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# MAPS

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## ABBREVIATIONS

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| AGRA   | army group, Royal Artillery                                     |
| AHEC   | Army Heritage and Education Center                              |
| APCBS  | armor-piercing, capped ballistic shell                          |
| AVRE   | armored vehicle, Royal Engineers                                |
| CCRA   | corps commander, Royal Artillery                                |
| CSR    | Canadian Scottish Regiment                                      |
| CinC   | commander in chief  |
| COSSAC | chief of staff to the supreme Allied commander and/or his staff |
| CRA    | commander, Royal Artillery (division level)                     |
| DD     | duplex drive, swimming Sherman tanks                            |
| DF     | defensive fire  |
| DHH    | Directorate of History and Heritage, Ottawa                     |
| DUKW   | amphibious truck  |
| FOO    | forward observation officer                                     |
| FOB    | forward officer, bombardment (naval)                            |
| FUSAG  | 1st US Army Group   |
| GR     | grenadier regiment  |
| IJP    | Initial Joint Plan  |
| JIC    | Joint Intelligence Committee                                    |
| KSLI   | King's Shropshire Light Infantry                                |
| LAC    | Library and Archives of Canada                                  |
| LCA    | landing craft, assault  |
| LCMSDS | Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies   |
| LCT    | landing craft, tank   |
| M7     | 105mm self-propelled gun  |

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| M10   | self-propelled antitank gun                      |
| NNSH  | North Nova Scotia Highlanders                    |
| NSR   | North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment             |
| OKW   | Oberkommando der Wehrmacht                       |
| PIAT  | projectile, infantry antitank                    |
| PR    | panzer regiment                                  |
| PG    | panzer grenadier                                 |
| PGR   | panzer grenadier regiment                        |
| PGLR  | panzer grenadier Lehr regiment                   |
| POW   | prisoner of war                                  |
| RA    | Royal Artillery                                  |
| RAF   | Royal Air Force                                  |
| RCA   | Royal Canadian Artillery                         |
| RCAF  | Royal Canadian Air Force                         |
| RCT   | regimental combat team                           |
| RM    | Royal Marines                                    |
| RMAS  | Royal Marine Assault Squadron                    |
| RWR   | Royal Winnipeg Rifles                            |
| SHAEF | Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force |
| SOS   | prearranged emergency close fire support         |
| SPs   | self-propelled guns                              |
| SS    | Schutzen Staffel, Nazi military force            |
| TNA   | The National Archives, Kew, England              |
| WN    | Widerstandsnest (strongpoint)                    |
| WO    | War Office, UK                                   |

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book has been decades in the making. Indeed, as the son of a D-Day vet who fought in these epic engagements, I have long been aware of the landings and the initial beachhead battles. The debates and discussions with my father over the who, what, when, where, and how of Normandy began early and only ended with his death in 2006. My discovery (only after enrolling) that the University of New Brunswick had a program in military history simply stoked that interest. So, too, did the mentoring of another Normandy vet, Professor Dominick S. Graham. The rest, as they say, is history.

Despite my thirty-five-year distraction as a naval historian, Normandy was never off the radar. Since coming back to UNB in 1986, most of what I have taught in the classroom and supervised at the graduate level has been “army” history. Given UNB’s proximity to the Canadian army’s corps schools at CFB Gagetown, army history was—and remains—a natural focus for our program. You can, quite literally, do military history here to the sound of guns firing. Heated discourses on tactics and doctrine, weapons templates, beaten zones, command thresholds, “in support or under command,” and C<sub>3</sub>I issues still dominate casual discussion in the hallway. Not surprisingly, then, most of the sixty-plus master’s and doctoral theses I have supervised over the years have been on army topics. Among these, several graduate students require special mention for feeding the Normandy passion: David Wilson, who worked on armored doctrine, Dan Malone for his work on naval fire support, Mike Sullivan for his look at combat motivation in the 12th SS, Arthur Gulachsen for taking a closer look at casualties in the 12th SS, and Larry Zaporzan for his MA on Radley-Walters. John Rickard’s PhD on General Andy McNaughton changed my thinking (and probably that of many others) about that much-maligned Canadian general. Chris Kretschmar, an MA student who actually did a thesis on naval history, worked for me on a number of occasions as a research assistant and very kindly ferretted out the information of the personnel strength of 12th SS in the spring of 1944.

