

# READY FOR THE FRAY



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



**The Battle of Falaise**

**By the Canadian Scottish Regiment**

**From Ready for the Fray**

**By R.H. Roy**

## CHAPTER IX

### *The Breakout—From Hill 168 to Calais*

On Tuesday, August 8, everything was ready. The cooks, as usual, had been up at the crack of dawn preparing an especially good breakfast for the men, and shortly afterwards the carriers, Jeeps and other vehicles were marshalled into blocks preparatory to moving. Petrol tanks and extra jerricans had been topped, the wireless sets had fresh batteries, Bren and Sten gun magazines were loaded, grenades were primed, 2- and 3-inch mortar and Piat bomb cases were filled, maps had been issued, and a thousand other items had been checked and taken care of. It had been a good rest, and the news of the advances made along the American and British fronts had given an extra fillip to morale. There was an air of confidence and expectancy among the men—confidence in themselves and expectancy about the outcome of the attack then under way by the First Canadian Army.

The 3rd Division's immediate task was to take over the positions of the attacking force to enable the reserve brigades to be used. The division's future role would depend on the outcome of Operation "Totalize". If the operation made the progress it was hoped, the 3rd Division would be employed to follow up the 1st Polish Armoured Division, one of the two armoured divisions which were to crack and pierce the enemy's last belt of defences south-east of Caen.

The roads were packed with vehicles of every conceivable type. Not only was there the constant movement of trucks carrying men, equipment and supplies to the front, but the entire division was



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on the move. The Canadian Scottish was to travel behind the Reginas, and it was not until mid-afternoon that word came to move. At three o'clock the despatch riders waved the head of the long convoy forward, and within a few minutes the battalion was on its way, slowly at first, but gathering speed as it gained priority over other convoys. The warm dry weather during the past weeks, together with the constant driving of thousands of wheeled and tracked vehicles over the dirt roads, resulted in each vehicle throwing a cloud of fine white dust behind it. The "point men" from the Provost Corps at each cross-road who waved on the convoy were caked with dust, as were the despatch riders and those in the open carriers.

The convoy sped on through familiar territory towards Caen, slowing down as it wound its way through that ancient, rubble-packed city which even then was showing signs of returning to civil life after a month's siege. Near the river the men could hear the rumble of the guns, a sound which grew louder and more distinct as the convoy struck down the Caen-Falaise road to the battalion's concentration area near Ifs. The war diarist describes the scene near this spot as follows:

Here was a most dramatic sight as we came over the hill and looked across the rolling fields to the distant hills. It was a sea of grain freckled with vehs [vehicles] and troops of all types and sizes. This city of vehs and troops included as a part the 3 Cdn Inf Div. On our right were long lines of heavy Cromwell tanks squatting snout to rear. Over all the pall of dust hung heavily. Adequate camouflage of such a powerful array was impossible. One soldier was heard to remark: "If a Heiney flew over here now, he'd land just over there and surrender".<sup>1</sup>

The enemy, however, was not in a surrendering mood yet even though he had been badly shaken by the strikes of the air force, infantry and armour. The first 24 hours of the Canadian attack had sent him reeling back over five miles closer to Falaise so that by the evening of August 8 the Canadian front lay roughly along what had been the enemy's second line of defence. On the following day a further advance of about three miles was made against strong opposition, an opposition strengthened by the arrival of the enemy's 85th Infantry Division from north of the Seine. In the hills and valleys north of Falaise the Germans now had

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



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two infantry divisions and what remained of the 12th SS Panzer Division, a force made much more formidable by the numerous anti-tank and artillery guns cleverly concealed in well-prepared positions along the Canadian front.

On August 9 the Canadian Scottish moved closer to the battle front to be ready when called for. On that day it took up a position about 500 yards north-east of Cintheaux and on the following day it was warned to be ready to support an attack on Quesnay Wood which was being launched by the 8th Brigade. As events developed, the Canadian Scottish was not required and remained where it was, suffering only a few casualties from enemy shells which fell sporadically throughout the battalion area. Several men in the battalion, however, had to be taken to the rear with severe cases of stomach flu and enteritis. Lt-Col. Cabeldu was among them. Major R. M. Lendrum took over as acting Commanding Officer, while his place as second in command was filled by Major D. G. Crofton.

