

# READY FOR THE FRAY



THE HISTORY OF THE CANADIAN SCOTTISH  
REGIMENT (PRINCESS MARY'S) 1920 TO 2002

**The Battle of D-Day**

**by The Canadian Scottish Regiment**

**From Ready for the Fray by R.H. Roy**

## CHAPTER VII

### *“D” Day and the Putot Counter-attack*

Perhaps the most astonishing thing about D Day was the fact that the greatest armada of ships ever to leave Great Britain sailed one hundred miles across the Channel towards German-occupied France without being detected. It was a masterpiece of security, planning, deception—and good fortune. Thus it happened that the first knowledge the enemy had of the place and time the Allied blow would fall was when British and American paratroopers began to land on either side of the assault area between midnight and one o'clock on D Day.

During the night R.A.F. Bomber Command aircraft pounded the ten main coastal batteries in the assault area, and at daybreak American aircraft, switching the attack to the beach defences, built this aerial bombardment up to a crescendo just prior to H Hour.

The roar of the aircraft overhead was music to the ears of the men in the 7th Brigade. By daybreak the eleven L.S.I. (Landing Ships, Infantry) under Captain V. S. Godfrey, RCN, in the *Prince Henry* commanding Naval Assault Group “J.I.”, were getting close to their anchorage about seven and one-half miles off the Normandy coast.<sup>1</sup> Even while the Canadian Scottish were finishing off the last of their breakfast and some were beginning to buckle on their equipment, the sound of the heavy guns of the warships could be heard as they poured broadside after broadside into the German coastal defences. H Hour was getting close, and tension

<sup>1</sup> Information concerning the naval side of D Day supplied by the Office of the Naval Historian, Ottawa.

## READY FOR THE FRAY

was mounting. The L.S.I., which had been steaming in line ahead through the mined coastal waters, now deployed to starboard so as to form two columns with the leading ship in each column paralleling the coast, just as if on an exercise. It was too overcast to see the shore, and the dust and smoke caused by the bombing and shelling made it impossible in the early, grey morning to pick out any landmarks so far from the beaches.

On board the *Ulster Monarch* Major D. G. Crofton and his second in command, Capt. H. L. Alexander, checked "C" Company's serials to see that everyone was at his station ready to get into the L.C.A. (Landing Craft, Assault). Then the ships began to slow down and a few minutes past six o'clock, after a few blasts from the *Prince Henry's* sirens, the engines were stopped and with a roar of steel chains the anchors were dropped.

Almost immediately "C" Company began to clamber into the L.C.A. which were hanging from their davits at deck level. Despite the battle equipment each man carried, the operation went smoothly and, on a signal, the L.C.A. were lowered into the rough sea. The men could see the loaded L.C.A. rising and falling in the choppy water as they pulled away from the other L.S.I., each anchored 1½ cables' length from the other. In a remarkably short time all the assault craft were in station on their flotilla leader ready for the seven-mile run-in to the beach, with "C" Company's craft on the right flank of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles.

Despite the tablets which many took to prevent sea-sickness, the rolling, plunging motion of the L.C.A. made quite a few men sick. To add to their discomfort, the stubby bows of the assault craft hitting the white-capped waves sent sprays of water over the men. The oiled gas-capes came in handy as temporary raincoats. As the large L.S.I. grew smaller in the distance, the men began to stand up in the craft to look at the shore. As yet there was no evidence of enemy fire, but the rumble and roar of the naval bombardment was still throwing up clouds of dust and smoke, and soon afterwards the fire of the 12th and 13th Field Regiments, R.C.A., together with that of the mortars, rockets, etc., would add weight and fury to the fire from the cruisers and destroyers.

As the objects on shore began to take on a definite shape and form for "C" Company's men, those who may have turned their heads to look seawards might have seen, about a mile or so to their

## "D" DAY

rear, the bows of the L.C.A. carrying the Winnipeg's reserve companies. Mixed in with that group were a dozen officers and men of the Canadian Scottish. This small number would land before the main body of the battalion, scout out the beach exits and make sure they were clear of wire, and be on hand to guide the unit when it landed.

The main body of the Canadian Scottish, meanwhile, was preparing to start their run-in to the beach. The disembarkation of part of Battalion Headquarters, Headquarters and "B" Companies from the *Prince Henry* to the assault craft which were to carry them to the beach is described by a naval historian as follows:

With the pipers of the Canadian Scottish playing cheerfully in the bright morning as they had the evening before when the ship sailed, 227 assault troops [sic] of the Canadian Scottish Regiment embarked in the "PRINCE HENRY'S" seven landing craft assault as they hung at boat deck level, and the craft were lowered at 0645 hours. As the troops left they gave three rousing cheers for the "PRINCE HENRY", which her ship's company heartily reciprocated.<sup>2</sup>

In a matter of minutes the naval officer in the Motor Gun Boat responsible for shepherding his flock of L.C.A. to their exact landing place was barking orders through his loud hailer, urging some to catch up, some to close up, some to steer a bit to port or starboard as the situation demanded. The navy, as usual, was doing a grand job.

At about 0730 hours almost the entire battalion was in assault craft, for a few miles from the anchored L.S.I., or about four to five miles behind the bulk of the battalion, the wheeled and tracked vehicles of the Carrier, Mortar and Transport platoons were churning forward in their L.C.T. (Landing Craft, Tank). These platoons had made the entire trip across the Channel in their larger craft, finding what shelter they could on the exposed vehicle deck by curling up under the canvas or hauling a camouflage net over them. Now let us leave them and travel towards the beach past the immediate reserve still in the L.S.I., past the main body of the unit, on four miles to the small group of guides and up to the first

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<sup>2</sup> Information supplied by the Naval Historian, Ottawa. The actual number of Canadian Scottish carried in the seven L.C.A. was 146. The remainder were ferried in later in the day. The ship's galley provided the assault troops with two hard-boiled eggs and a cheese sandwich to supplement their rations, a gesture greatly appreciated by all ranks.

## READY FOR THE FRAY

assault wave to "C" Company heading straight for the beach at Vaux.

"C" Company was now very close to the shore, and those who had been watching the landmarks on the beach pulled their heads down as enemy machine gun fire began to strike the craft. The beach obstacles were close, and even though the soldiers could no longer see them, the swerving of the craft and the curses of the sailor at the wheel warned them that the beach was only yards away. At about ten minutes to eight the company's assault craft grounded on the shore, their ramps dropped down, and out dashed the men, some of them in four or five feet of water, and some almost dryshod: As one officer described it:

The Petty Officer in command of my L.C.A. was superb. The craft was landed according to plan. When the small armour-plated doors at the bow were opened and the ramp lowered, we could see the open grey beach with not a person in sight. We were the first to land and over the beach somewhere was the enemy. There was machine gun fire coming from the left front as we disembarked at the double. . . . So skillful had been the landing that we were able to leap ashore without getting our feet wet.<sup>3</sup>

Some of the men did not get more than ten feet from the L.C.A. before they were killed or wounded. The open beach made an excellent "killing ground". The enemy knew it. So did the assault troops. The men ran across that open stretch as they never ran before, sending up fervent prayers of thanks as they did so that the sand was absorbing most of the shrapnel from the mortar bombs falling around them, and that the beach itself was not mined. So much happened in so few seconds as each man raced across the 75 - 100 yards of beach. A soldier would cry out, clutch his arm and feel the sticky, warm blood beginning to soak his shirt. But he kept on going. Another would gasp and fall, not to rise again. But on the platoons went, on to their objective.

Lieut. V. R. Schjelderup's platoon (No. 13, with Sgt. J. H. Pelly) had the immediate job of capturing a 75-mm. casemate located right beside the road leading off the beach towards Vaux. A section of pioneers were with the platoon to blast a way through the barbed wire and the concrete pillbox itself. The D.D. tanks had not arrived, but by great good fortune the naval bombardment had struck the post and silenced it. The post commanded the

<sup>3</sup> Personal narrative, Lt-Col. V. R. Schjelderup.

## "D" DAY

landing area. Had it been manned, the company would have lost four times the casualties it suffered. As it was, the two platoons of the enemy's 441 East Battalion defending the immediate area of Vaux had been hard hit by the bombardment and their morale was low.<sup>4</sup>

As the company moved up the road, shedding their Mae Wests as they went, Lieut. D. A. Hay's platoon (No. 14, with Sgt. R. G. Atkins) made its way to the high ground on the right of Vaux. In this area the men came to grips with German machine gunners. In a short, fierce action the platoon overcame these posts and later some field gun emplacements. During this action Cpl. W. G. Ritchie, killed leading his men, deserves special mention. In this area also Pte. B. M. Francis, a crack shot and, incidentally, a native B.C. Indian, accounted for two or three of the numerous snipers who seemed to be everywhere. One he killed by shooting from the hip without taking aim, at about 50 yards.<sup>5</sup> Later he, too, was killed.

While this action was going on, Lieut. F. G. Radcliff's platoon (No. 15, with Sgt. T. D. Carney) had pushed to the left towards the Chateau Vaux to attack their objective, which consisted of the chateau itself as well as a couple of wicked 88-mm. guns camouflaged by a haystack. The chateau, set in a wooded park, offered plenty of cover for snipers and machine gunners. To flush these out the men resorted to battle-drill tactics which proved their worth. The company commander described the action in these words:

They would flush out these snipers, capturing some, killing some, and our casualties were fairly heavy. However, we managed to get in and surround the Chateau Vaux and we had the flame throwers ready to use to set fire to the place if there was too much opposition in the building. However, after throwing a couple of grenades in the doorway the enemy immediately gave up.<sup>6</sup>

There was no waiting around after the chateau was taken. The urgent need to press on dominated everyone's mind. The wounded were being cared for, the prisoners were being hustled back to the P.O.W. (Prisoner of War) collecting point on the beach, and the immediate job was to get farther inland and take

<sup>4</sup> Information supplied by the Historical Section, Army Headquarters. This battalion consisted of "volunteers" from German-occupied eastern countries, stiffened by a German cadre.

