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Pursuit to the Seine

The Essex Scottish Regiment and the Forêt de la Londe, August 1944

Doug W. McIntyre

The II Canadian Corps was to plan for an opposed crossing of the Seine River between Pont de l'Arche and Elbeuf and subsequently to secure additional bridgeheads both above and below Rouen on opportunity. On the left of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division axis of advance was the 7th British Armoured Division on a roughly parallel line of advance. On our right the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division would be driving directly for Elbeuf and to their right, the 4th Canadian Armoured Division was aimed at Pont de l'Arche a few miles east of Elbeuf.

On 21 August, the Essex Scottish left Point 152, a northern pivot or shoulder position of the Falaise Gap, at the head of the 4th Brigade leading the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division. We, the battalion, formed up in the routine "advance to contact" (ATC) formation directed to Bourgheroulde, a town on the southern fringes of Forêt de la Londe, just short of Elbeuf on the Seine River. The roster of command that day for the Essex Scots was as follows:

Commanding Officer - Lieutenant-Colonel Peter W. Bennett
Second-in-Command - Major Tom Brown
Officer Commanding (OC) Support Company - Captain Doug W. McIntyre
OC "A" Company - Captain Tom C. Stewart
OC "B" Company - Major Houghton Laird
OC "C" Company - Major Tim McCoy
OC "D" Company - Major Telford Steele

All sub-unit commanders were commanding badly-depleted companies, platoons & sections following the maulings of the Caen and Falaise fighting of the previous weeks...and no

replacement personnel were forthcoming for this operation.

At this point in time, still in sight of the smouldering town of Falaise, we were less than 50 miles (as-the-crow-flies) from the Elbeuf/Rouen loop or peninsula in the Seine River. As we shall see, we did not reach the outskirts of Elbeuf until six days later or after midnight on the night of 26/27 August. Of course, the actual true miles traversed on narrow, congested and cratered roads with make-shift bridges could have been upwards of 100 miles. But, as explained briefly below, this was the only way to travel.

The ATC formation, a manoeuvre well-rehearsed by all survivors of exercises in England, was *the* accepted procedure for re-engaging or catching up to a flown enemy. While somewhat precarious for the "point" sections and platoons of the leading company strung out in single file on alternate sides of the axis road, companies and battalions could be rotated by simple leapfrogging within the marching column. Not even the most duty-bound infantry soldiers relished the idea of acting as "bait" stuck out in front of a divisional column on strange terrain and unknown countryside to draw enemy fire whenever and from wherever it might come. Most though took personal pride in being trusted with the point "honours." The pace or rate of movement in such a formation was that of the leading section of six or seven men on their "flat feet," so one can estimate an average of say three miles per hour with no road obstructions or enemy harassment. This rate placed a severe strain on the dozens of tracked fighting vehicles of the supporting weapons moving along in the



Officers of the Essex Scottish Regiment, England, June 1944.

Front row, (left to right): J.S. MacLennan, J. Burgess, D. Mackenzie, F.A. Wansbrough, T.S. Jones, J.S. MacDonald, F.A. Tilston, VC, H.W.P. Thompson, H.C. Laird, A.R. Johnson, Hayes; **Second row**: Graw, T. Stewart, McCrimmon, ?, D.W. McIntyre, J. Cardy, J.A. Baxter, T.E. Steele, J.C. Cottrell, E.L. Cohen, G.A. Ponsford; **Third row**: Webster, F.J. Lynch, ?, MacDonald, Chander, ?, B. Mackenzie, Martin, W. Hogan, L.S. Bond; **Back row**: Pofre, J. Cropp, Morgan, Genereau, Watt, F. Chauvin, Hodges, W.C. Wilson, Waddon.

(Photo courtesy of T.E. "Si" Steele)

immediate rear of the marching infantry troops. Innovation, in the long run, did more to ease this problem than the "training manual."

Fortunately for the Essex Scots, as the lead battalion of the 2nd Division's initial ATC operation in Northwest Europe, we had until mid-afternoon to get our supporting weapons vehicles act in order. As Support Company Commander, I started off in the morning with my entire 40 or 50 tracked and wheeled machines "hugging" the tail of the fourth company's last section on the march. Naturally, my jeep was never out of low gear, but at least I was in the CO's favoured position to direct rapid movement forward if and when the lead company's "bait" encountered the enemy and needed help.

However, before noon that morning the General Staff Officer (G-1) of 2nd Division appeared on the scene and directed me to adopt the other procedure of pulling my vehicles into "harbour" at 20 minutes to every hour (using some convenient field as a parking lot). I protested that as forward battalion my CO wanted us as close as possible to his advancing companies. The G-1 assured me he would instruct his Military Police (MPs) to give our

convoys priority on the road for the other 40 minutes of the hour. He went on to direct that because of congestion and sloppy traffic discipline, the Division Commander had made the vehicle "harbour" procedure an order...and that was that. There was pandemonium on all roads from then on. Brigade and Division staff officers seemed to appear in both directions, evidently on their own private reconnaissance missions and asking why my regiment was "dragging its feet." (Actually, we had few if any stops until hitting the enemy...not even for a tea break). Also MPs were charging back and forth on Nortons (motorbikes) and some did not know what to give priority to. In any event, by early afternoon, I pulled out with my jeep, two 6-pounder anti-tank guns and two double armed carriers to join the tail of our marching companies permanently, leaving the bulk of the support vehicles to perform the "harbouring" game. An extra radio system was on so we had constant control over the call for more support gear as required.

During all of this jockeying for position in the rear of the marching column during the morning and early afternoon of 21 August, the Essex Scots had passed uneventfully through the towns of Damblainville, Barou and Ammeville.

