

OPERATION CHARNWOOD: The Canadian Battle for Caen

**Produced by:
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**For:
The War Amps of Canada**

Duration: 57 minutes, 30 seconds

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Introduction

H.C. Chadderton: In Part One of this film, we covered the D-Day Landings. In Part Two, we will talk of the counter-attacks of the Germans on D-Day plus 1, and the eventual capture of Caen – that took 30 days.

The blockbuster Hollywood film is called *Saving Private Ryan*. Fifty-four years after D-Day, Stephen Spielberg is defining the way we will look at the battle for Normandy. Canadians who see this film, and that will be a big number, might wonder what our army, much of which had been sitting in England waiting for the invasion, was doing.

This will be particularly true when they see a cameo conversation between Tom Hanks, the Infantry Captain, and his Major, played by Ted Danson. We hear the statement that Montgomery, and by implication the Canadians, are delaying matters, while they dilly-dally over the capture of Caen.

This complaint by our American allies is not new. It was running rampant right after World War II. Later, historians realized that Montgomery tied down the German divisions on purpose. This left the Americans free to go all out to take their objectives. Unfortunately, Spielberg's suggestion that we were holding back is galling to Canadians.

We simply cannot leave that impression out there. *Saving Private Ryan* is a great movie, but we have to set the record straight on the Canadian's battle for Caen.

The Counter-Attack

H.C. Chadderton:

Late on D-Day plus 1, in the area on the left of the Canadian assault, the North Nova Scotia Highlanders, supported by the Sherbrooke Fusiliers, tried to break through to the Abbaye d'Ardenne, a distance of some five miles.

The North Novas had leapfrogged through the Queens Own Rifles and the Chaudières. They had no inkling of what lay in store. It was to be the first encounter with the Hitler Jugend Regiment, the 12th SS.

Terry Copp described the situation in his book, *A Canadian's Guide to the Battlefields of Normandy*:

"...The North Novas had run into a regiment of the 12th SS Panzer Division which was holding a defensive position northwest of Caen until the rest of the division arrived. General Kurt Meyer, in command of a Panzer Grenadier Regiment, had watched the approach of the North Novas from the tower of the Abbaye d'Ardenne and decided to counter-attack with two battalions supported by tanks. The North Novas in Authie were overrun after a vicious close quarters battle. Buron was attacked and a fierce tank battle raged around the village. Buron was lost. The Brigade Commander brought the remaining North Novas and Sherbrookes back to Les Buissons where the other battalions were preparing a "fortress" position. The vanguard of the 9th Brigade had been decimated; 110 men were killed, 192 wounded and 120 taken prisoner. Twenty-one tanks had been knocked out. Losses equalled more than 40 per cent of all Canadian casualties on D-Day!

The Canadians had done a remarkable job. They had not only stormed the beachhead, they moved inland and they had captured vital strong points, like this Château St. Come, near Caen. They beat off vicious counter-attacks, and by this time the Germans realized one thing: we were on the continent for keeps.

Much has been written about the fateful advance out of the original bridgehead area. It was an attempt to puncture the enemy defences beyond Buron. It ended up in the capture and shooting of some 18 members of the North Nova Scotia Highlanders and the Sherbrooke Fusiliers, a war crime for which 12th SS General, Kurt Meyer, was found guilty. His death sentence was later commuted. The other incident in this area involves the slaughter of 37 helpless, unarmed soldiers from the North Novas in the village of Authie.

The history of the Sherbrooke Regiment, by Lieutenant-Colonel H.M. Jackson, is descriptive of what happened:

“...“B” Squadron halted, forming a firm base of operations in an orchard south of Les Buissons, while the remainder of the North Novas advanced “A”, bypassing Buron on the right, “C” on the left.

A few minutes later, another formation of enemy tanks suddenly confronted “A” Squadron as it moved into a valley on the right of Franqueville, and a tank battle began... Hardly had “A” Squadron engaged the enemy, then the Panzer force on the left rushed forward and entered the engagement. Most of the Regiment was thus involved at once in the pitched battle.

The sheer weight of enemy armour and the ferocity of their attack forced the outnumbered Regiment to withdraw from Franqueville, past Authie and then behind Gruchy, but the withdrawal was a fighting retirement and the enemy became exhausted by the time his forward infantry reached Buron. The Sherbrooke’s tanks then returned to the orchard, south of Les Buissons, to harbour for the night...”

Let’s discuss now what took place on the right. The Regina Rifles were holding an objective around this town of Bretteville l’Orgueilleuse.

