

TAKE NO PRISONERS

The Nazi SS in Normandy

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

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***Dedicated to the 134 or more
Canadian soldiers executed
by members of the 12th SS Hitler Jugend in Normandy.***

Take No Prisoners – The Nazi SS in Normandy

Introduction

Mike Red Beach, Courseulles, France

H.C. Chadderton: This is the Mike Red sector of Juno Beach, where the Royal Winnipeg Rifles landed on June 6, 1944. It was not until late in 1945 that Canadians heard of the execution of our prisoners. However, very recently new information has become available which has put a new perspective on the heroism of those who were executed because they would not give the information to the Germans which would have allowed them to drive themselves right back to this beach.

Monument Debarquement

H.C. Chadderton: This is perhaps the final chapter in the commemoration of the events which took place more than 50 years ago. We believe, however, it is an important chapter and one about which Canadians should have a great deal of knowledge.

Personal Connection

Royal Winnipeg Rifles Monument, Courseulles, France

H.C. Chadderton: This is the Royal Winnipeg Rifles monument in Courseulles in France. Behind are the beaches where the regiment landed on D-Day, June 6th, 1944. I confess to a personal involvement in this story. I was with this regiment from the start. Less than 48 hours and within five miles of where we're standing, more than 50 members of this regiment were murdered. We believe that this story should be more than a footnote in history.

Fred Hodge

Outside Château d'Audrieu

H.C. Chadderton: This is the Château D'Audrieu in Normandy in France. Early in June of 1944 the 12th SS reconnaissance battalion established its headquarters in these grounds. Major Fred Hodge, when commanding "A" company of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles, was taken prisoner at Putot and he was brought to these grounds for interrogation by the German SS. Fred Hodge had wanted to be a soldier all of his life. In his teens he joined the Cameron Cadets. He became a crack rifle shot. When the Royal Winnipeg Rifles mobilized, he was one of the first officers in uniform.

It is understandable then, that when the 1944 invasion of Europe took place, Major Fred Hodge would be found holding a position in close contact with a German reconnaissance unit.

The battle of Normandy had just begun. Hitler and most of his German generals still thought the main Allied thrust would come at Calais. Then, a Canadian major commanding an infantry company at a point of deep penetration became their prisoner. He could tell them what they wanted to know. He refused. His interrogator blew him away!

Tom Windsor

Outside Abbaye Ardenne

H.C. Chadderton: The night before the senseless murder of Major Hodge at the Château d'Audrieu another officer who was fairly familiar with the D-Day plan had been subjected to frightening interrogation here at the Abbaye Ardenne. He was Lieutenant Tom Windsor of the Sherbrooke Fusiliers and, incidentally, a man whom I had met several months before in training exercises in England.

Tom Windsor would give his interrogators only his name, rank and number. The SS commander – General Kurt Meyer – was furious. Windsor realized that the Germans were going to shoot all of the Canadians. Meyer issued the orders for their execution.

In a final act of courage and leadership, the 31-year-old Montrealer shook hands with his young soldiers and entered a garden where a member of the merciless Hitler Youth Regiment shot him in the back of the head. The rest of the Canadians met the same fate.

The Interrogations

H.C. Chadderton:

I would like to talk now, about how two Canadian officers faced a brutal death, rather than tell their German interrogators what they wanted to know. It should be remembered that Lieutenant Windsor and Major Hodge were interrogated before we had an opportunity to build up our reinforcements. Had the SS learned of the meagre troop dispositions we had between this area and the beach, the situation could have been disastrous.

Terry Copp, noted military historian, vividly describes the situation in *"A Canadian's Guide to the Battlefields of Normandy"*:

"...If the Germans had broken through the Canadian position astride the Caen-Bayeux railway, the 12th SS could have launched a coordinated attack splitting the Anglo-Canadian bridgehead..."

Tracing the Route

Canadian Battle of Normandy Foundation, Near Buron, France

H.C. Chadderton: In this film, we will trace the movements of the Sherbrooke Fusiliers and the North Nova Scotia Highlanders in their movement from the beach to the Abbaye Ardenne.

Also, we will trace the movement of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles from their landing at Courseulles, through to Putot-en-Bessin, and on to the Château d'Audrieu. Thirdly, we will tell of incidents at places such as Authie, where the SS again brutally murdered Canadian prisoners.

Valour and Horror

H.C. Chadderton: After the war, in December of 1945, Canadians were outraged when they learned the details of these murders through the war crimes trials which began in Aurich, Germany.

