficulty in resisting any determined counterattack... (Brigadier Young) was apparently not suffering from any of these physical discomforts or worries and was very composed. He refused to see that anything was wrong, or that I had any basis for my complaint and misgivings respecting support. It seemed sufficient to him that we had an armoured regiment standing around in the hills, whether they did anything to help us or not, while the Panthers harassed us at will with 88mm and MMG fire, and obviously intended to support an attack on our position... My feelings were less nervous than frustration and suppressed anger at his impatient attitude toward me and my inability to move him.²⁸²

Young later claimed that as a result of this meeting, he found MacDonald to be in a highly nervous and anxious state, that he was so out of control personally, that he was unfit to command a battalion. It may certainly be that MacDonald appeared anxious and annoyed, which might have looked like "nervousness" to the Brigadier, however, as we have seen, MacDonald and the South Sask officers all had good reason to be anxious about what was happening at the front while they were receiving limited support from the Brigade. Such a state of anxiety, however, does not necessarily mean that one is unable to make informed and proper decisions. Both MacDonald and his men, however, denied that he was not holding it together. *All* of his men or officers that were in the field that day signed the petition in support of the CO. The only real evidence available to assess MacDonald's state of mind, however, is the official protest letters he wrote to Foulkes and Simonds. These letters are necessarily courteous and he therefore stops short of accusing the Brigadier of any direct wrongdoing. He *does* however state that Young was unduly impatient with him. Given the situation, such an assessment on MacDonald's part seems fair. However, John

²⁸² BJS MacDonald Papers. Letter to Maj-Gen Chas Foulkes. NAC. MG40 E480.

Edmondson was also responsible to Young on that day and his account tells of Young being impatient and annoyed with him also. At around 1900 hours on July 20, Edmondson reported the desperate situation on the front to Young. Young then told Edmondson to “stop getting so excited.” To this, Edmondson replied, “I’m just giving you the facts.” The SSR Major goes on to describe Brigade HQ that day as being “in a state of confusion because they didn’t know what was going on. They seemed to change their mind from moment to moment. I could get no further direction... the Brigade Commander offered no help to alleviate the immediate desperate situation.”²⁸³ Later, when Lt.-Col. Gavreau of the FMRs came to report the situation on the left flank, Young remarked that he was “somewhat excited”.²⁸⁴

A pattern of behaviour begins to emerge when all of this evidence is taken into account. Invariably, Brigadier Young saw the COs’ responses as being “excited”, “nervous”, and “out of control.” Brigadier Young, being in his first battle, certainly appears to have been unaccustomed to the way in which officers react in a combat situation. That three officers approached him in an “excited” state seems therefore to indicate that it was normal, given the circumstances, for them to be reacting that way. That Young was unduly intolerant of their behaviour is evident in that he told Edmondson to calm down, and then accused MacDonald of losing control, and consequently claimed that he was not fit to command. As we shall see however, the shortcomings experienced in this attack were not MacDonald’s or Edmondson’s, but Young’s. In fact, he appears to have been so acutely aware of the fact that the entire operation was botched, especially with regards to armoured support, that most post-battle documentation reads like a cover-up in which Young did nothing wrong and MacDonald was to blame for everything.

²⁸³ John Edmondson. “Pawns of War”. p. 11.