Battlefield touring gave this project its impetus. My first visit to Normandy was in 1993 with my father and Toby Graham. I knew by then, based on a 1984 professional development tour of the Gothic Line battlefield in northern Italy that Toby and I ran for CFB Halifax, that no account of battles makes sense until you have seen the ground. So I jumped at the chance in 1997 when Terry Copp asked me to start leading tours of northwest Europe and Italy for what was then the Canadian Battle of Normandy Foundation (now the Canadian Battlefields Foundation). I am grateful to Terry for that opportunity, and for insisting that generations of young Canadian students, and historians, study the ground as the primary document in any account of what happened. Indeed, having studied and taught the Normandy campaign for years, my first contact with the ground in a systematic fashion convinced me that what I thought I knew was either wrong or woefully incomplete. I am grateful to the students and serving Canadian Forces personnel of numerous tours over the last two decades for the opportunity to guide them around and, in many memorable cases, “rewrite” history on the spot with the aid of maps, aerial photos, war diaries, memoirs, regimental accounts, and the ground itself (and, in many cases coming away with a head shake, muttering, “Well, that just does not work out!”).

Regrettably, I got to aging veterans of this campaign twenty years too late. By the time I shifted a little energy to my father’s unit, 13th Field Regiment, RCA, it had stopped having reunions, and many of the vets had passed on. In 2001 and 2002, Tom Greenless, a survey officer with 13th RCA, exchanged a few letters, as did Bud Lund, and Tom sent a transcript of interviews done with his regiment’s vets. I tracked down one battery commander, Major R. K. MacKenzie, in Toronto. Robert Spencer, PhD, a veteran of 15th Field Regiment, RCA, the author of his regiment’s monumental history, and a distinguished historian, carefully explained how an artillery regiment worked in the field. Remarkably, Freddie Clifford, 13th RCA’s commanding officer at this stage of the war, was still alive and well in his nineties when I started this project. He allowed me a couple of hours over a beer in the Ottawa army mess in April 2002. I am grateful to all of them and to countless other veterans whom I talked to over the years (including British vets in Normandy) for sharing their stories and their insights.

Two other veterans deserve special mention. Ken Newell, who served with 3rd Anti-Tank Regiment, RCA, shared his memories and memorabilia. This helped enormously with sorting out that regiment's contribution. I was also in regular contact with the brigade major (essentially the staff officer operations) of 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade from this period, the late David Dickson. Still sharp as a tack well into his nineties, David was no mean critic. He commanded a company of the North Nova Scotia Highlanders during the Rhine crossing in 1945 and retired as the chief justice of the New Brunswick Supreme Court. His comments on and endorsement of this manuscript mean a great deal to me, and I am grateful for his interest and support.

To a considerable extent the lack of veterans to interview has been overcome by several sources. One is the remarkable collection of interviews done by the late Jean Portugal, transcribed and published as *We Were There* in five volumes by the Royal Canadian Military Institute in Toronto. Portugal's work is a priceless resource for historians and an invaluable legacy to Canada. The second, equally crucial source of first-person accounts is the work compiled by Doug Hope of Toronto. Doug is a passionate amateur historian who has been working on the failure of Canadian artillery on 7 June for nearly two decades. Over that time he recorded interviews with a great many veterans of 14th Field Regiment and other units of the vanguard of 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade on 7 June. His pointed questioning and relentless pursuit of the problems resulted in a unique group of recollections, which he shared unreservedly with me. This would be a much poorer book without Doug Hope's enormous curiosity, his zeal for record keeping, and his passion for wrestling with the material in conference papers. I cannot thank him enough for his trust and generosity.

The third key source of personal accounts is Walter Keith of Calgary. If archives are like a "pull" logistic system, where you have to ask for specific information and you only get what you ask for, Walter would be a "push" system: the stuff just keeps coming, and it's all good. Walter did not fight in these battles, but he joined the Regina Rifle Regiment in the fall of 1944, he knew many who did, and he kept in touch. Moreover, as a retired geologist, Walter has a trained eye for information and an urge to compile it. Then, like most good academics, he knows it needs to be shared. I have a stack of handwritten

notes, photocopies of citations for bravery, excerpts from war diaries, and other miscellany that Walter pushed my way. He also very kindly read an early draft of the book, saved me from many egregious errors, and then sent more information to fill in the gaps. The Reginas, and the little army it served, owe a great debt to Walter Keith for keeping the memory alive: my debt is no less.