<sup>5</sup> Personal narrative, Lt-Col. D. G. Crofton.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

## READY FOR THE FRAY

out the guns. During this action Lieut. Radcliff was mortally wounded, and Sgt. Carney took over the command of the platoon. He did a grand job, mopping up enemy opposition in the area and pushing on to the southeastern portion of the wood.

Meanwhile Schjelderup's platoon, closely followed by company headquarters, were pressing forward along the centre, up the road to Vaux and then through the tree-filled gulley towards the open fields beyond. The men had to fight every yard of the way. About 700 yards inland, at a crossroad, the platoon took its first prisoners. Then in the next several hundred yards leading down to the gulley and beyond, the platoon attacked three machine gun posts, one after another. It was grim going, but not a man faltered. The platoon wiped out the machine gun posts and took about fifteen prisoners, one of whom, with just a little persuasion, led the assault troops through a heavily mined area in the gulley. Once through this spot, the platoon started across the fields in extended formation, moving through the tall grain towards the gap between Ste. Croix-sur-Mer and Banville. By this time the other platoons were coming in from the flanks, closing up on either side of company headquarters towards the tip of the woods.

We know now that between Vaux and Ste. Croix was the headquarters area of the 2nd Battalion of the enemy's 726 Regiment. In Ste. Croix itself were three platoons of this battalion — soldiers who knew the country like the palm of their hand, who had prepared carefully concealed field positions and emplacements months previously, and who had been trained as thoroughly in a defensive role as the Canadians had been trained to attack.<sup>7</sup> The odds were in their favour, and elements of the Winnipegs, cutting across "C" Company's axis of advance, had been stopped short when they tried to push west from Banville.

It was now after nine o'clock, so let us go back about 45 minutes in time, and move eastward about a mile along the beach where the main body of the battalion was to land.

As with "C" Company, the rest of the battalion were surprised at the lack of enemy fire as their L.C.A. drew closer to the beach. However, their landing was made more hazardous by landing about

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<sup>7</sup> Information supplied by the Historical Section, Army Headquarters. Early in the fighting a platoon of the German 716 Engineer Battalion was sent to reinforce the Ste. Croix area. "No members of this platoon returned". (*Ibid.*)



## "D" DAY

8:30 a.m., roughly 40 minutes after the assault wave, as the shore wind had pushed the rising tide to a point where the mined wooden stakes and steel girders along the beach were awash, many visible only in the troughs of the waves. Under these conditions the engineers found it impossible to clear paths through them for the L.C.A., thus leaving each craft to try to pick its own way through the obstacles.

One of the L.C.T. landing vehicles for the first troops ashore had struck a mine and was beached. The L.C.A. carrying Lt-Col. Cabeldu and half of battalion headquarters (the other half was in Major Wightman's craft) swerved towards the L.C.T. and the men scrambled over it to the beach beyond. Several other craft tried the same trick. Major A. H. Plows, commanding "A" Company, describes how his craft headed in for its appointed landing place but found the way completely barred by beach obstacles. He wrote later:

It was apparent we could find no opening here and as there was a concentration of artillery and mortar fire at this point, the RCN officer in charge of the craft pulled out and proceeded to our right (west) and came alongside an L.C.T. . . . It was down in the stern and my guess is that it had been holed by one of the mined obstacles.

Scrambling over this craft [i.e., an L.C.A. alongside the L.C.T.], my "A" Company men and elements of the Beach Group with us, boarding the L.C.T., went forward and off the landing ramp into 4 or 5 feet of water. I hit on the crest of a heavy swell and went right under but was carried forward and my feet hit bottom. . . .

Things were lively as we struggled our 30 yards or more to the beach. Most of the fire was artillery or mortar, with occasional bursts of M.G. fire from our left flank.<sup>9</sup>

Most of "B" Company, commanded by Major R. M. Lendrum, came in through the heavy surf close to the mouth of the River Seulles. Evidently the naval officers guiding the company's flotilla, seeing the mortar and artillery shells smacking the water around the beached L.C.T. now that it was being used as a "wharf", decided to take the L.C.A. right through the obstacles. Luckily, none struck the stakes or mines. However, just as No. 10 Platoon was disembarking one or two mortar bombs struck the ramp of the craft, killing Pte. V. R. D. Garcia and seriously wounding Lieut. J. H. Russell and several others. Russell was carried through the

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<sup>9</sup> Personal narrative, Major A. H. Plows.

## READY FOR THE FRAY

surf to the shore, and Sgt. K. Byron assumed command of the platoon.<sup>9</sup>

The six L.C.A. carrying "D" Company, commanded by Major G. T. MacEwan, had an experience similar to "B" Company. They landed at their appointed spot and fortunately none of their L.C.A. struck the obstacles. As with the others, though, there were some near misses. The craft carrying the company commander, for example, "missed two mines by a very few inches". He added later:

The first grim sight of war faced us as we rushed from our L.C.A. It was a Canadian soldier face down in the shallow water. The body was rushing up to the beach on each wave and receding as it broke and ran back to the sea.<sup>10</sup>

After racing across the beach the companies took shelter behind a long sand dune. Between the dune and the sea bank was a 30-foot wide sea meadow filled with water, deep in some parts, while only swampy in others. The area was covered by machine gun fire. "A" Company, on the right, found their beach exit, a cart track leading off the beach. The track itself was neither blocked nor heavily wired, although there were mines on either side of it. Luckily it was a foot or so above the sea meadow, but it was swept by machine gun fire. By a series of quick dashes "A" and "D" Companies and Battalion headquarters used this route to get across to the higher ground. Burdened with equipment as they were, the men simply flew across this space, some claiming later their feet hardly touched the ground. On the other side there was some cover, and from here the companies could make their way to the battalion assembly area at La Valette, several hundred yards directly inland from the beach.

"B" Company, farthest left, closer to the machine gun fire, found its beach exit flooded. Mortar fire, evidently directed from a pill box at the far left of the beach, was causing casualties and making things extremely uncomfortable in general. At this point the beach was only about 30 feet wide, which not only narrowed the beaten zone for the enemy's fire, but made it imperative that the beach be cleared as even then more craft were coming in behind with more troops and vehicles. By looking over the dune the

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<sup>9</sup> Personal narrative, Major P. F. Ramsay. Byron was badly wounded but was able to carry on until late that afternoon when he was ordered back and a corporal took command.

<sup>10</sup> Personal narrative, Major G. T. MacEwan.

## "D" DAY

company could see that one of the Royal Engineers' special tanks (Armoured Vehicle, Royal Engineers) had attempted to cross the flooded road and had sunk down until only its turret was above water. The company's second in command relates what happened:

I told C.S.M. Frank Fisher to keep his eye on me and I jumped on the tank and ran across it and jumped into knee-deep water on the other side where a submerged roadway could be discerned. There was some shelter about 200 yards along this roadway and I made for it "hell for leather". In its shelter I saw that the small arms fire was coming from the church tower at Graye-sur-Mer [about 500-600 yards directly inland]. I signalled C.S.M. Fisher to keep down and come to me and the company to follow in extended line. This they did in yeoman fashion as small arms fire whistled all around. C.S.M. Fisher pointed out a "Staghound" with a 4-pr. gun proceeding laterally from La Valette and with a few directions they shelled the church tower to allow the company to continue without M.G. interruption.<sup>11</sup>

"B" Company, once off the beach, struck inland across the fields between La Valette and Graye-sur-Mer. Some of the Winniegs were still battling in Graye but, despite some interference from this flank, Major Lendrum, with the C.O.'s permission, decided his best course was to avoid getting entangled with the action in Graye and struck inland along the low land bordering the River Seulles towards Amblie.

All this action—from the time they landed on the beach shortly before nine until setting off to their first objective—took place within half an hour. Some of the rifle companies were off the beach a bit sooner, but nobody stayed on that stretch of sand because he wanted to. There were some whose duty demanded they be there—the stretcher bearers for example. One of these men was hit as he was helping a wounded comrade, and the stretcher bearer was in turn looked after by the Medical Sergeant, Sgt. W. Garner. While helping this man amid the mortar and machine gun fire, Garner himself was hit in the face by splinters from a mortar bomb. Although bleeding very badly he continued his work and directed the work of his men until he became too weak from loss of blood to carry on.<sup>12</sup> His place was taken by another. The unit's medical personnel from the M.O., Captain Young, to the newest stretcher bearer, were starting to build a reputation for

<sup>11</sup> Ramsay, *op. cit.*

<sup>12</sup> Sgt. Garner was awarded the Croix de Guerre avec Etoile de Bronze for his bravery.

## READY FOR THE FRAY

themselves which was based solidly on courageous work amidst hazardous conditions.

Battalion Headquarters, "A" and "D" Companies, assembled at La Valette, could look back and see part of the beach, now getting more crowded. Every minute more L.C.T. and L.C.A. landed in increasing numbers tanks, trucks, carriers, armoured cars, self-propelled guns, Beach Groups, infantrymen, engineers and so forth amid the beach obstacles which were taking their usual toll of craft surging in through the surf. Protected by the sand dunes were the wounded, and moving among them was Padre Seaborn. The L.C.T. carrying the carriers and vehicles of the Canadian Scottish were just about to touch down.