²⁸⁴ 6CIB WD. July 20, 1944

As mentioned in the previous chapter, there are numerous discrepancies in the 6th Brigade War Diary. This document was undoubtedly read and approved by Brigadier Young prior to its being filed, yet it does not correspond with other evidence in many respects. The War Diary maintains that as a result of the South Sasks' second call for help, the reserve squadron of the Sherbrooke Fusiliers, as well as an additional troop from A Squadron near St. André, was "ordered across" to help the Sasks.²⁸⁵ As we have seen, the Sherbrooke's War Diary, and the Ops Log for the day, makes no mention of any orders to commit tanks to the centre. Additionally, Sherbrooke after-action reports never mention moving out in support of the centre; certainly the South Sasks and the Essex Scots never saw tanks in close support. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, there are numerous timing inconsistencies between the 6th Brigade Ops Log and the War Diary. The War Diary paints an orderly picture of the advance in which Brigade HQ took a full half-hour to assess the situation at the front before committing the Essex Scots. In reality, Brigade could have had no more than three minutes before ordering the reserve battalion forward. Finally, with regard to the War Diary, Brigadier Young made his own personal entry in which he claimed that "the chief difficulty experienced by all four (battalions) was the devastating mortar and (artillery) fire which descended upon them immediately they reached their objectives."²⁸⁶ This assessment, however, does not fit the facts. While artillery and mortar fire inflicted numerous casualties, it appears that had enemy tanks not attacked the forward battalions, they would have stood a much better chance of success. According to John Edmondson, who was at the front that day, the chief difficulty experienced by the troops was enemy armour. Indeed, an examination of the battle reveals that both the South Sasks and the Essex Scots were forced to withdraw because they had no way to deal with the enemy tanks. Edmondson quoted Captain Murray Stewart of the South Sasks as

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ 6BIC WD. July 20, 1944

saying: "Our misfortunes were apparently due to a lack of armour or (anti-tank) weapons on the spot to cover our consolidation on the objective. Armour was committed to each flank (battalion) but there was none in the centre".²⁸⁷ Thus, the chief difficulty experienced by the two centre battalions (and, incidentally, the FMRs and the Camerons) was enemy armour. Brigadier Young, being in charge of ordering armoured counterattacks and also being the one who "removed tank support", might certainly have benefited by claiming that enemy armour was not in fact the problem. That is precisely what he did. Furthermore, the War Diary claims that when Edmondson visited the Brigadier at 1900 hours Young told him "orders would be issued to the armour to cover him with protective fire."²⁸⁸ Edmondson denies that any such assurance or support was offered at all. It is therefore circumstantially possible to claim that Young, based on the discrepancies in the War Diary, knew that his plan was flawed and that he should have provided armoured support in the centre.

Young also denies that MacDonald tried to reorganize the men of Able and Baker Companies and further claims that he himself made good ammunition and weapon deficiencies with 2nd Division. This does not change the fact that MacDonald tried to get the men re-equipped but Brigade was unable to accommodate his request. The War Diary further claims that the "(Brigade Commander's) orders were made very clear to (MacDonald) but he seemed to have lost complete control..."²⁸⁹ However, MacDonald contends that the orders were *not* clear to him and he complains that Young issued a series of contradictory orders that were nearly impossible to follow completely. MacDonald outlined the contradictory orders as follows:

- i) That I should continue to hold my (forward position).
- ii) That I should organize an intermediate position with these remnants of A and B Coys.

²⁸⁷ John Edmondson. "Pawns of War". p. 19.

²⁸⁸ 6 CIB WD. July 20, 1944.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

- iii) That I could withdraw my (forward troops) to the intermediate position for reorganization and later reoccupation of the forward position.
- iv) That I must not withdraw the (forward troops), but should continue to hold the intermediate position.
- v) That I should hold the intermediate position and so secure the (start-line) for the RHC attack at 1800 hours.²⁹⁰

Clearly, Brigade orders were not “made clear”. Edmondson’s account confirms that orders were not made clear in that the Brigadier offered no material assistance, and later claimed he promised armoured support when, apparently, he did not. The Brigade War Diary further contends that at the end of July 20th, the Essex Scots were “in the process of being reformed to their original objective.”²⁹¹ This statement implies two things: first that the Essex were not on their objective and, second, that they needed to be reformed. Neither of these implications, however, appears to be entirely accurate. The Essex Scottish forward companies were where the Brigadier ordered them to be and they were effectively holding the line and did so all night long.