As one might expect though, the public lost interest - until the docu-drama titled *"The Valour and the Horror"* rekindled the story in January of 1992. However, *"The Valour and the Horror"* somehow managed to get the good guys and the bad guys mixed up. Here is a clip from that controversial film.

[McKenna]: *"...While the German atrocity in this garden and others like it were prosecuted, reports of allied atrocities against Germans were never pursued. The message seems clear. War crimes committed in a good cause are politically acceptable, perhaps regrettable, but such war crimes are prosecuted only on the side that loses the war..."*

H.C. Chadderton: We owe much to those young Canadians who were butchered without mercy in the Normandy bridgehead area in June of 1944. Their memory demands that we set the record straight.

Medals for Gower and Fulton

H.C. Chadderton: Now, let's go to the story of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles.

Mike Red Beach, Courseulles, France

H.C. Chadderton: This tremendous pillbox was at the extreme left of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles objective on D-Day. It was captured by our "B" Company under command of Phil Gower, who won a military cross for that action.

The assault on the beaches to the west was carried out by "D" Company of the Winnipegs. They penetrated the sea wall and headed for Graye-sur-Mer.

Major Lockie Fulton received the Distinguished Service Order for his leadership in the capture of this village.

Capture of Graye-sur-Mer

Well Monument to Royal Winnipeg Rifles

H.C. Chadderton: Throughout Normandy, the local French inhabitants and Canadian veterans have erected a number of monuments and plaques. This is a very interesting one, it is actually a well. It commemorates the capture of Graye-sur-Mer by the Royal Winnipeg Rifles. This area was stoutly defended by the men of the German 716th Division.

Capture of Creully, France

Re: de Gaulle-Montgomery Monument

H.C. Chadderton: This chateau is just north of Creully. On June 14th, General de Gaulle and General Montgomery met here. However, eight days earlier this was the scene of a crucial battle.

Seulles River and Bridge in Distance

H.C. Chadderton: The town of Creully is protected on the north by the Seulles River. The Royal Winnipeg Rifles reached this spot and had to fan out, but were stopped by the Germans who were heavily defending the river and the bridge which we see in the distance. There is another bridge which is further east and that was the scene of a very large battle and we'll tell you about that next.

This is the bridge at the eastern approach to Creully.

It is easily defended. The Germans were stopping us cold here. But eventually a platoon of "D" company crossed the bridge, an action for which Lieutenant Jack Mitchell was awarded the military cross. If the Royal Winnipeg Rifles had not been able to capture Creully, there was no way that the 7th Brigade could have gotten anywhere near its D-Day objectives.

Capture of Putot

H.C. Chadderton: The Royal Winnipeg Rifles reached Putot-en-Bessin on June the 7th, the second day of the invasion. And a very sad day it was for this western Canadian battalion. Terry Copp, Sir Wilfred Laurier University Historian, tells the story.

Terry Copp: Putot-en-Bessin was a scattered village which proved difficult to defend. Lieutenant-Colonel John Meldram used "A" Company to defend the Brouay Crossing. "B" and "C" Companies were deployed in between. "D" Company was at the eastern edge of the village where a dirt road went under the railway line.

Back in Putot, the Germans had broken into the village and by afternoon, three of the Winnipeg companies were cut off and surrounded. Sixty-four Canadians had been taken prisoner and 45 of these were murdered by the 12th SS.

Recent attempts to justify this war crime by reference to rumours of atrocities by individual allied soldiers missed the point. The Canadian prisoners were well away from the battlefield under guard, when a staff officer of the 12th SS ordered their execution.

Château Murders

H.C. Chadderton: Major Fred Hodge became the first Canadian company commander in the hands of the SS. The Major and two of his soldiers were taken immediately to the SS advance headquarters.

Château Grounds, Path at Rear

H.C. Chadderton: We are now in the grounds at the rear of the Château d'Audrieu.

About 2 p.m. on the afternoon of June 8, the three prisoners, Major Hodge and Corporal Ralph Fuller and Rifleman Fred Smith were brought in from the north along this road.

They came to this point and then the guards turned them and headed them in this direction towards a very large sycamore tree.

The 12th SS had a tent here as its headquarters. In that tent, Major Hodge was first interrogated. Major Bremer was the commanding officer of this reconnaissance unit. He was wounded and away from here at the time. His second in command was a Lieutenant Schenk and the British war crimes unit identified a third officer later as a Major Von Reitzenstein.