The bitter opposition along the front had brought the two armoured divisions—both newly committed to action—to a standstill. The attack had carried the corps half-way to Falaise, but another major assault was needed to get over the final hurdle to bring our strength crashing down on Falaise and the escape corridor. Coming up from the south the American forces were closing in on Argentan. Time was precious if the German divisions in the pocket were to be trapped. This sense of urgency and activity on the Canadian front was matched by a feeling of desperation on the part of the enemy. He was determined to keep the escape route between Falaise and Argentan open. Any ground gained from him would be seized only by bitter and savage fighting. On August 11 General Montgomery gave orders for the Canadian Army to renew its attack against Falaise as soon as possible. As a preliminary, Lieutenant-General Simonds ordered the 3rd Division to relieve the two armoured divisions while on the right the 2nd Division kept up a steady pressure on the enemy. For the 7th Brigade, as for almost every other brigade in the corps, there followed a period of movement and reshuffling of areas as the various units were jockeyed into position for the attack. For the Canadian Scottish in particular the orders were to move some four miles to the south-east and relieve a Polish battalion at Soignolles.



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On the afternoon of August 11 Major D. G. Crofton went to Soignolles to make a reconnaissance of the area the battalion was to take over. When he arrived he was amazed to see that the Polish soldiers had not bothered to dig in. After noting the number of dead scattered about, and after a few enquiries through an interpreter, Crofton found that the Poles "felt it was undignified to get below ground for the Germans",<sup>2</sup> and consequently had not bothered with slit trenches. The area, however, was under enemy observation and well within range of his artillery and mortars; as a result the Poles had suffered over 100 casualties from enemy artillery fire the previous day. The attitude of the Poles rather shook the second in command since experience in Normandy had emphasized the "dig deeper, live longer" motto among the Canadians. However, he finished his "recce", plotted the company positions, and returned to the unit. Late that evening the battalion left for Soignolles, arriving there in the early hours of August 12.

Accurate shelling, and plenty of it, marked the short stay of the Canadian Scottish at Soignolles. It was not intense, but constant, and periodically the battalion area would be laced with machine gun fire which kept everyone in or very close to his slit trench. The enemy evidently had plenty of ammunition stocked in his positions, and if he lacked numbers and tanks, he made up for it with plenty of fire power.

Late in the evening of August 13 Major Lendrum was called to attend an "O" Group at Brigade Headquarters. Operation "Tractable" was to go in at noon on the 14th. The plan was similar to the first push towards Falaise. After a heavy air bombardment the Canadian Corps would launch its main attack with two divisions, the 4th Armoured Division on the left and the 3rd Infantry Division on the right. Attacking on a narrow front each division would make the initial assault with an armoured brigade, each closely followed by an infantry brigade in "Kangaroos" (armoured personnel carriers), and other armoured vehicles. Behind the "armoured infantry" would be another brigade of infantry. The 3rd Division, led by the 2nd Armoured Brigade, was to strike almost due south and overcome the enemy's positions on the high ground north of the Laison River at Montboint. The 9th Brigade, carried in armoured vehicles close on the armoured brigade's

<sup>2</sup> Personal interview, Lt-Col. D. G. Crofton.



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heels, would seize the river crossings and establish itself south of the river. Once that was accomplished, the 7th Brigade, supported by armour from the 2nd Armoured Brigade, was to push forward quickly to the hills east of Soulangy.

August 14 was hot, with the sun beating down on the fields already baked hard after weeks of good weather. Canadian troops, tanks and vehicles packed in the area waited for the artillery and bomber aircraft to trigger the action. In the midst of this warlike scene there was a man in the uniform of the American Air Force, trudging wearily but doggedly towards Soignolles. Sgt. J. M. Paterson, returning in a Jeep to his signal platoon with a fresh supply of telephone wire, came upon the American, stopped the Jeep, and found it was Pte. "Georgia" Rudisil, a member of his platoon from 1940 to 1942 when he had transferred to the American forces. Asked where he was going, "Georgia" told Paterson he had hitchhiked his way through Normandy to get into action with his old outfit. He was welcomed by his old buddies, outfitted, and stayed with the battalion for about two weeks doing a good job as linesman and telephone operator with the signals. When he finally left, he was provided with a couple of letters of recommendation to his own unit which may have softened the reception he received when he reported back.

The sun was high overhead when the artillery opened up with its massed field and medium guns, some pounding known enemy positions, some laying down smoke on the southern slope of the Laison Valley and others firing coloured smoke shells to indicate targets for the aircraft already approaching the battlefield. The enemy was quick to reply, and while the leading waves of the attack were going in, the Canadian Scottish positions were subjected to intense artillery, mortar and machine gun fire. While raking over the area enemy guns began to register on the battalion's "F" (Fighting) Echelon vehicles situated in the orchard immediately behind Soignolles. Within a matter of minutes six trucks were hit and burning, with ammunition, petrol, flares and other explosive matter going up in a blazing display of fireworks resembling the May 24 celebrations in Victoria. The water truck was hit by shrapnel and damaged and shortly afterwards another shell hit close to the signal exchange, wounding two signallers and putting the Commanding Officer's half track with its No. 19 wireless set



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out of action. A lot of personal property which was carried in these vehicles went up in flames too. With the battalion on half-hour's notice to move, the situation was not a particularly happy one. However, there were few casualties as R.S.M. Fisher had had the drivers dig in before the shelling.