It is therefore not too difficult to understand why Young filed an adverse report against MacDonald. It was easy enough for the Brigadier to claim MacDonald, his subordinate, failed, not himself, especially considering that Foulkes was not on hand to assess the situation for himself. Perhaps this is because Major Matthews was killed in action and so the next best person to blame was Lt.-Col. MacDonald. This is, incidentally, also what John Edmondson believes:

Lt.-Col. MacDonald was relieved of command of the Essex Scottish only because, I conjecture, it was not possible to find a scapegoat in the A/CO of the SSR, Major Reg Matthews, who was dead... when I look back and remember the confusion I found (at) the 6 Bde HQ on the 20th, I cannot help wondering if the three different Brigade Diary references to Col MacDonald’s excited state were contrived, since the Diary was written after the fact, in order to find a place to lay blame.²⁹²

As mentioned earlier, it seems that every officer that approached Young was accused of being “excited”. Once the South Sasks had pulled back, the War Diary and the Brigadier continually refer

²⁹⁰ BJS MacDonald Papers. Letter to Maj-Gen Chas Foulkes. p. 1. NAC. MG40 E480.

²⁹¹ 6CIB WD. July 20, 1944.

²⁹² John Edmondson. “Pawns of War”. p. 33.

to that battalion having made a “withdrawal to reorganize”, whereas it is implied that the Essex withdrew out of control since “patrols were established to stop any further rearward movement of the Essex Scots.”²⁹³ One is left to wonder if Young found it easier to blame the Essex Scots since they were from the 4th Brigade and were therefore not one of “his” battalions.

Finally, MacDonald pointed out that the Black Watch had indeed succeeded in regaining so-called lost ground that evening. But he also argued that the Black Watch did not secure any ground that the Essex had not already secured the night before and were not occupying that ground at the time of the Black Watch attack only because Brigade had ordered MacDonald to withdraw the men to an intermediate position. MacDonald claimed that had Brigade offered any significant support, like aggressive tank assistance, effective artillery support, or a proper refit, the Essex Scottish would have been able to hold their forward positions as long as necessary. This is another example of what MacDonald called “contradictory orders” from Brigade. MacDonald further maintained that

The area eventually reoccupied by the RHC was only that part of the front finally held by the Essex Scottish prior to the final withdrawal, and this reoccupation was accomplished with all the real artillery and close tank support which was denied to us.²⁹⁴

So the question remains: why did the Essex suffer a defeat that day? There are a number of possible reasons. Lt.-Col. MacDonald may have lost control of his battalion and become too nervous to exercise command and control, as Brigadier Young maintained. Given the evidence presented above, this assessment has dubious merit. Alternatively, the confusion of the battle, the fact that the Essex had to contend with the retreat of another unit directly through their consolidation area, the subsequent retreat of its own forward companies, the lack of an effective means of communication both to lower level commanders and to Brigade, coupled with incessant

²⁹³ 6CIB WD. July 20, 1944.

²⁹⁴ BJS MacDonald Papers. Letter to Maj-Gen Chas Foulkes. p. 3. NAC. MG40 E480.

and well supported enemy infantry and tank attacks made the exercise of command and control excessively difficult for MacDonald. Nevertheless, he continued to issue orders and attempted to refit and reorganize his men as directed by Brigade HQ, and in accordance with his training. MacDonald made these efforts despite the fact that Brigade HQ offered next to no assistance to the Essex Scottish, who were committed to battle without the benefit of tank assistance or any significant artillery support. Clearly, the provision of such support, which MacDonald repeatedly asked for, would most likely have reduced Essex casualties and would have greatly increased their chances of success. One need look no further than the Black Watch who launched their attack shortly after the Essex pulled out, and were "supported by the tanks of the 6th and 27th Armoured Regiments, and a formidable artillery programme."²⁹⁵ If the Brigadier had expected the Essex infantry, without significant armoured support of their own, let alone anti-tank guns or artillery, to hold fast against Panzers that roamed at will, machine-gunning and running over any moving infantry, then indeed his expectations were not met.