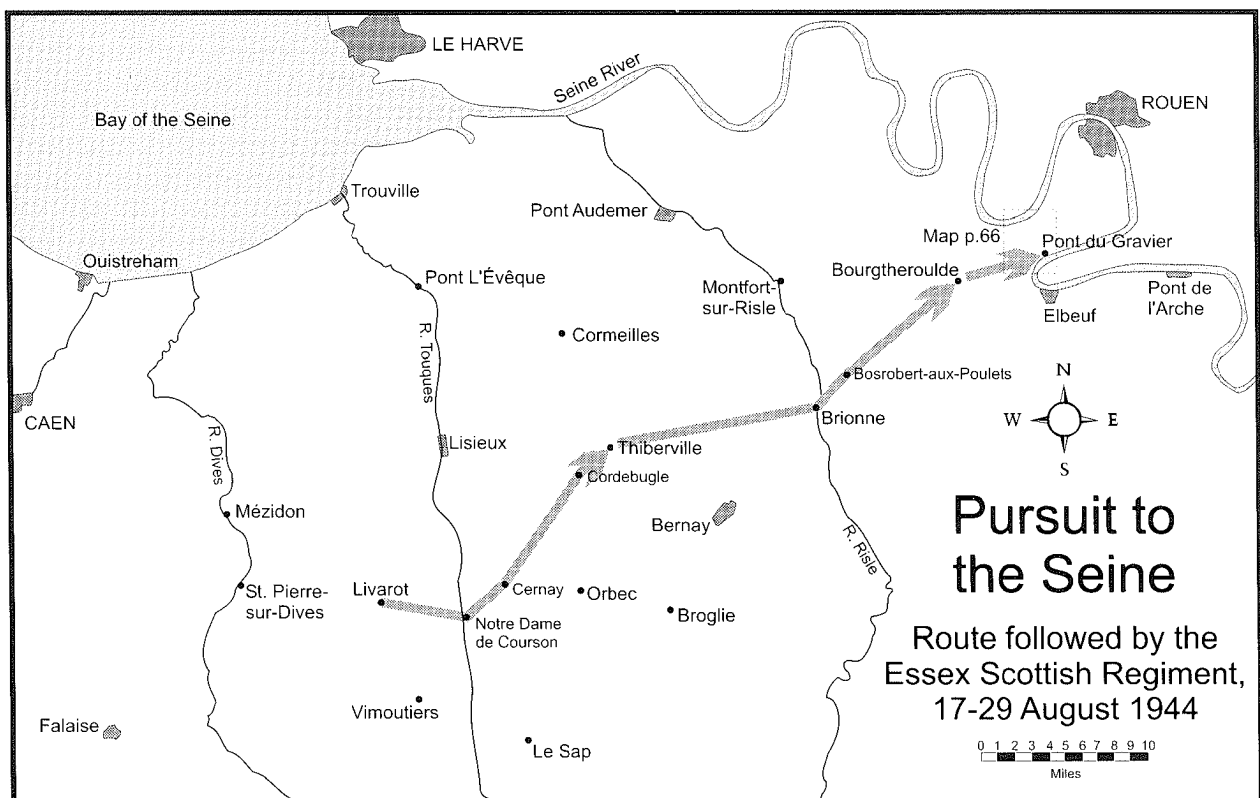
Approaching the village of Tortisambert, a few miles east of Ammeville, the enemy finally showed its ugly fangs. The lead company was fired on by machine guns (MGs) and some heavier calibre weapons (thought initially to be a tank) in an improvised road block astride the road into Tortisambert.

We had arrived at the most crucial instant of the ATC battle. Rather a distinction for the Essex Scots to be the first to “draw enemy blood” in the 2nd Division’s Pursuit to the Seine operation. A more notable achievement now would call for a quick and accurate appreciation of the situation and execution of a counteraction to overcome the enemy and to continue the advance with a minimum loss to the momentum in the Division’s push to the Seine.

It was a place for cool, calculated decision-making. The lead company commander, in contact with the CO, launched an immediate flanking movement with two platoons and heavy MG fire support from the third platoon, supplemented by point-blank firing of the two 6-pounder anti-tank guns which I had sent up the last few hundred yards to the front of the column with the enemy’s first blast of MG fire. A second company was committed within a short time on the other flank enroute into Tortisambert to back the lead company and to assure a full

consolidation of the German obstacle. The use of our own 3-inch mortars (and Division artillery) was not required with the likelihood that our assaulting infantry would rapidly overcome their objective. This result was achieved after a little time in early darkness to mop up and completely exploit further in the town to ensure clear passage for the remainder of the battalion and the brigade following up. Any “fire fight” of this nature, even the most minor, has its vicious moments. While the CO, with the lead company commander, made the correct appreciation of the enemy’s position without over-reacting and perhaps throwing in greater strength involving costly time and casualties, the Essex Scots did not get off completely unscathed. Private Donald R. Smith died in the assault and a promising young corporal, James A. Gatschene, died of wounds the next day. Picking up our pieces, after the Tortisambert delay of several hours, we pushed on toward our planned bound for the day, Livarot, a town liberated by the 7th British Armoured Division on 20 August, and reached it about 0400 hours for a few hours of much needed sleep and a hot meal.

Despite the presence of the 7th British Armoured Division in the vicinity, our continued moves on 22 August yielded numerous and conflicting reports from civilians of retreating enemy groups, some with tanks, and most in a





A photograph of the author, Doug W. McIntyre, taken just prior to D-Day in Folkestone, England. It was sent home to his wife, Rosemary, with the inscription, "With Love Darling, Doug."

(Photo courtesy of McIntyre family)

beautiful hills around us, if somewhat deadly hills as we soon found out. It was the perfect setting for a relaxing picnic if one could be romantic enough to conjure up such visions under happier times. There wasn't much rest as the regiment became involved in an "on-again-off-again" shooting match with the much-feared German 88's, rifle and MG fire. Before we moved off the following day, we buried two young privates, Kenneth W. Bolitho and Richard J. Parent.

On 24 August, we were blessed with the arrival in our bailiwick of a fleet of troop-carrying vehicles (TCVs), a luxury to an infantry division of that era, but common to the infantry element of an armoured division. At least those troops not performing the lead role could rest their feet with dry socks. The 24 and 25 August took us through cheering throngs of villagers in Courbonne-la-Ville, Cordebugle, Thiberville, Duranville, le Mesnil, Brione and Bosrobert-aux-Poulets. With the exception of the odd stray shot and the reappearance of German fighters over Brione, the situation was quiet, perhaps too quiet.

At 2000 hours on 26 August, the Essex Scots were again leading 4th Brigade toward Bourgtheroulde. We had not proceeded more than a few miles when it became most apparent from the sound effects that a stiff fight was going on in the town between the enemy and our own Royal Highland Regiment (Black Watch). How they (the Black Watch) had arrived in Bourgtheroulde ahead of 4th Brigade was a mystery. However, they had fought off several German counterattacks with fairly heavy (from our observations) casualties on both sides. As we moved into the built-up area caution was required to avoid a conflict with the Black Watch in early darkness. We then "ran a gauntlet of fire," mostly very heavy mortar bombardment in the main intersections, with some artificial lighting. A number of vehicles and buildings were on fire which assisted our regimental MPs in hustling the marching companies directly through the town. One such MP became a recruit (later permanently) in my Support Company HQ. The

state of complete confusion. The few German prisoners, rounded up from time to time had lost contact with their main units and could not provide any viable information as to locations, directions or strengths.

The passage through the villages of Notre Dame de Courson, les Aumais, Cernay and la Cressonnie on 22 August were uneventful but most gratifying. Every French citizen in the towns, young and old, turned out to cheer on their liberators. They presented or threw flowers, offered apples, bread and that "forbidden beverage" Calvados or other home-brews. (It was an offence in II Canadian Corps if officers allowed troops within their unit to consume the stuff.) Nothing was more rewarding to all of us, even VE-Day itself, than this heart-warming reception. It alone made our journey worthwhile!