And we have here the actual sketch which was done for the court of inquiry set up under the supreme headquarters of the allied forces, that is, General Eisenhower, to investigate this incident. That court sat in mid-July.

I've pinned this map to the sycamore tree and will take you through step by step what actually happened. Here we have the sycamore tree. This is the Château itself. The M stands for the place where members of the Château d'Audrieu staff could observe everything that was going on. And that becomes very important. In other words, they could not commit murders in this area because they would have been seen. Major Hodge and the other two prisoners were marched up this road along here. There was an officer (or a non commissioned officer) in the German army SS standing here, to direct them. They went further along this road and into a very deep area known as "the park."

This is a tragic, sacred and emotional place for me and for members of the Canadian Army who fought in Normandy. This is where Major Hodge, Corporal Fuller and Rifleman Smith were further interrogated and were then executed because they would not give the German SS reconnaissance battalion any information on the Canadian

dispositions. Major Hodge's body was on the left. Corporal Fuller was next, and on the right was Rifleman Smith.

Here we have a tragic accident of fate. Rifleman Fred Smith initially belonged to the Queen's Own of Toronto. He was transferred to the Winnipeg as reinforcement and a day later, he was murdered.

Standing facing them would have been the interrogating officer, Gerd Von Reitzenstein and standing near him was the Polish conscript in the SS, Withold Stangenburg, who heard it all and later wrote a statement about what happened here.

Stangenberg's Statement

Stangenberg:

“Three prisoners were brought to the Château grounds. There was an Officer Major and two other soldiers. They had been disarmed and were without helmets or caps. Hauptmann von Reitzenstein approached the three men under guard. He had maps in his hand and was making gestures indicating he wanted information.

The officer apparently refused to give any information. He appeared cool but definite. He refused to look at the maps and just kept shaking his head.

Hauptmann von Reitzenstein became very angry and drew his pistol. He waved his map in the Officer's face. The officer turned to the other prisoners and repeated this phrase: ‘Rank, Name, and Number.’

When he turned back, Hauptmann von Reitzenstein shot him, I think in the face.”

H.C. Chadderton:

The evidence, according to the recent book, *“Hitler's Last General”* by Ian Sayer, is that it was von Reitzenstein.

“...Twenty-five year old Hauptsturmführer Baron Gerd von Reitzenstein was the officer responsible for ordering the executions...”

Von Reitzenstein was implicated in the finding of a supplementary report of a SHAEF Court of Inquiry and the book states further:

“...The activities of von Reitzenstein (who survived the war) were submitted as evidence at the trial of the Major War Criminals which opened before the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg on the 14th of November 1945...”

Additional research indicates that the charges against von Reitzenstein were not proceeded with. The chief witness against him, Withold Stangenberg, had mistakenly been released and was eventually repatriated to Poland where he died in 1982.

Sneath's Testimony – Outside Château D'audrieu

H.C. Chadderton: Captain Lloyd Sneath had been a former NCO with the Royal Winnipeg Rifles. He transferred to the Hallamshire Battalion of the Lancaster and York regiment. He came across the gruesome discovery of these bodies when the British Army came through and captured the grounds of the Château d'Audrieu. He was thus able to give evidence to the war crimes investigation unit.

Sneath: The following morning I went down to the Château and saw the bodies as they lay near the hedge. Each man had been wounded in the head. In some cases, the top of the head had been lifted completely off.

Geneva Convention

H.C. Chadderton: Article 17 of the Geneva Convention regarding the treatment of prisoners of war states: Every prisoner of war is bound to give only his name, rank, and regimental number. *“The Valour and the Horror”* mentions some oblique reference in a notebook taken from the body of a dead Canadian officer. It was supposed to have said: *No prisoners will be taken.*

No officers of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles ever remembers any such order. In any event, there is ample photographic evidence that many German prisoners were taken by the Canadians in the early fighting.

McLean's Evidence

H.C. Chadderton: Only a few hours after the murder of Fred Hodge and his men, another slaughter was carried out by the SS.

Fontenay-le-Pesnel

H.C. Chadderton: It was along this road near Fontenay-le-Pesnel, on June the 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, some of them were wounded. They were advanced upon by several Hitler Jugend with schmeissers ready to fire. It was at this point that Bill Ferguson, a lieutenant serving with the Royal Winnipeg Rifles, a man who hailed originally from Vancouver, performed an act of sheer bravery.

Lieutenant Ferguson tried to reason with his captors. Laughingly, they cut him to pieces with machine gun fire. Then they turned their schmeissers on the other Canadians. Nevertheless, five did manage to escape into a nearby grain field.