They were supported by the tanks of the Fort Garry Horse. One Regina Company had crossed the Caen-Bayeux railway tracks and were holding a salient at Norrey-en-Bessin, the furthest penetration of the invasion. This invited the first really strong counter-attacks by the 12th SS.

At the same time, the Winnipeg Rifles reached the Putot-en-Bessin area. They were holding a vital rail crossing to the right of the Reginas. June the 8th was a very confused day for the Winnipegs.

Now, back to the Reginas. Foster Matheson had been with the Militia before the war. He hailed from Prince Albert, Saskatchewan.

Foster became one of the most famous Battalion Commanders in this magnificent story of how the Canadians captured the beachhead and smashed their way to Caen.

No finer example of what Foster Matheson and his Reginas did was the holding of the positions in and around Bretteville l’Orgueilleuse and Norrey-en-Bessin on June the 8th. The 12th SS mounted a major

attack on the Reginas' positions. The description in the *1st Battalion Regina Rifles Regimental History*, written by Major Gordon Baird, tells the tale:

"...On the night of June 8th to 9th, the Germans put in a heavy infantry and tank attack on the Battalion position and carried it to the door of Battalion Headquarters. One Panther tank moved to the house where Battalion Headquarters was located. A second Panther began to fire wildly down the street.

In this skirmish, Rifleman Joe LaPointe with great coolness and determination was instrumental in knocking out the first tank with PIAT bombs.

A fool-hardy German dispatch-rider rode down the main street of Bretteville on a captured Canadian motorcycle only to be brought down by the Sten gun of Commanding Officer Foster Matheson.

At first light, the SS tanks withdrew. We held our ground; the companies had taken a heavy toll on the enemy infantry who followed the tanks. We also bagged five Panthers, one light tank and an armoured car. Our stand at Bretteville that night had blunted the German attack..."

The remarkable action of "C" Company of the Reginas in holding the village of Norrey is described in a later history of the Reginas titled *Up the Johns*:

"...“C” Company, under Major Stu Tubb, at Norrey, held the most advance and precarious position of any of the Allied troops. The Brigade Commander wanted the company withdrawn, but Matheson protested that he would just have to retake the position later. “C” Company remained..."

Terry Copp takes up the narrative in *A Canadian's Guide to the Battlefields of Normandy*:

"... (German General) Kurt Meyer now decided that Norrey would have to be captured before the attack on Bretteville was renewed. As the Panthers approached Norrey they were stopped by a minefield and caught in a crossfire. Seven Panthers were left burning. This devastating blow was struck by the tanks of the Fort Garry Horse..."

The importance of Norrey is described by the regimental historian of the 12th SS Hitler Jugend Division, who stated:

“...Four attempts to capture Norrey, a cornerstone of the Canadian defence, had failed. Together with Bretteville, the village formed a blocking position {in the path of the planned offensive of Panzer Group West}. Therefore, repeated efforts were made via different approaches to take these positions. They failed not least of all because of the bravery of the defenders... who were well entrenched and effectively supported by strong artillery, anti-tank defence and tanks...”

Meanwhile, disaster was about to strike my own battalion, the Royal Winnipeg Rifles. The situation is described in our regimental history, *The Little Black Devils*:

“...Putot-en-Bessin was a critical point in the bridgehead...it could control the road and rail lines (and thus communications and supply) from Caen westerly to Bayeux. Because of the speed of their advance to Putot, the Royal Winnipeg Rifles created a salient... The Regiment was like a spear thrust into the German defence system.

As dawn advanced on June 8th, enemy infantry supported by a Panzer Mark III tank attacked the railway bridge being guarded by Major Fred Hodge's "A" Company. They were repulsed. Corporal H.V. Naylor's six pounder anti-tank gun knocked out the tank.

By 9:30, Kurt Meyer's youthful troops were ready to resume the fight. By noon the enemy had infiltrated the village. The gallant stand by the regiment is now a matter of record. When the enemy occupied the village, several tanks broke through the battalion position at 1300 hours. The three companies, "A," "B" and "C," were now completely isolated. It took a certain type of soldier to dig in and fight it out when overrun, and the Regiment was filled with this type. Eventually, sheer numbers combined with a lack of ammunition overwhelmed the regiment.

Only "D" Company under Major Lockie Fulton plus their support company remained of Colonel John Meldram's regiment...”

It was a black day and for another reason as well. On the 8th, and in several days following, the Hitler Jugend murdered more than 60 Royal Winnipeg Rifles, who had long ago thrown away their arms and given up in an honourable surrender.

This was the subject of a film in The War Amps *NEVER AGAIN!*

series titled ***Take No Prisoners***, released in late 1995.