It appears that had the Essex Scots been properly supported by armour, had they been properly managed and fed, had they been allowed to properly consolidate once they had been pushed off of their forward positions, they might have succeeded in this attack. Most of the evidence suggests that Lt.-Col. MacDonald could have done little more than he did to maintain control and to recapture any lost ground. All indications point to the fact that Young, through his plan of attack and especially through his mismanagement of both troops and armour, botched the operation. He is therefore careful in post-operation documents to imply that artillery and mortar fire was the problem, not enemy armour. Brigade claims that the Sherbrooke Fusiliers were repeatedly ordered forward, but there is no evidence to support such a claim. The Sherbrookes received no such orders and never appeared on the scene. The reason why the Essex suffered a defeat on the

²⁹⁵ Stacey. *The Victory Campaign*. p. 176.

slopes of Verrières Ridge is that they were not adequately supported by HQ 6th Brigade, and in particular Brigadier H.A. Young, in a number of respects. The lack of success achieved at Verrières Ridge that day was indeed Brigadier Young's failure.

Epilogue

During the operation that followed Atlantic, Operation Spring, II Canadian Corps renewed its attack on Verrières Ridge, using both the 2nd and 3rd Canadian Infantry Divisions and elements of the British 7th Armoured Division. The results of Spring, which took place only on July 25, were plainly unsatisfying. The Black Watch attacked up the western end of the ridge and were badly mauled; they suffered 307 casualties including 118 killed and 37 taken prisoner.

The North Nova Scotia Highlanders attacked Tilly-la-Campagne and initially reported success in reaching their objectives. However, the enemy counterattacked in strength, fierce fighting ensued, and the battalion was pushed back out of the village. The North Novas suffered 139 casualties: 61 killed, 46 wounded, and 32 taken prisoner.

Attacking along virtually the same line as the South Sasks and Essex Scots a few days earlier, the British 7th Armoured Division moved forward just to the west of the Rileys' simultaneous advance. Several enemy tanks were knocked out by the British armour, but the main body of the 7th Armoured only appear to have made it as far as the South Sasks had done in their own fruitless attempt of July 20. However, leading tanks of 7th Armoured accompanied the Royal Regiment of Canada towards Rocquancourt further forward. On the Royals' right the 1st Royal Tank Regiment advanced also. Unfortunately, both the Royals and the Tanks were checked by heavy fire from German anti-tank guns situated just north of Rocquancourt. "The 7th Armoured Division reported that there were some 30 enemy tanks hull-down on the ridge between Fontenay and Rocquancourt and north-east of the latter place."²⁹⁶

The only real success of the day was achieved by the RHLI. The Rileys attacked in the centre, up to the crest of the ridge, and captured Verrières village. This successful action is a source of great pride for the Rileys, who were properly supported in this attack with an attached

²⁹⁶ Stacey. *The Victory Campaign*. p. 191.

troop from 2nd Anti-Tank Regiment R.C.A. The Anti-Tank gunners used their 17-pounders to knock out Panzers at close range during this engagement; they also supported the advance with indirect fire from Troteval Farm. Field and medium artillery concentrations also aided the Rileys.²⁹⁷ To the Rileys' great credit, they managed to repel an armoured counterattack mainly using the PIAT. Nevertheless, although successful, the Rileys captured Verrières at the cost of 200 casualties.

As both South Sask acting CO John Edmondson, and Lt.-Col. MacDonald had told Young and Foulkes to no avail, Verrières Ridge was a tough nut to crack. The events of these subsequent days should easily demonstrate, on their own strengths, the difficulties inherent in taking such a feature, even when supported by, and directly attacked with, tanks. An attack mounted by infantry unsupported by armour, as was the case for the South Sasks and Essex Scots, stood virtually no chance of success against such odds. MacDonald himself brought this fact to Foulkes' attention stating that "subsequent fighting and (casualties) have, I would submit, demonstrated the great difficulties of taking and particularly holding the areas originally assigned to S Sask R and Essex Scot."²⁹⁸ Here Macdonald was clearly referring to the losses incurred during Operation Spring. All further operations were cancelled on July 26, even though renewed attacks on the same objectives had been planned. With the exception of the Riley's great success in Verrières village, Operation Spring served very effectively to convince higher command that the taking of this feature was not as simple as it first might have appeared. Perhaps Edmondson and MacDonald had been correct after all.

In late July, General Simonds ordered a series of small-scale attacks that would, first, get the newly arrived 4th Canadian Armoured Division into the fight, and would, second, provide the Corps with more advantageous positions from which to launch a further southward advance. In

²⁹⁷ Stacey, p. 190.