Concerning this terrible massacre, Corporal Hector McLean of Inverness, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, risked his life to give the following testimony to the war crimes trials.

McLean: *"...It wasn't even a minute afterwards, the firing squad moved towards us in an extended line and... the order was given by one German to fire. After the first round was fired, I made a break for it and escaped into what I think was a grain field..."*

Clark's Evidence

Fontenay-le-Pesnel

H.C. Chadderton: 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 Wildon Clark gave evidence concerning Barker's heroism.

Clark: *"...Lieutenant Barker told us to stand steady until the first burst was fired. He was going to try and 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..."*

Purpose of Executions

Fontenay-le-Pesnel

H.C. Chadderton: Evidence in recent German publications indicates that the purpose of these mass executions was to scare the rest of the Canadian prisoners into giving information. It didn't work.

The purpose of these atrocities was confirmed in a news story in the London Daily Herald as early as August the 3rd of 1944. It stated:

"...The executions were ordered by an officer, said to be a major, apparently because he was infuriated at the Canadians for refusing to talk when interrogated.

It is confirmed that the men were shot on D-Day plus 2, near Pavie, Normandy, north of the Caen-Bayeux Road which the Canadians were battling to cross..."

Murder of British and American Troops

Mouen Monument

H.C. Chadderton: We are in Mouen, an area just south of the Caen-Bayeux railroad. The Hitler Youth butchers murdered many Canadians, some of them carrying their own wounded on the roads in and around here. The person held responsible was Wilhelm Mohnke, a Nazi general who had previously been held responsible for a massacre of British troops in the evacuation of Dunkirk, at a place called Wormoudt. And later in the war this same Wilhelm Mohnke was held responsible for the infamous massacre of American troops at Malmédy in the Battle of the Bulge. Please don't ask me why he was never prosecuted.

Haut-du-Bosq Murders

Haut-du-Bosq

H.C. Chadderton: Withold Stangenberg, who told us of the brutal murder of Fred Hodge at the Chateau d'Audrieu, gave evidence to the war crimes trials about another terrible tragic murder which took place at Haut-de-Bosq near this factory.

Bruce MacDonald, in his epic book *"The Trial of Kurt Meyer,"* describes what happened:

"...Three Canadian soldiers, Rifleman Allen Owens of the Royal Winnipeg Fusiliers and Sappers John Lonel and George Benner of the Engineers, were interrogated, shot and their bodies pushed into a bomb crater..."

Transition from Mohnke to Meyer

Château d'Audrieu, Royal Winnipeg Rifles Monument

H.C. Chadderton: This monument was erected in 1989 to the loving memory of 58 members of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles.

Also eight soldiers from other regiments and units who were murdered in the grounds of the Château d'Audrieu, at Fontenay-le-Pesnel, at Haut-de-Bosq and other surrounding areas.

This monument is mute testimony to the brutal murders carried out under the direction of Nazi General Wilhelm Mohnke. The young men were defenceless Canadian volunteers.

Other war crimes had been carried out the day before at the famous Abbaye d'Ardenne by another SS General, Kurt Meyer.

The prisoners involved came mostly from the North Nova Scotia Highlanders and the Sherbrooke Fusiliers.

Landings – Bernières-Sur-Mer

H.C. Chadderton: Most Canadians, who have watched films of D-Day, will recognize this beach house behind me, which is still intact more than 50 years later. This is at Bernières-sur-Mer where, in the second wave, the North Nova Scotia Highlanders and the Sherbrooke Fusiliers came ashore at about 10:00 in the morning.

Les Buissons

H.C. Chadderton: The vanguard of the Sherbrooke Fusiliers, with the North Nova Scotia Highlanders riding on their tanks, reached this spot early on June 7th. In his book, *“A Canadian's Guide to the Battlefields of Normandy,”* Terry Copp tells us about the first encounters with the German SS.

“...Kurt Meyer, in command of 25th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment had watched the approach of the North Novas from the tower of the Abbaye 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. The remaining North Novas and Sherbrookes retreated to Les Buissons where the other battalions were preparing a fortress position...”

Other Murders – Buron

Place des Canadiens

H.C. Chadderton:b This is a very honoured place for Canadians. It is the Place des Canadiens in Buron, France. Sergeant Stanley Dudka of the North Novas rode one of the Sherbrooke Fusiliers' tanks on the initial advance into this town on June 7th. Stanley lived to give evidence before the war crimes trials of the shooting of prisoners by the German SS which took place later that day.

