

**NORMANDY MEMOIRS**

by

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D-Day, 6 June, 1944. We had slept fitfully, some not at all. The sea was swelling, the early light of dawn showing an overcast, rain-darkened sky, the horizon difficult to see. The transport lurched and rolled, frustrated by the convoy's slow speed across the channel. I went on deck, happy to escape the pungent atmosphere of the small cabin, a mixture of woolly body odour and oil impregnated air. My fellow officers joined me to view an extraordinary sight: in every direction there were ships, ships, ships, of every size, shape, and purpose. There were destroyers, cruisers, Landing Craft Tanks, Landing Craft Infantry, minesweepers, escort vessels, transports, and battleships, their huge bulk blocking the distance. Suddenly I realized that with this armed might, the invasion would succeed. It was as simple as that.

We had boarded the transport (RMS Llangibby Castle) thirty six hours earlier, on the evening of 4 June. We were not to know at that time that D-Day had been postponed for a day, hence our incarceration on the overcrowded vessel. We were the reinforcement group, specifically assigned to the 7th Brigade, 3rd Canadian Infantry Division. The five officers of our group were slated to replace the immediate casualties of the 1st Battalion, The Canadian Scottish Regiment, our parent regiment. We realized from our briefings, however, that there would be no guarantee we would serve with our unit once the landing took place. We had soldiers with us under our command whom we had only met for the first time in our concentration area. They were, as we were, reinforcements to be sent where needed, depending on casualties suffered by the assaulting units. Good soldiers all of them. Well trained as "back ups", but obviously not to the standard of the Battalion troops who had served and trained together since 1941. However, despite these shortcomings, we developed a close relationship in those few short days before landing.

The assaulting troops touched down in France at about 0600 hours under a tremendous bombardment. We, as the reinforcement group, landed about six hours later. While waiting for orders to disembark, all of our troops were on the deck of the transport, watching the preparations. The disembarkation drill called for the troops to clamber over the side of the transport and descend

by rope ladders to the Landing Craft Assault waiting below. I looked over the side of the transport and there was an L.C.A. badly damaged and sinking, trying to get along side under command of a sailor who was partially overcome by fumes from his damaged engine. A rope happened to be hanging down to the L.C.A. from the deck of the transport, thirty feet below. With little thought I handed my glasses to someone, climbed over the railing, and slid down the rope to the deck of the L.C.A. I reached the sailor, lifted him fireman style, and attempted to carry him along the bulwark of the L.C.A. to where the bow was being held from the side hatch of the transport. This was not the thing to do : a wave hit the L.C.A. and I found myself together with the semi-conscious sailor, in the water between the one thousand ton L.C.A. and the sixteen hundred thousand ton transport. Why both of us were not crushed to death I will never know. Fortunately, sailors at the hatch managed to secure the bow of the L.C.A. long enough for us to be pulled over the side and through the hatch before the next big wave. We were wet but no one was hurt and the asphyxiated sailor recovered in the transport's sick bay. I even received my glasses back, along with my friend saying "What a bloody foolish thing to do" while slapping my back.

Our actual landing was uneventful, as by that time (approximately noon) the beach area had been secured. We waded ashore in chest high water but as I was already wet it made little difference. The Corsuelles<sup>1</sup> beach was a scene of organized chaos: landing craft disgorging troops. L.C.A.'s badly damaged and abandoned, equipment scattered, vehicles stranded, wounded waiting to be evacuated, bodies both Canadian and German, but through it all a steady flow of troops, vehicles and tanks slowly moving inland. My first experience of seeing a dead man - it gave me a lurch and then it was over. Guided by the beach control officers we led our troops across the sand and through a gap in the bank. Behind was a wide and deep water-filled ditch. Our bridge over this was one of our own tanks, hopelessly bogged. I remember thinking

1. Brian Carrothers identifies the actual landing site being 'Nan Beach' near Vaux and Graye sur Mer.

"damn silly place to put a tank" and found out later that this had been done deliberately to allow the assaulting troops to cross the obstacle. Then we were past the shell houses and into the farmland, where we finally bivouacked in a wooded area some two miles inland. We immediately dug in and waited for nightfall or to be called forward to replace casualties in the Battalion, which, we learned later, had penetrated further (six miles) than any other formation in the Second Army.

German activity, as far as our reinforcement group was concerned, was minimal. We were too far inland to be affected by any beach shelling and the mortar and machine-gun fire was too far forward. Thus we arrived in our bivouac area without casualties but full of trepidation the next day. How would a reinforcement officer be received? What platoon would he command? Would he be able to lead his men well and not let them down? These thoughts kept returning as we dug out slit trenches, ate our rations, and attempted to sleep. During the night (6/7 June). German fighter bombers flew over the beach area, missed their targets and dropped their bombs close to the bivouac. Fortunately there were no casualties.

The next morning we received orders that some of us would be moving forward to the Battalion. The Canadian Scottish reinforcement officers consisted of myself and Lieutenants Stu Corsan, Norm Park, Jack Gallagher, Stew Chambers and Brian Carrothers. Later that day three of us, Jack Gallagher, Stu Carson and I, together with enough soldiers to take the place of the eighty seven casualties the Scottish had suffered on D-Day, were guided toward Battalion headquarters, located at Secqueville-en-Bessin. There we were met by the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Fred Cabeldu, and assigned to our companies. Mine was C, commanded by Major Des Crofton, who told me I would be taking over No. 15 Platoon, whose commander, Lieutenant Gordon Ratcliff, had been killed the day before. The defensive positions of C Company (and those of the Battalion) were explained to me and I was taken to my platoon, where I met my sergeant, Tom Carney.

Tom made me welcome and showed me around the positions, where I met my section commanders, Corporals Al McDonald, Don Mitchell and Lloyd Butlin, who proved to be outstanding leaders.<sup>2</sup> Tom was a magnificent sergeant and we became good friends.

With me were ten soldiers to replace the D-Day casualties. They too were made welcome by the 'veterans'. I don't know what my platoon thought of me but I recall vividly the quiet confidence and great spirit the men showed. They had proved themselves in battle and had won their objectives against experienced and battle-hardened troops. It was a great feeling for me.