²⁹⁸ BJS MacDonald Papers. Letter to Maj-Gen Chas Foulkes. p. 3. NAC. MG40 E480.

support of this directive, the Essex Scottish Regiment was to ordered to seize a farm complex outside of Tilly, thereby facilitating a further advance into the town. Apparently, higher command had come round to the idea that Tilly (and all other points on Verrières Ridge for that matter) could not easily be taken, and that a staged approach might be necessary. Therefore, the Essex Scots' task was an essential preliminary step to any further operations.

The Essex Scots' first attack since losing MacDonald as CO went in on July 29. The attack was to be conducted by Dog Company under Major T.E. Steele, with Charlie Company in reserve. This time the Essex Scots were supported by a pre-attack artillery bombardment, one section of carriers, one section of anti-tank guns, 4th and 5th Field Regiments R.C.A., and supporting fire from one troop of tanks. This time the Essex Scots, with the support that their training had led them to believe would be available to them, attacked and were confident of the plan. At 1655 hours the artillery and tanks started pounding a ruined house at the south end of the complex, which lasted for five minutes. "At 1700 hours the attack began with (artillery) putting down a murder fire on North and South ends of objective and a (concentration) on orchard between."²⁹⁹ Much of this fire, however, was inaccurate.

At 1708, as the barrage ended, Dog Company began its assault. The men crossed 300 yards of open ground before closing with the enemy. One of the Company's platoons, number 16, failed to reach its objective at the north end of the complex as it was subjected to heavy mounted machine-gun fire as it started across the ground. Number 17 platoon, however, made a successful attack and cleared the centre of an orchard within the complex. The platoon consolidated its area and sent up success flares. At this signal, number 18 platoon began its assault on an enemy strongpoint at the south end of the complex, which they captured and consolidated. Company HQ then put in another attack on the orchard, but were slowed down by MMG fire coming from the

²⁹⁹ Essex WD. July 29, 1944.

north strongpoint, which number 16 platoon had failed to capture. Major Steele, realizing the nature of the problem, ordered number 17 platoon to take out the enemy strongpoint. However, before this could be achieved, number 17 platoon's OC, Sgt. Burdick, was killed. Steele was then informed that the FOO had been badly wounded so he went to him, learned the DF and DFSOS tasks, and ordered the FOO evacuated.

At this point Company Sergeant Major Dixon came forward with the Company carrier, and a section of anti-tank guns. Dixon's carrier drove along a hedgerow from which the enemy fire was emanating and tossed grenades over it. Unfortunately this had little effect. As a result, Major Steele ordered an assault on the strongpoint. Three men gave covering fire as CSM Dixon charged forward and threw 36 grenades into the enemy slit trenches.³⁰⁰ This silenced the strongpoint and all remaining enemies were either killed or taken prisoner. As usual, the Germans replied immediately, in the form of a mortar barrage, which continued throughout the night, but the position was held. "The company successfully held this important ground which gave observation in all directions, and as much as five miles observation in some directions. The damaged building turned out to be a waterworks with a reservoir of 30000 litres supplying adjacent enemy held towns. It is little wonder they wished to hold (this point)."³⁰¹

The following day's diary entry reveals that the battalion was feeling extremely proud of its achievement near Tilly. Dog Company completed consolidating its defensive positions and buried both Essex Scottish and German dead. At this point, further anti-tank and self-propelled artillery support was given to the position. After dark, the Calgary Highlanders moved through and put in another attack on Tilly itself. On July 31, Charlie Company relieved the tired but happy men of Dog Company who had single-handedly redeemed the battalion's reputation. On August 5 the Essex

³⁰⁰ Essex WD. July 29, 1944.

³⁰¹ Essex WD. July 29, 1944.