On 23 August, 4th Brigade stopped at la Chappelle Yvon to take up a defensive position on a reverse slope for what might be "that pause that refreshes," certainly long enough hopefully to get my dozens of drivers out of their rattling tracked carriers. It was a mild, calm day with

moment he parked his Harley, to run 20 feet to the centre of an intersection to direct our vehicles, his bike was hit by a mortar bomb and blown into several pieces. That incident ended his driving of a two-wheeled machine forever. At the far end of Bourghtheroulde, we linked up with the main body of the Black Watch and took up defensive positions beyond them. But not for long! Before my most able Anti-Tank Platoon Commander, Lieutenant Jock McLennan, could rush out his six 6-pounder guns to the company positions, we received the order "prepare to move on." We had been in and out of our intermediate objective, Bourghtheroulde, in a matter of about two hours, barely enough time to pick up our four sad losses or patch up a number of wounded. Privates Harold W. Gallant, Peter Heckman, George L. Hill and Donald E. Price had fought their last battle...what little there was to it on this particular evening.

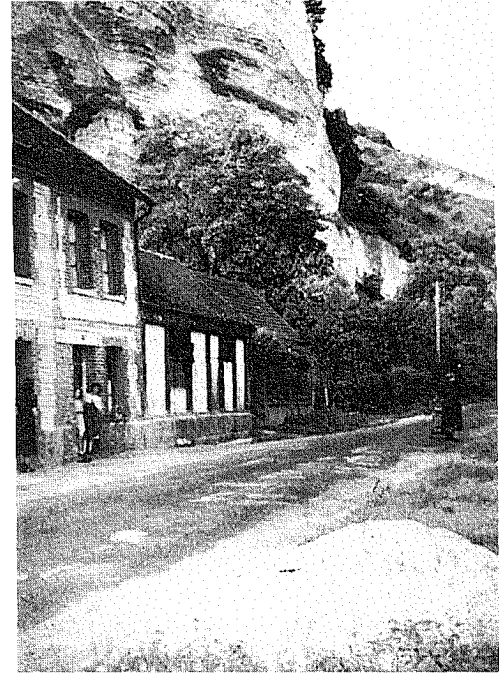
Although records are incomplete, during that two hour period, Major-General Charles Foulkes, the commander of 2nd Division apparently considered that 6th Brigade should clear the Forêt de la Londe of such enemy that might still be present, while 4th and 5th Brigades crossed the Seine at Elbeuf with the brigades of 3rd Canadian Infantry Division. The final decision was made to attack the Forêt on the morning of 27 August with 4th Brigade on the right and the 6th Brigade on the left. Specifically, this would mean 4th Brigade entering the western environs of Elbeuf and proceeding north up the river road toward Port du Gravier, just under the high ground in the middle of the Forêt de la Londe. The Royal Hamilton Light Infantry (RHLI) would now take over the lead followed by the Essex Scots with the Royal Regiment of Canada (RRC) in reserve. The two forward battalions were to seize the high ground overlooking Port du Gravier and the RRC was to pass through and take up a position south of Grand Essart. Obviously, Corps or Division intelligence summaries could not have indicated a strengthening this very day of the "high ground." The German 559th Grenadier Regiment (or elements thereof) of the 331st German Infantry Division had been reinforced by elements of the German 6th Para Group. Unconfirmed reports from enemy prisoners taken during the next few days revealed that some of these reinforcements had been flown to the Rouen vicinity on 25/26 August from Paris with the do-or-die intention

of preventing us from interfering with the German escape activities at Rouen.

With the order-of-march established as above, we moved off from the east side of Bourghtheroulde behind the RHLI at about 2330 hours to reach the Elbeuf area and the river road with no problems. For some miles as we marched (no place for TCVs here), the high ground loomed on our left and as we closed up with the Seine River west of Elbeuf, the high ground became sheer cliffs on the left with limited shoulder off the road. It did not occur to me until too late that this was a great spot to get ambushed, just like in the old Hollywood westerns. As it happened, we were ambushed and trapped in the defile for almost three days.

As outlined above, our ATC function was to force the enemy to divulge his whereabouts. At Port du Gravier, whether by design or accident, he played it very cunningly. At about 0200 hours (this was now 27 August) the lead company of the RHLI mistakenly took the left fork in the road at Port du Gravier instead of continuing on up the river. Some 500 yards up the road to the north along the valley of the railway they found the road was blocked. The Essex Scots became the lead battalion, by tactical necessity rather than by a brigade order, by remaining on the river road in the direction of Oissel and thence Rouen. Reports differ, even among veterans of that night, as to distances involved and the exact timings of the events about to take place. As best as we can surmise, Major Laird, "B" Company Commander, and now the point company of 4th Brigade, was challenged from the forested heights to his left to, "Halt," (in good English) at a point about 500 yards after passing through the railway underpass at Port du Gravier. The time was between 0330 and 0400 hours

Major Laird ignored the command, and taking a conventional crash action response ordered his platoons to take cover, what cover there might have been on the right of the road and the narrow meadows falling into the river bank. They were immediately fired on by an assortment of LMGs, MGs, mortars and grenades. The following "A" Company under Captain Stewart was still moving through the eastern built-up end of the village but it was also caught in the same blast of fire and it in turn moved off to take cover along the left of road,



Left: Port de Gravier looking south back along the road 4th Brigade used to approach the town. The precariousness of the river road is apparent with the river on one side and sheers cliffs on the other. The rail overpass at the centre of the photo marks the place where the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry missed a turn in the road and walked into a road block. By necessity, the Essex Scottish assumed the lead and shortly thereafter were attacked by the Germans. **Right:** The defile where the Support Company vehicles were trapped and mortared just outside of Port du Gravier. (Source: Essex Scottish Battalion History)

where more cover existed. Both commanders reported by radio to Battalion HQ that the entire river road was covered by fixed, probably ranged-in fire, lines of fire and not likely manned by some "hit and run" rearguard. The cunning Jerries had effectively "let slip in" the best parts of two infantry battalions, certainly into temporary "dead-ends" (if aided by a simple map reading error), and now if he possessed heavy enough guns could "lock in our rear" by blocking us with our own destroyed vehicles. This he momentarily accomplished!

It shortly became apparent that the Germans on the hills had ranged-in more than just the village of Port du Gravier. The tail of the Essex Scots, "C" and "D" Companies with Support Company vehicles behind them, had still not reached the village, when they were "hose-piped" with light and medium mortar fire for perhaps a 1,000 yards. Sitting in the river side of my jeep with the demolished Port du Gravier railway bridge barely visible in the darkness, the string of bursting mortar shells could be seen progressively approaching our position in the middle of the road. A jeep is a sitting-duck target any time and Bren gun carriers are a fairly vulnerable target for direct hits from falling bombs. My orders back along the column had a

few seconds to be heard – "dismount, forget your gear, just small arms and radios...take cover along the cliffs on the left." Not all moved swiftly enough. The bursting mortar bombs overtook them! I will never know why my own jeep driver/batman got under the jeep, instead of the safety behind a wall just off the road, where Signals Corporal "Chief" Thompson and I had between us moved the heavy signals gear. It was too late to save Private Harold R. Kalbfleisch, a 20-year-old boy from Kitchener, Ontario, from parents of German extraction. The bomb detonated on the thin steel floor in the back of the jeep thus contributing to the force of the fragmentation. The jeep immediately behind our Company HQ jeep suffered a near-miss and caught two occupants with shrapnel, one the Pioneer Platoon Commander, Lieutenant Angus McCrimmon, very seriously. The few dozen vehicles further back in the column were spared direct hits.