Early that afternoon the second wave of bombers came over and, unable to distinguish their correct targets in the smoke- and dust-filled area beneath them, dropped many of their bombs on the brigade area and elsewhere on friendly ground. Fortunately the Canadian Scottish positions were missed, but Brigade Headquarters and the two rifle battalions were hit and shaken up. The two forward brigades, however, were not affected and were making good progress so that by six o'clock the battalion was ordered forward to its objective, Hill 175, five and one-half miles due south of Soignolles. Within half-an-hour the battalion was on the move, crossing the Laison between Montboint and Rouvres, and winding its way up the open fields past Hill 188 to "marry up" with the tanks of the 2nd Armoured Brigade west of Olendon. Shortly after ten o'clock the bulk of the battalion stopped for a breather which gave some of the sub-units of the battalion a chance to catch up. Resistance to the Canadian Scottish, and to the Winnipegs coming up on the left, had been slight, but on their march during the late afternoon and evening they had passed burning tanks—both "ours and theirs"—wrecked vehicles and demolished gun sites which spoke of the fighting which had preceded them.

While the Winnipegs took over the woods between Olendon and Tassily, the Canadian Scottish again pressed forward to their objective at Hill 175, a position which would place them at the very apex of the division's advance. Over a mile to the left, close to Epancy, there were some troops from the 4th Armoured Division. About the same distance behind were the Winnipegs. There were no friends on the right, and the enemy was somewhere in front. The battalion would be out on a limb well and truly, but tactical soundness had to give way to strategic opportunity if the race to cut off the Falaise pocket was to be won.

The move from the area east of Olendon to Hill 175 was one few will forget. The night was pitch black, the territory strange, the whereabouts of the enemy unknown, and various sub-units of the battalion still a bit scattered after the five mile cross-country



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march through the battlefield. Dotted here and there en route were burning haystacks and the smouldering remains of enemy tanks and vehicles. At first "A" Company led, moving in an "advance to contact" formation. Map reading under these conditions was difficult, to say the least, and the company commander related later that "Lieut. Stu Chambers and myself did most of it by guess and by God".<sup>3</sup> Later "C" Company, now commanded by Captain V. R. Schjelderup, took the lead with Major Lendrum moving very closely behind with his carrier. The Intelligence Officer, taking quick glances at the compass with a shaded light, acted as navigator while Schjelderup "moved with his leading section where conditions were similar to those on a night patrol action, the main difference being that the main responsibility for guiding the battalion following behind rested with that small element".<sup>4</sup> The column, with its supporting tracked vehicles making a horribly loud clanking noise in an otherwise quiet night, moved on through the countryside in fits and starts. The men muttered to themselves that nobody knew where the hell they were going, and someone said the dark figures moving between and around the burning haystacks resembled a bunch of Indians at a potlatch. The head of the column pushed on, snaking its way over the fields, through orchards, and then finally up the gradual slope towards Hill 175, capturing en route three or four Germans who had blundered straight into the battalion area. By one o'clock on the morning of August 15 the battalion was on its objective.

During the night the men dug in close to Hill 175, using what cover they could by siting the slit trenches so as to make use of the hedges surrounding the fields in the area. It was well they did, for early in the morning the enemy began to make himself known. Two men had been sent out from "D" Company to a farmhouse a short distance ahead to look for some water for a brew of tea. A short time later Captain H. F. Bailey, the company's second in command,

. . . saw the corporal and the private come running out of the house full pelt. They reported that while upstairs in the house presumably looking for water (a most improbable place to find a well) they looked out of the window into the mouth of the biggest gun they had ever seen.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Personal narrative, Lt-Col. W. H. V. Matthews.

<sup>4</sup> Personal narrative, Lt-Col. V. R. Schjelderup.

<sup>5</sup> Personal narrative, Captain H. F. Bailey.



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This started a spattering of enemy fire, a morning greeting which was returned by fire from the battalion's infantry weapons, as well as by the supporting M-10's (self-propelled anti-tank guns). The anti-tank platoon got in some good shots also on the buildings, eventually setting them on fire. In general, however, the enemy's fire was light as it appeared he was more concerned with regrouping his forces after his setback the previous day than with trying to make a counter-attack. He was still off balance, but he knew where the Canadians were and was making his own preparations.