We settled in for the night (7 June). There had been a lot of artillery and mortar fire on our front during the day but this quietened down as it grew dark. Sleep was not easy to come by. Everyone slept in the slit trenches, one on guard for two hours, the other attempting to sleep. The trenches were dug four feet deep, six feet long, and two feet wide, and were designed for two men to fight an attacking enemy and give shelter from artillery and mortar fire. The man not on duty sat in the bottom of the trench with his back against the end, his helmet on his head, and his weapon between his knees. I shared a slit with my batman. It seemed like a long night.

A word about the equipment. All soldiers in the 3rd Division were issued special helmets, more shaped to the head than the traditional Army issue. We also wore high-laced boots which buckled on the top and were very sturdy and comfortable. Our battle dress was standard issue but had been impregnated with a gooey substance designed as a gas deterrent. Very uncomfortable when first put on, but one became used to it. Officers wore a shirt and tie, other ranks a shirt or sweatshirt but no tie. All wore the same webbing except that officers had small pouches for revolver ammunition, while the other ranks carried large pouches to take magazines for the Bren

2. Mitchell and Butlin were both killed at Cussy, after knocking out German tanks with Piats - a great loss. McDonald and I renewed friendships in 1987, after a gap of 43 years.

and Sten guns. Everyone carried a Commando knife, extra bandoliers of rifle ammunition, and one or two field dressings (large bandages). The small pack, carried on the back, contained mess tins, shaving kit, towel, a housewife (sewing kit), two pairs of socks, a sweater, a spare shirt, spare undershorts, a gas cape, rations (which were resupplied every two days and divided up by sections) and if there was any room left, notepaper, envelopes and a pen. Officers carried a map case, which most threw away and just carried their maps folded in the large pocket of their battle dress trousers. On the back of the webbing a ground sheet was folded around a blanket. The .303 Lee Enfield bolt action magazine charged rifle was the weapon of all riflemen; section commanders carried Sten guns, a semi automatic hand held weapon. Officers carried Smith & Wesson revolvers. Most platoon commanders quickly acquired another weapon, either a rifle, Sten or even a captured German Schmeisser, equivalent to the Sten. I purloined the latter, plus a German Luger revolver, as I had discovered in training that I was hopeless with a Smith and Wesson. All carried grenades, either '36' high explosive, or phosphorus or both. With the weapon(s) and ammunition, all this probably came to thirty pounds per man, quite suitable for fighting.

Dawn came about 0430 hours this 8th of June. Everyone stood too . . . that is, everyone was on guard half an hour before dawn to half an hour after dawn. No talking was permitted. No smoking was allowed. As soon as stand down was over, breakfast was cooked in the bottom of the slit trench on a small burner, consisting of strong tea, pork and beans, and hard biscuits. It was quickly eaten. I had just completed my rounds of the position (all men were in good heart) when there was a sudden cry from one of the trenches. Without warning an ME 106 zoomed not more than fifty feet above our position, so low and close that I could easily see the pilot's face. He was firing his cannons as he passed over us and everyone dived for the nearest trench. In a flash he was gone with no casualties to us, but it made us all realize how vulnerable the soldier is to attack from air, unless he is under cover. We stayed close to our slits for the rest of the morning.

Although there was little activity around the Scottish reserve position, we were not far from the two forward battalions of the 7th Brigade. Suddenly, the Germans launched a very strong armoured attack against the Regina Rifles, left forward of the Norrey-en-Bessin, and even more strongly against the Royal Winnipeg Rifles, right forward at Putot-en-Bessin. As the day wore on it became obvious to us that a tremendous battle was raging forward of our own position at Secqueville-en-Bessin. We later learned that the German attack was made by the 26th Panzer Grenadier Regiment (Hitler Youth). At about 1830 hours the Company Commander was called to Battalion Headquarters. He returned in about fifteen minutes and immediately called for his platoon commanders. The orders were brief: the Winnipeg's had been overrun by the Germans and the Battalion's task was to counter-attack and retake Putot-en-Bessin. Our failure would allow the German's to drive to the beach and jeopardize the whole invasion. Pretty heady stuff! The Scottish would attack with two companies up, two in reserve. C Company would be right rear behind D. My platoon (15) would be right forward of C.

No time to lose. Return to platoon on the run. Call together platoon sergeant and section commanders. Try to talk clearly but quickly. Explain situation on map. Everyone understands. Send them back to sections. On with small packs. Ammunition checked by Tom Carney. Begin to move out. 13 Platoon on my left. D company already well ahead. Much smoke from our own screen of mortars and artillery. Check to see that my two forward sections are moving forward in extended line with me in centre. Tom Carney with platoon headquarters and reserve section behind. Fire beginning to get heavy. Bullets buzzing close. O.K. if you can hear them - you're not hit. Smoke clearing. How far to go? Look around - no platoon. Gone to ground because of fire. Screw up courage, wave pistol in direction of enemy, shout "Come on guys, up the Scottish!", get everyone moving again. Suddenly on outskirts of Putot-en-Bessin - pass through hedge into orchard, pass through orchard, then through another hedge. See dead Germans, dead

Scottish. See Scottish officer flattened by a tank. Take up position rear of D Company. All hell breaking loose. Tank, machine gun fire, mortar fire, artillery fire coming from everywhere. Can't tell which side bullets are on. Everyone digs in. Fastest slit trenches made in Normandy. Next minutes, hours, a daze. D Company seem to be holding their own. Finally nightfall. Tracer bullets make a brilliant fireworks display. Everyone awake. Weapons cocked, waiting for the next German attack.

At first light the Battalion's positions were adjusted to get better fields of fire. C Company was pulled back some fifty yards to within the orchard we had passed through. We were now right flank Company and had excellent fields of fire forward to the railway embankment some four hundred yards ahead (the railway was the main Caen-Bayeux line). My platoon was right forward of the Company and hence right flank of the Battalion. During the day (9 June), the Battalion was subject to counter-attacks by the Panzer Grenadiers against the left and left-centre positions, but these were successfully beaten off. At the end of the day the Scottish were in firm control of Putot and the battle had been won, but at a very high cost: forty-five officers and men were killed and another eighty wounded. Fortunately, my platoon casualties were low and during the next few days I got to know my men. They were good men, just average Canadians, from all walks of life, dedicated to doing the best job that they could. It was a privilege to be with them.