The work of many professional and amateur historians has recorded the experiences of the German side of this battle. Much of this reflects popular interest in things Nazi and panzer, but it has served to record first-person accounts. One record of German experience that does not fit this mold, but has contributed enormously to this project, is the publication of *Kurt Meyer on Trial [A Documentary Record]*. Edited by Whitney Lackenbauer and Chris Madsen, this tome reproduces the transcript of the Meyer war crimes trial and is one of the few sources that provides almost contemporary first-person accounts from the German side. I am enormously grateful to Whitney and Chris for their efforts in compiling and publishing the volume.

I am especially grateful to colleagues in Canada, the United States, and Great Britain who have encouraged and supported this project. David Charters, Steve Harris, and Lee Windsor all read an early draft and offered both suggestions for improvement and encouragement. Rob Citino and Harold Winton did the same with a later draft and supported publication when that was required. The late Eugene Feit and the New York Military Affairs Symposium heard a paper on this subject during the preliminary stages in 2006 and offered helpful suggestions, and Bruce Vandervoort was kind enough to publish the revised paper as an article in the *Journal of Military History* in 2010. From all this the book grew. Steve Bourque, Stephen Zolaga, Marcus Faulkner, Robert von Maier, Roger Sarty, Andrew Wheale, Kathy Barbier, and many others offered help and encouragement along the way. Andrew Lambert read some of the early chapters and helped me try to find a British publisher. Thanks to Dennis Showalter for putting me in touch with a New York literary agent (which did not work out, but that's another story!), and to John Ferris, who read the sections on Fortitude South and offered insight, sources, and encouragement. I want to say a particular thanks to Robin Brass, one of Canada's finest publishers, for his early expression of interest in the manuscript, and

I am grateful for his encouragement. He also loaned me his copy of General Sir Charles Loewen's privately published memoirs, for which I am especially thankful. Thanks to Cindy Brown for helping with the photos and the final production, and to my son Matthew Milner and my wife, Barbara, for reading several draft chapters.

Research for this book has been undertaken as part of a much larger project, for the moment titled "Normandy and the Battle for History," which has been under way for more than a decade. This has allowed me to visit some archives that historians of the Normandy campaign would not normally use. I would especially like to thank the staff at the following: the Library and Archives of Canada (LAC), Ottawa; the University of Toronto Archives, Toronto; the Directorate of History and Heritage, National Defence Headquarters, Ottawa; the Public Archives of Nova Scotia, Halifax; the First Division Museum, Cantigny, Illinois; the National World War II Museum, New Orleans, Louisiana; the George Marshall Research Library, Lexington, Virginia; the Howard Gottlieb Archives, Boston University; the National Archives, Kew, England; Churchill College Archives, Cambridge; The Liddell-Hart Centre, Kings College, London; and the Imperial War Museum, London.

Considerable effort went into finding documentary photos for the book. I would like to thank my friend and colleague Brent Wilson for dealing with the LAC; my former graduate student Colonel Doug Mastriano for searching through the holdings of the US Army Heritage and Educational Center, Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and for employing his expertise as an intelligence officer to confirm the time of an aerial photo; Mike McNorgan for his efforts to find a photo of Gordon Henry and a good Firefly for the cover; James Hoyle of British Pathé for his prompt and courteous service; Dr. Jean-Pierre Benamou, the doyen of Normandy history and commemoration in France, for his help with photos; Delores Hatch for sharing her photos of the Reginas; Gerry Wood and Fred Jeanne of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles museum for help with photos; and Mike Bechthold and the Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies for sharing their remarkable collection of photographs.

But Mike Bechthold deserves credit for more than just sending along photos. Mike has done an extensive workup on the battle for Putot, and so the original idea for this book was joint authorship. The pres-

tures of a new family and completing his dissertation prevented Mike from participating in the project. However, he shared his work on Putot, responded promptly to my seemingly endless e-mail appeals for more photos, and drew all the maps for the book. He has been a source of steady support and encouragement, and I am deeply grateful for his skill as a mapmaker, his ready response to photo requests, his insights as a historian, and his professionalism and friendship.