While Corporal Thompson was setting up Support Company HQ in a cave at the base of the cliff opposite our burning jeep remains, I undertook to get the wounded up forward to our Regimental Aid Post (RAP). We located Captain Cliff Richardson, Battalion Medical Officer, and his heroic stretcher bearers in a spacious cave a

few hundred yards short of Port du Gravier. On the way, I picked up another seriously wounded acquaintance, Sergeant Walter Buszowski of "D" Company, another victim of mortar shrapnel in the eye. Unfortunately, Captain Richardson was unable to save him. It is of note to mention at this time, Captain Richardson had personally driven his Red Cross van up and down the river road, exposed to enemy fire, to pick up such casualties as Sergeant Buszowski dying alone in the darkness through loss of blood. Captain Richardson, was awarded the Military Cross for his actions.

Directed on to Battalion HQ from the RAP, I arrived to be advised by the CO that Support Company would have no role to play in the late morning advance by the RRC and our own "C" and "D" Companies

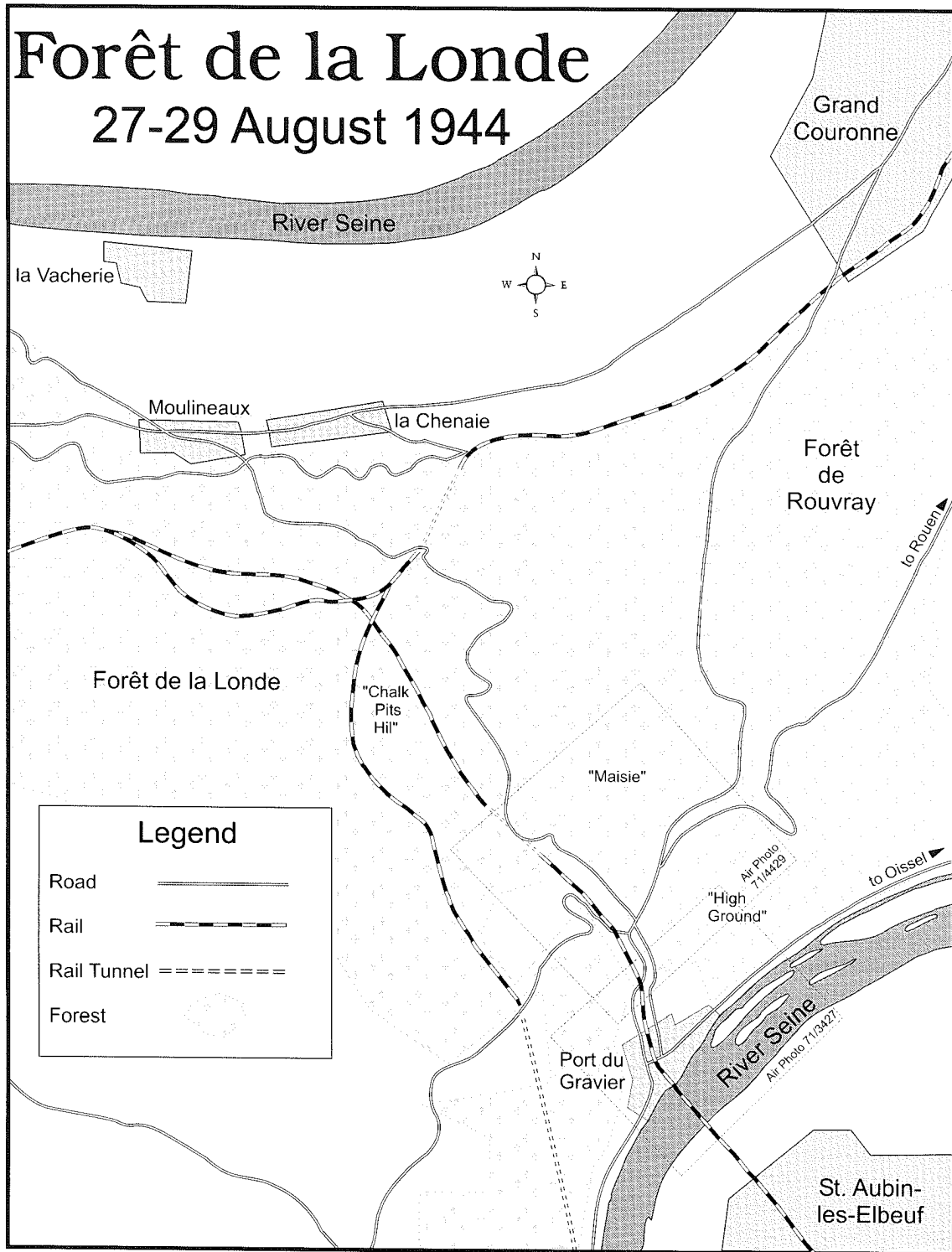
The CO had been alerted by 4th Brigade Commander, Brigadier J.E. Ganong, that he had ordered the reserve battalion to make a wide flanking movement to the northwest, across the Port du Gravier/Moulineaux road and get behind the positions "Chalk Pits Hill" and "High Ground" which were holding up the RHLI and the Essex Scots.

The RRC advance got off about noon and found slow going in the woods. Later in the afternoon, the battalion ran into the Fusiliers Mont-Royal (FMRs) advancing on the 6th Brigade right flank. Still later in the day, the GOC 2nd Infantry Division placed the FMRs under command of the 4th Brigade. With this turn of events, the RRC's plans were changed. They were to abandon their attack across the road and move northward to a rendezvous (RV) with "C" and "D" Companies of the Essex Scots. Our "C" and "D" Companies had been moved up from below the village during the morning and were now covering the battalion's left flank. These companies ran into heavy mortar and MG fire as they moved into the woods west and northwest of the RHLI position. Direction and control were difficult to maintain, particularly with the harassment of enemy fire. In any event, the RV was never established. The Essex Scots' War Diary tends to blame the RRC for an "abortive attack." We do not have the RRC War Diary before us. The 4th Brigade Commander shed no more light on the situation other than ordering units

involved back to the south for a new attack plan as soon as it could be launched.