We stayed at Putot until the night of 17/18 June. Aggressive patrolling was the order of the day, and in due course my turn came up. I was told by Des Crofton to take a seven man night patrol to the railway embankment directly ahead of my position. It was suspected that the Germans were placing standing patrols on our side of the embankment; our capture of a prisoner was top priority. I selected my men (with the help of Tom Carney), briefed them on the purpose, route,



password, order of march, what to carry (weapons and ammunition), made sure all jingling items were removed or tied down, blackened our faces, and replaced our helmets with balaclavas. At about midnight we set out, with two men in front, then myself and Lance Corporal Gunther (who spoke German) with the other three bringing up the rear. There was a well defined road leading past our position to the bridge spanning the railway, and as this had not been mined, we used it as a route. After twenty minutes we arrived at the embankment and I spread the patrol out on the near side of the ditch. We settled in. Suddenly, I had to urinate, which is difficult to do lying down, but I did it, much to the amusement of Gunther.

A half an hour went by. Voices . . . German voices, then footsteps across the bridge. Raise head slowly. Just make out two German soldiers not twenty feet away. "God, will they see us?" No - talking too much. Must be young, inexperienced. Getting into trench right in front of us. They will see us if we stay here much longer. What to do . . . what to do? Idea. Crawl to Gunther. Whisper in his ear, "I will crawl over embankment and get behind Germans. When there I will open fire. You call to them to surrender. O.K.?" Gunther nods. Off I go - crawl slowly to the right - go between two of my patrol. No time to brief. Signal to them to stay put. Wonder if they think I've gone mad. Over the embankment. Now on far side. Hope no Germans on other side of railway or I'm a dead duck. Crawl along towards Germans and come up behind them. Stand up. Fire burst from my Schmeisser. Gunther on cue yells "Hans Hoch!" All hell breaks loose. Bloody Germans firing back. Pull phosphorous grenade from pocket and throw. Everything lights up. German screams. Both throw up hands. "Come on Gunther!" I yell. He appears. Disarm Germans, push them down road at full run. Wrong road. Germans across railway firing heavy machine guns (tracer) down road which we came up. Lucky we're on the wrong road. Keep running. German prisoners terrified, probably no more than their captors. Approach our position. Forgotten bloody password. Can only shout "Don't shoot, it's Lieutenant

Corry." Finally in own lines. Met Hec Alexander, Company Second-in-Command, who said "We damn near shot you!" Told him I had to go back for rest of patrol. Told to take prisoners to Battalion H.Q. for debriefing by Second-in-Command, Major Wightman.

The German soldiers were teenagers, one seventeen, the other eighteen, and it was the phosphorus grenade that had made them give up so quickly. When phosphorus hits exposed skin it burns, and if water is applied it burns more. They were more frightened of the burn than they were of being shot. I returned to my platoon (just as dawn was breaking) to learn that the five other members of the patrol had returned safely - no one killed, no one wounded - and we had captured two prisoners. Des Crofton came to the platoon and congratulated me on the capture. I felt good. I was told later that these were the first prisoners taken by the Brigade by a night patrol.

During the period in Putot we were very busy but not fighting. Every night it was two hours on, two hours off, and stand to for everyone thirty minutes before dawn. Every position in the platoon had to be visited before breakfast, chatting with the men, seeing how their health was, inspecting weapons and feet, organizing duties for the day, staying under cover, catching what sleep one could, getting ready for night work, whether it be supporting patrols, minelaying, or erecting barbedwire fences on vital approaches, and generally doing one's best to ensure that everyone stayed alive. Snipers were always a threat and everyone was cautioned not to expose themselves outside the orchard. One of the officers in another company was killed by a German sniper. Our snipers eventually killed him.

While in Putot I received a birthday parcel from my parents, quite forgetting that I had arrived at the ripe old age of twenty-one the month before. "What could it be?" I thought. "Socks . . . cigarettes . . . chocolates?" I opened it up, undid the tissue paper, and there, in all its newness lay

a beautiful, bright red silk dressing gown! "My God," I thought, "the perfect gift for a man who lives in a hole in the ground!" My batman collapsed with laughter and it didn't take long for the word to be passed around that the Platoon Commander received the perfect gift for the Normandy campaign. I always regret that I never had the chance to wear my bright red silk dressing gown.

One night C Company laid minefields. An eerie experience. Complete darkness. Everyone following a drill as we left the orchard to carry, place, and prime the anti-tank and anti-personnel mines to our front and flank. I often wondered whether, following our departure from Putot, some unsuspecting villagers or even friendly units might inadvertently stumble on our efforts.

Sleep - how precious it became. There was simply not enough of it, as platoon commanders were lucky to get two hours out of twenty-four. After a week one becomes a bit light-headed, which is dangerous. One day the Medical Officer took pity on Lieutenant Sandy Hay and me and took us to the Regimental Aid Post, pointed to two stretchers, and said "I will call you when you are needed." That three hours of unbroken sleep was the best I have ever had. I am not sure that I told the Company Commander where I was for three hours, but I am sure he knew. Tom Carney was quite impressed.

On 15 June, C Company was told to move across the railway line and occupy the village of Le Mesnil Patry (known by all as The Mess In The Pantry) which had been reported clear of the enemy. This was a night move, very eerie, very touchy, as we did not know if the Germans had really vacated the village, or where their positions were. The worst thing about this was that on the route we had to pass a dead cow and a dead German, both of which had been lying in the sun for a week and were bloated to near explosion. The stench was indescribable, overpowering and absolutely gut wrenching. It took all our control not to cough and retch, which might have given

our position away. No sooner had we arrived at Le Mesnil than we were ordered back to Putot and had to pass the corpses once again. The whole exercise was a complete nightmare for me. How good it was to get back to the familiar orchard at Putot.