Scots were relieved and sent back to rest in Louvigny Woods where they slept, ate, cleaned weapons and wrote letters home.³⁰²

It is necessary to provide answers to the question posed at the beginning of this paper. The disastrous raid on Dieppe had a profound effect upon the Essex Scottish Regiment. The unit was virtually annihilated on the beaches and lost its Commanding Officer who was marched off into captivity. During the later rebuilding of the battalion it became clear that the sense of pride in the unit that existed prior to Dieppe had largely disappeared with the influx of new recruits and men transferred from other battalions whose loyalties might have been elsewhere. Nevertheless, there is little evidence that would indicate there was a long-term residual memory of failure around Dieppe as the 4th Brigade went into battle in Normandy. The loss of so many men required the almost complete reconstitution of the units of the 4th Brigade and so those newcomers (who now made up the majority of the battalions) had little memory of the units before the disaster and did not experience the disaster itself. If anything, the Dieppe raid served to increase the level of regimental anger and determination to move forward among those officers and other ranks that survived August 19, 1942. Indeed, the Essex Scottish were acutely aware that a second front would at some point be opened and, as we have seen, they were confident that the lessons learned at Dieppe would be applied to any future invasion. They were right and the units of the 4th Brigade that landed at Dieppe, through their sacrifice, made the Normandy invasion so much more achievable.

The 4th Brigade's reconstitution in the aftermath of Dieppe, and the subsequent re-training, was indeed adequate preparation for battle in Normandy. The units were completely rebuilt after Dieppe and underwent an extremely extended and intense two-year period of training virtually

³⁰² Essex WD. Aug 5, 1944.

unparalleled among the armies of other Allied nations. Additionally, the 4th Brigade, and the Essex Scots in particular, were fortunate enough to have the use of the 4th Brigade Battle School, led by none other than B.J.S. MacDonald. That the retraining of the 4th Brigade was adequate preparation for battle in Normandy can be seen in that after Operation Spring, when the lessons of Atlantic and Spring itself were learned by higher command, the units of the 4th Brigade continually proved their mettle.

As for the question regarding the high level of Essex Scottish casualties, it is clear that battalion leadership, despite MacDonald being fired, did not fail them. The Essex Scottish, in reality, were no more or less successful than its sister battalions. Perhaps it suffered more casualties, and perhaps it did not seize the same number of objectives as the RHLI. However, in a battle as diverse and enormous as the one in Normandy, each battle was used as a learning experience, from each failure lessons were learned so that another unit might be successful in future. Each kilometer of ground captured might have provided an infinitely more advantageous spot from which to launch a further attack. Simply put, traditional notions of “success” and “failure” on the battlefield are due for revision. Indeed the Essex “failed” to capture the ridge on July 20, but they succeeded, eventually in convincing the Canadian Army that infantry needed to be properly supported. They “failed” to take Dieppe, but convinced the Overlord planners that pre-raid aerial bombardment, airborne assaults, seaborne artillery bombardment, and Naval bombardment were all necessary prerequisites for landing a force on a defended coast in the absence of surprise.

One wonders why the Rileys and the Royals were successful in their early engagements in Normandy. All three units were part of the 4th Brigade and, as has been shown, they received very similar training that should theoretically have prepared all three for battle. It is easy to look at the Essex Scots and conclude that, since they were the only ones to suffer a defeat in those early days, their commander must have been to blame. The Royals at Louvigny and the Rileys at

Verrières Ridge (on July 25), under 4th Brigade command, proved that to have been trained in the Brigade was a benefit. The Essex Scots also received that same training and were indeed prepared to go into battle and succeed. That they did not is not reflective of a failure of their commander or a failure of their training. MacDonald trained most men, at one time or another, in the Brigade. Essex training failed only inasmuch as it created an expectation of excellence in them. They expected support, they expected to be properly managed, they expected sound higher command decision-making, and they expected reliable planning. They received none of this from 6th Canadian Infantry Brigade and *that* is why they suffered a defeat. Had the Essex Scottish come up against a different set of circumstances, they would most likely have fared much better than they did. Indeed, they only needed one more chance to prove their training, and their trainer, correct and outside of Tilly they did the battalion, the Brigade, and MacDonald proud.