The staff at the University Press of Kansas made the whole publishing process a pleasant one. Sara Henderson White's persistence over photo permissions kept me on my toes and kept me honest, while Mike Kehoe and the people in marketing and sales did a great job and showed commendable forbearance in dealing with me. Kathleen Rocheleau compiled the index, for which I am eternally grateful. Kelly Chrisman Jacques, the production editor, handled my Luddite tendencies with the patience of Job, which I very much appreciate. Finally I am especially grateful to Mike Briggs, the editor in chief, for supporting the book from the outset. I hope and trust that his faith has not been misplaced. All of these folks, and no doubt many more whom I have missed and to whom I apologize for the oversight, have helped make *Stopping the Panzers* a reality. Any errors or omissions that remain are mine.

Finally, as always, thanks to Bobbi for suffering through long days on Normandy battlefields, and the agony and distraction of another book. Thanks Bud.



## INTRODUCTION

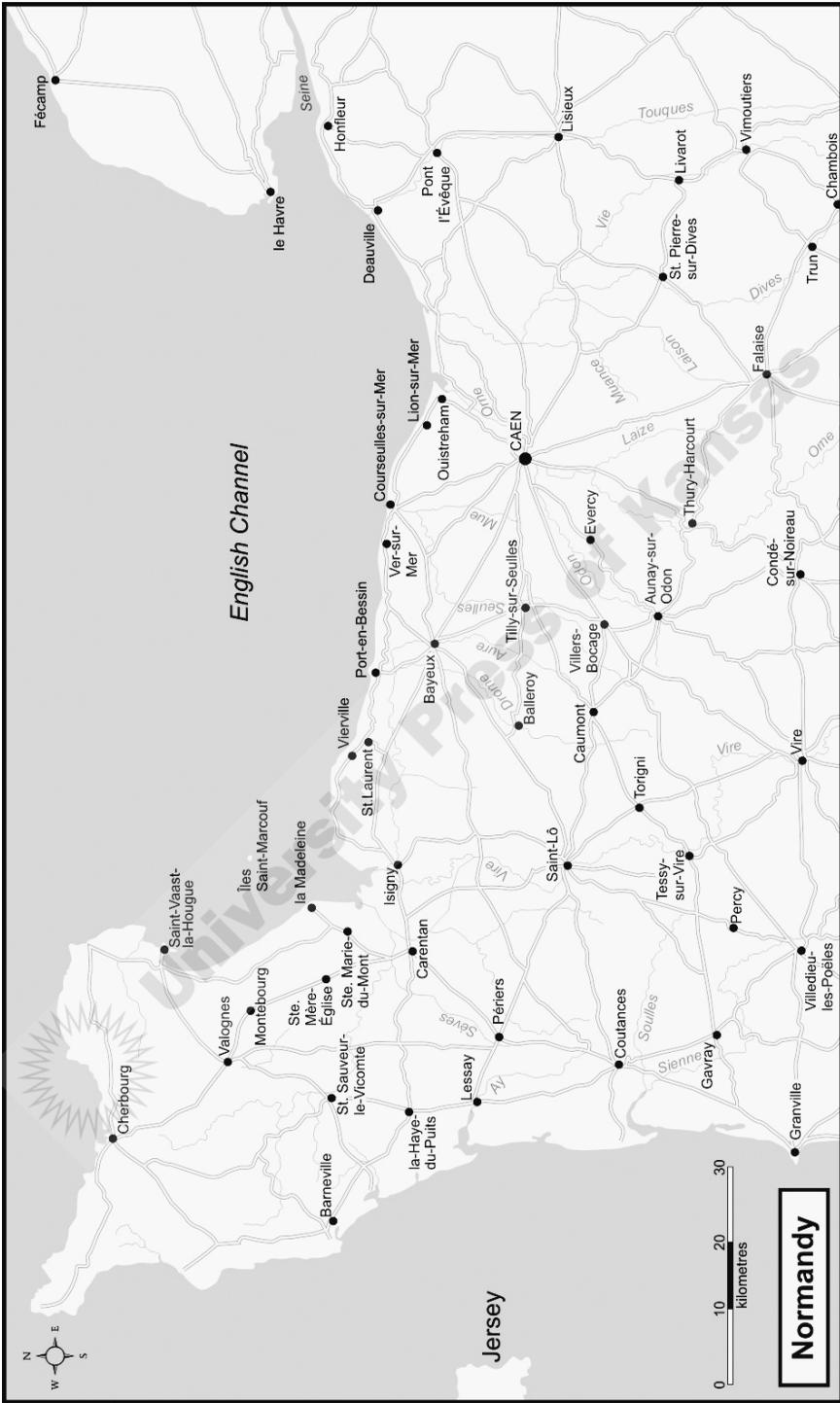
What passing-bells for those who die as cattle?  
Only the monstrous anger of the guns.  
Wilfred Owen, "Anthem for Doomed Youth"