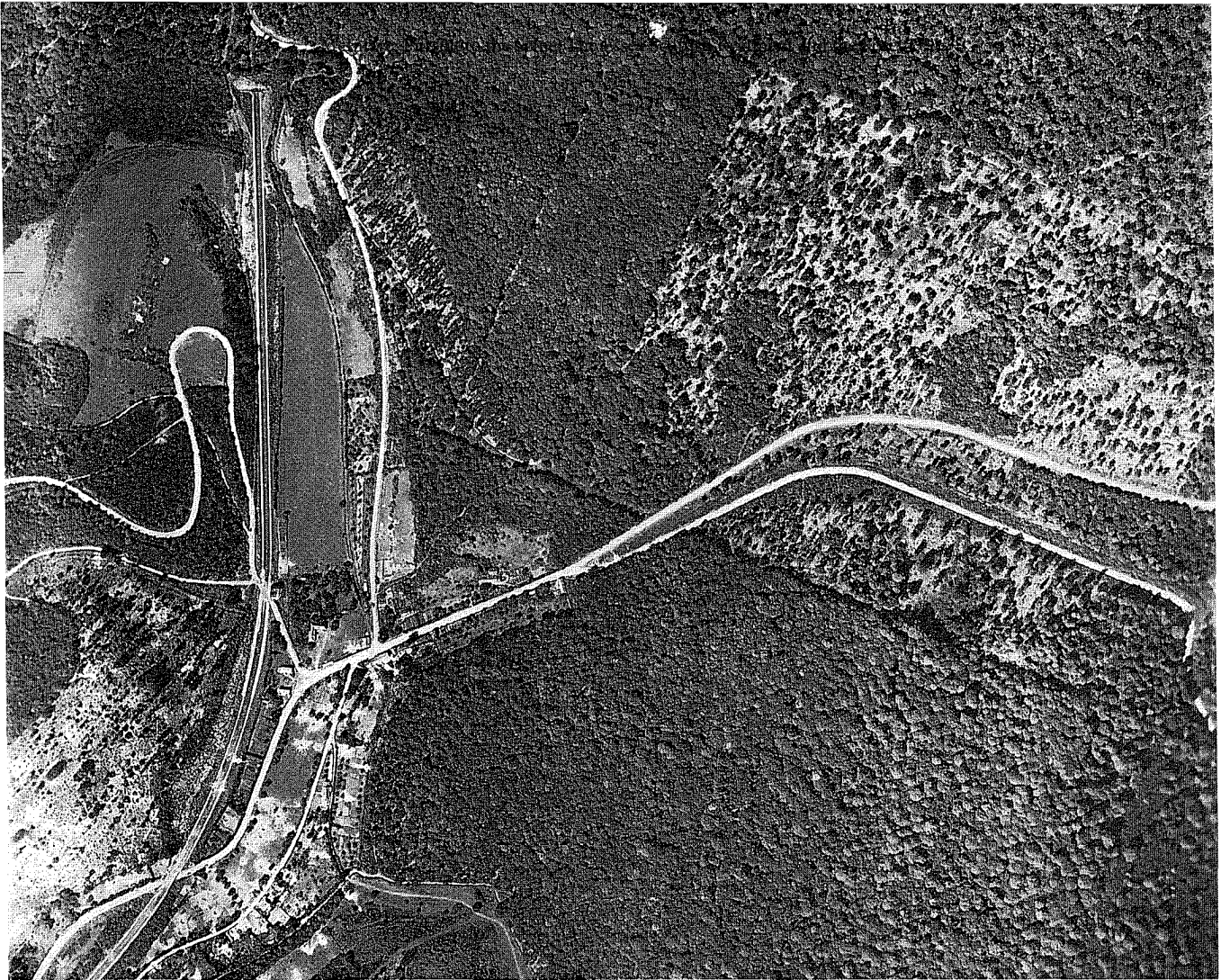
In the meantime, unlike all "the walks in the woods" of 4th Brigade's left flank, heroic efforts were being made all day on the far right flank, all limited company or platoon sorties. "A" and "B" Companies of the Essex Scots had to expand their real estate holdings as held at first light on the 27th. "A" Company, already in the shelter of village buildings in the northeast sector of Port du Gravier, formed and executed a plan of moving up a steep building-lined sideroad or lane to reach the base of the cliffs below "High Ground," and thence to get up the heights in the cover of small trees and perhaps neutralize part of the enemy position. Little was gained and when his leading platoon commander, Lieutenant Bill Phoenix, was severely wounded along with other casualties, Captain Stewart called off the assault. With less than 30 all ranks remaining in "A" Company, he hardly had sufficient manpower remaining to reinforce success. "B" Company, originally trapped along the river bank, gained some ground during the morning on the left side of the road and made the supreme sacrifice in trying to exploit this by an assault up the south slope of "High Ground." Early in the afternoon, Major Laird directed Lieutenant Jim Coombe with two reduced platoons in extended line to make their way up the steep slope. If any officer could get his men to the top. Jim Coombe was that officer. Just about one month earlier, he had held his ground against a robot tank attack at Verrières south of Caen and a few of his "veterans" of that day were still with him. However, the climbing assault bogged down as the enemy fired...or perhaps simply let gravity move anything that would roll, every step of their way up. Coombe was killed some distance from the summit, and despite the spirited leadership of several section leaders, the momentum was lost.

Around midnight on 28 August, the commander of 4th Brigade had left the GOC 2nd Canadian Infantry Division with a new plan of attack to begin as early as possible. (It is of note that some of the units to engage in this forthcoming attack had not had a hot meal for 18 hours or more). Briefly the plan was for the RRC to continue their wide flanking movement and outflank the MG and mortar positions