During the morning the decision was made to push the Canadian Scottish on farther south to Hill 168. This would bring the battalion within two miles of Falaise, and bring the division's front in line with the 4th Canadian Armoured Division whose troops were battling around Epancy. The first intimation that there would be an advance came late in the morning, when Major Lendrum was called on the wireless to report for an "O" Group at an unknown headquarters. The name of the latter had been given in code, but the code name was completely unknown to the acting C.O. He found out who it was by asking that the message be sent in clear. It was then he found out the battalion had been placed temporarily under the command of the 2nd Armoured Brigade, and that the "O" Group was at that headquarters, about 1,000 yards south-west of Montboint.

Lendrum and the Intelligence Officer, Lieut. Burge, went back in a carrier and were informed by Lt-Col. R. J. Colwell, DSO, the acting Brigadier, that the Canadian Scottish was to exploit success by attacking Hill 168, crossing the start-line at eleven-thirty that morning.<sup>6</sup> It was already close to the proposed H Hour and this meant the battalion would have to move very quickly. There was no time to make a reconnaissance of the area, there was extremely little information as to the enemy's strength and disposition, and there was little time to work out some sort of infantry-cum-tank plan before H Hour, even though the latter was put back about an hour. It would seem that the planners felt there would not be much opposition to such an advance, an assumption which had

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<sup>6</sup> W.D., 2 Cdn. Armd. Bde., August, 1944, Appx. 7, "An account of Ops. by 2 Cdn. Armd. Bde. in France, 14 to 16 Aug. 1944". Extracts from this source and from the war diaries of the supporting armoured and anti-tank units supplied by the Historical Section, Army Headquarters. See also Lieut. Foster Stark, *A History of The First Hussars Regiment*, (London, Canada, 1951) pp. 104-105.



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little to support it, considering the hard resistance met in this area all along by British and Canadians alike.

To save time, as the Intelligence Officer related later:

... [Major] Lendrum sent me back in the carrier "post haste" to call the Bn. "O" Group together and to tell them as much of the attack plan as I had heard during the few minutes I was at Bde. H.Q., and that he would follow behind me as quickly as possible in one of the armoured cars from the Armoured Brigade. I arrived back at the Bn. and told them of the coming attack and about two minutes to H Hour Major Lendrum arrived back and by the time he had finished the briefing H Hour had passed and the artillery barrage had already fallen.<sup>7</sup>

The start-line was the east-west road running across Hill 175. The objective lay across a succession of sloping grain fields, with numerous thick hedgerows running both at right angles to and parallel with the unit's axis of advance. Geographically, the companies were to find themselves somewhat separated from each other, with each fighting its own battle in each field. The battalion was to advance in a box formation with "D" Company on the left and "B" Company on the right followed respectively by "A" and "C" Companies. At the "O" Group, Lendrum had been given a squadron of tanks from the 6th Canadian Armoured Regiment and the self-propelled guns of "B" Troop, 33rd Battery, of the 6th Canadian Anti-Tank Regiment. However, the supporting tanks were the same ones which had taken part in the day-long attack on August 14. They were low on ammunition and petrol, and later, during the attack, "even under great prodding they said they were unable to move beyond the first hedgerow to our front".<sup>8</sup> This lack of armoured support was all the more keenly felt owing to the position of the battalion so far to the division's front. It was beyond the range of field artillery. As it turned out the gunners, firing with their strongest charge at extreme range, could hurl their shells only a few hundred yards beyond the start-line. This, however, was not known at the time.

The instructions given at an "O" Group became progressively briefer as they filtered down from the Brigadier to the C.O., then to the commanders of the companies and support platoons, and finally

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<sup>7</sup> Personal narrative, Lieut. T. A. Burge.

<sup>8</sup> Personal narrative, Lt-Col. R. M. Lendrum. This hedgerow was about one-third of the way to Hill 168. The tanks supporting the battalion were those from "A" (seven) and "C" (four) Squadrons, both of which had been hard hit the previous day.



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to the rifle platoon commanders. By the time the latter received their orders for the attack on Hill 168 there were only a few minutes to throw on one's equipment, get the platoons in tactical formation and crack off for the start-line.