BY THE TIME Lieutenant Gordie Henry led his troop of London, Ontario's First Hussars into position east of Bretteville L'Orgueilleuse, the battle for the Normandy beachhead was in its fourth day. The village itself and the magnificent church of St. Germaine were already crumbling under the weight of German shells. Wrecked enemy tanks, including a half dozen of the vaunted Panthers, smoldered in the fields nearby amid the dead panzer grenadiers.

The First Hussars, supported by two troops of Shermans from the Fort Garry Horse of Winnipeg, had shifted to 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade's eastern perimeter to help tackle an imminent attack. Farther east along the crucial Caen-Bayeux highway, sheltered by the verdant foliage of the Mue River valley, elements of the 12th SS Hitler Youth Panzer Division were already in place, ready to assault the Regina Rifles' forward position at Norrey. For a few moments around noon on 9 June 1944, things were ominously quiet on this sector of the Canadian front.

Gordie Henry's tank, nicknamed the "Comtesse de Feu," was a Firefly, a British adaptation of the basic American model M4 with the new 17-pounder high-velocity gun jammed tightly into the turret. It fired a 76.2mm (3-inch) armor-piercing, capped ballistic shell (APCBS) at 1,204 meters per second, capable of cutting through 131 millimeters of plate armor at 900 meters. The 17-pounder was the most powerful antitank gun in the arsenal of the Western Allies, and Normandy was its battle debut.

But it had been rushed into service and was a fickle and problematic weapon. The jury-rigged fit in the cramped Sherman turret was far from ideal and made it tough to load. The enormous blast from the gun's muzzle slapped the ground like a thunderbolt and threw up a huge



cloud of smoke and dust. This, coupled with the tremendous speed of the shell, prevented the gunner from seeing if he had hit anything. And not all the smoke vented out the muzzle. The backdraft from opening the breech to load the next round filled the tank with acrid smoke. Normally Fireflies got off one good shot before the 17-pounder's smoke totally obscured the enemy—and drew heavy retaliatory fire.

Allied tank commanders typically fought with their heads out of the hatch, but for Firefly commanders like Gordie Henry, that risk was a fundamental requirement. Not only was it necessary to vent the tank, but he had to track the shot. Everything depended on Henry's ability to see through the murk to guide the gunner, and on his crew's ability to fire fast and accurately enough to kill the Germans before they killed them. If Henry and his crew knew all this by 9 June, they had learned fast. Their introduction to the 17-pounder had been on a range tank in Westmorland two months before. They never fired the main armament of the "Comtesse de Feu" prior to D-Day, and it is not clear how often—or even if—they had fired it since landing three days earlier. It was all new.

On this day, everything worked fine, a tribute to skill and training. Henry and his troop, plus tanks from the Fort Garry Horse under Captain C. D. A. Tweedale, had barely settled into their position north of the rail line at Bretteville when the 12th SS attack on Norrey began. The Germans had to cover about 400 meters of flat, gently rising open field to reach the Reginas' C Company positions. They had been trying to throw them out of Norrey for three days, and all previous attempts had ended in bloody failure. This one would be no different. Anglo-Canadian artillery poured a murderous fire into the valley of the Mue, stripping away German infantry. All that finally emerged from the smoke were a dozen Panther tanks. The Panthers crawled from the low ground to Henry's left and were soon moving across an open field right before his eyes. The Canadian tanks had arrived at just the right time. As the twelve Shermans lined up along the railway line southeast of Bretteville, the closest Panthers were running across their front less than 1,000 meters away.

"Seventeen-pounder! Traverse left! Steady!" Henry barked through his microphone. His gunner, Trooper Archie Chapman, swung the turret slightly, aligned his sights on a tank 900 yards away, and then re-

ported: "ON! 900. Tank!" Once the target and range were confirmed, Henry ordered "Fire!" and Chapman squeezed the trigger on the 17-pounder's electronic firing mechanism. Nearby, Tweedale and his gunner, Trooper W. L. Bennett, went through the same sequence. Who fired first we will never know.