At La Valette Lt-Col. Cabeldu was in wireless contact with "C" Company about a mile to the right. Two platoons from "A" Company were deployed defensively while Lieut. R. E. Turnbull's platoon (No. 7 with Sgt. C. M. Nettleton) was reconnoitering a route forward and making sure there was a passage through the minefield which aerial photographs had indicated on the battalion's axis of advance. When he reported the way clear the message was passed on to the C.O. who was anxious to get off to help "C" Company. At about this time, Major Plows wrote later:

. . . I was looking to the rear and saw an armoured car appear over the crest of the beach dunes. By its red and yellow pennon I recognized it as belonging to the Inns of Court Regiment . . . which was detailed to go forward with all possible speed and seize and hold certain bridges and road intersections and deny them to the enemy. . . . Suddenly the A.F.V. burst into flame and almost simultaneously came the report of an 88-mm. gun.

Off on our left was an innocent looking haystack and Lieut. Bernie Clarke was sent with his platoon to deal with the suspected gun emplacement. In short order he secured the surrender of the enemy gun crew and put the gun out of action.<sup>13</sup>

On the beach itself the unit's mortar and carrier platoons saw this action also. In fact they were about to use the same exit off the beach as had the armoured car. But more of this later.

Two platoons of "D" Company, whose job was to get forward and seize bridges over the River Seulles, had started off on their bicycles to accomplish their mission immediately the company arrived at La Valette. Many bicycles had been abandoned during

<sup>13</sup> Plows, *op. cit.*

## "D" DAY

the dash across the sea meadow, but by borrowing those from company headquarters and the reserve platoon, the two sub-units were quickly on their way, leaving the rest of the company to follow on foot. Lieut. T. W. L. Butters' platoon (No. 17, with Sgt. S. Hill) made for the bridge at Pont de Reviere, arriving there without meeting much opposition before the leading elements of "B" Company, upon whose axis of advance the bridge lay. Lieut. A. C. Peck's platoon (No. 18, with Sgt. D. Andrews) went for the bridge at Colombiers-sur-Seulles and it, too, was able in time to report to Major MacEwan that it was successful. Meanwhile the reserve platoon and company headquarters started out behind it, going along the road from Graye to Banville and on towards Colombiers.

To return to La Valette for a moment. When Major Plows ordered Lieut. Clarke to take out the gun emplacement Clarke's classic reply was "Who? ME?", and he immediately set out to clear up the spot. His platoon had been the first in the La Valette area and he had heard the firing coming from the enemy position upon arrival. Calling his section leaders and sergeant to come with him, the group crawled towards a small knoll about 75 yards from the enemy's gun position. From the knoll they would be able to overlook the area at close range. They crawled up the knoll—and came almost face to face with a few Germans crawling up the other side of the knoll on the same sort of mission. Clarke and his men nabbed them and a few others in one bound. Then with half the platoon following him, Lieut. Clarke and Sgt. W. A. Paterson ran for the haystack, and since it was firing towards the beach they headed for its back door. It turned out to be a gun emplacement encased in concrete with hay piled on its roof for camouflage. A door leading into the emplacement was pulled open and someone threw in a grenade. That did the trick. The men, with eyes only for the gun emplacement, heaved a sigh of relief, but as they turned around their hair nearly stood on end. All around them were German soldiers, about fifty of them, rising out of their slit trenches—all surrendering. So quick had been the action and so sudden the platoon's dash that the enemy had been overrun without the platoon knowing they were there. The terrific naval and air bombardment had taken any aggressiveness out of the enemy. They were willing to fire on the beach 600 or so yards

## READY FOR THE FRAY

away, but there was no heart in them for close-quarter fighting. It was at this point that "A" Company's second in command, Captain W. H. V. Matthews, came running up, asking Clarke, "What the Hell are you trying to do, win the V.C.?"<sup>14</sup>

Flushing out the gun position had not taken more than 15 or 20 minutes, but it was enough to impose a slight delay on Lt-Col. Cabeldu since the gun and its surrounding field defences were only a hundred yards from the unit's assembly point. "B" and "D" Companies were pressing inland, "A" Company was with him, and he had received a wireless message from "C" Company on the right flank. As we have seen, Major Crofton's company was having a sticky time of it and Cabeldu, after putting in a call for tank support for "C" Company, immediately set out cross-country to help Major Crofton get through or around Banville and Ste. Croix.

"C" Company was indeed in the thick of it. The company had scarcely got to the southern tip of the wood, about 800 yards from the Chateau Vaux, when a hail of rifle, machine gun and mortar fire slowed down its progress as the platoons came into the open fields in front of Banville and Ste. Croix. After a brief consolidation, Major Crofton and Captain Alexander went forward to see if they could locate any elements of the Canadian Scottish. The two villages were supposed to be taken and held by the Winnipegs while the Scottish went through them to their objective farther on. Crofton, at this point, had not yet established wireless contact with Lt-Col. Cabeldu but thought the unit must be close as it was after ten o'clock.

Major Crofton could not see the Scottish, but he could see some of the Winnipegs and the enemy on the outskirts of Ste. Croix where a battle royal was in progress. So heavy was the opposition that the Winnipegs were being pushed back. The situation was critical and, as the company commander wrote later: "I realized that this area of the beachhead was in danger of being overrun by the enemy".<sup>15</sup>

Seeing numerous German soldiers moving around between both villages, darting between hedgerows and ducking through the tall wheat on his front, Crofton asked the artillery F.O.O.

<sup>14</sup> Personal interview, Lieut. B. Clarke.

<sup>15</sup> Crofton, *op. cit.*

## "D" DAY

(Forward Observation Officer) with him if he could contact some artillery unit on his wireless set to shell the area. At about the same time, "C" Company established contact with battalion headquarters and asked for assistance.

The company commander, who with his second in command, seemed to be everywhere encouraging his men, had ordered Lieut. Schjelderup "to keep the enemy contained back in the village of Ste. Croix", and had ordered the other two platoons to give him all the support they could with fire. No. 13 Platoon, pushing on in extended line, found the fire from the enemy's field positions in front of the villages was as hard to locate as it was damaging. The waist-high wheat gave excellent concealment to the enemy and flushing him out was a grim business. The leading platoon was advancing towards the gap between the villages when

. . . an L.M.G. which sounded like a Bren opened up from a position about 150 yards away. We "hit the dirt" and I [Schjelderup] shouted "This must be the Winnipegs—when I say UP—all up together and shout 'WINNIPEGS'". We did, and to our surprise two enemy infantry sections stood up in their slit trenches just 125-150 yards ahead. They too were a picture of amazement and looked rather odd with their painted faces below helmets covered with grass. Their camouflage was perfect and it was no wonder we did not see them earlier. But the stunned silence did not last long.

There was only one course of action and to a man the platoon rushed the enemy positions. It was a bitter encounter with much hand-to-hand fighting. Enemy supporting machine gun fire from the area on the northern outskirts of Ste. Croix and mortar fire from Ste. Croix made our task more difficult.

Whilst all ranks in the platoon fought well, special credit is due to Cpl. Townsley and his section of pioneers who took to the straight infantry role without flinching. Cpl. Townsley died next day from wounds received in this action.<sup>10</sup>

It is hard, if not impossible, to pick out individual deeds of valour under such conditions. "All ranks", reported Major Crofton, "fought like veterans". As one example, he added:

During this action Pte. V. C. Paulson, one of the Bren gunners, could not get a field of fire with his gun due to the height of the grain in the wheatfields. This did not stop him from standing up and advancing, firing as he went. In fact, all ranks behaved in a similar manner; they would get up with their Bren guns and go firing from

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<sup>10</sup> Schjelderup, *op. cit.*

## READY FOR THE FRAY

the hip, which demoralized the enemy and I am sure prevented an attack on our front.<sup>17</sup>

"A" Company and Battalion Headquarters, pushing their way through the small pockets of the enemy which were now coming to life, had made directly for "C" Company, and to see them coming through the fields was a most welcome sight to Crofton's cut-up platoons. So, too, was the sound of our artillery now beginning to blast the enemy in his field positions. "C" Company's losses in killed and wounded had been heavy, especially the lead platoon. Several of the 6th Canadian Armoured Regiment's tanks, which arrived a few minutes before "A" Company, had broken the back of the German resistance in Ste. Croix, and the further arrival of the infantrymen soon made the entire situation much more favourable.

Lt-Col. Cabeldu held a short "O" Group in the field and ordered "C" Company to follow "A" Company as they struck inland between the villages. The tanks, together with elements of the Winnipegs, took on the task of stamping out what resistance still remained in Ste. Croix. "A" and "C" Companies were to push straight on between the villages towards the battalion's intermediate objective, and in so doing would clean out any enemy pockets directly in its path but would avoid getting held up or involved in village street-fighting. Captain Gillan, with two of Sgt. Grey's carriers, came up at this time and gave protection on the flank. The right half of the battalion was now rolling again as both "A" and "C" Companies swept forward towards Colombiers-sur-Seulles.