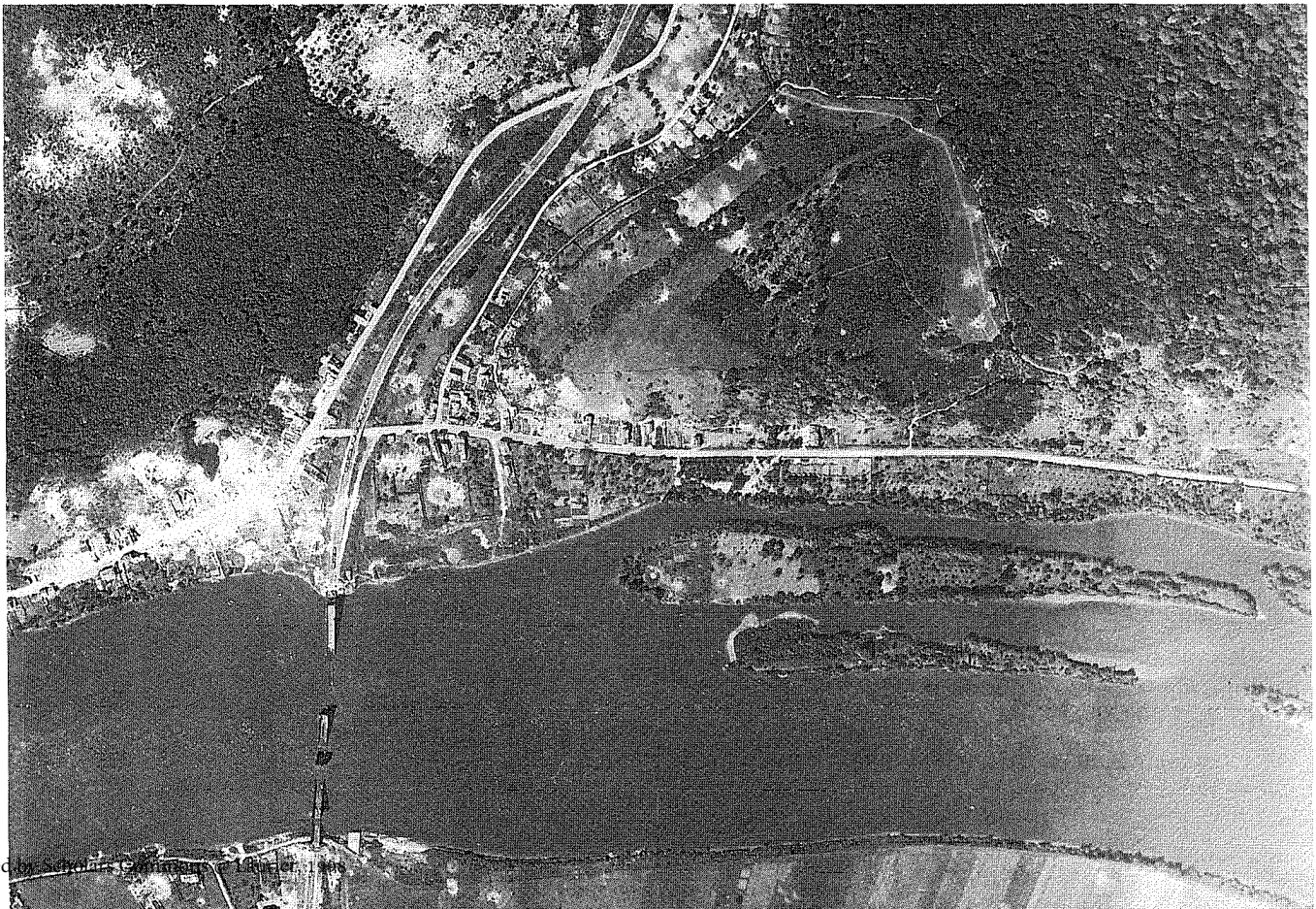
Above: Map showing Forêt de la Londe. The railway lines running from top to bottom (Moulineaux-Port du Gravier) indicate the course of a valley dividing the heights to the east and west. The dashed boxes indicate the approximate area shown by the air photos to the right.

Opposite: Air photos taken on 26 August 1944 (the day before the battle) showing the area contested by 4th Brigade. The bottom photo shows Port du Gravier, the bombed railway bridge, and the area known as "High Ground." Visible just above the downed bridge is the railway overpass seen in the photo on page 64. It is easy to see how in the darkness the RHLI missed the fork to the right to continue along the river. The upper photo shows the area just north of Port du Gravier. The railway overpass in the lower left corner of the photo marks the spot where the "C" and "D" Companies of the Essex Scottish began their attack towards "High Ground" on the 28th and were met with heavy fire and forced to ground.



Above: LCMSDS Air Photo 71/4429

Below: LCMSDS Air Photo 71/3427





Major Telford "Si" Steele commanded "D" Company of the Essex Scottish. Here he is being presented the Military Cross for his exploits south of Caen at Tilly-la-Campagne in July 1944 by Field Marshal B.L. Montgomery.

(Photo courtesy of T.E. "Si" Steele)

concentration requested by the Royals to support their assault would have changed the end result. But these shoots were not made due to the unknown location of the South Saskatchewan Regiment working down from the north. Some success was achieved and with two companies reaching the line of the most easterly rail line, "Chalk Pits Hill" might have been within grasp. Unfortunately, the companies became separated in the woods and with that the loss of the battalion's momentum meant a stop to the attack.

holding up the line of advance on the right flank. At the same time the Essex Scots were to "punch" through on the right just north of Port du Gravier. Final objectives for the day were "Maisie" and "High Ground" for the two battalions respectively, with the RRC to consolidate "Chalk Pits Hill" with their "C" Company enroute to "Maisie."

On 28 August all major 4th and 6th Brigade attacks were broken up by the intensity of enemy defensive fire and our difficulties with the terrain. The topography was most favourable to the defence of the isthmus and the enemy took full advantage in the selection and placement of his strong points, albeit his maps were far superior to ours. It is interesting to note at this juncture that on the morning of 28 August there was a momentary intention to abandon the attack on the Forêt de la Londe and move the 2nd Division across the Seine River through the Elbeuf bridgehead. However, it was not until later in the day that 7th Brigade of 3rd Canadian Infantry Division could consolidate the bridgehead. So the major thrust on a full battalion level, that of the RRC got underway at 1130 hours on the intermediate objective of "Chalk Pits Hill." This ground was far less dominant than "Maisie" and probably the heavy medium artillery

On the right flank of the RRC, the Essex Scots again put its "C" and "D" Companies into action. At about 1300 hours they moved through the underpass of the railway in the north part of Port du Gravier and upon emerging on the east side of Port du Gravier/Moulineaux road were met with heavy fire from MGs, light mortars and cup-discharged grenades. It became immediately evident to these two companies, that to come to grips with the base of "High Ground" to commence their assault, they would have to negotiate a steep slope down the railway embankment and then cross a narrow valley. It turned out to be an insurmountable obstacle enroute to the base of "High Ground" let alone its summit. "C" Company was commanded by Major Tim McCoy. He was a successful staff officer seeking an infantry battalion posting, and had had a few offensive encounters. "D" Company Commander, Major Telford Steele, was the only officer to fight his company, exactly one month earlier (28 July) into Tilly-la-Campagne, south of CAEN, and bring over half of it out. He was awarded the Military Cross. But here, at this insignificant assault in the north of a small hamlet in the Forêt de la Londe, past exploits and the gallantry of the key leaders, commissioned and non-commissioned officers and a few courageous experienced men turned out to be incapable of grappling with the situation. Many of the men of these companies literally slid down the embankment to the valley floor – not to get out of it again that day, being hemmed in by intense, accurate and sustained MG fire. Some were forced to dig in along the

left branch of the road for protection and until regrouping could begin to force the main objective. In this process Major McCoy was wounded in the shoulder but refused to be evacuated. Shortly afterwards one of his platoon commanders, Lieutenant George Jones, while rallying his men, was killed. Major Steele estimated that close to half of his company were casualties. The assault on "High Ground" ground to a halt. After darkness "C" and "D" companies were withdrawn to their original positions along the river road southwest of Port du Gravier.

By late evening, it was learned the South Sasks' assault from the la Chenaie area into the railway triangle was stopped and the FMRs could not disengage from the south to back-up the South Sasks' fine effort.