DUDKA: My Company was the spearhead of the division. My platoon was cut off once and we were told every man for himself. This time we got into a rough fight. The Germans swarmed in and captured 15 of us. Immediately they picked out one man, threw him in the street and one of the Germans emptied a pistol into him. Then they walked us toward Caen. On the way, we passed a row of Canadians who were lying lined up in the street; they had all been shot through the head.

Tanks Disabled – Authie, Southern Outskirts

H.C. Chadderton: In the late afternoon of June 7th, Tom Windsor and his tank crew were captured about here, on the southern outskirts of Authie. Stan Dudka takes up the narrative.

DUDKA: We ran into a heavy mortar barrage. Within minutes most of our tanks had been knocked out. Everything happened so fast, that the crews never had a chance... The Shermans went up like torches; explosions, fire, smoke and screaming men.

The Abbaye Murders

Abbaye d'Ardenne

H.C. Chadderton: The first seven prisoners, including Tom Windsor, were taken to the Abbaye and locked in a storage shed.

The inner walls of this 13th century Abbaye d'Ardenne in Normandy have seen some macabre sights. But certainly, none more sinister than that which took place here late in the evening of June 7th, 1944. Seven defenceless, unarmed Canadian prisoners of war were executed for obeying international law. The Geneva Convention states that a captured soldier must give only his name, rank and serial number. The German SS wanted much more from them and they paid the penalty of their lives.

This is a panorama of the walls of the inside of the Abbaye. First we see the main gate. Then we travel along to see the storage sheds, next, the chapel. In the far distance the administration buildings and still further in the distance the tower from which Kurt Meyer could see the entire Normandy battlefield.

This was the area of the pump from which the Pole, Jesionek, heard Kurt Meyer give the order to execute the prisoners.

JESIONEK: I saw seven Canadian soldiers who had been taken prisoner. They were taken to a stable on the right of the Abbaye courtyard, where Meyer was standing.

Meyer said, "What should we do with these prisoners? They only eat up our rations. In future no more prisoners are to be taken."

This area looks exactly the same as it did on that terrible evening of June 7th, 1944. This is the passageway along which the seven soldiers were marched. They were held here momentarily. They were then led on the way into the garden and, at this location; individually they shook hands with each other and went up the stairs, led by Tom Windsor.

This is the entranceway to the garden and it was at this location where the executions were carried out.

Jesionek's evidence said:

JESIONEK: After the shooting was over, I went to the pump at the passageway. I saw the NCO reload his pistol as he walked out of the garden. I was

convinced of these cruelties when I entered the garden and saw the dead bodies of the seven Canadians in a large pool of blood.

H.C. Chadderton: The actual number of the North Nova's and Sherbrooke's who were murdered here on the 7th are buried in this garden, including that of Tom Windsor.

Garden Monuments

H.C. Chadderton: This heart rendering, little shrine was erected by the Vico family who were the inhabitants of the Abbaye. They put it up many years ago.

Then in 1984, the larger memorial was erected. It contains the names of 18 members of the Canadian army who were shot here on the 7th and 8th of June, 1944, and two other members, Corporal Pollard and Lieutenant Williams, who were executed here on the 17th of June, 1944.

Significance of Windsor's Death

Plaque, Main Gate of Abbaye d'Ardenne

H.C. Chadderton: This memorial plaque, erected beside the main gate of the Abbaye, is to the memory of 27 Canadians who were executed in cold blood by the Hitler Jugend. Inside, the memorial names 20 of these. Another seven were found later. On December the 27th, 1945, Kurt Meyer was found guilty of the execution of these prisoners.

He was to be hung but the sentence was commuted to life imprisonment, part of which he spent in Canada. He was released to a German prison and died in 1961 at the age of 51.

Specific evidence regarding the policy of the SS concerning the shooting of prisoners was given at Meyer's trial. We quote from a report of the Canadian War Crimes Investigation Unit dated 12th January, 1946:

"...Four German soldiers, members of the 25th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, swore that, during training, Meyer had said to his troops on different occasions: 'My regiment takes no prisoners.' These later orders included instructions that if prisoners were taken, they were to be shot..."

According to Sayer's recent book, "*Hitler's Last General*," a member of the 12th SS Reconnaissance Battalion stated that his company was given secret orders, the relevant part of which reads:

"...The attitude at the front: SS troops shall take no prisoners. Prisoners are to be executed after having been interrogated..."