The Canadian Scottish

H.C. Chadderton: I'm standing before the Canadian Scottish monument at Putot. With the decimation of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles on June the 8th, a very dangerous situation had developed. Many historians have missed this, but not Reginald Roy, in his excellent history of the Can Scots, *Ready for the Fray*.

"...The Canadian Scottish must capture and hold Putot. There was no other infantry battalion between Putot and the beaches..."

He states further:

"...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.

As Major Des Crofton crossed the start line, the tanks of the First Hussars crossed with him providing armoured protection.

The Scots, all green troops, were hit, staggered and fell but the Canadian Scottish pushed forward. Their job was to re-take the village and nothing would stop them.

Approaching darkness was a factor which helped the attacking troops. The enemy, by using tracer, made his positions easier to spot. The SS troops were, however, a far different crowd from those of the coastal defence division..."

In describing the battle, historian Roy sums up what it meant to have support in these terms:

"...The 12th and 13th Canadian Field Regiments, Royal Canadian Artillery, the No. 5 Platoon of the Camerons and the tank squadrons of the First Hussars were striking back over the heads of the Scottish with their 105 mm guns, their Vickers machine guns and their 4.2-inch mortars..."

Many observers of this battle give a great deal of credit to Major Art Plows. Reginald Roy gives an eye-witness account.

"...The Scottish were held up, then rallied. 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, Lieutenants Aubrey C. Peck, Mollison and T.W.L. 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..."

Roy describes the situation on the morning of the following day, June 9th as follows:

"...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..."

The Canadian's hold on the Caen-Bayeux railway at Putot had been restored. Reginald Roy states:

"...They (the Can Scots) had recaptured Putot and had thrown back the enemy's attempt to take it. The village was theirs, and they intended to hold it..."

Le Mesnil-Patry

H.C. Chadderton: In doing the research for this film, I went to the usual sources (books by military historians; regimental histories, etc.)

One of such sources is the paper titled *Between Strawberry and Raspberry* by Major Mike McNorgan of National Defence Headquarters. The Battle for Le Mesnil-Patry took place on June the 11th. It was an infantry and armoured attack involving the Queen's Own Rifles and the First Hussars. The attack met stiff resistance by dug in German tanks. Military analysts have drawn different conclusions. The fact is we bloodied their noses.

The casualties were heavy on both sides. It is evident, however, that the Germans learned that we too would successfully employ combined infantry and armour.

The Battle for Le Mesnil-Patry ended the possibility of any successful German counter-attacks. Thus, the units of the 3rd Canadian Division and the 2nd Armoured Brigade could go into a defensive pattern.

The next four weeks took on a very special character. For one thing, the troops learned all about "moaning minnies," the German six barrel mortars which sounded like Mac trucks and had a significant fear factor. We also learned about the deadly accuracy of the vaunted German 88.

Yes, and we lived constantly with the words "counter-attack" on our minds but, fortunately, it never came.

What did happen, however, was that the D-Day troops, plus their reinforcements, settled into static warfare knowing all too well that the orders for a break out to Caen would come soon.

Carpiquet

H.C. Chadderton: The stumbling block to any further advance into German-held territory in France was the heavily fortified city of Caen. The plan of attack, to get into Caen, was in two phases. The first was against Carpiquet, both the city and the airport, involving only the 8th Brigade made up of the Queen's Own Rifles, the North Shores and the Chaudières, augmented by the Royal Winnipeg Rifles from the 7th Brigade.

In addition to the infantry battalions, tank support was given by the Fort Garry Horse.

And so, not to fall into the trap of providing the explanation from personal observation, allow me to quote from Reginald Roy's excellent book *1944 - Canadians in Normandy*.

"...Caen had to be taken. Brigadier Kenneth G. Blackader's 8th Brigade were ordered to capture the village of Carpiquet and the airfield adjacent to it which lay about three and a half miles from the centre of Caen. The need for additional landing sites made the Carpiquet airfield outside Caen a particularly valuable prize.

The town itself was allocated to the North Shores Regiment on the left, Le Regiment de la Chaudière on the right..."

The Royal Winnipeg Rifles were to attack the aircraft hangars on the south side of the air field. The Queen's Own Rifles, positioned in a counter-attack role were to push through the town to capture the control buildings.

The fighting in Carpiquet quickly developed into a bitter, stubborn battle as the Chaudières and the North Shores fought their way forward house-by-house.

Far to the right, we of the Winnipegs were encountering equally stiff resistance with constant heavy mortaring. It took our prairie regiment almost four hours to cover the 1,500 yards between Marcelet, our starting point, and the approach to the hangars.