During the afternoon of the 28th, the GOC 2nd Division held a conference with Brigadier Ganong and the COs of the RHLI, RRC and the Essex Scots. The GOC's plan was based on the capturing of "Maisie" by the passing of one battalion by night through the right two RRC company positions, followed by a swing to the southeast to take out "High Ground" holding up the Essex Scots. During the meeting, the COs of the RHLI and RRC expressed the opinion, with sound reasons, that at this stage the plan was beyond the capabilities of the battalions. They also suggested that the enemy were actually stronger than Intelligence had indicated and that the ground was immensely favourable to defence. We are not aware of Lieutenant-Colonel Bennett's opinions as may have been expressed at this meeting. It is obvious, however, at that moment he did not know of the sad fate of his "C" and "D" Companies at the underpass/embankment conflict back in Port du Gravier. The operation as outlined at the conference was considered necessary. The RHLI was to make the attempt and they moved north to their forming-up-place south of the RRC. The operation was to commence as soon as possible, presumably timed for a pre-first light zero hour on the 29th.

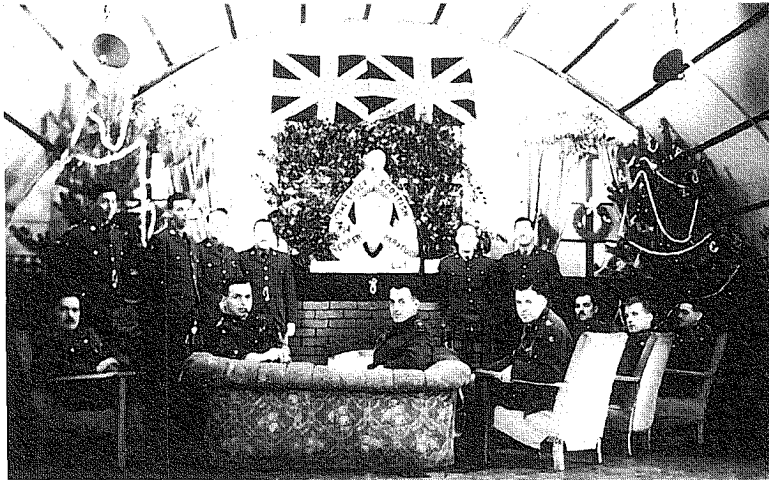
Once again the ground hampered movement and the RHLI made slow progress in reaching their start-line in the morning by first light. Although field and medium artillery was in abundant supply, as well as artillery smoke, the RHLI took a considerable amount of time to get across the first railway line and move on to the

second or most easterly line. Early in the afternoon, Battalion HQ reported that its three forward companies had suffered heavy losses. Two of them had been withdrawn some distance having continually run into heavy fire from MGs and mortars. This message concluded with, "...impossible to proceed with original plan and that position must be taken from another direction." Later the RHLI were withdrawn to the RRC area.

On the far left 6th Brigade front, the Camerons of Canada had withdrawn but South Sasks were back in full fight striking again in the railway triangle. Here again they were halted and counterattacked. However, before they could continue the offence, the operation was cancelled. Even the Calgary Highlanders brought into the picture after the Camerons' withdrawal, received a taste of the determined enemy's intentions up to the last few hours of fighting on the 29th. They suffered a number of casualties in holding a position west of Moulineaux.

On 29 August, the situation on 4th Brigade's right flank was much more encouraging. While it was a breakout of sorts for the Essex Scots *only*, this battalion is, after all, the featured formation of this brief narrative. Sadly, the other battalions of 4th and 6th Brigades – the South Sasks on the left flank and the RHLI in the centre of the line – failed to make the same gains. By noon our "A" and "B" Companies found the enemy to be withdrawing (on his own bloody time) and these companies were able to advance several hundreds of yards over part of "High Ground" and along the river road toward Oissel. In fact, with the clear observation from "High Ground," Captain Stewart was able to give fire direction to our artillery to engage the still escaping Germans over the Seine River in Rouen. By the end of the day, all battalions of the two forward brigades were consolidating defensive positions in preparation for a relief in the line the next day.

We seem to have all but concluded this narrative with very little to say about Support Company. There is not much to narrate! The four rifle companies had limited room in which to manoeuvre and when they made their assaults, the 4th Field Regiment RCA and the Toronto Scottish – heavy mortars and MMGs – performed



Essex Scottish Officer's Mess, Horsham England, 1944. (Left to right): Jack Burgess, Jack Haggans, Si Steele, Jock MacLennan, Doug McIntyre, Bruce Macdonald, Phil Grandjean, Stew Jones, Art Zaldon, Hut Laird, Cam Ritchie, L. Harper, Tom Stewart.

(Photo courtesy of McIntyre family)

a more effective task on the elevated enemy positions. However, our 6-pounder Anti-Tank Platoon could hardly avoid becoming involved because of their active commander, Captain Jock McLennan. He and his gunners were able to manhandle a few guns east of the railway embankment on 29 August and get a few shots off at suspected enemy held rock formations and caves on "High Ground." They enjoyed some success...perhaps because the enemy was pulling out anyway and wanted to observe the prowess of our gunners. It was, evidently, during one of these skirmishes on the 29th that Lieutenant Angus Murrison, the Battalion Scout Platoon Commander, while assaulting his platoon with our anti-tank gun support, was killed. He and his platoon were probably trying to make up for lost time during the last couple of days. Their gallant effort, within the pattern of entire divisional operation, was to no avail. Murrison, a promising young officer, was either the second or the third Battalion Scout Platoon Commander killed in action during July and August. As for Support Company, of which I only had the pleasure of commanding for ten days, their record of service to the forward companies was and continued to be unblemished. All of its ranks were dedicated weapons specialists. It is a distinction of sorts, that of Essex Scots officers serving in Northwest Europe, the first and last killed in action were members of Support Company (Lieutenant George "Pete" Ponsford, Anti-Tank Platoon Commander, 13 July 1944 and Captain Phillip M. Grandjean, Company Commander, 30 April 1945 respectively). Only in mid-August, two weeks before this battle, their Carrier Platoon Commander, Lieutenant Jack

Stewart, Distinguished Conduct Medal, was killed while capturing a number, of enemy MG nests at Point 151 just north of Falaise.

Our heavy supporting arms were as usual superb! Our 4th Field Regiment Forward Observation Officers (FOOs) were with us from first light on the 27 August seeking out targets of opportunity on "High Ground." Before the day was out, white patches began to appear in the upper forested slopes as hundreds of 25-pounder HE shells exploded, tearing trees apart with their air-burst effect. From my personal observations and those reported from the German positions after the fighting, it is quite evident that the only discomfort and/or casualties inflicted on the enemy in three days were inflicted by our field arty or the Toronto Scottish heavy mortars. Company Sergeant-Major Jim Coughlin of "A" Company advised me on 30 August, that the Germans on "High Ground" had carted away all their dead and equipment but that evidence was everywhere that shrapnel had pulverized the ground under the trees and had also entered a number of cave-type dug-outs. This evidence was confirmed by blood and wrappings from shell bandages and dressings. As we have noted above, our field arty was also hampered by the poor quality of our maps and also to a large extent the pinpointing of prime targets. In one case, our medium arty was forced to abandon important concentrations for the RRC because of a lack of communications between units meaning that the exact location of the South Sasks was unknown. However, this situation could occur in any operation. Even though fighter-bombers could not fly in the poor weather

**4th and 6th Brigade Casualties
Forêt de la Londe, 27-29 August 1944**

Battalion	Wounded	Killed	Total
Royal Hamilton Light Infantry	-	-	59
Royal Regiment of Canada	-	-	118
Essex Scottish Regiment	74	22	96
South Saskatchewan Regiment	141	44	185
Fusiliers Mont-Royal	-	-	20
Cameron of Canada	-	-	99
Total			577

of 28 and 29 August, our dear friends the arty were always with us!