Both at Dieppe and at Verrières Ridge, the Essex Scottish were defeated because the circumstances they faced were virtually insurmountable. Leadership at the battalion level was not lacking. Jasperson was the first on the beach at Dieppe and tried repeatedly and doggedly to organize attacks over the seawall despite being out of radio communication for almost the entire operation. MacDonald was close to his men and had forged a common Essex Scottish identity, with him as the leader, prior to entering the fray in Normandy. When they were committed to battle on July 20, B.J.S. MacDonald did everything that could have properly been expected of him. He was at the front-line organizing forward positions, keeping spirits high, arranging to re-supply the troops, organizing orderly withdrawals in the face of superior enemy firepower, attempting to reorganize men that had been forced out of the line, and reporting to his Brigadier whenever and as soon as he was summoned. Nevertheless, in the face of overwhelmingly superior enemy firepower, the Essex Scots were forced to withdraw and hold a position just short of their assigned objective and then, when counterattacked a second time, were pushed back even further.

Although, the forward companies did not completely relinquish their positions until ordered to do so by the Brigadier. MacDonald could have done nothing about the lack of armoured support offered to his unit. In fact, he attempted to acquire such support from Brigade and from the Sherbrooke Fusiliers himself, but was flatly denied. The reasons for the Essex Scottish Regiment's "failures" at both Dieppe and at Verrières Ridge were due to circumstance and a lack of adequate support from higher command. The battalion's leaders were not to blame.

It is perhaps fitting to close this investigation with the words of Lt.-Col. MacDonald himself, who, despite being unfairly punished for something he could not help, left on a graceful note thinking mainly of the men he knew so well:

TO ALL RANKS OF THE ESSEX SCOTTISH REGIMENT, CANADIAN ARMY
OVERSEAS

As your Commanding Officer I have been held responsible for the failure of portions "A" and "B" Coys to rejoin the unit during the night 20/21 JUL 44, and as a consequence have lost my command. Despite my most strenuous efforts, and your much appreciated assistance, I have been unable to avert this result, and am being transferred to another command. This is a bitter disappointment to me, but I cannot quarrel with an army practice that holds a unit commander responsible for anything that goes wrong in his unit, despite his efforts to prevent it. It is for your protection partly that such a rule exists.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart for all the support and loyalty you gave me as C.O.. I was, as you know, tremendously proud of you, and I hope you will let me continue to regard you as "my boys", and to be of service to you collectively and individually whenever I can. I have done my best to serve you and my whole heart is, and always will be, with you and the Regiment.

My congratulations to "D" Coy on its splendid show the other day. May the whole Regiment get an opportunity to demonstrate to everyone's satisfaction, under proper conditions, that it is what I have always said it was, the best regiment in the Division. God bless you, and the best of luck in the days that lie between us and victory, to your new C.O. and to every single one of you.

2 AUG 44

Signed – B.J.S. MacDonald Lt Col³⁰³

³⁰³ BJS MacDonald Papers. "To All Ranks of the Essex Scottish Regiment". NAC. MG40 E480.