The two leading companies crossed the start-line a few minutes after one. Several hundred yards beyond the road, after passing through the first hedge, the men were subjected to intense light and heavy machine gun fire as well as to enemy fire from positions hidden in the hedges ahead. "I never saw before or after such intense M.G. fire and certainly never had I watched tracer bullets go between my legs", wrote one officer later.<sup>9</sup> To push on through open fields towards a hedge which enemy snipers and machine gunners were using as cover was bad enough, but beyond the first hedge the companies came up against enemy tanks. On the left "D" Company went to ground and Major Henderson put in a call for assistance from the tanks or M-10's which were supporting the battalion. Meanwhile two men came forward with a Piat and took a shot at the tank. The Piat bomb struck the hedge in front of it and exploded without hurting the tank. It then opened up with its machine guns and 88-mm. gun, killing the Piat group and wounding others before it retired out of the range of possible further Piat attacks. Meanwhile further groups of enemy infantry were coming to life as the men advanced, and enemy mortar fire was thickening that of enemy tanks. The latter, it was noticed, had their hulls covered with a concrete-like substance designed to take the sting out of the Piat bombs. Many, too, had sections of track welded on their hulls as additional protection.

The increased amount of directed enemy fire caused a number of new men in "D" Company to go to ground, and it was at this point that the example set by Major Henderson, C.S.M. Nimmo and the "old timers"—N.C.Os. and privates alike—got the company going steadily forward. In the next field the going was tougher, and casualties mounted as the company, now a little more than halfway to its objective, broke through to still another field which sloped off to the left. About 400 yards away, farther off to the left near an orchard, were two tanks whose fire commanded the open slope, and as soon as "D" Company appeared through the hedge they opened up with their weapons, killing and

<sup>9</sup> Bailey, *op. cit.*



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wounding many. Glancing behind him, Captain Bailey could see a tank behind his company but in front of "A" Company coming up in support. He told one of his men to go to the tank commander and get him to fire on the enemy tanks. The man went back and had an experience shared by many that afternoon. As the war diarist describes it:

More than once a Cdn. Scottish would see a tank moving through a hedgerow and conclude it was one of ours come to assist. He would dash through the intertwined brambles and thorns [of the hedges] to pound on the side of the tank, thus attracting the attention of the occupants. Too late realizing that he was pounding on a large black swastika! But for the amount of dead ground close to these tanks many more of our men would now be casualties. Pte. Good, who was thirsty and tired, climbed a tree to avoid an enemy tank. Then, while it lumbered by beneath him, he calmly quenched his thirst with apples plucked from the tree. Another private in this Coy. called to a tankman standing up in a turret position. He waved the tank to help them. But the tank navigator laughed and retired "downstairs" [into the tank]. As the awkward vehicle moved off this D Coy. private was chagrined to realize he had been fooled into thinking an enemy tank was one of ours.<sup>10</sup>

There was little help forthcoming from our armour or from the self-propelled guns. In this action the former felt their position as mobile forts more keenly than their history as a cavalry regiment. The Canadian Scottish were on their own more than they had ever been before.

"A" Company coming up close on the heels of "D" Company ran into the middle of this infantry versus tank battle also. It, too, had suffered casualties from enemy machine gun and tank fire, and it suffered more when it flushed out other tanks while going forward to help the hard-hit leading troops, now close to their objective but so depleted in strength that their situation was serious.

Behind the forward troops Major Lendrum was having his own difficulties. The supporting tanks and M-10's, despite the pleas of the acting C.O., for one reason or another found themselves unable to get up to the forward troops where their help was so desperately needed, thus leaving the infantrymen to fight it out as best they could. The unit's anti-tank and mortar platoons were doing all they could. The latter found it necessary several times to dismount from their carriers and fight their way forward with

<sup>10</sup> W.D., 1 C Scot R, August 15, 1944.



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Bren guns and rifles. "As with the rest of the battalion", the mortar platoon report states, "these mortar sections experienced the utterly unpleasant feeling of being sniped at by 88-mm. guns, M.Gs. dismounted and M.Gs. in tanks".<sup>11</sup>

The anti-tank platoon also found it difficult to get forward, but hearing of "D" Company's situation Captain Compton-Lundie decided to make a dash for it. One section managed to take up a position covering a gully between "D" and "C" Companies, while the two guns of the other section, after being pinned down and having to dismount several times, finally reached the forward platoons then almost on their objective. While siting their weapons the anti-tank gunners were subjected to a severe artillery pounding. This shellfire killed Cpl. F. Barton and Pte. F. Blair and wounded two others. The carrier driver, Pte. G. A. Schumann, although badly wounded himself, loaded the carrier with the wounded and took them back. As a result the two guns had to be served by only four men, so some of the men from "A" Company were given some rapid, on-the-spot instruction and became *pro tem* anti-tank gunners.<sup>12</sup> The anti-tank platoon found the battle for Hill 168 was to cost it more in dead and wounded than any other.