With our initial pursuit operation completed (we had several later in the year and in 1945 but none so costly...or so futile), we will take a few sentences to examine some implications that should not be buried under the last humble infantryman's blanket with him on the banks of the Seine.

Some factors may not have come to light before this date. Others from a tactical and/or command aspect may have been studied at staff colleges in the late 1940s or 1950s. Most have probably been forgotten forever. However, with the publishing of the detailed Essex Scottish fatality list in the mid-1950s, a more thorough research tool can be utilized by those who care. For instance, the precise number of those killed-in-action in early July at Eterville, Normandy and wherever else through Oldenburg, Germany in late April or early May 1945 can be readily established. Thus within the entire pursuit operation just completed, the Essex Scots suffered a total of 125 casualties of which 30 were fatal. These included three officers and seven non-commissioned officers...a one-in-three loss and almost irreplaceable even at this early stage of the Northwest European campaign. A loss of 125 would not be too hard to bear in a full-scale battalion attack. Yet in this operation, the Essex Scots had no such opportunity. This is not to insinuate we would come off any better than the RHLI on 29 August or the RRC earlier. But at least it would not appear as if our troops were frittered away on incidental skirmishes.

At first glance, we have tended to overlook the approach part of the pursuit operation as perhaps some kind of an approach to the

**Fatal Casualties
Forêt de la Londe
27-29 August 1944
The Essex Scottish Regiment**

27 August 1944

Lieutenant James O. Coombe
Sergeant Walter Buszowski
Corporal Owen T. Wilson
Private Alfred Arsenaault
Private John F. Beston
Private Gordon H. Colville
Private William L. Fish
Private James G. Hill
Private Harold R. Kalbfleisch
Private Bernard L. McFadden
Private Bruce W. Murdoch

28 August 1944

Lieutenant George H. Jones
Corporal Marvin Burke
Corporal Albert Chadwick
Corporal Ralph E. Chamberlain
Private James A. Oldman
Private Harold E. Malott
Private John E. Marvyn
Private Stanley Thorpe
Private Raymond W. White

29 August 1944

Lieutenant Angus Murrison
Sergeant Charles R. Wilson

startline. Yet eight men named earlier lost their lives in the field and by the Essex Scots fatal/wounded ratio, we can assume another 28 to 30 all ranks were wounded up to 26 August. The confirmed figure for the main objective, Forêt de la Londe, 27, 28 and 29 August was 96 of which 22 were fatal. On 27 August 11 were killed, on 28 August nine were killed and on 29 August two met their deaths. The six infantry battalions

of 4th and 6th Brigades had a total three-day casualty toll of 577 all ranks, from a brigade commander down. See box for details.

Balancing the above losses against results or objectives taken is a complete impossibility. Colonel C.P. Stacey in his *The Victory Campaign* sums up the matter very simply, "It is evident that in these three days of unpleasant fighting the 2nd Division failed to make an important impression upon the strong enemy positions east of the valley in the Forêt de la Londe. The hard-fighting Germans holding them carried out their task of covering the river crossings at Rouen, and withdrew only when it had been completed."

Thus, as with very few operations before this one or after, we begin to wonder about the sudden persistence on the part of the GOC, 2nd Division? As early as the late afternoon of 26 August, there is some record of indecision at 2nd Division. There were undoubtedly options open, for example, having 6th Brigade clear the Forêt and pass 4th and 5th Brigades to Elbeuf to cross the Seine with 3rd Division. At least there is no indication the GOC, 2nd Canadian Corps was pressing for a total 2nd Division involvement to clear the Forêt. Then later on the morning of the 28 August, at a time when some weight should have been given to the horrendous results of the RRC and South Sasks fighting in the woods during the afternoon of 27 August, the option of abandoning the attack on the Forêt was still open and was considered.

The "piece-meal" destruction of 4th and 6th Brigades was to continue on through the day of 28 August, even though 3rd Division had consolidated their bridgehead at Elbeuf and had units opposite Oissel pushing ahead very rapidly for Rouen. Why then did the GOCs "...consider it necessary that a battalion be moved around by night (it turned out to become the RHL's time-at-bat) to make an attempt to capture "Maisie" and "High Ground"" at an "O" Group (conference) held in mid-afternoon of the 28th...the attack to be in progress most of 29 August? Was there some kind of a fierce, rules unwritten, Patton/Montgomery-type competition going between divisional commanders to be the first to reach Rouen? We were already aware of the GOC's stubborn haughtiness and apparent disregard for the well-being of an infantry regiment. We

will not enlarge at this time. It is hardly fair under the circumstances.

On 30 August, Lieutenant-Colonel Bennett reorganized the battalion on a three rifle company basis with 85 to 90 all ranks each. Our full strength would normally be four rifle companies of 137 all ranks. We presume the South Sasks and others had to make similar adjustments. We were barely able to reform ranks after a few reinforcements arrived into some semblance of a first rate infantry outfit by early October for the Breakout of Antwerp, Belgium.

By 1 September, the Essex Scots were tumultuously welcomed back to Dieppe. One would hardly think we had been gone for two years and two weeks! Among a few ceremonious events of the next few days was a battalion March Past in honour of those survivors of the 19 August 1942 Raid still serving with the regiment. All seven men took the salute with pride, and perhaps a tear in their eyes. And so it goes with an infantry regiment...and thank heaven for esprit de corps!

The editors of Canadian Military History would like to thank Fran Crummer for bringing this article to our attention, and for her tireless efforts to find photos to accompany it.

Lieutenant-Colonel Doug W. McIntyre mobilized with the 1st Battalion, The Kent Regiment in 1940. He later joined the Essex Scottish Regiment in the United Kingdom and served with that unit as a company commander and second-in-command. During the battle to liberate Groningen, Holland in April 1945, McIntyre, then commanding "A" Company, discovered a bridge intact over a major canal. He quickly launched an attack with his company mounted in Kangaroos. The bridge was captured and greatly facilitated the liberation of the town. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Order for his actions. Following the war, McIntyre rejoined the Kents and served as their commanding officer from 1951 to 1954 when the regiment was amalgamated with the Essex Scottish to form the Essex and Scottish Kent. Doug McIntyre passed away in 1981.