We were told that the Battalion was moving five miles east to the twin villages of Rots/Le Hamel where we would be relieving Le Regiment de la Chaudiere. It was to be a night relief to take place after dusk on 17 June, so at about 2300 hours we set off. Going across country at night with no moon and no way to read one's map is not easy, so it became a case of following, single file, the company, platoon, section and man in front of you. It was only by the greatest stroke of good fortune that I did not get my platoon lost. We were following 16 Platoon (I was leading mine) when the man in front went through a gap in the hedgerow. I followed, went through, looked around, and there was no one in sight. That sinking feeling! Visions of leading my platoon, plus all those behind me, straight in to German hands. Luckily, at the last moment I saw a blurred figure disappearing, followed it, caught up and breathed a huge sigh of relief when the figure became the last man of 16 Platoon. It could easily have been a cow! In due course we arrived at Rots. No Chaudieres were there to show us our positions. We learned later that they had left earlier and that the position had been held by the Battalion's advance party of eight people for almost two hours. It was just good luck that the Germans had not attacked. If they had, God knows what might have happened. The Chaudieres committed a fundamental error in tactics, but that was not all. Before leaving their slit trenches, which we were supposed to occupy, they used each one as a latrine. The muffled curses could be heard from one end of Rots to the other. New slits had to be dug during the night, and to this day no Scottish veteran of Normandy will say anything good about Le Regiment de la Chaudiere.

Rots was situated on a rise of ground overlooking a valley, with the opposite side held by the Germans, one thousand yards away. In the far distance one could just make out the hangars at

Carpiquet airfield on the outskirts of Caen. During the three weeks we were there, the valley became a no mans land, with each side attempting to control it by fire and patrols. My platoon was on the right sector of the Battalion.

The Germans shelled and mortared us unexpectedly, dangerously, and accurately. They used their eighty-eight millimetre anti-aircraft/anti-tank guns in the direct role and their velocity was such that you never heard the shot until the shell crashed.<sup>3</sup> In addition, they used Moaning Minnies, mortars fired in tandem whose shells screamed like a thousand devils just before they landed. Both caused many casualties, although my platoon was lucky to escape. However, this constant harassment both day and night caused us to restrict our movement to the minimum. All very wearing on the nerves, but not without its lighter moments. On one occasion a mortar attack started and we, as usual, dove for our trenches. Somehow our usual drill did not quite work, and three of us tried to get into a slit trench built for two. The last in, my batman, went in head first and ended with his rear sticking up. I took off my helmet and placed it firmly but reverently on his bum. Tom Carney, who was watching me, just shook his head. My batman didn't even thank me, which really hurt!

In Rots we had our first church service since landing. The Padre, Roy Seaborn (who later became Anglican Bishop of Quebec), held a series of these in an apple orchard in the Le Hamel part of the village. It was a beautiful day and peaceful, as the Germans, for once, were not shelling. By sections, the Battalion in turn attended the series of services organized by Roy. We remembered those who had been killed, those who had been wounded, prayed for our safe return, sang "Onward Christian Soldiers" (we all knew that) and ended with the Padre's blessing. It was a memorable day and we all returned to our positions and our duty with new heart. Somehow the shelling and mortaring did not seem so bad after that.

3. Battalion Headquarters, located in a farmhouse was hit on 26 June, killing three officers, and wounding three others, including the CO and Second-in-Command, two sergeants and a piper.

During the time we were at Rots I was called upon to lead another night patrol for the express purpose of capturing prisoners, hence it was a 'fighting patrol'. We went through the same drill of preparing, but this time the patrol was of ten men, as I had a Bren gun section (a light machine-gun section of three men). With the help of Tom I picked my patrol, which included LCpl Gunther. We left the battalion lines through another company's FDL's (Forward Defended Localities) at about midnight and quietly moved through our minefields (somewhat nervously) and into the wheat fields, which were about four feet high and gave good cover. Eventually, after about thirty minutes, we came to an unpaved road which joined the village of Vieux Caron on our far left to Carpiquet on our right. We settled into position and had been there only about ten minutes when two German soldiers came walking down the road from the direction of Vieux Caron. They were about thirty feet away as they passed our position and I did not think they were close enough to make a snatch. In retrospect this was a bad decision, for in a few seconds they were past us and our opportunity was lost. I thought that they must have come from an outpost position down the road and were being relieved. We waited, as I hoped they or others might come back again, but nothing happened. After three hours I decided to withdraw and we returned to our lines empty-handed, much to the disappointment of Battalion Headquarters. I should have seized the chance and been more aggressive. Perhaps the ease of the Putot snatch had spoiled me or perhaps some battle fatigue had set in. In any case, no prisoners were taken. Tom Carney took out a patrol a few days later which went out at night, stayed in the wheatfields all day (under broiling sun), and returned that night, also empty-handed. We learned much later that the Germans were very careful not to wander from their positions at night, such was the reputation of Canadians for night patrolling.

Our time at Rots was not only one of German mortar and artillery harassment but also of disruption of another kind: visits by Army Generals. This was part of their job, but nothing is more unsettling than to have them wandering around your platoon position when any movement is

likely to draw fire. On one such visit the General was from England and had been flown over by the R.C.A.F. and then jeeped up to our lines, accompanied by the pilot. This elegantly dressed gentleman, complete with the fighter pilot's traditional white silk scarf, arrived at my platoon position. For some reason I knew him slightly, perhaps from school days, and also for some reason did not particularly like him. He didn't seem to take much interest in what we were doing and was rather anxious to get away. When I asked him what his rush was, he replied that he had to get back to England, because he had a date for dinner in London with a blond. I thought "My God, these people don't know what war is all about!" Perhaps I was just envious that he would be sleeping between clean sheets, warm and dry, and probably not alone.

There were still civilians in Rots. One of these was a character whose name was Joe Blots, and who was also the town drunk. However he was a friendly soul and quite ready to trade a fresh egg or two for a can of pork and beans. He seemed quite impervious to German shellfire, and became affectionately known as "Joe Blots from Rots."