The final push on past Ste. Croix by the right half of the battalion had some interesting effects on the left half, especially "D" Company. ("B" Company, on the extreme left, was farthest away from this action.) "D" Company had one platoon each at Pont de Reviere and Colombiers, while company headquarters and the reserve platoon, having gone through Banville on the left, had stopped several hundred yards behind that village to await word of the capture of the bridges. Scarcely had word arrived when they heard the noise of the attack on the villages to their right rear. The reserve platoon was despatched to Colombiers while company headquarters followed on behind, but before either had moved very

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<sup>17</sup> Crofton, *op. cit.*



## "D" DAY

far they ran into elements of the enemy leaving Ste. Croix by the "back door". The company commander describes the situation as follows:

A road leading out of Ste. Croix ran into the road along which we were moving. A small German car came dashing along and Sgt. J. D. Blacklock fired his rifle at it. The bullet found its mark in the driver's head and the car did a somersault off the road. A short while later a second car rushed along. A shot at this one wounded the driver who stopped and was placed in a ditch. By now we could see more people coming out of the village. The rest of our party moved on to the bridge but Captain J. T. Bryden, my 2 I.C. with our two runners stood behind the parked car and as the Germans, in ones and twos on bicycles—and one on a motorcycle—rushed away from the village . . . we stepped out and held them up. This was quite entertaining for a while but soon we had quite a bag. A section of infantry from another company came along and we turned our prisoners over to them. Capt. Bryden and I decided to use the German car. He drove, and after grinding a gear or two got under way. To avoid being shot at by our own troops I stood up with my head out of the open top. This was fine until a sniper took a pot shot at us and we left the car very quickly.<sup>18</sup>

With "A" and "C" Companies pushing between Ste. Croix and Banville, and with a small part of "D" Company catching a grab-bag of German prisoners as they came out the back door, yet another section of the battalion—the Bren and Mortar carriers—now came upon the scene.

Many of the unit's Universal Carriers<sup>19</sup> had landed from the L.C.T. just west of Courseulles with comparatively little trouble, though a mine striking the door of an L.C.T. carrying Sgt. G. J. Rhodes' section caused some delay before the tracked vehicles could disembark. Once on the beach the problem was to get off. The men had seen the Inns of Court armoured car hit squarely as it left the beach exit near La Valette, so Lieut. J. J. Andrews looked for another exit. Farther down the beach a tank had slipped from the narrow track leading to high ground and got bogged down, completely blocking that exit for at least an hour. Not until the tank

<sup>18</sup> MacEwan, *op. cit.* "D" Company managed to capture a sizeable amount of money—French francs—when a German paymaster fell into their hands. For a while this company was the richest in the battalion.

<sup>19</sup> Universal Carriers, small, thinly-armoured tracked vehicles, were used by the 3-inch Mortar platoon, the "Bren Gun" or Carrier platoon, and the anti-tank platoon. Each Company Headquarters also had one. The Carriers described here were about 15 in number, belonging to the two platoons and the various companies. Others landed later.

## READY FOR THE FRAY

was cleared, and then only with Brigadier Foster giving them priority, did the Bren and Mortar carriers get off the beach.

Once on the main lateral road just off the beach, the carriers went towards Courseulles and then inland through Graye towards Banville, following the path taken by "D" Company two hours earlier. Upon arrival in Banville, and knowing only that the battalion was "ahead", Lieut. Andrews decided to take the road to Tierceville, which led past the rear of a large towered church, when an enemy machine gunner in the tower halted the convoy abruptly. Recalling the incident later the officer leading the convoy wrote:

To carry on would have exposed all the open Carriers to direct fire from this vantage point high above the road. I ordered a section of Carriers to remove the menace when a self-propelled gun ambled down the road from our front towards us. On hearing our troubles the S.P. gun commander very obligingly put three or four solid shot followed by two H.E. shells into the bell tower, rendering it unfit for the service it had recently performed for the enemy.<sup>20</sup>

Learning from the gunners that he had not seen any Canadian Scottish on the Banville-Tierceville road, Lieut. Andrews took the carriers towards Ste. Croix and, coming up on a rise, "a section of tanks and many running figures" could be seen around that village. Although they did not know it, this was the final act of the clearing of Ste. Croix. The carriers took up a defensive position along the sunken road midway between the villages and the officers decided to strike cross-country for Colombiers when suddenly a section of infantry moved into view through a nearby hedge under the muzzles of the assembled Brens of the carrier platoon. Fingers were tight on triggers when it was realized the infantrymen were Canadians, in fact, Canadian Scottish. This recognition "was verified when the lead scout was observed to have his pants completely lacking in anklets and rolled up logger style".<sup>21</sup>

It was the leading section of "A" Company, and within a few minutes, when Lt-Col. Cabeldu arrived, the carriers were dispersed to their proper supporting role with the various companies. This meeting took place a little after two o'clock in the afternoon,<sup>22</sup> and was but an incident in the battalion's push on to Colombiers,

<sup>20</sup> Personal narrative, Major J. J. Andrews.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> W.D., 7 Cdn. Inf. Bde., June, 1944, Appx. 8, Battle Log.

## "D" DAY

through that village and over the bridge captured by "D" Company's bicycle troops.

By this time the men's uniforms were partially dry, but they still had had nothing to eat since their breakfast aboard ship about nine hours previously. The glasses of wine and cider offered the men by the farmers and villagers enroute were downed with gusto, but the looks thrown at the chickens in the farmyard underlined deeper thoughts of solid food.

On the extreme left "B" Company, after a very brief stop near Amblie, had continued its drive inland, meeting only scattered opposition on its way. On their left there was, as yet, no contact with the Reginas. As Major Lendrum reported later:

All we could see on the left was repeated attempts by their [the Reginas] tank support to make the high ground directly inland from Courseulles. None of these tank efforts got more than about 4,000 yards from the beach since the tanks were one by one knocked out. . . .<sup>23</sup>

"B" Company found Amblie clear of enemy, so the platoons pushed on across the open fields up the slope towards the high ground overlooking the valley of the Mue River.

About four-thirty in the afternoon, after crossing the River Seulles at Colombiers, Lt-Col. Cabeldu reported to Brigade Headquarters that the battalion had reached "Elm", the code name for the Creully-Pierrepoint road.<sup>24</sup> This was more than four miles directly inland from the beaches, and the Canadian Scottish was now spearheading the brigade attack. After a brief pause at Les Planches, Lt-Col. Cabeldu again gave the order to push on.

The battalion's objective in the second phase of the attack was the high ground south of the Seulles lying approximately between Pierrepoint and Fontaine-Henry, but the C.O. decided to get in a little farther if he could. "B" Company, crossing at Amblie a few hours previously, had already taken up its position on the left of the objective, a spur of high ground overlooking the river valley on their left. The rest of the unit lost no time in striking southeast to join them.

"C" Company was ordered to head directly for the crossroads

<sup>23</sup> Personal narrative, Lt-Col. R. M. Lendrum. Actually, the Reginas had had a major battle in the beach area but arrived at Reviere around noon, pushing on from this area some five hours later. (Capt. Eric Luxton, ed., *1st Battalion, The Regina Rifle Regiment, op. cit.*, p. 35).

<sup>24</sup> W.D., 7 Cdn. Inf. Bde., June, 1944, Appx. 8, Battle Log.

## READY FOR THE FRAY

on the high ground about 1,000 yards south of Cainet. Some casualties were suffered en route when the company had to mount an attack on an enemy mortar and machine gun position. Farther inland these positions had escaped much of the bombing which had blasted the enemy close to the beach. But if they put up a good fight, their numbers were fewer, and for the first time "C" Company could meet them on a near equal or better basis.

Crossing at Pierrepont "A" and "D" Companies, the latter now without their bicycles, also took up positions well to the front. "A" Company, marching across country directly for Camilly, made contact with "B" Company on the outskirts of Le Fresne-Camilly. During this march Captain W. H. V. Matthews organized a party of men to search barns and other buildings en route, flushing out a large number of German stragglers and others, and making the route safer for those coming behind. Near Camilly enemy artillery opened up on the company's right flank, and Major Plows ordered the gun to be taken out. At five-fifteen Brigade Headquarters received the message: "I C Scot R captured battery position of 109 Arty Regt together with large amount of signal equipment".<sup>25</sup> The men of "A" Company were getting to be experts at capturing enemy guns.

Fortunately Camilly itself was occupied without opposition, but the men had scarcely dug in when Universal Carriers, coming up the road from Thaon, clattered into the village. In the leading carrier was Lt-Col. Matheson, C.O. of the Reginas. It was a happy meeting, even though the C.O.'s first words were: "What in Hell are you Scottish doing here?"<sup>26</sup>

"D" Company, swinging to the right of Le Fresne-Camilly, had struck out for the Cainet - Le Petit Vey area. Behind them, near Pierrepont, was Battalion Headquarters, while with them was a troop of tanks together with one of the Inns of Court Regiment's armoured cars.

By this time the Canadian Scottish had cut its way six miles inland from the sea. It seemed incredible that twelve hours previously the entire unit was still seaborne. Of all the infantry battalions of the assaulting brigades in the British Second Army landing on D Day the Canadian Scottish, in its present positions,

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Plows, *op. cit.*

## "D" DAY

had gone farthest through the enemy's defences. It was a remarkable achievement, and said a great deal for the aggressive leadership of the officers as well as the splendid spirit of the men. There were gaps in the ranks, many of them, and no platoon had been hit harder than Lieut. Schjelderup's. He had come ashore with 45 men under his command. At the end of the day when he, himself, was ordered back to have his wounds dressed, there were only 19 men left.<sup>27</sup> Grim as these and similar figures were, there was some consolation when the men thought of the number of enemy killed, wounded and captured. Of the latter a conservative estimate would be about 200. No figures or estimates are available for the number of enemy killed, but to take a wider view, the enemy's 716th Infantry Division, which took the full force of the British-Canadian assault, was so badly shredded that it never fought again as a formation.