As Corporal Jimmy Low summed it up, "that night we learned that Carpiquet, at least for the Winnipeg's, had been a disaster. Hundreds wounded, more than 50 killed."

Over on our left, we could hear that the North Shores were taking a terrible beating. Later I read in their regimental history, they called Carpiquet “the graveyard of the Regiment.”

Still, they had indeed captured the village of Carpiquet, with the Chauds and the Queen’s Own firmly in control.

It was vital to hold this ground in preparation for the major assault on the city of Caen about five or six miles to the east.

THE BATTLE FOR CAEN

Buron and the Highland Light Infantry

H.C. Chadderton: The major German defences were centered around the town of Buron and a tremendous anti-tank ditch which was to figure prominently in the battles to come.

There is an excellent gem of a book on the battle titled *Bloody Buron* by Captain Allan Snowie, the historical officer of the Highland Light Infantry. It was published in 1984. References, here and there, from the book will give some idea of the attack by the HLI which led to the fall of Caen.

The CO was Lieutenant-Colonel S.M. (Smokey) Griffiths who describes, in *Bloody Buron*, the troops he had available:

“...I had a Battalion Group: The HLI Regiment of course, plus a Squadron of Sherbrooke Fusilier tanks, a Troop of British self-propelled anti-tank guns and a troop mixed stuff, flails, and flame-throwers...”

The battalion War Diary describes the action of the leading companies:

“... “D” Company, under Major Anderson, was the first company into the village. The tanks were not able to follow them in as they struck a minefield on the right flank. “D” Company had to smash its way through alone and clean out all the trenches that comprised the defensive system. They suffered heavy casualties doing this and progressed on to the orchard on the right forward side of the village with only half a company...”

Another excerpt from the War Diary entry states:

“...In the orchard, Sergeant A.P. Herchenratter reorganized the remnants of two platoons and led the attack at clearing out the orchard. Cpl Weitzel, already wounded, here distinguished himself by leading two men left out of his section into an attack on two well sited machine gun posts. When both of them were hit he continued on and knocked out both posts before he himself was killed...”

The book *Bloody Buron* describes the action of a Private Michael Borodaiko. He won a Military Medal.

“...Borodaiko, single-handed, charged and cleaned out six enemy positions with his Bren gun. At times, he seemed to be blanketed in fire that was so thick that other members of his Section were pinned down; yet he continued on and cleared the way for them, miraculously escaping injury himself...”

Another quote in the book, from Sergeant Jimmy Kelly tells a story of its own:

“...I was left with 14 men just after the Ditch, out of 37 supposed to be. There was hardly anything in the town at all. It had been bombed pretty well. It was all dug-in, in the orchards south of the town or in the anti-tank ditch...”

The battle continued. The advance was house by house. The War Diary states:

“...Night fell on a quiet, smoking village which had witnessed one of the fiercest battles ever fought in the history of war. It was the HLI's first big fight and the 8th July will go down in its memoirs as a day to be remembered. The ranks were sadly depleted and reorganization showed them to be thin on the ground – too thin to stave off a counter-attack in the night. Yet doggedly they dug in, determined that their days work would not be in vain. One hundred percent stand-to was maintained during the night but the enemy had expended all his energy during the day and with the exception of a few snipers trapped behind the lines, all was quiet and the night passed without event...”

The Glens and Gruchy

H.C. Chadderton:

We can go to several sources to tell the story of the Battle of Gruchy, a strong German defensive line, built along this creek.

Terry Copp in his clear descriptive style gives us the overview from *A Canadian's Guide to the Battlefields of Normandy*:

"...The Battle for Buron lasted all day, but on the right flank, the Glens captured Gruchy with much less difficulty. Aided by an unorthodox charge by the Bren gun carriers of the 7th Reconnaissance Regiment, the Glens were able to move on to the Châteaux St. Louet by 09:50 hours. The Glens took the Châteaux in mid-afternoon..."

The regimental history of The Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders:

"...As the forward troops disappeared into the smoke near their objective, the enemy machine guns opened up. By 08:20 hours the forward troops had entered Gruchy and the place was completely occupied within 15 minutes..."

The battle joined and the Glens captured the stronghold, but the real cost was in the casualty list. It included two officers commanding companies, and some 70 other ranks.

The famous carrier attack is described in the history of the 7th Reconnaissance Regiment of Montréal.

"...SDG had been stopped by very heavy machine gun fire just outside the town. Lieutenant Don Ayer, of the 17th Duke of Yorks – who with his 15 or 16 carriers – was waiting for the SDG's to push on, saw this. So, without hesitation, he charged right through them, in real old calvary style, right into the middle of an enemy Company position. With grenades and Bren guns (not to mention the 'Ayer pistol') firing at point-blank range, they drove the enemy from his dug-outs, killing dozens, wounding others and capturing 25 or 30 prisoners. Due to this act of extreme gallantry on the part of all ranks of the 7th Recce allowed a complete battalion of infantry the SDGs to advance into Gruchy..."