Marcel Dagenais, a French-speaking Sherbrooke, had been taken prisoner at the same time as Tom Windsor. Because Dagenais was French-speaking, the Germans had held him apart from the other Canadian prisoners. Dagenais survived but later described Windsor's interrogation.

DAGENAIS: Lieutenant Windsor said, when questioned, he had only three things he would tell them, his rank, name, and number. With that, the Sergeant-Major slapped Windsor across the face.

H.C. Chadderton: Bruce MacDonald, in his book "*The Trial of Kurt Meyer*" concludes:

"...It might be a fair inference, that Lieutenant Windsor's declaration that he would answer only the three questions, which international law

prescribed a prisoner of war could be asked and be obliged to answer accounted for the fact that he and the others in his party never got beyond the Abbaye d'Ardenne, but they paid the price with their lives for their loyalty to their comrades and devotion to duty..."

The strategic value of these acts of withholding information was emphasized by historian Charles Stacey in his book, "*The Victory Campaign*," where he stated:

"...Anticipating a second invasion, probably to be directed against the Pas de Calais, the Germans continued to retain very large forces idle in that area, waiting for an attack which never came. Had these forces been directed immediately against our bridgehead in Normandy, the outcome of the battle there might have been different..."

The Killing Fields

H.C. Chadderton: We have dealt with the murders at the Château d'Audrieu, and at the Abbaye d'Ardenne. There is, however, more information about the murders at Authie.

Place des Canadiens

H.C. Chadderton: The people of Authie have named this the Place du 37 Canadiens. The number would have been much higher except for the courage of a gung ho Major of the North Nova's by the name of Rhody Rhodenizer. Rhody spoke some German, and was able to reason with his captors to stop the slaughter, thus placing himself in great danger.

There were other atrocities during this time as identified by the Canadian investigators.

First Aid Post, Le Mesnil-Patry

H.C. Chadderton: This is the site of a German SS field aid post. We are near Le Mesnil-Patry. It was here that on June the 9th, three Canadian soldiers were executed in cold blood. They were Fred Holness and Ernie Baskerville of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles, and Harold Angel of the Camerons of Ottawa. These were the only war crimes trials committed in this area for which the perpetrators, two German SS officers, were hanged.

Major Bernhard Siebken and Captain Dietrich Schnabel were tried and found guilty for these murders by a British court in 1948.

While on patrol on June 12th, Company Sergeant-Major Charlie Martin of the Queen's Own Rifles found the bodies of his friend, Tommy McLaughlin, and five other members of the Queen's Own Rifles, near this position. They, too, had been executed.

Historical Research

H.C. Chadderton:

A project such as this requires a great deal of research, much of it has been carried out through the study of books and documents, many of them long out of print. As well, we have had access to archival files in Germany, France, Great Britain and, of course, Canada.

While here in Normandy working on this film, I visited the “Memorial” or the Caen Museum. I picked up a book called *“The Canadians Face the German SS.”* Believe me; I was very annoyed to find a passage which said that the murders at the Château d’Audrieu were in fact retaliation for murders carried out by the Inns of Court Regiment of the British 50th Division. This is not only pure nonsense, but it’s hindsight at its worst.

A Count, Clary-Aldrigen, of the Panzer Lehr Division told a British Court in 1948, that he and a Colonel Luxenburger and a Colonel Zeissler were taken prisoner by the Inns of Court. They were tied to the armoured cars as human shields as this patrol attempted to find its way back through the German lines. They were fired upon and, according to Count Clary-Aldrigen, two of them were killed.

A history of the Panzer Lehr Division, published in 1989, makes no reference to this shooting of prisoners. Also, Colonel Zeissler received an award for gallantry three months after this so-called shooting, while he was supposed to be with the Inns of Court Regiment.

Another major book, published in 1995 in France and titled *“Album Historique of the Panzer Lehr Division,”* even has a photo of Zeissler, identified as a Major, taken in October of 1944, three months after he was supposed to have been killed by the British patrol.

Also, this publication *“Zie Kommen,”* published in 1960, states that Colonel Luxenburger and Colonel Zeissler were in a German column of vehicles which were bombed by the Luftwaffe.

For my money, the most reliable source as to what happened would be the war diaries for the Inns of Court Regiment. We were able to obtain the entries for June 8, 1944.

Yes, there was an incident where prisoners were taken. Yes, this patrol was ambushed on its way back, but certainly no indication that the officers were tied to the vehicles. What did happen was the Inns of Court lost two of their best officers, a Lieutenant Yodaiken and Lieutenant Wigram.