One day there was a commotion in the village, much shouting and screaming which preceeded a procession from one end to the other. As my platoon headquarters was dug into a bank overlooking the main street we had box seats. Along came the villagers, 15 or 20, driving two attractive young girls ahead of them. They would have been attractive if their heads had not been shaved to a complete baldness. Apparently these two had collaborated with the Germans when they occupied the village and the villagers were now taking their revenge. We never actually found out what happened to the two girls but if the mood of the procession was any indication I would hate to guess.

On 6 July we were told that the battle of Caen was about to take place, and on the evening of 7 July the Battalion was relieved by a British armoured regiment and began moving east to the

village of Caron. That same evening we were given an aerial display of might that few have seen. To soften up Caen the Allies sent in five hundred bombers at about two thousand feet, on a route that took them directly over us. In addition, the Royal Navy joined the barrage with its battleships' sixteen inch guns, and as these huge shells passed over our heads at about five hundred feet, they sounded exactly like an express train travelling through the sky. The combined noise of aircraft and naval shells was the continuous roar of a giant waterfall, over powering and deadening. This assault lasted over an hour and we couldn't help feeling a little sorry for those unfortunates on the receiving end, but, on the other hand, it did give us a great boost in morale.

At Caron we got what sleep we could. I was more fortunate than others as two of my enterprising soldiers raided a farmhouse and presented me with a very soiled but very thick mattress. Although we were supposed to be in slit trenches I really couldn't refuse this generosity and spent the night before our biggest battle very comfortably.

The next morning, after a good breakfast provided by the Battalion's A Echelon, we moved to the assembly area, midpoint between Vieux Caron and Gruchy, where we dug in. We had received our detailed orders by then and knew that the Battalion's objective was the heavily defended village of Cussy and that C Company would be left forward in the Battalion attack, with my platoon left forward of the Company. Jack Gallagher's platoon would be on my right.

The assembly area was subject to heavy sniper fire. Suddenly, as I was checking my men, I received a tremendous blow to the head and found myself on my hands and knees staring at my steel helmet. It had a jagged hole through the rim, where the bullet had passed through, cutting the chin strap and grazing the side of my head. I got to my feet blind with fury that someone should have the audacity to fire at me, and, shouting at my men, began to clear the area. We discovered



later that units of 9 Brigade had passed through these fields but had not bothered to check the enemy positions left behind. The result was that my platoon and No. 13 (Jack Gallagher's) succeeded in flushing out thirty Germans who had hidden in the by-passed dug-outs. My blood was up and if time had permitted I would have joyfully shot the lot. It is one thing to be shot at from the front, but quite another from the back. The prisoners were identified as belonging to the 25 SS Grenadier Regiment of 12 Panzer Division.

At 1730 hours we moved across the Start Line. B Company was on the right of C Company, with B and D Companies in reserve. The reserve platoon of C Company was No. 14, commanded by Lieutenant Harling, who was a veteran of the Italian campaign and had joined us the night before. Harling was shot between the eyes just as he crossed the start line. Ironic and very sad.

The noise was deafening. Our guns firing. Enemy mortars, eighty-eights, and machine-guns firing. No good ducking. Must keep moving. Must keep the platoon moving. Buzz, buzz, buzz. At least I can still hear them. Must keep moving. Check section on left, section on right, me in centre with runner behind. Keep moving. Our shells landing fifty yards in front. Great shooting. Some falling behind. Realize not ours but German. Moving ahead in a box between opposing artillery barrages. Eerie feeling. Boom! Flat on back. Christ, that was close! Get up, look around. Keep moving. God, the men are marvellous! All in a good line, although gaps appearing. Enemy fire increasing from village of Bitot on left. That was supposed to have been cleared. Can't worry about that now. Got to keep moving. Must be Cussy just ahead. Christ, a walled village. Too much to the right. Company off line. Can't take whole village with one platoon.<sup>4</sup> To hell with it. Time to charge. "Come on men, up the Scottish!" I

4. I am overstating the situation here but this was my very clear impression at the time.

yell, and in we go at the dead run. Pass through break in wall, move left into small orchard, one section with me. Look ahead to see German behind wall. Aim Schmeisser and fire. Chips fly from wall. Missed. Great blow on leg. Fall down. Shit! I'm hit! Funny, not much pain. Get up and hobble to east side of orchard. Where are my men? All killed or wounded. All alone. Look around wall. Boom! Part of wall collapses. Bloody big Panther tank staring me in the face. Duck back behind wall. Must get off leg. Lie down against wall, behind small pile of rubble. Poke my head up. Twang! Two Germans, fifty feet away, potting at me. Another hole in helmet. What to do. Lie still. Might think you're dead. If they rush have only pistol and grenade. Grenade best. Slowly ease off belt. Place finger in ring. If I raise up to throw, make great target. Have to throw on one side. Good time to pray.

I lay there for what seemed like hours (although possibly only one) while the battle raged in the other half of the village. It seemed ironic that in this considerable orchard, there were three lone soldiers all flat on their bellies waiting for the first move. Suddenly there was a shout, the stutter of a machine gun, and Tom Carney appeared running through the orchard with the remainder of the platoon. They killed the two Germans and then Tom found me. I was never so glad to see anyone in my whole life. Prayer helps! He didn't say much except "You're hit," which I already knew, and that the village was in our hands. He picked me up fireman style, carried me to Company Headquarters at the near side of the village, dumped me, and returned to the platoon. Des Crofton was not there, but the Second-in-Command, Hec Alexander, was answering the track carrier's wireless set. "What are you doing here?" he asked. "I have just come from my platoon," I said. "Well, you had better get back to your platoon," he said. "Yes sir," I replied, and thought, "heartless bastard". Of course, I had neglected to tell him I was wounded. So I picked up a piece of wood and hobbled back towards the platoon headquarters.

On the way and just outside the village wall I came across a wounded German soldier. He was clutching his stomach and when I looked closely I could see that his hands were the only thing preventing his entrails from falling out. A mortar or shell fragment must have sliced across his belly like a circular saw. He was very young and in much pain. I took a field dressing and wrapped the wound as best I could and left him there. He had not long to live. When I arrived back at the platoon, Tom asked "What the hell are you doing here?". I didn't explain as enemy gun and mortar fire began to fall, so we crouched in a dug-out, which only hours before had been occupied by Germans. It eased up and I started to go and inspect my positions, but my leg was so stiff and painful that I could not even hobble. Tom went out and reported, "Everything under control."