The "severe artillery pounding" mentioned above came from our own guns. When the reports came to Major Lendrum of tanks on the front and of enemy mortars shelling the advancing troops, he asked his artillery representative for defensive fire to be brought down on suspected enemy positions well to the front. The medium artillery opened up and their first "stonks" fell between the front and rear companies. The "arty. Rep.", Major Fleury, called back and told the batteries their fire was falling short and ordered them to increase their range. He was operating under considerable difficulties, however, since his wireless set was functioning very poorly. In fact, the only way he could get a message through was for the signaller to hold certain parts of it together by hand to get good connections. Before he had the guns cease firing altogether they had fired again, with their fire again falling among the Canadian Scottish companies. At this point a mortar bomb struck the Command Officer's carrier, killing the signaller in it and demolishing the wireless set. Lendrum, fortunately, was a short

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, Appx. 11.

<sup>12</sup> Personal narrative, Sgt. R. Pedersen.



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distance away. With his set knocked out, his only link with Brigade was by sending the Intelligence Officer back about half-a-mile to Major Crofton, who had a wireless set in the half-track. This slow and awkward method of communication was the only one possible until the wireless set belonging to the mortar platoon was brought up and placed at Lendrum's disposal.

On the right, meanwhile, "B" and "C" Companies had encountered the same sort of enemy resistance on their front and flanks as had the left half of the battalion. Well camouflaged and dug in, enemy snipers and machine gunners took their toll of the advancing troops, and several hundred yards beyond the start-line enemy tanks brought their fire on the attacking platoons. First one tank and then another made life hell for the men who already had their hands full with the task of rooting out the enemy concealed in the hedges. At one stage of this swirling battle the acting commander of "B" Company, Captain D. V. Pugh, was crouched in a ditch with his C.S.M. and signaller, yelling over the wireless set for tank support. The only reply, through some atmospheric fluke, was a B.B.C. announcer introducing the musical programme "Music While You Work".<sup>13</sup>

Another incident took place several hundred yards behind "B" Company which will be remembered by some. Lieut. W. K. Wardroper had just been wounded, the bullet passing through his water-bottle into his thigh. Pte. Wing Hay immediately went to his aid and saw the water gurgling out of the bottle over the wound. He looked up, saw Lieut. Gallagher passing and, pointing to the well-watered blood, with a big grin on his face yelled: "Look, sir! He's anaemic!" Humour on the battlefield, frequently grim, is rarely forgotten.

Every platoon in "B" and "C" Companies had similar experiences to relate as they battled forward to their objectives, taking their losses, but driving forward regardless. Few prisoners were captured, and several cases of enemy soldiers taking their own lives rather than surrender were reported, an indication of the enemy's determination to fight to the finish. Without armour and artillery support and subjected to our own artillery firing in their midst, the men pushed steadily towards the road running between Epancy and St. Pierre Canivet. Bren guns, Sten guns, rifles, grenades,

<sup>13</sup> W.D., 1 C Scot R, August 15, 1944.



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bayonets, mortars, Piats—every weapon was brought to bear to cut a path through the enemy's stubborn opposition to the companies' objectives.

On the left "D" Company, its strength almost halved by casualties, was going down the gentle slope immediately beyond Hill 168 when

. . . the left flank of the company caught up with and battled against several "Tiger" tanks. These tanks had been using their crews on the ground with M.Gs. and retiring from hedge to hedge. Here again the splendid example of the older men came to the fore. The enemy fought bitterly in this attack and many died at their posts. One young machine gunner was found with his pistol in his mouth and the back of his head blown out. There were no prisoners.<sup>14</sup>

The orchard on the left flank continued to be a hornet's nest after both companies had crossed the road. It was about this time that C.S.M. J. S. Grimmond was ordered by Major Matthews to go back to the orchard and set up company headquarters. There he had to obtain cover for the signallers who were now acting as control for the battalion. "D" Company's set had been smashed and the company's second-in-command wounded when he was putting in a call for help from the armour. The wireless set at battalion headquarters had gone to pot, "B" Company's set was bringing in the B.B.C., so "A" Company's wireless set was precious. Communications through this set to the other companies was kept going by a signaller who was a newcomer to the battalion. Grimmond, meanwhile, with a few men armed with Brens, rifles and Piats took on two enemy tanks and a number of German infantrymen in the orchard and managed to chase away the former and killed or wounded the latter. For his gallantry and leadership in this action Grimmond was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal.<sup>15</sup>

Two other Warrant Officers were to be decorated for their work at Hill 168 and in later battles. Both were "old timers" with the regiment, and both set an example of exemplary conduct of coolness, initiative and courage during the attack. C.S.M. R. S. Proverbs was awarded the Croix de Guerre avec Etoile d'Argent and C.S.M. J. L. Nimmo, wounded at Hill 168 where

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, Appx. 11, "Account by Major L. S. Henderson".