The 87 casualties suffered by the Scottish was a hard blow, yet the unit was fortunate it did not have three or four times this number killed and wounded, as the planners for the invasion feared and expected. In fact, when Naval Assault Force "J. 1" returned to Portsmouth that evening to pick up more men and material for Normandy, Captain Godfrey had a hard time finding an anchorage for his ships. The naval authorities had not expected the "J. 1" force to return intact by any means, and had not reserved sufficient anchorage for them.<sup>28</sup> Thus, if the Canadian Scottish, along with the other assault battalions, had good cause to mourn its losses on June 6, it had better cause to be thankful that its wounds were not deeper.

Early that evening the companies dug in. One man would dig a slit trench while his chum, who would share it with him, either kept guard, cooked for them both, or perhaps went on patrol. Everyone had a story to tell of his "near scrapes", and there were few who did not have some sort of souvenir—a German belt, revolver or other bit of equipment or insignia, Nazi badges, officer's dirk, German machine gun, and Heaven knows what else. Some of the men, digging out German snipers or stragglers in farm buildings, would go through the buildings and emerge triumphantly

<sup>27</sup> Schjelderup, *op. cit.* Lieut. V. R. Schjelderup was awarded the M.C. for his leadership and bravery on D Day. Captain W. H. V. Matthews was awarded the bar to his M.C. for his sterling work on both D day and June 8/9.

<sup>28</sup> Personal interview, Commodore V. S. Godfrey.

## READY FOR THE FRAY

with two live prisoners and three or four dead hens. Sometimes after the melee they would emerge with only the eggs.

It was getting dark and everyone was very much on the alert when the order came through to pull back. The battalion, although in an all-round defensive position, and with all its mortars and anti-tank guns with it, was exposed on either flank. Moreover the warning had come from Brigade Headquarters to "freeze"—that is, to be on guard against an enemy armoured counter-attack. The forward companies withdrew closer into the brigade "fortress" until the front paralleled the Pierrepont - Fontaine-Henry line. Once again they dug in, ready for whatever the enemy might choose to do. The activity behind both fronts was intense as each side rushed up men and material under the cover of darkness, but the front line itself was quiet with only intermittent artillery fire, the crack of a rifle or the ripping sound of a German machine gun breaking the silence.

Late that night Lt-Col. Cabeldu held an "O" Group at his headquarters in Pierrepont. As the company commanders, and the officers commanding the specialists platoons arrived, the C.O. greeted them warmly. All the company commanders were on hand—an almost unique situation for an assault battalion, and one neither the C.O. nor his field officers expected. It was a happy meeting. The orders were brief and to the point. Early on the next day the brigade was to go all out for its final D Day objective, the main road and railway line running between Caen and Bayeux.

Early on D plus 1 the 7th Brigade struck inland. During the night the brigade had been settled in a triangular fortress formation, with the Canadian Scottish in the Pierrepont - Cainet area, the Winnipegs slightly south of Creully, and the Reginas in the Fontaine-Henry area. For the second day's advance the brigade would go with the Winnipegs heading for Putot-en-Bessin, the Reginas for the Bretteville l'Orgueilleuse - Norrey-en-Bessin area, and the Scottish, now in reserve, for the area behind the two forward battalions in and around the Secqueville-en-Bessin - La Bergerie Farm area. The crust of the enemy's coastal defences had been breached. By early afternoon of June 7 the brigade was on its objective and digging in.

D plus 1 was a comparatively quiet day, but there was still plenty to do. Quite a few snipers were flushed out of their nests

## "D" DAY

and, once assured that they would not be shot, as many expected, they seemed happy to give themselves up. R.S.M. J. Stothard, who was with "D" Company during the day's advance, was one of the few at this time who made a quick trip to the beach and back. When he reported in to Battalion Headquarters at Secqueville, he relates:

The Bn. needed ammunition and I commandeered a 60-cwt. and went back to the beach. The driver (Jimmy Hassel) and I took as loaders Pte. "Bud" Tweedhope and Piper Alex Waterton. We also took two prisoners with us.

Snipers pestered us all the way back. The ammunition dumps were well established and all we had to do was drive around and pick up what we needed. The British troops in charge, with their usual efficiency, made us sign for it.

We were glad to leave the beach area as it was just on dark and "Jerry" was putting up what aircraft he had at night. A petrol dump went up as we were there so we lost no time in hitting the road.<sup>29</sup>

During that afternoon, as the Canadian Scottish were digging in their new positions, the enemy struck hard at the left flank of the Canadian division. This attack, borne by the 9th Brigade, was to involve the Canadian Scottish in a battle even tougher than that on D Day. To appreciate how critical this attack became, we must examine briefly the assault from the German point of view.

The German High Command had been caught completely off guard by the Allied landing in Normandy. For over two years the Germans had used millions of tons of steel and concrete in building the Atlantic Wall. The strongest sector of their coastal defences, however, was in the Pas de Calais area which was closest to England and which contained many of their V-1 rocket sites. It was in that area they had expected, and at this time continued to expect, the main Allied blow would fall.

The enemy knew that his best, and perhaps only, chance to defeat the Allied invaders was as soon as possible after the landing had taken place. For the first few days the Allies would be weak in infantry, armour, artillery—in fact in almost everything. Before the assaulting divisions could establish themselves firmly in the bridgehead, and before they could be reinforced by men and

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<sup>29</sup> Personal narrative, R.S.M. J. Stothard. Mr. Stothard was wounded on the following day during an infantry attack against a pocket of German infantry. Cpl. A. B. Mitchell won the Military Medal for his courageous leadership during this action.

## READY FOR THE FRAY

material with which to put muscle into their attack, the Allies must be pushed back into the sea. This was vital.

To achieve this there were in France nine panzer and one panzer grenadier divisions. Closest of these to Caen was the 21st Panzer Division, elements of which were committed on D Day. About 40 miles to the northeast was the 12th SS Panzer Division (Hitlerjugend)—a formation filled with young, tough SS fanatics, and looked upon as one of the best German armoured divisions in France. The 12th SS Panzer Division, however, was one of the German armoured divisions held in strategic reserve, and could not be committed to battle without the express orders of Hitler. These orders, “that the enemy in the bridgehead be annihilated by the evening of June 6th”<sup>30</sup> arrived too late on D Day for the division to be moved to the battlefield. Repeated Allied air attacks on enemy tank and vehicle movement further slowed the 12th SS Panzer Division, but on June 7 a battle group commanded by Standartenfuhrer (Colonel) Kurt Meyer, commander of the 25th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment, and consisting of his own regiment and the division’s battalion of Mark IV tanks, attacked the left flank of the Canadian 9th Brigade around midday. The brigade, even then moving up towards its final objective, was engaged in a fierce infantry and tank battle that afternoon around Buron and Authie. After heavy losses the brigade was prevented from reaching the Carpiquet area and retired to Les Buissons, thus leaving the entire flank of the 7th Brigade exposed from Cairon to La Villeneuve. The enemy had not got off lightly, but during that afternoon and evening the 26th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment was swinging into position farther to the west of Caen on the left of the 25th. Early on June 8 Field-Marshal Rommel ordered an attack between Caen and Bayeux. This attack was to be made with three armoured divisions, but with the 21st SS Panzer Division already engaged north of Caen, and Panzer Lehr Division still on the approach march, the only one capable of achieving the enemy’s aim was the “Hitler Youth” Division. The 26th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment, apparently, was to capture Norrey, Bretteville, Putot, and Bronay, with the seizure of Putot being the responsibility of the 2nd Battalion of the regiment. With the exception of Bronay, the main attack was to be launched against the 7th Brigade.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted from the German Seventh Army Telephone Log, June 6, in Chester Wilmot, *The Struggle for Europe*, (Collins, London) 1952, p. 287.



## "D" DAY

The news of the armoured attack against the 9th Brigade on the afternoon of June 7 had been flashed to the 7th Brigade, but as far as the Canadian Scottish was concerned its main effect, aside from a general strengthening of the battalion's field defences, was reflected at first only in the movement of "B" Company several hours after the German attack on the 9th Brigade. "B" Company had taken up a position at Bray, on the extreme left of the unit's line, in order to provide some protection for the artillery units setting up their guns behind the village. Of the rest of the battalion, headquarters was in Secqueville, with "A" Company on the right, "D" Company was about a mile in front, and "C" Company on the left of Secqueville.

"B" Company had dug in around Bray when Major R. M. Lendrum was ordered to take his company to Cairon as quickly as possible. A squadron of tanks from the 6th Canadian Armoured Regiment and a troop of M-10 self-propelled guns would go with the company. If the force was small, it had plenty of fire-power. It would need it too, for with Rots in the south held by the Reginas, there was a three-mile open front on the 7th Brigade's flank, and the small infantry and tank group was all that was immediately available to stop a German thrust along the main road from Caen to Creully. While Major Lendrum and the tank commander, Major D'Arcy Marks, raced northeastward to "recce" good defensive positions for their troops and platoons, Captain J. D. M. Gillan's carrier platoon rolled up to take on "B" Company's task in Bray. With their arrival, the infantry platoons scrambled onto the waiting tanks, and as dusk was falling the group went hell-for-leather towards Cairon.

"Shortly after last light," wrote the company commander,

. . . the three platoons of Baker Company were in position, one on the forward slope overlooking Cairon, two platoons on the reverse slope astride the Cairon - Pierrepont road, with the tank squadron arced on both sides of the road and the two troops of [M-10] anti-tank guns disposed to deny that approach to an enemy tank thrust. It was noticeable as the company came back through Camilly, that the area Camilly - Cairon was completely bare of any troops at all, ours or the enemy's, and in Cairon, as far as one could see or hear . . . , there were no troops of ours at all. We were aware that it was important that this plug in the general beachhead perimeter be a firm one.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Personal narrative, Lt-Col. R. M. Lendrum.