Authie and the North Nova Scotia Highlanders

H.C. Chadderton: The heavily fortified village of Authie anchored the left end of the German position. The story is told in *No Retreating Footsteps*, by Will Bird:

“...This was the day of revenge for the North Novas, and every man was filled with grim resolve. This time they would take Authie and stay there.

Now they were to meet the German fanatics again, men who were to cling with blind, bitter tenacity to hidden trenches in the wheat fields and to battle through Buron and Authie from house to house and wall to wall...”

Major Cy Kennedy was a close personal friend. He was a War Amp and became a Member of Parliament. The regimental history describes his actions on that day:

“...Major C.F. Kennedy was hit before his company reached the anti-tank ditch. His arm was almost severed by shrapnel and he coolly called Captain S.S. Bird on his 18 set and shouted encouragement to the nearest men. He had Private Adrian Gaudet use a knife to sever the rest of his arm before he started back to the Aid Post...”

The North Novas were to move through Buron when it had been taken by the HLI. The regimental history describes what happened:

“...Word was given for the Novas to attack and the barrage started to come down on the far side of Buron. A big surprise awaited the Novas. An orchard and stone wall marked the southern limit of Buron. “D” and “B” Companies found there a system of trenches filled with Germans...”

This map describes the action so far. This was the HLI's start line. They came through the anti-tank ditch, down through Buron to this position. When the North Novas passed through them, they came to the southern limits of the town, only to find, that the Germans had dug in strong defensive positions just beyond a stone wall which marked the perimeter of the town.

Since the Canadians had first entered this area on D-Day, and it was recaptured by the Germans, they had made the position impregnable. The story is told in the North Nova's history:

“...The Germans had worked hard to strengthen their position during the 30 days the Novas stayed in Hell’s Corner outside Buron. But the HLI had torn into it and the Novas had finished the cleaning. Men wondered what the next day would bring. Now they were no more than seven kilometres from Caen...”

The Reginas and the Abbaye

H.C. Chadderton: The Abbaye d'Ardenne is central to this entire battle from Juno Beach to Caen.

The first attempt to take it, which was described in our film, ***Take No Prisoners***, was on D-Day plus 1. It ended in a repulse of the Canadian troops. The murders carried out on orders of General Kurt Meyer of the 12th SS had given the Abbaye its notoriety.

The Abbaye was on commanding ground and its capture was necessary before the Canadians could enter Caen.

The overall picture of the task facing the Reginas is described in Gordon Baird's earlier history as follows:

"...It looked like a tough assignment. 9th Brigade was to take Buron, Gruchy, and Authie, and were to pass through using Authie as a start line with our final objective the ancient Ardennes Abbaye..."

Major Baird then describes the horrendous shelling and mortaring which the Reginas underwent when close to the start line. He then states:

"...Despite this, they proceeded with their attack directed at the Abbaye itself..."

Fortune has again blessed us, in that Major Gordon Brown, whose company actually took the Abbaye in a fierce battle on July the 8th, has written an account of it. It was published in *Canadian Military Journal* in 1995.

We are including herewith some excerpts from Major Brown's article.

"...As Roberts and I lay in some small scrub bushes, tracer bullets flashed past our faces. We rolled back and, as Roberts said, we could have lit our cigarettes on the tracers.

When we finally got going, the advance was awfully slow because of the relentless machine gun and rifle fire. The two forward platoons began to use fire and movement effectively, but it was heavy going. We had already lost several men and were forced to crawl and run in short bursts to avoid heavier losses. We had to limit our losses if we were to have anyone

left for the final assault.

The mortar smoke was fired and created a perfect screen. The two platoons rose from the wheat and firing on the run, we all made the dash towards the walls. There were many slit trenches and dug-outs in which we threw grenades.

When it was over we found some members of Charlie Company who told us that they had lost about 90 men, including all five officers. I asked about my friend, Stu Tubb, and breathed a great sigh of relief when told that he was alive and was just now being carried off the battlefield.- He had been hit in a leg and would later have it amputated above the knee..."

We return now to Gordon Baird's early history of the Regina's to sum up:

"...Manned by fanatic SS troops the Abbey had been a tough nut to crack. It had perhaps been the toughest fight since D-Day. But it had helped pierce the defence of Caen..."