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, "Personal Account by Major W. H. V. Matthews", and Paterson, *ibid.*



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he served with "D" Company, was awarded the Croix de Guerre 1940 with Palm.

By three-thirty in the afternoon Hill 168 had been taken and the companies were digging in on its forward slope. Major Henderson pulled the shattered remains of "D" Company behind the road while "A" Company moved up on the left to support it. "B" Company, whose forward platoons could see some ten enemy tanks in a wood near St. Pierre Canivet, was firm on the right and "C" in reserve. But if the situation was brighter, it was not yet completely stabilized. Hobbling back to the R.A.P. to have his wounds dressed at this stage of action, one officer related later:

On the way back I was shot at by snipers and ran into another enemy tank. Our own tanks had finally started to move but in single file over a forward slope and were already having casualties. This was just not their day. When I arrived back at the R.A.P. it was littered with wounded and dead. It had been shelled and the poor M.O. [Captain J. K. Morrison] could hardly keep up with the casualties.<sup>16</sup>

Proportionately, most of these casualties were from "D" Company, for by the time Major Henderson withdrew across the road and consolidated with what remained of his company into the battalion fortress he had only 46 all ranks left. He had led his men that day until as Major Matthews states, "he literally fell exhausted into my arms as we came up to take over".<sup>17</sup>

Henderson was awarded the Distinguished Service Order for his gallantry at Hill 168, an award well deserved personally and one which also reflected the sterling qualities of the men he led.

A great deal more could be written about the battle for Hill 168. Certainly everyone who was there will retain vivid memories of his own or his platoon's actions during the four hours of confused combat. At the end of the fighting the men were dead tired, hungry, thirsty and exhausted after the tension of battle. A great many had been killed or wounded, more than in any other battle. All told 34 lost their lives and 93 were wounded in

<sup>16</sup> Bailey, *op. cit.* The tanks Captain Bailey saw were in all probability those supporting the Winnipeg Rifles who were forming up about this time for a further attack. The composite squadron supporting the Canadian Scottish during this battle lost two tanks.

<sup>17</sup> Personal narrative, Lt-Col. W. H. V. Matthews.