## READY FOR THE FRAY

That evening Lieut. I. P. MacDonald's platoon (No. 13, with Sgt. G. E. Burton) was ordered to send a patrol across the Mue River to Vieux Cairen, a village well outside the brigade boundary but as yet not entered by any Canadians. Meanwhile, Lieut. S. R. Ross' platoon (No. 11, with Sgt. R. S. Proverbs) was digging in on the forward slope overlooking Cairen and doing a professional job of camouflaging their slit trenches in anticipation of plenty of trouble on the following day. Trouble came in large doses, for before dawn on June 8, the 12th SS Panzer Division struck again.

The first intimation that the enemy had switched his attack to the 7th Brigade front came at quarter to three on the morning of June 8 when the signallers at Battalion Headquarters intercepted a wireless message "that the Regina Rif Regt had been overrun by a large number of tanks . . ." <sup>32</sup> Shortly afterward word arrived that the Winnipeggs were being heavily attacked. During the warm summer morning more and more reports came in telling of bitter fighting a mile or so ahead. The most forward Canadian Scottish troops, "D" Company, became slightly involved when some of the enemy's tanks began firing at the platoon situated in a wood about 500 yards across the road from La Bergerie Farm. There were no casualties to the Scottish although the platoon was somewhat shaken up. The medium machine gunners (Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa) in the area were harder hit, and some of the men from "D" Company who had had training on the Vickers machine guns when with the 2nd Battalion of the regiment helped out by manning a few of the Vickers when some of the Camerons were wounded. Throughout the day the men listened to the fire fight on the brigade front. Sometimes it would be the Reginas who were being pounded, then the Winnipeggs, and there was not a man there but wondered when it would be the turn of his platoon and company. <sup>33</sup>

Lt-Col. Cabeldu was warned during the day by Brigadier Foster that the position on the brigade front was getting worse and that the Canadian Scottish might be called upon to mount a counter-attack. Meanwhile all companies worked hard perfecting their own defences in case the enemy should break through. The situation deteriorated further, and it became apparent that the

<sup>32</sup> W.D., 1 C Scot R, June 8, 1944.

<sup>33</sup> Personal narrative, Major G. T. MacEwan.

## "D" DAY

Winnipegs would be unable to hold Putot. On the left the Reginas, although almost surrounded, were fighting gallantly and holding. Putot, however, was being overrun and the Winnipegs' casualties were such that that battalion was trying to withdraw. Lt-Col. Cabeldu describes the situation at this point:

At approximately 1830 hrs [Brigadier] Harry Foster came to my H.Q. and told me that it was imperative that I put in a counter-attack on Putot-en-Bessin within two hrs. time. Information as to the situation at Putot was scanty. While I was compiling my orders I received further information that all that remained in Putot, as far as we knew, was the Winnipegs' Bn. H.Q., and that Bde. H.Q. was still in communication with Lt-Col. Meldrum. I was given the resources of two Field Regiments of Artillery and what was left of the 6th Cdn Armd Regt as tank support. My problems were many as Baker Company was . . . well over to our left flank.

My plan was a simple one. We were in possession of the La Bergerie Farm woods. This was to be our start line. The road Secqueville-en-Bessin - Putot-en-Bessin was the centre line of attack, with "D" Coy right, "A" Coy left, "C" Coy reserve right. "B" Coy was to disengage from its action at Cairon, be at the start-line as soon as possible, and follow "A" Coy's axis. Tanks under Major Frank White were to give right flank protection, our own Carriers left flank protection, and our 3-inch mortars were to fire from just rear of the start-line. The Camerons were to lay a smoke screen for us with their 4.2 inch mortars. We were on the extreme right of the division, and British elements of the 50th (N) Div were supposed to be holding the woods north of Bronay in small numbers. The artillery fire plan was difficult in view of the fact that enemy positions were not known, and according to available information the Winnipegs' Bn. H.Q. was still in Putot. A creeping barrage commencing 300 yards in advance of the start-line was decided upon with a lift sufficient for a three-mile-an-hour advance, then lifting to concentrations south of the railway crossing and certain known enemy positions beyond. "D.F." (Defensive Fire) tasks were to be prepared in advance on all crossroads leading into Putot-en-Bessin anticipating a completely successful attack.<sup>34</sup>

Even while forming his plan of attack Lt-Col. Cabeldu sent word for his company commanders to come with all speed to headquarters to receive their orders. At the "O" Group the C.O. gave a quick outline of his plan and impressed on his officers the imperative need for success and haste. The Canadian Scottish *must* capture and hold Putot. There was no other infantry battalion between the enemy in Putot and the beaches.

<sup>34</sup> Personal narrative, Brigadier F. N. Cabeldu.

## READY FOR THE FRAY

Immediately after the "O" Group the company commanders returned quickly to their troops to give their platoon commanders their orders. Major Wightman, acting for the tank commander who was unable to be present at the "O" Group, raced back about two miles on his motorcycle to where the tank squadrons were refuelling and restocking their ammunition. Major Lendrum's company had farthest to go, and to make things more difficult "B" Company, just outside Cairon, was under fire from German tanks, mortars and machine guns and thus had to disengage from one battle and make a five-mile cross-country march to get into another. This company's platoon commanders were briefed by having the officers shuttled over to battalion headquarters and back on a motorcycle while the second-in-command led the men across country to Putot.

Most of the platoon commanders received their orders while moving up to the start-line. There just was not time to stop and give a detailed plan if the battalion was to benefit from the artillery barrage which would start on the dot at eight-thirty. It seemed almost a miracle that the leading platoons of "D" Company did cross the start-line within a few minutes of the planned H Hour.

The road from Secqueville past the outskirts of Putot-en-Bessin to the bridge over the Caen - Bayeux railway was straight, narrow and rather flat. On either side were orchards and open fields, the latter enclosed in hedgerows and covered with two- to three-foot high grain. Three days previously the area presented a quiet, pastoral scene in the Normandy countryside. On this evening it was to be turned into an arena where everything that went into the making of the Canadian Scottish would be tested by fire.

"D" Company went forward in extended line with Lieut. T. W. L. Butters' platoon (No. 17, with Sgt. S. Hill) on the right, Lieut. Peck's platoon on the left, and Lieut. Mollison's platoon with company headquarters slightly in the rear astride the road. About 400 yards beyond the start-line enemy mortar bombs began to fall close to the men. This was a favourite trick of the Germans—and they knew all the tricks—to shell and bomb the area behind our own creeping barrage to catch the troops following their own artillery fire. Not only would the men not expect it, especially with but two days' experience behind them, but it would also make them believe their own artillery was firing short. Yet the company went

## "D" DAY

forward steadily as if on an exercise, with Major MacEwan setting a splendid example by his coolness to those around him.

Farther behind came "A" Company, led by Major A. H. Plows. This company had had a bit farther to go to get to the start-line—in fact to get there on time the men had to march at the double for a good half-mile. The company commander describes the scene as follows:

The Company deployed at the double but did so perfectly. From my central position I could observe all nine sections advancing steadily through the mustard and grain fields. Shells were falling among the sections but no section leader deviated from the axis of advance. Any small arms fire at this point was over our heads, but as we topped a slight rise the company was subjected to intense fire of every conceivable kind.

Sporadic fire was also coming from the left flank and the orchards there seemed filled with snipers.<sup>35</sup>

As he topped the rise Major Plows could see "D" Company spread out ahead and noticed that one of its platoons was on the left of the road (cf. Cabeldu's orders). At about the same time a runner from battalion headquarters reached him with a map trace of his company's final objective, a position in the southern section of Putot close to the railway cutting. "D" Company's objective was about 700 yards to the right by the bridge. Rather than try to change his axis of advance at this stage of the game, Plows decided to carry on in echelon behind and in support of "D" Company as much as possible before swinging to the left. This decision was influenced not only by the casualties being suffered by his own company, but also by the greater losses he could see among the company ahead of him.

Behind and to the right of "A" Company came "C" Company under Major D. G. Crofton. His objective was the orchards in the right rear of the village. As Crofton crossed the start-line, the tanks, which had raced down the Pierrepont - Putot road, crossed with him, providing armoured protection for the right flank. Lt-Col. Cabeldu, himself at the start-line by this time, waved them on. Then seeing large numbers of men running in a northeast direction far across the fields towards La Bergerie Farm, and thinking they were enemy troops, the C.O. sent the carriers to stop them. Fortunately the troops turned out to be Winnipeggs.

<sup>35</sup> Personal narrative, "The Putot Counter-Attack", Major A. H. Plows.

## READY FOR THE FRAY

Several hundred yards to the front the enemy's fire was intensified, and as the sun sank below the horizon, the enemy's tracer rounds and shells showed up brighter and brighter. Beyond the main Caen - Bayeux road "D" Company came to close grips with the SS troops and casualties mounted as the enemy brought every weapon he had to try to stop the attack. Men were hit, staggered and fell, but the Canadian Scottish pushed forward. Their job was to retake the village and nothing would stop them. An enemy armoured car (a half-track) opened up with its machine gun on the forward left platoon. It got away temporarily, but was later destroyed. Major MacEwan, already slightly wounded, was wounded again and put out of action. He tried to attract the attention of Captain Bryden, his second in command, passing close by with the company carrier, but the smoke and flame and roar of exploding shells made this impossible. A hundred yards farther on a mortar bomb mortally wounded Captain Bryden, C.S.M. Kilner and the company signaller, Pte. Sinclair, thus leaving the senior subaltern (Lieut. A. C. Peck) in command. Up on the right all but one of No. 17 platoon's N.C.Os. were killed or wounded, and some of the men, pinned down in the open fields by machine gun fire, were unable to move for hours.<sup>36</sup> Pte. G. M. Powell, a former C.Q.M.S., took over Kilner's task and did an excellent job bringing up ammunition.