This film demands that we examine the events which led to the recruiting of the 12th SS Hitler Jugend. These were all young Germans between the ages of 16 and 19. They had been nurtured in the ideology of the Nazi socialism system. They took a blood oath to the Fuhrer.

The first time they were in action was against the Canadians in the Caen sector in Normandy. They demonstrated the kind of brutality that can arise from a system such as that foisted upon the German people by Adolf Hitler.

These young soldiers were monsters in camouflage uniforms, killers with no conscience. They formed a division of fanatics that killed without rhyme or reason.

In his book *"Blood and Honour,"* Craig Luther, an American historian, states:

"...Many Canadian soldiers admit freely that their own forces were also guilty of shooting enemy prisoners in Normandy..."

In a footnote, Luther says:

"...Questionnaires completed for the author by veterans of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division confirm that German prisoners, particularly those from the Waffen SS, were sometimes shot..."

Luther's book indicates, however, that a total of only nine Canadians were interviewed and only three of those were infantry. This would hardly be justification for the author's conclusion that and I quote:

"...many Canadians freely admitted shooting prisoners..."

One of the Canadians supposedly interviewed by Luther was Larry Brabant, of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles. I know Larry personally. I spoke with him on a live radio show on July the 7th, 1995 in Winnipeg.

Live Radio

H.C. CHADDERTON: Larry, can you tell us just what was in that questionnaire?

BRABANT: I don't remember filling it out, Cliff.

Loose Ends

Wall of Honour, Caen Memorial Garden

H.C. Chadderton: This is the Wall of Honour, erected by the Canadian Battle of Normandy Foundation in the grounds of Le Memorial. It contains the names of all of the regiments and units which fought in the Battle of Normandy in June of 1944.

We shall proceed now to the reflecting pool.

As you can see, this is a peaceful place, a place for reflection. But one cannot escape the reality that we are only a few short kilometres away from the scenes of the most brutal murders in Canadian military history.

After the war, the German government carried out its own investigations under the War Crimes Bureau. The terms of reference are quoted in the book *"The Wehrmacht War Crimes Bureau, 1939-1945."*

No evidence was found to substantiate charges that there had been shooting of German PoWs by Canadians, even though this is strongly implied in the CBC film, *"The Valour and the Horror."*

The massive *"History of the 12th SS Panzer Division Hitler Jugend,"* written by Hubert Meyer (no relation to Kurt Meyer and published in English in 1994), makes no reference to the murder of Canadian prisoners. That, we could probably expect. It is somewhat strange, however, that author Meyer, himself a staff officer with the 12th SS, failed to turn up any evidence of Canadians shooting German prisoners either.

Shooting Of American and British PoWs

Pointe du Hoc

H.C. Chadderton: We are at the Pointe du Hoc, a fortification on the Normandy coast between Caen and Cherbourg. This fortification was taken on D-Day by the American Rangers. It is of interest to our story however, that very few Americans, or for that matter British PoWs, were shot. The reason: They were not up against the 12th SS.

SS Philosophy vs. Regular German Army

German War Cemetery, La Cambe, France

H.C. Chadderton: We are at the German military cemetery in La Cambe, near Bayeux in France. This cemetery is maintained by a private commission in Germany with public funding. There are nearly 22,000 German military personnel buried here. It is traditional in the German cemeteries that there are two soldiers buried at each headstone. And throughout the cemetery you will see symbolic five crosses of stone.

The members of the regular German army fought by the rules of war, as we ourselves did. In fact, the regular German army was always severely critical of the SS, and particularly the military arm called the Waffen SS.

A good description of the twisted philosophy of the young SS soldiers is given in Bruce MacDonald's book "*The Trial of Kurt Meyer*:"

"...Their indoctrination included lectures in which they were reminded of the destruction wrought at home by our bombers and they were told that they must be hard and fight to the last bullet. They were told that the Allied Forces took no prisoners and that they too should take no prisoners..."

Gauvin Clip

Chaudiere Monument, Beny-sur-Mer

- H.C. Chadderton:** We turn now to a clip involving a discussion between Captain Michel Gauvin of the Regiment de la Chaudière and an officer of the 21st Panzer Division who fought in Normandy.
- Helmut Liebeskind:** *I must find out that in North Africa, due to Marshall Rommel's education and leadership, we fought a gentleman's war. We... it did not happen that a war prisoner would be killed.*
- Michel Gauvin:** *When you speak about that, do you recall an incident where the Canadians killed their prisoners?*
- Helmut Liebeskind:** *No!*
- Michel Gauvin:** *Ah!*
- Helmut Liebeskind:** *No! No!*
- Michel Gauvin:** *That's what I just wanted to clarify.*
- Helmut Liebeskind:** *No! No! No!*
- H.C. Chadderton:** Helmut Liebeskind, later a General in the German Army, makes it crystal clear. Canadians did not shoot PoWs.