The cost to the Reginas is set out in Stewart Mein's history *Up the Johns*. Mein gives the following description of the objective:

"...Before attempting the assault on the Abbey, Gordon Brown and Major Stu Tubb did a careful reconnaissance. They climbed a church steeple north of Rots where they were able to see the fields stretching out between Authie and the Abbey. They didn't like what they saw. The area was flat, open and devoid of cover where an attacking force would have easily been seen. What's more, the defenders had the advantage of dug in defences and clear fields of fire..."

Mein tells of the casualties as follows:

"...The Battalion suffered 11 officers and 205 other ranks casualties, 36 of them fatal, with one missing in action. This had been the worst fighting for the Battalion since D-Day. The capture of the Abbey by the Rifles helped pierce the ring of the defences of Caen. That action caused the Germans to withdraw back into Caen itself..."

The Taking of Caen

H.C. Chadderton:

The 9th Brigade, known as the Highland Brigade, had done a tremendous job, aided by the tanks and the artillery. Now it was up to the 7th Brigade to finish the task.

The only major objective left was Cussy. Terry Copp in *A Canadian's Guide To The Battlefields of Normandy* sets the stage:

"...Both flanks were still held by the SS and the battle for Cussy became a long, confused action.

The Canadian Scottish found their approach to the start line contested by snipers and shell fire. At the appointed time, the Can Scots were ready, but so were the Germans.

Towards darkness, two companies of the Winnipegs were brought up to thicken the position before the anticipated counter-attack came in..."

In Ready for the Fray:

"...Once beyond Buron, walking at a steady pace 'as if on a South Downs exercise,' all Hell broke loose as the Canadian Scottish came under a hail of fire from the enemy's mortars, 'Moaning Minnies' (German mortar), machine guns and anti-tank guns. The ground shuddered and shook with the pounding of exploding shells and bombs..."

The battle progressed and the history states:

"...So terrific was the fire and so great was the carnage in Cussy that Lieutenant Colonel Cabeldu, a short distance away, feared his battalion was being cut to pieces. He was doing everything he could; calling up carriers to evacuate the wounded, bringing the tanks up to give close support to the infantry in the village, calling for additional artillery fire, sending his anti-tank guns right into the village, and warning the brigadier that with ammunition running low and his casualties mounting, he would have to call on the reserve battalion, the Winnipeg Rifles, to send some help to thicken up the front..."

And yet another description:

"...The arrival of two companies of the Winnipegs not only

strengthened the weakly held area between "A" and "C" Companies, but they brought with them sorely needed ammunition.

By 10:30 that evening the Reginas had captured the Abbaye Ardenne (described previously), thus silencing a hornet's nest and depriving the Germans of their excellent view over the brigade area..."

With the entrenched Germans being overrun, the boys of the 3rd Div and the 2nd Armoured Brigade converged on the city of Caen.

The fighting front was confused. Many Germans gave up, but some held on to the bitter end. The bombing to this area, to the Canadian Front and the perimeter of Caen, had put the German defenders in disarray.

Caen, cornerstone of the German defence, was captured by Canadians by July 10th. Some 33 days earlier, this band of untried citizen soldiers, most of whom had enlisted in 1940, had first gained a foothold in Normandy and in the week following D-Day, they had fought off wicked counter-attacks by Hitler's so-called "supermen" and in driving the German tanks and Grenadiers from Caen, they had earned the battle honours, which today adorn their cap badges. Names such as: Putot, Bretteville, Carpique, Buron, Authie, Gruchy, and Cussy, and of course, the Abbaye Ardenne.

By July 11th, more than a month after D-Day, Caen was in our hands. The history of the HLI tells the story:

"...Captain G.E. Lowe commanded a Guard of Honour at the ceremony of raising the first British flag over Caen. The honour went to the 9th Brigade as being the first troops in the city..."

CLOSE SUPPORT ELEMENTS

Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa – D-Day

H.C. Chadderton: The Camerons of Ottawa were an integral part of the 3rd Div with their powerful Vickers machine guns and their 4.2 mortars, they provided close support for the infantry battalions.

On D-Day, the Camerons landed with or immediately behind the assault battalions, that is the North Shore Regiment at St. Aubin on the left, the Queen's Own Rifles at Bernières in the middle, and the Reginas and the Winnipeggs with a company of the Canadian Scottish on the right. Tactically, the Camerons and the infantry regiments worked as one.