The company's carrier driver, Pte. R. H. Tutte, following close on the heels of the leading troops, recollects this scene.

One of our boys who was bringing up the rear on . . . [a motorcycle] caught up with me afoot and said [the motorcycle] had quit. He was carrying a Sten gun and had only one magazine, so he asked me for more. I gave him three extra magazines from a stock I had ready and he went merrily on his way. Three minutes later he came back and handed the three magazines back to me. Each of the mags. had been hit with enemy fire and was full of holes. The man himself didn't have a scratch. I gave him more mags. and he went on his way.<sup>37</sup>

By this time it was getting dark, a factor which helped the attacking troops more than the defenders. The enemy, by using plenty of tracer, made his positions easier to spot but no less difficult to wipe out. The fighting was savage and at close

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<sup>36</sup> W.D., I C Scot R, June, 1944, Appx. 12, "Counter-Attack on Putot-en-Bessin. Collective Report by No. 17 Platoon".

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, "The Advance, Occupation and Holding of the Bridge . . . at Putot".

## "D" DAY

quarters. Few prisoners were taken on either side. The SS troops were a far different crowd from those met on the coast. They would fight to the finish, and led as they were by veterans of Russia, Africa and elsewhere, they were hard, skillful opponents.

"D" Company's platoons, or what was left of them, fought their way against strong enemy opposition to a position on the banks across the railroad. Number 16 and 18 platoons got a few men across the bridge, while No. 17 platoon, with company headquarters, established itself on the near bank of the cutting. Ammunition was running low, but fortunately some captured German machine guns had a fair supply and they were used to good effect against the SS troops. There was always an added sweetness to "clobbering" the enemy with his own weapons, and this time the sweetness was tinged with necessity.

A short distance behind the forward companies "C" and "B" Companies were on the receiving end of the enemy's mortar and artillery fire but were managing to get on to their objectives without meeting heavy resistance on the ground. There were plenty of snipers—even battalion headquarters personnel had to fight their way through these pests to occupy the farm building picked out for their headquarters. But with the exception of some "C" Company men who had worked their way up close to the bridge, theirs was a "fire fight", with the enemy throwing over everything he had except the traditional kitchen sink. The 12th and 13th Canadian Field Regiments, RCA, No. 5 platoon of the Camerons and the tank squadrons on the right were striking back over the heads of the Scottish with their 105-mm., their Vickers machine guns and 4.2-inch mortars, and tank fire respectively. The SS troops were not having a picnic either.

By the time elements of "D" Company had crossed the bridge the company's casualties had been so heavy that there were only three officers and 26 men left. "A" Company, coming in behind and to the left, had given close support and strength to "D" Company's attack right up to the bridge. Leaving his right forward platoon close to "D" Company where it would temporarily both provide right flank protection for his own attack as well as assist "D" Company, Major Plows brought up his two remaining platoons and pushed on to his company's objective. Leaving Captain W. H. V. Matthews to consolidate "A" Company on its

## READY FOR THE FRAY

objective, he went to search for Major MacEwan. He found Lieut. Peck who told him MacEwan was wounded, that Captain Bryden was dead and that company headquarters was almost wiped out, as was most of the company itself.

With the position so thinly held, the battle still fluid, and the enemy's fire still heavy, Plows decided to take over "D" Company and amalgamate it with his own into a firm line of defence. Some of "C" Company's men, at this time close to the bridge, were ordered to reinforce "D" Company, thus making up in part for the gap left by the right platoon of "A" Company which had to be shifted to the left. Across the railway cutting, elements of "D" Company were putting up a splendid fight but were losing heavily, so Plows ordered them to withdraw to the near bank. The 20-foot railway cutting would provide an excellent, if dry, "moat" and was a first-class anti-tank ditch at the same time. To help matters, a section of the battalion's own mortars was operating in the field behind "D" Company and giving close support. An eye-witness wrote later of Major Plows during this hectic battle.

Plows should have been given a V.C. for his efforts. His coolness while organizing "D" and "A" Companies at the bridge was an inspiration to all. With "D" Company's headquarters knocked out Lieuts. Peck, Mollison and Butters worked strenuously and with complete disregard for their own safety. But it was Major Plows with his cool, calm direction who stabilized the situation.<sup>38</sup>

That night, as enemy harassing fire continued to fall on and around Putot, the Canadian Scottish was busy preparing its defences in readiness for further attacks. In a strange village, in utter darkness, and with enemy mortar and shell fire striking haphazardly in and among the buildings and orchards, this was a difficult task. As it turned out many of the positions taken up at night were found to be too exposed when daylight came. Contact had been made that night with the rifle company and battalion headquarters of the Winnipeggs. A sprinkling of Winnipeggs were at the bridge when Peck arrived, while more were in the village itself. It was learned later that the Winnipeggs had three of their rifle companies overrun, and had suffered twice the casualties of the Scottish. It was also learned that of the Winnipeggs captured, almost two dozen were murdered in

<sup>38</sup> Personal narrative, Lt-Col. W. H. V. Matthews, "The Putot Counter-Attack".



## "D" DAY

cold blood by the Nazi SS troops, an indication of the type of enemy around Putot at this time.

The last of the Winnipegs were preparing to leave Putot when the Canadian Scottish was subjected to the first dive bombing attack it had had. The bombs landed in a field close to Battalion Headquarters, doing little damage except to some livestock. Later the same company heard "Moaning Minnie"—a nickname given the enemy's six-barrel mortar projector. The weird grunts and groans given by this weapon were enough to raise the hair on the back of one's head whether its bombs landed in the immediate area or not. Fortunately, the bombs did land off to the left.

At first light, when Plows reconnoitered his forward defences, he decided his platoons were too exposed in their present positions, and later suggested to the C.O. that they be pulled back slightly where the men could have a better field of fire and at the same time obtain better cover from enemy observation. Captain L. S. Henderson, who came up to take over "D" Company, had arrived at the same conclusion. Lt-Col. Cabeldu agreed to the withdrawal—it was only a matter of 50 to 100 yards—but with the understanding that these positions would be held to the end. Meanwhile, although the forward companies were badly shot up, he kept "B" and "C" Companies in reserve, sent the Pioneer platoon to reinforce "D" Company, and placed his anti-tank, mortar and carrier platoons where they would give the rifle companies strong support against expected renewed enemy attacks.

That afternoon the 26th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment struck again with strong tank and infantry forces. Twice, under a covering barrage, the enemy moved up to be met by a hail of fire from the forward and supporting troops. During the first attack an enemy shell hit a half-track the SS troops had abandoned on the north side of the bridge. This vehicle, loaded with ammunition, was right in the middle of "D" Company's position, and as the vehicle began to burn exploding ammunition was hurled in all directions around the area. As some of the larger rounds inside the vehicle went off, the force of the explosion made the half-track lurch back a foot or so, until in a short time it had rolled over a slit-trench occupied by two of "D" Company's men. They managed to get out in time, and a carrier pulled the half-track away. Enemy tank fire also scored a direct hit on one

## READY FOR THE FRAY

of the two anti-tank guns of "D" Company's right flank. The entire crew was wounded, but those on the other gun split up and manned both, and when they were not doing that, they served as riflemen.<sup>39</sup> Any soldier who was in Putot at this time, whether he was a cook, a clerk or driver, pitched in to help the hard-pressed riflemen in the F.D.Ls. (Forward Defended Localities).

The second attack on the afternoon of June 9 also hit the troops along the railway line and on the right flank, and once more it met the same fate as the others. Cpl. E. Jobs did an especially fine job on this occasion and was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal. After he was beaten back, the enemy's fire subsided somewhat, although snipers and small groups of enemy infantry continued to try to infiltrate forward from Bronay and the orchards on the other side of the railway track. That evening the enemy continued to probe the battalion's defences, and on the left tanks came within a few hundred yards of "B" Company's positions. The company, having been warned not to fire indiscriminately and so give away their positions to the enemy, kept quiet. The tanks came up to the edge of a temporary mine field laid by the company and then clattered off in the direction of Bretteville. Under the cover of darkness the forward companies withdrew a few yards to consolidate in their new defences. They had recaptured Putot and had thrown back the enemy's attempts to take it. The village was theirs, and they intended to hold it.

The success of the Canadian Scottish at Putot-en-Bessin had been achieved at a heavy price. Forty-five officers and men were killed in this action, and another eighty were wounded. These casualties, taken with the 88 suffered on D Day and D plus one, represented almost one third of the total strength of the battalion before going into action.

The counter-attack at Putot will live long in the memories of those who were there. Some will remember looking around in the morning to see the area littered with the dead and wounded—Winnipegs, Canadian Scottish and German. The marvellous work of the stretcher bearers throughout the day and night will never be forgotten. Others will remember the individual acts of heroism and coolness under fire which are too numerous to record here,

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<sup>39</sup> Personal narrative, "The Counter-Attack on Putot", Sgt. R. Pedersen.