Night fell and no German counter-attack. This was fortunate because my platoon was down to half strength and the other platoons were probably not much better.<sup>5</sup> A very painful night. The shock had worn off and the pain took over. At first light there was still no enemy activity so Tom arranged for two of our soldiers to carry me back to Company Headquarters once again. This time Hec Alexander believed what he saw and put me in a jeep to be taken back to the Regimental Aid Post. The Germans began firing mortars and suddenly I found myself sitting alone in the jeep. I couldn't move, but everyone else could and had all dived for cover. The mortar fire ceased and I was taken to the Regimental Aid Post and then eventually to the Army hospital on the beach. There the bullet was removed from my leg bone, and the following morning I was flown to England, then driven by ambulance to a hospital on the Astor estate. How green it was. How quiet it was. How lucky I was.

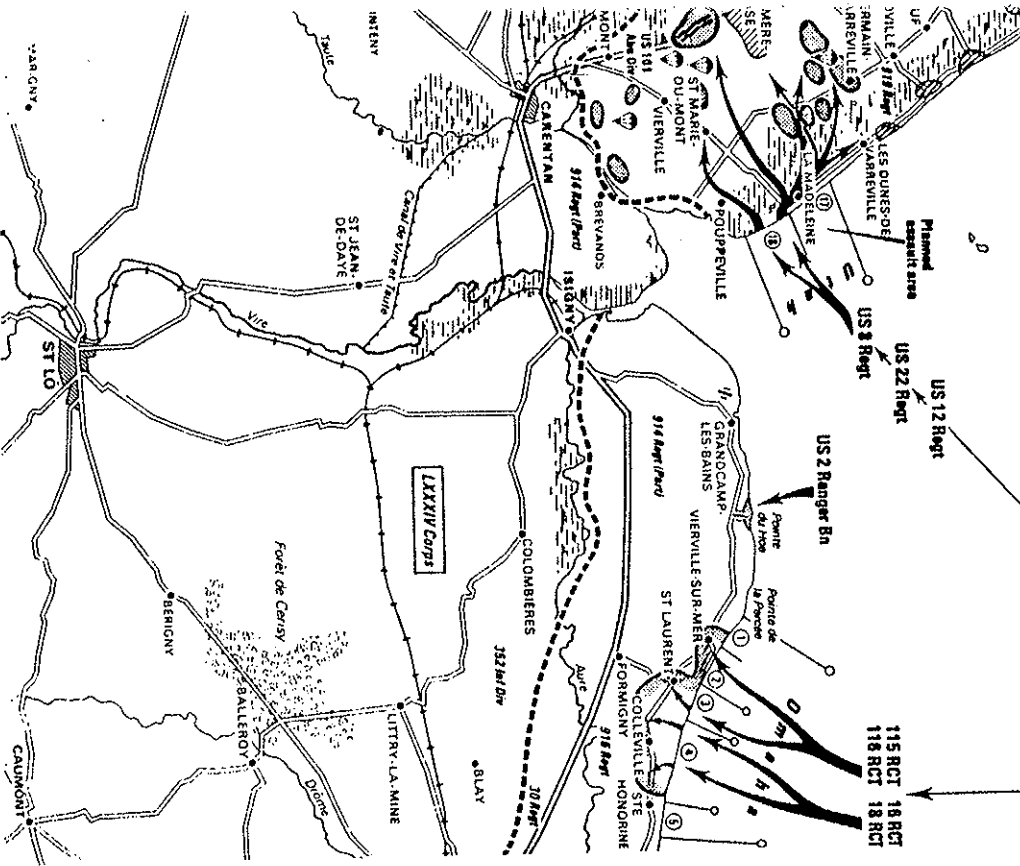
So ended my thirty-five days in Normandy.