It is somewhat difficult to give a clear picture of what the Camerons did, if you tried to compare it with an infantry battalion which had a concentrated objective. In training, however, the Camerons had worked closely with the infantry battalions, the officers and NCOs all knew each other. It was often a situation where a company commander in, for example, the North Shores could get on the communications net and ask for machine guns or heavy mortar support. An example quoted in *The History of the First Battalion Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa* follows:

"...The Regiment de la Chaudière and the Queen's Own Rifles were having their hands full with snipers and an 8.8 cm gun which, effectively positioned, completely blocked off the approach toward Bèny-sur-Mer. Number 6 Platoon of the Camerons took up position and was instrumental in silencing many snipers. Major J.M. Carson, commanding "B" Company, and his batman, Lance Corporal R.L. Parker personally directed the infantry against the '88' and succeeded in taking it out of play..."

Another example from the regimental history:

"...Lieutenant James C. Woodward and his batman, Private A. Caron... penetrated the enemy defences where they were pinned down by fire... Refusing to withdraw... Woodward elected to fight it out and dispatched his batman to the rear for reinforcements... His bold aggressive action was instrumental in starting the infantry forward and he was awarded the military cross for his courage and gallantry..."

On the right, 14 and 15 Platoons of the Camerons landed in support of the Reginas and the Winnipeggs and the Canadian Scottish. Their heavy machine guns in particular were in on the capture of Banville by the Reginas and the Winnipeggs.

Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa D Plus One and Two

H.C. Chadderton: As we have noted, the tanks of the Sherbrookes and the infantry regiments of the 9th Brigade saw bitter, bitter fighting around Les Buissons.

Brigade Commander, Brigadier Don Cunningham, ordered the stand to be taken in the Buron area when the 12th SS and the 21st Panzer Divisions threatened to break through to the coast.

The Cameron's regimental history states:

"...Number 11 Platoon positioned itself well up near the ditch and slugged it out with the enemy until Major C.C. Hill, commanding the Company, ordered its withdrawal to the woods at Les Buissons when the ammunition was expended. Number 10 Platoon moved in beside Number 11 and together they continued to hot up the front..."

The Camerons did not escape the fatal shooting of prisoners. This mostly fell upon the Royal Winnipeg Rifles in the attack on the extreme right of the Canadian front.

Two Camerons were captured and executed at the Château d'Audrieu. They were not so lucky. Their names were Harold Angel and D.J. Burnett.

3rd Anti-Tanks

H.C. Chadderton: Another of the ground forces that landed with us, and fought side by side all the way, were the brave members of the 3rd Canadian Anti-Tank Regiment.

Where the infantry went, so went the Anti-Tanks. Listen to this excerpt from their regimental history.

"...A Troop was deployed in Les Buissons (supporting the abortive attack of the North Novies and the Sherbrookes towards the Abbaye) but was taken from there almost immediately and sent to Putot-en-Bessin replacing "H" Troop which had been overrun by the enemy..."

The big problem in a documentary of this type is the absolute inability of including reference to all units which played such a vital role in the invasion. The gunners, for example, included the 12th and 13th Field Regiments. Then there was the heavy artillery and the anti-aircraft batteries. Obviously, without them, there would have been no success on the beaches or inland.

It was decided from the planning stages of this documentary, however, that we could tell the story of only those whom the infantry could reach out and touch. Hopefully, everyone will understand. At least I have the privilege of including one regiment of the gunners, the much decorated 3rd Anti-Tanks.

We have space for one more story from their regimental history, as reported by Sergeant Jack Rudd of H Troop:

"...June 7th, at approximately 13:00 hours, Lieutenant Reg Barker stationed me in an apple orchard at Putot-en-Bessin. We had contacted the RWR and were now in support.

"...June 8th. I was without information until 10:00 hours at which time Lieutenant Barker appeared to tell me to be prepared to move... The first inclination I had that things had soured was when Norm Johnstone and Bill (Weldon) Clarke came running back to my position to say, "They are all gone. They are all dead." Based on this information, I decided to limber up and move back to battalion headquarters for new orders.

Approximately 300 yards to the north edge of the orchard, we were

stopped by a Lieutenant from the Can Scots who informed me that we were surrounded and that we should remain with him... Unfortunately it was too late, as the SS were on top of us and the game was over for 23 of us. So started our prisoner-of-war life.

The SS marched us approximately one mile to the rear of their lines and into a field. By this time, they had collected approximately 100 of us. It was years later that I found out how fortunate we were, because they were prepared to hand out the same fate as was meted out to Lieutenant Barker and the other 66 Canadians murdered by the 12th SS at the Château d'Audrieu.

Lt. Reg Barker was shot as a prisoner of war. His story was told in ***Take No Prisoners!***, the forerunner to this documentary.

Excerpt from *Take No Prisoners!*:

"...It was along this road near Fontenay-le-Pesnel on June 8th, 1944, near dusk that about 40 members of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles, two members of the 3rd Anti-Tank Regiment, and a member of the Cameron Highlanders were marched as prisoners of war.