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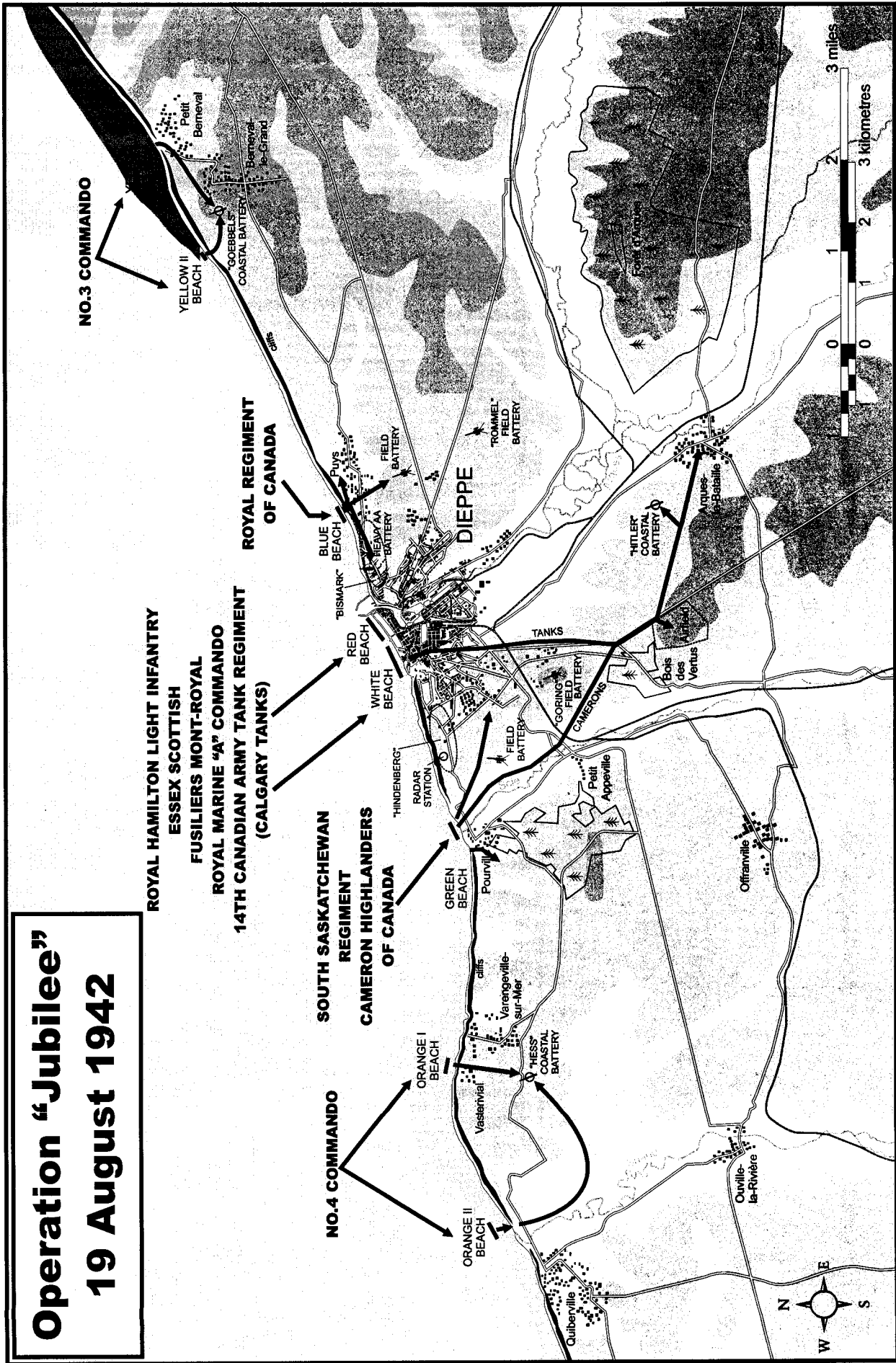
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Operation "Jubilee" 19 August 1942



Operation Goodwood/

Atlantic

18-21 July 1944



2nd Canadian Infantry Division

4th Brigade
 RRC - Royal Regiment of Canada
 ES - Essex Scottish
 RHLI - Royal Hamilton Light Infantry

5th Brigade
 BW - Black Watch of Canada
 R. de Mais - Le Régiment de Maisonneuve
 CH - Calgary Highlanders

6th Brigade
 FMR - Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal
 C of C - Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada

3rd Canadian Infantry Division
 SSR - South Saskatchewan Regiment

7th Brigade
 RWR - Royal Winnipeg Rifles
 RR - Regina Rifle Regiment
 CSR - Canadian Scottish Regiment

8th Brigade
 QOR - Queen's Own Rifles
 R. de Chaud - Le Régiment de la Chaudière
 NSR - North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment

9th Brigade
 HLI - Highland Light Infantry
 SDG - Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders
 NNHS - North Nova Scotia Highlanders

Phase Lines

- Allied Front Line, midnight 17-18 July
- - - Allied Front Line, midnight 18-19 July
- · · Allied Front Line, midnight 19-20 July
- · · Allied Front Line, midnight 20-21 July
- German Front Line, midnight 20-21 July