5. The Battalion lost forty killed and eighty wounded in this battle.

## Canadian Army Hierarchy - Normandy 1944

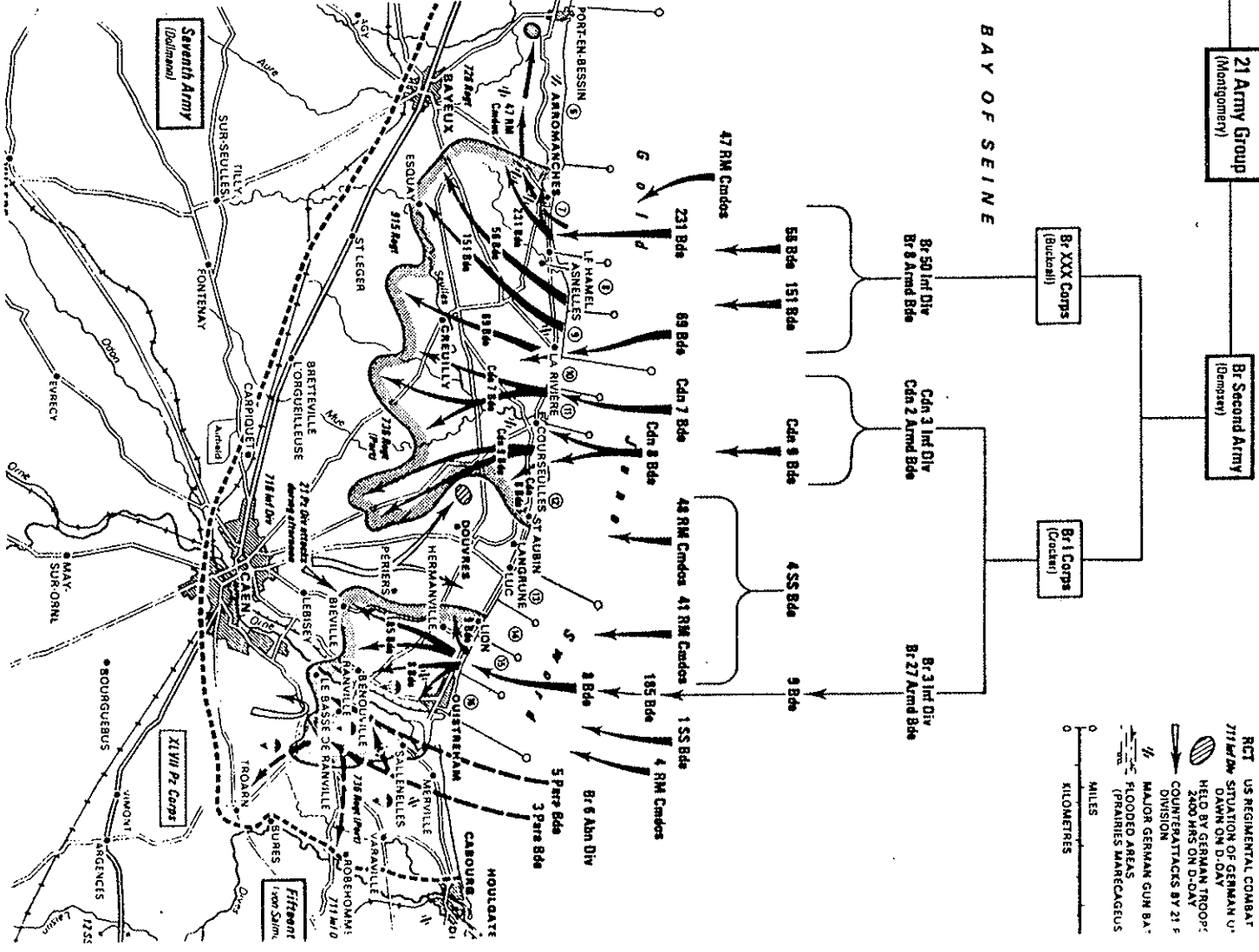
Name	Number of Men	Description
Section	10	Corporal (section leader) Six riflemen (privates) Light Machine Gun detachment: Lance Corporal, two privates
Platoon	37	Lieutenant (platoon commander) Sergeant (platoon sergeant) Batman (private) Runner (private) Mortar section: corporal two privates
Rifle Company	127	Three Rifle Platoons Major (company commander) Captain (second in command) Warrant Officer 2nd Class (company sergeant major) Staff Sergeant (company quarter master sergeant) Twelve corporals and privates (drivers, signallers, medical orderlies, batmen)
Battalion	811	Three Rifle Platoons Lieutenant Colonel (commanding officer) Battalion Headquarters Headquarters Company Support Company Four Rifle Companies
Brigade	3500-4000	Three infantry battalions One machine gun battalion One anti-tank battalion One artillery regiment One armoured regiment
Division	12,000-15,000	Three infantry brigades Three artillery regiments One reconnaissance regiment One engineer regiment Three armoured regiments
Corps	30,000-50,000	Two or more divisions
Army	100,000-200,000	Two or more corps
Army Group	500,000-1,000,000	Two or more armies

- LANDING BEACHES**
- 1 CHARLIE
  - 2 DODD
  - 3 DUCK
  - 4 FOX
  - 5 GEORGE
  - 6 HOW
  - 7 IEM
  - 8 KING
  - 9 LOVE
  - 10 NINE
  - 11 NINE
  - 12 NINE
  - 13 OBOE
  - 14 PETER
  - 15 QUINCY
  - 16 QUINCY
  - 17 TAGE
  - 18 UNCLE