These soldiers were herded into a bunch in the middle of a field. Some of them were wounded. They were advanced upon by several Hitler Jugend with schmeissers ready to fire.

Another Lieutenant, Reg Barker, of the 3rd Anti-Tanks also risked his life in an attempt to argue the Germans out of shooting these Canadian prisoners.

Gunner, Weldon Clarke, gave evidence concerning Barker's heroism:

'...Lt. Barker told us to stand steady until the first burst was fired. He was going to try to talk them out of it. I am sure they had the idea of getting rid of us because nobody tried to escape until they came forward with those automatics...'

Tactical Air Support

H.C. Chadderton: A great deal has been written about the German 88mm, an anti-tank gun, an anti-aircraft gun, and it could be used as a field piece to break up infantry attacks.

But in the confined bridgehead area, the devastation it could cause was beyond belief. The worst words we could hear were: "They've got an 88 dug in with a field of fire over an area we intend to use."

Coupled with this is the frank admission that our 34-ton Sherman tanks, although plentiful, were no match for the 88s mounted on the sleek German mobile half-tracks or panther tanks.

But we did have an answer. I remember it was a blazing hot July afternoon; a company of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles were tasked to attack the Château St. Louet near Cussy. Every time we climbed out of our forming up place along the sunken road, the German 88s pushed us to ground.

Above there was what was known as a "Cab Rank" of circling air force fighter bombers. We fired yellow smoke which landed among the 88s and, in a few short minutes, the Typhoons, or Tiffies as we knew them, neutralized the German position. Our Shermans, even with the 75mm fire fly, were out gunned, but the Typhoons were the great equalizers.

The Bombing

H.C. Chadderton:

On July 7th, at long last, the 3rd Div was given instructions “take the city of Caen.” It would be tough, tough going.

Imagine our relief when the attack was temporarily called off to allow the RCAF and the RAF to bomb the outskirts of the city which, so far as we knew, contained thousands of Germans, ordered to fight to the last.

Those of us who sat in the fields and watched that bombing, cheered wildly. Incidentally, the cheering came to a sudden end when we saw at least two Lancasters fall from the sky, and we realized that there would be a price in human lives among the air force crews that night.

There has been public criticism about the bombing of Caen. I can tell you, because I was there, that it was very, very necessary for the softening up process otherwise we could never have gotten into that city.

In 1992, for example, in a CBC - televised series titled ***The Valour and the Horror*** the following was said:

“...The Allied military was under enormous pressure from the press and the politicians for results. To buy time, General Montgomery decided to provide a public relations victory at Caen. Despite the fact the German defence was centered outside the old Norman city, the Allies decided to boost Allied morale by levelling the place...”

The bombing of Caen was an essential part of the military strategy, as a prelude to taking this vital strongpoint in the German defences. Here we see an official Canadian army map which shows the Canadian front line on July the 7th, the night of the bombing. It will be noted that the Canadians still had to capture some major German strongholds which guarded the entrances to this ancient city. Strongholds such as: Buron, Authie, Gruchy, Cussy and the Abbaye Ardenne.

The strategic plan behind the bombing of Caen was to soften up the rear areas of this heavily fortified German position. Then, we must examine the actual air force bombing target, shown in the rectangular section. It will be noted that the target zone was not in the heart of the city, as claimed in ***The Valour and the Horror***, but rather on the most lightly populated northern outskirts. Much of this ancient

Norman town was spared, including the ancient church of St. Etienne, founded by William the Conquerer.

CONCLUSION

H.C. Chadderton:

And so ended the 33-day battle for Caen. It tried the metal of these young volunteers from Canada. They served with the infantry; they served with the armoured corps, the artillery, the signal corps, the medical corps, all the support groups, the tactical air force. It was just one grand magnificent battle that showed what it really would take to drive the Germans all the way from Juno Beach to the pivotal city of Caen.

The Canadians had pierced the Atlantic wall defences. They had captured Caen; they had opened the gateway to Falaise. At Falaise, two weeks later, the German forces in Western France would be trapped or annihilated. Terry Copp, in *A Canadian's Guide to the Battlefields of Normandy*, sums it up:

"...The German defensive ring around Caen had been broken. During the night Rommel had ordered the withdrawal of all heavy weapons south of the Orne and rearguards left in the battered city of Caen were in no mood to put up resistance on the 9th. The bridges across the river were down and the enemy firmly entrenched on the other side. But the city, which had loomed before the Anglo-Canadian forces since D-Day, was at last in their hands..."