## "D" DAY

but which exemplify the spirit of the battalion as a fighting unit. Two men were decorated for outstanding performance on this occasion. Lt-Col. Cabeldu received a well deserved D.S.O. for his leadership and calm handling of every emergency, and Lieut. A. C. Peck, wounded on June 9, received the M.C. for his command and control of the remnants of "D" Company after it had reached its objective.

Every soldier in the battalion fought his own individual war that night. On his shoulder badge he carried a distinctive battle honour—the oak leaf and acorn—handed down by the parent regiment for a famous counter-attack in 1915. It was an honour handed down in trust, and that trust was not broken.

By the evening of June 9 the brigade front was stabilized even if its left flank was still thinly held. In Norrey and Bretteville the Regina Rifles had hurled back the "Hitlerjugend" attacks on their positions even as the Canadian Scottish was fighting its way into Putot. With these villages secure, the Queen's Own Rifles, placed temporarily under 7th Brigade's command, was shifted to Bray, and plans were made to clear out the Mue Valley from Vieux Cairon to La Villeneuve by the 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade. On the right British troops were about to launch an attack which would bring them to the outskirts of Tilly-sur-Seulles. The attempt by the 12th SS Panzer Division to cut through to the beaches had failed, and it was now forced onto the defensive.

One of the strongest patrols sent out by the Canadian Scottish at Putot was on the night of June 10-11. Lieuts. I. P. MacDonald and S. R. Ross were ordered to take two platoons of "B" Company to ascertain the strength of, and if possible wipe out, an enemy position in a wood midway between Bronay and Le Hamel. The enemy position was known to contain several machine guns and was thought to contain heavier weapons as well. The patrol was to be aided by the fire of 4.2- and 3-inch mortar fire, as well as by the artillery. At least two troops of tanks from the 27th Canadian Armoured Regiment were to give additional protection.<sup>40</sup>

The patrol ran into trouble even before crossing the railway embankment. As the war diary account states:

<sup>40</sup> W.D., 1 C Scot R, June 10, 1944.

## READY FOR THE FRAY

No. 12 platoon [commanded by Lieut. MacDonald with Cpl. A. L. Frost as A/Sgt.] gained the bridge over the rwy. and came under heavy mortar fire and M.G. fire from down the track on either side. No. 11 platoon, less two sections, which were held up, made their way across the track, taking out at least one M.G. on the track and one beyond it. From then on the situation was one of very close and confused fighting, our troops in the open taking on enemy machine guns in fortified positions and deep slit trenches, and trying to avoid mortar fire and fire from our tanks. Two M.Gs. were taken out for certain and losses, at least as heavy as our own, inflicted on the enemy. Our losses were fairly heavy—Lieut. MacDonald was killed at the bridge and 17 O.Rs. [were] killed or missing.

Noteworthy during the raid was the aggressiveness of our troops in the face of terrific fire; the skill of the enemy in the handling of his fixed lines of fire and in his fire counter-attack, and finally the devotion to duty of the stretcher bearers and patrols sent to look after the wounded.<sup>41</sup>

Noteworthy too was the performance of Acting Sergeant Frost who, when his platoon commander was killed, "showed outstanding leadership under heavy fire". When returning from the patrol this N.C.O. came across a severely wounded comrade, Pte. D. W. M. Ives, and carried him back to safety. For his conduct and bravery, Frost was awarded the Military Medal.

Numerous other patrols were sent out each night, some to get prisoners, some to clear suspected enemy positions, and some to gather information. Within the battalion's perimeter, meanwhile, men dug deep, bringing this comment from the war diarist:

It has been observed that the troops are now constructing more superior types of slit trenches, some taking the form of dugouts with thick straw on the floor to make sleeping more comfortable. These have reinforced roofing to guard against airburst, ack-ack shrapnel and inclement weather conditions.<sup>42</sup>

Yet one cannot stay forever in a slit trench, and officers and men were struck down both below and above ground. Snipers were extremely active, and on June 11, for example, a very well known and well liked officer, Lieut. G. I. Hope of "A" Company, was killed instantly by one of them. Sgt. R. Dickson carried on until a new officer arrived to replace him, but officers like Hope were missed keenly by their men and their brother officers.

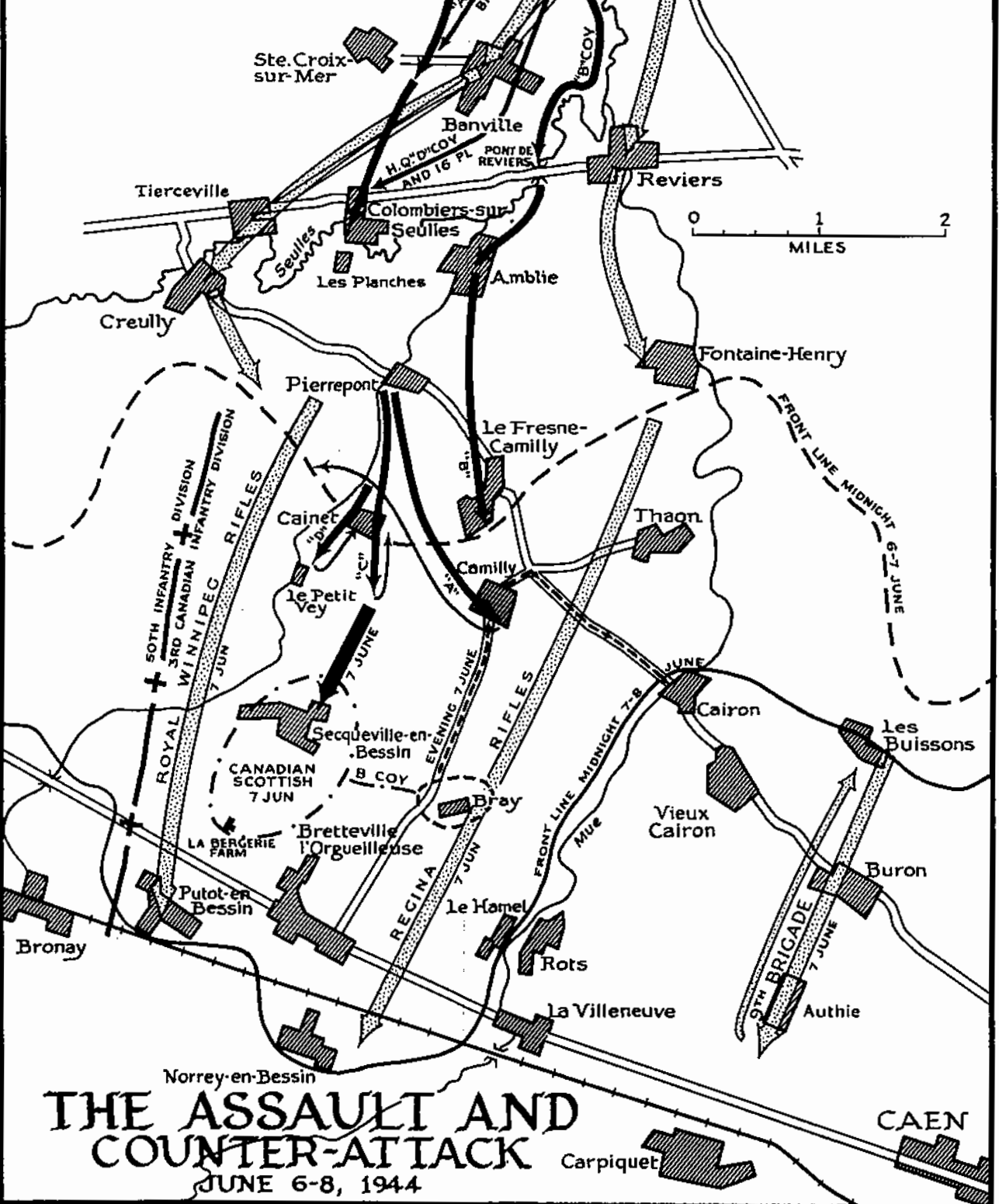
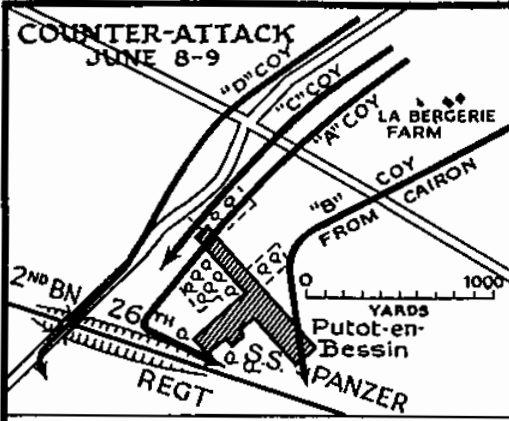
The men of the Canadian Scottish were learning new lessons

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, Appx. 13.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, June 15, 1944.

## “D” DAY

in a hard school. Their training had been good and their spirit and morale had been proved. They had yet to learn to be as hard and ruthless and cunning as the enemy, but these attitudes were being formed with each day's experiences. There was still plenty to absorb, but there was one thing that could not be taught—something the battalion had proved it possessed—and that was valour.



**THE ASSAULT AND COUNTER-ATTACK**  
JUNE 6-8, 1944

*Ready For The Fray* was the first of a dozen books written by the author on Canadian military and defence matters. Dr. R.H. Roy, CD, Ph.D., FRHS, served as an Infantry Lieutenant in the Italian and North-West European theatres during the Second World War, after which, having completed university studies, he worked in the Army Historical Section in Ottawa for two years. Thereafter, he taught History at the University of Victoria, and was the first to be appointed to its Chair of Military and Strategic Studies which he held for many years prior to his retirement as *Professor Emeritus*.

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