No Reports of Germans Shot

de Gaulle Monument, Courseulles, France

H.C. Chadderton: This is the Charles de Gaulle monument in Courseulles, France. We are pursuing the subject of whether Canadians shot German prisoners. As an infantry officer with four months experience, I think I'm in a position to say that frankly, it was not in their nature to do so.

Sherman Tank Monument, Courseulles, France

H.C. Chadderton: This is a Sherman tank which belonged to the 1st Hussars of London, Ontario. It was sunk in the channel, but it was hauled out a few years ago and stands in Courseulles. This seems to be the appropriate place to talk about whether Canadians did in fact shoot German prisoners as the McKenna's suggested. The idea is preposterous, but it seems to be spreading. Watch this clip from a recent British documentary.

"...Among the most able and savage units in Normandy were those of Hitler's Waffen SS. Expertly trained and intensely motivated, they were hated and feared..."

A former British officer Kenneth Macksey, Tank Commander with the Royal Armoured Corps, states:

"...They did carry out atrocities and the Canadians in particular suffered extremely badly from them in the early stages of the Normandy thing... ...Of course... ...and then the Canadians started going for them in a big way..."

We emphasize this British officer's statement, *"...Canadians started going for them, (that is, the SS) in a big way..."* So we see the damage that can result from inaccurate statements like the ones in *"The Valour and the Horror."*

Ashworth

Churchill Tank Monument, Courseulles, France

- H.C. Chadderton:** This is a Churchill tank. It actually landed on D-Day. It's called a Petard, because the rocket launcher hoisted a huge charge which would blow up the German fortifications. However, for our story, it happens to be at a very interesting location because we want to talk about Edward Ashworth. He was a British Naval Rating who claims that he got out of his craft, came ashore and saw some Germans with their throats cut.
- McKenna:** One story comes from the day of the landings on the Normandy beach. A British sailor claimed he watched Canadians march some of their German prisoners behind a sand dune, hoping to get a helmet as a souvenir.
- H.C. Chadderton:** He said that he found those Germans behind some sand dunes. So let's look around and see if there are any sand dunes. I think not. It's a very, very flat place where no one could hide.

Meyer / Mohnke Evidence

Beny-sur-Mer Cemetery

H.C. Chadderton: We are at the Bény-sur-Mer Cemetery, in the beachhead area in Normandy in France. There are 2,048 Canadians buried here. Our story directly concerns only five of them. Lieutenant Bill Ferguson, Lieutenant Reg Barker, Rifleman Fred Smith, Corporal Ralph Fuller, and Major Fred Hodge, a friend of mine for many years.

As the result of a long and careful military and legal inquiry, in 1945, General Kurt Meyer was found to be responsible for the murder of the Canadians in the Abbaye Ardenne. There is possibly a stronger indictment against another General, Wilhelm Mohnke, who is living in retirement in Germany as this film is being made. Mohnke was responsible for the murders in and around the Chateau d'Audrieu.

During the period from the 7th to the 17th of June 1944, a space of only 10 days, hundreds of unarmed Canadian prisoners of war had been murdered by the members of the 12th SS.

Why were no Canadian prisoners shot after June 17th? There is an understandable reason. By that time, it was painfully apparent to the Germans, that they might lose the war. They began to wonder if their actions would eventually catch up to them.

Tom Windsor's Letter

Bretteville Cemetery

H.C. Chadderton: And so we bring to a close this story of one of the most terrible episodes in our military history. It lasted only 10 days. The brutal German SS snuffed out the lives of Tom Windsor and another 133 young Canadians. They had fought bravely. They surrendered with honour. They were prisoners of war. They deserved to be treated as human beings under one of the oldest protocols of international law, the Geneva Convention. They died but their stories should not.

Sometimes we tend to gloss over the tragedy of war in terms of human loss. I would like to read to you part of a letter which Tommy Windsor wrote to his wife, to be opened "only in the event of my death."

"Dear Roma,

As our time draws near to go into battle, I want to tell you, darling, how much you have meant to me and how happy and complete you have made my life. I have no regrets, darling, at going and I am at peace with the world, knowing that you will be here to carry on for me. I will always be waiting for you."