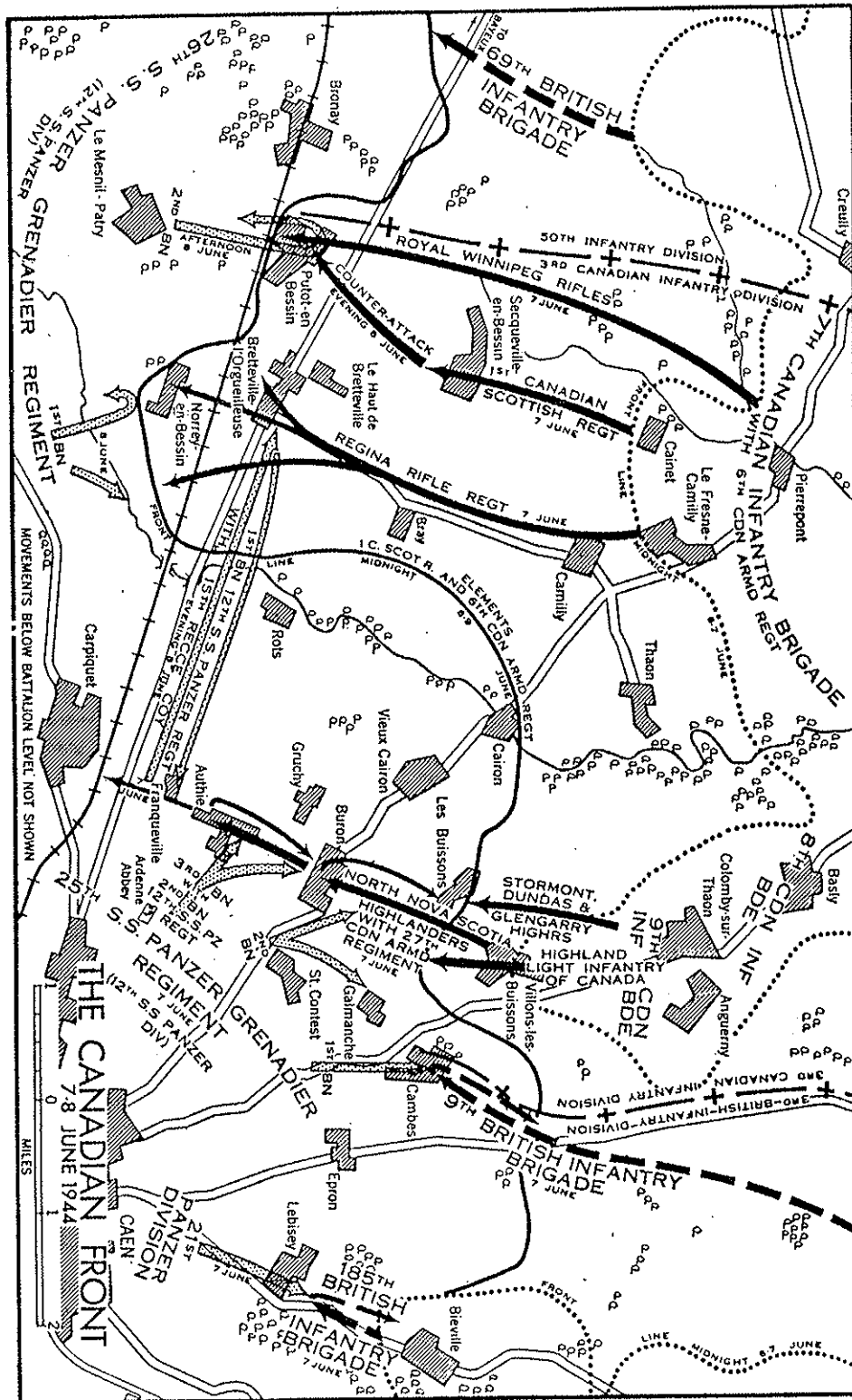


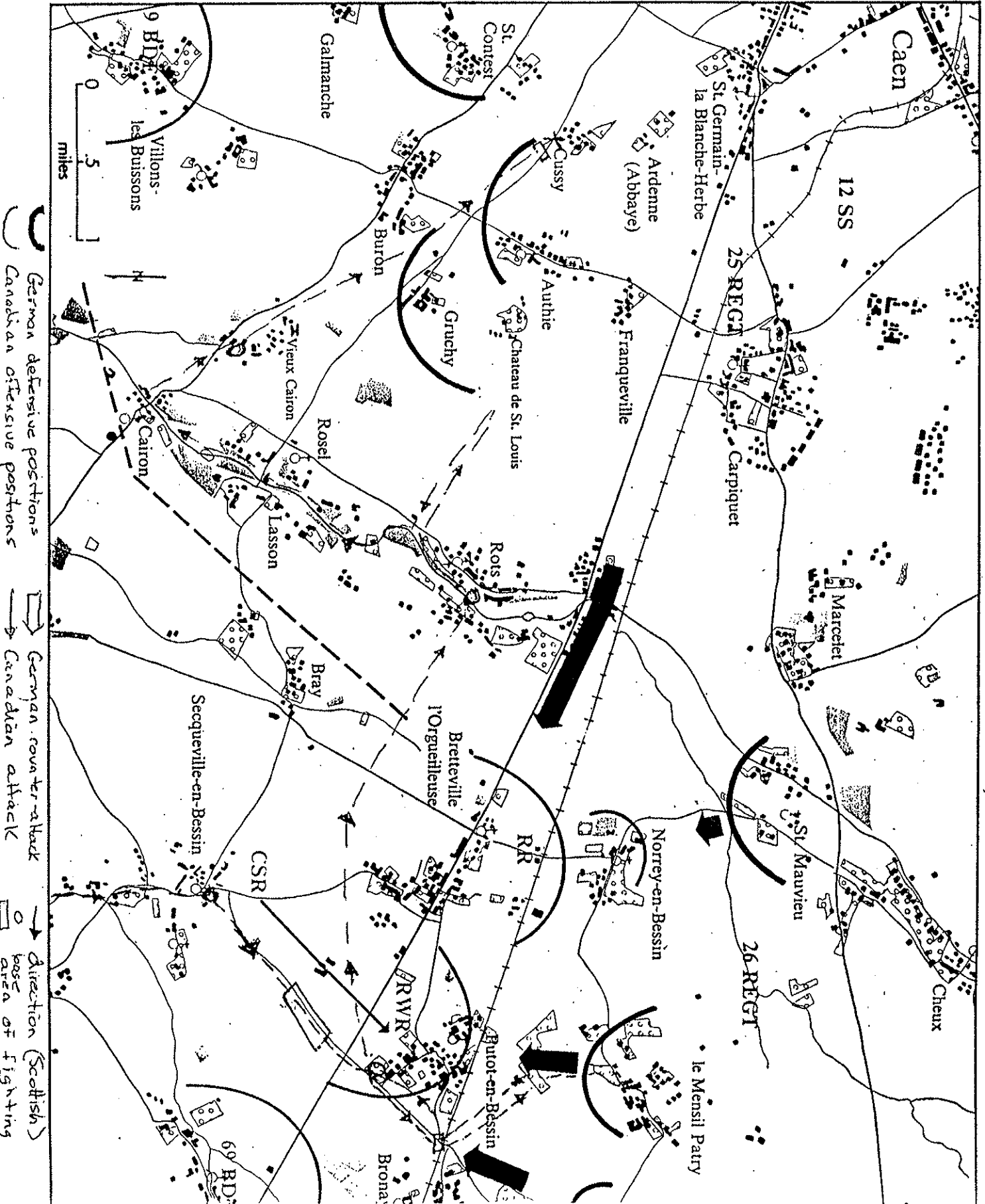
**OVERLORD, 6 June 1944**  
21 Army Group (Montgomery)

**BAY OF SEINE**



- 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
KILOMETRES
- 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
MILES
- ▲ ASSAULT AREAS
  - ▲ FIRST ASSAULT WAVES
  - ▲ ATTACKS BY BR 6 AIRBORN HELD BY ALLIES AT 2400 H. 0-DAY
  - ▲ ALLIED OBJECTIVE AT 2400 H. 0-DAY
  - ▲ US REGIMENTAL COMBAT SITUATION OF GERMAN UNITS ON D-DAY
  - ▲ HELD BY GERMAN TROOP: 2400 HRS ON D-DAY
  - ▲ COUNTERATTACKS BY 21 ST DIVISION
  - ▲ MAJOR GERMAN GUN BATTALIONS (FRANSES MARCAGEUS)





German defensive positions  
 Canadian offensive positions  
 German counter-attack  
 Canadian attack  
 Direction (Scottish) base area of fighting