## READY FOR THE FRAY

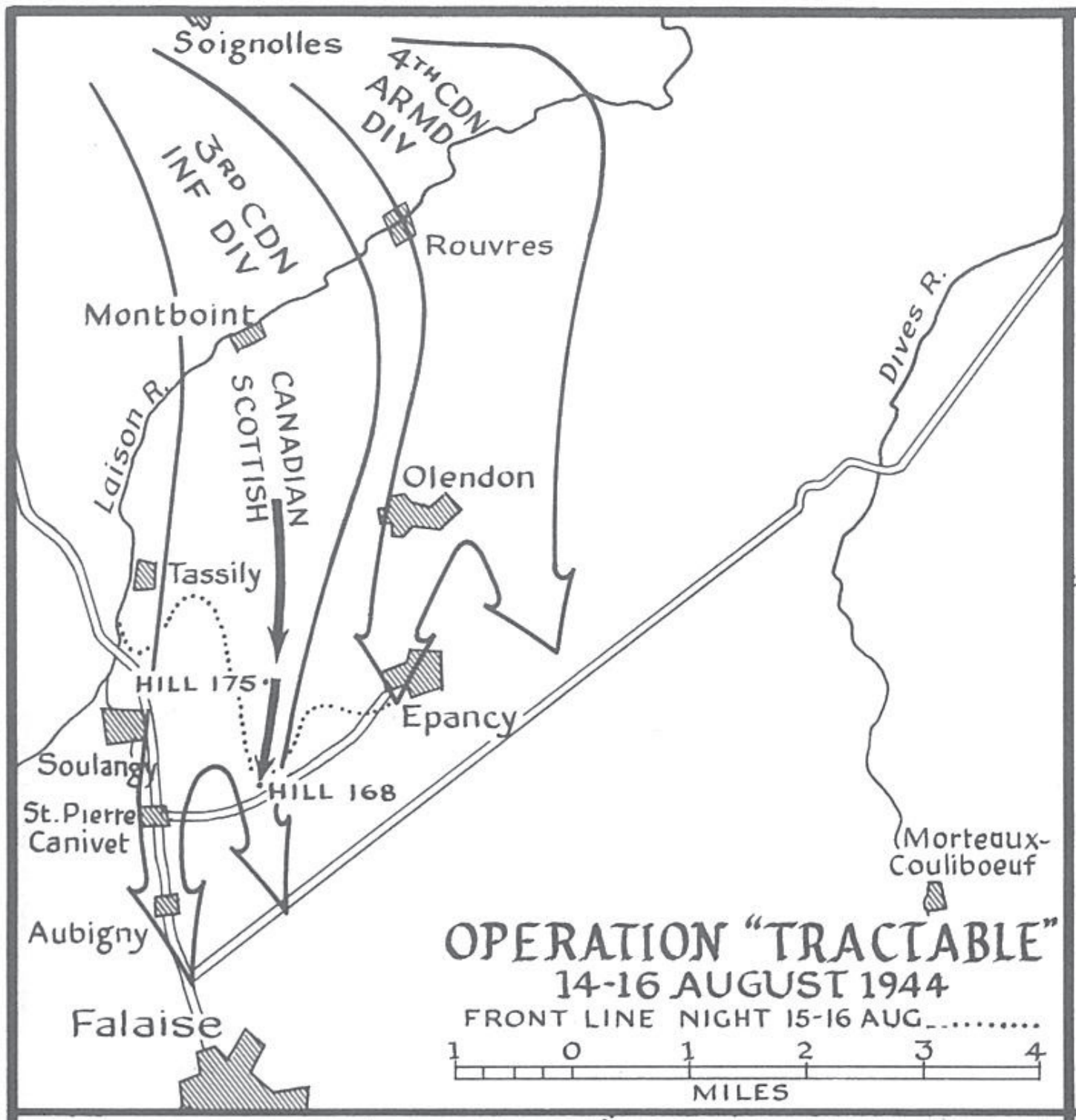
the final one-mile push toward Falaise. Many things had gone wrong during the battle. The absence of close armoured support, the shelling by our own artillery, communications breaking down, and other incidents made it a strictly infantry battle. What the Canadian Scottish had won they won by themselves. It was a personal victory for the battalion, a tribute to the leadership of the officers and N.C.Os. as well as to the spirit and aggressiveness of the men.

Later that evening, when the unit had reverted to the command of the 7th Brigade, the Winnipeg and Reginas came up to try to seize Soulingy and the area immediately west of Aubigny respectively. Despite their efforts they were unsuccessful, so withdrew close to the Canadian Scottish during the night. The brigade was now together again. Forward, just over the next hill, lay Falaise. By the following evening Canadian troops were battling in its outskirts and by noon of August 17 the demolished town, the birthplace of William the Conqueror, was in their hands.

On August 18 the 7th Brigade was warned that 2nd Division troops would be taking over their area. Early that afternoon the Canadian Scottish was relieved by The Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada and marched back to its new concentration area close to Olendon. While the company cooks were preparing a hot meal for the men, Lt-Col. Cabeldu held an "O" Group for the company commanders to put them in the picture on the battalion's new role.

In a pocket some 20 miles long and 10 miles wide were thousands of enemy troops with their tanks and vehicles. With Falaise in the north in Canadian hands and Argentan in the south held by Americans, the main road network which was to be the escape route of the enemy was blocked. The mouth of the pocket was now so narrow that a 25-pounder gun could fire a shell across it. Running north-westward across this gap from Chambois through Trun to Morteaux Couliboeuf was the Dives River which acted as a drawstring across the pocket. In order to seal up the remaining German divisions the 1st Polish Armoured and 4th Canadian Armoured Divisions were directed to capture Trun and Chambois, with the 3rd Division coming along behind them taking up positions along the northern bank of the Dives







*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*.

Dr. Roy, as Honorary Lieutenant Colonel of 741 (Victoria) Communications Squadron since 1988, continues to participate actively in promoting the interests of the Army Reserves within the Canadian Forces.

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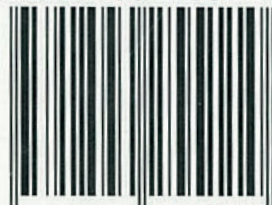
Major D. M. Grubb, CD (Retired), the editor of the additional material for the years 1955-2002, began his service in 1962 through the Canadian Officers' Training Corps at the University of Victoria. His Commanding Officer there was Major R.H. Roy. Thereafter, as an Army Reserve officer he served in The Canadian Scottish Regiment, with two interruptions caused by his civilian obligations, from 1965 to 1985, prior to transferring to the Personnel Selection Branch.

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