At 1,204 meters per second the APCBS shell reached its target almost instantaneously. The first to feel its impact was a Panther of the 3rd Company, 1st Battalion, 12th SS Panzer Regiment, commanded by SS Sergeant Alois Morawetz. Morawetz was on the right flank of the German formation, just a few yards from the rail line, and was charging hard for Norrey with his flank exposed. The forty to fifty millimeters of side armor of his Panther was no match for a 17-pounder armor-piercing shell. The Canadians' first round hit the front of Morawetz's tank, seriously wounding the gunner and bringing the tank to a halt. Morawetz heard the bang and felt his Panther sway to a stop: he thought they had struck a mine.

It took a moment for Morawetz to react to the hit. When he finally glanced out to the left through his hatch periscope to see if anyone else from his section had struck a mine, he watched the turret of the Panther on his left, probably the section leader Stagge, fly off in a shattering explosion. Morawetz scrambled out and briefly collapsed on the Panther's engine compartment: he awoke moments later with flame shooting out of the turret hatch like a blowtorch. By then he noticed that the third tank in the German formation was on fire.

It took only seconds for Henry and his gunners to light up the third Panther, and from there on it was largely their show. Their first round stopped the tank, the second went through the turret, right under the seat of the tank's commander, Willi Fischer. He scrambled out as the Panther began to blaze. By then Henry had already switched his attention to Sergeant Hermanni's tank, which Chapman struck with his first round and set alight. In just a few minutes, Henry and his crew had destroyed four Panthers with five shots, but they were not quite finished.

Most of the Shermans banging away at the Panthers had the standard 75mm gun. Reliable, fast, and accurate, the 75mm guns peppered the Germans with a barrage of shells that could not kill but could stun crews, shear off a track, or—as they soon learned—shatter the Pan-

ther's vulnerable hydraulic system and set it on fire. They added to the din and to the shower of explosions engulfing the Panthers.

By the time Henry and Chapman settled on a fifth Panther, the leader of 3rd Company's second section farther back in the field, moving targets were harder to see. As a result, the shell from Henry's 17-pounder struck his fifth Panther just as one from another Firefly hit the same tank. No matter, Henry was already searching for another target, and Trooper Chapman was just laying on a sixth Panther when it was destroyed by a 17-pounder shell from the Firefly of Henry's troop sergeant, Art Boyle.

In the end, seven Panthers were destroyed by the First Hussars and the Fort Garry Horse on 9 June 1944. At the time Henry and his crew were credited with five, Tweedale with two, and the other Garrys with one. It is not clear if Boyle received any credit for his—that would have made eight in all. The math was wrong, of course, but the outcome was unquestionable: seven Panthers were destroyed in an action that lasted just four minutes. The attack on Norrey by the Panthers of 12th SS was broken. Survivors from the blazing tanks scurried back to the shelter of the railway underpass at la Villeneuve under a torrent of Anglo-Canadian small arms and artillery fire. Max Wunsche, something of a poster child for the SS and the commander of the 12th SS Panzer Regiment, watched the action and saw his Panthers burn. Later he wrote that he “could have cried for rage and sorrow.”<sup>1</sup> No Canadian casualties were reported.

In the summer of 1944 several Canadian newspapers carried brief accounts of Henry's remarkable accomplishment, and in 1945 he was finally awarded a French decoration, the Croix de Guerre “with Vermillion Star.” No Canadian decoration was ever awarded for his remarkable feat of arms. The commanding officer of 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade, Brigadier R. A. Wyman, was notorious for not awarding medals to his troops for doing their job: destroying German tanks was what Henry and his colleagues were supposed to do. Even the First Hussars Museum in London, Ontario, has no commemoration of Henry's action on 9 June, and no photo of Henry other than a grainy image of the troop commanders of C Squadron has ever emerged. Not surprisingly, Henry remains completely unknown in the wider literature of the Normandy campaign. Had he been British or American, Gordon Henry would be one of the iconic figures of the Overlord story.

The same might be said of the accomplishments of 3rd Canadian Infantry Division in those first fateful days following the landings. In the laconic language of the Canadian army official history, the task of the Canadian division was to seize its D-Day objectives and hold them against counterattack. There was nothing special in that. Indeed, every Allied division that landed on 6 June 1944 was supposed to do the same: take the objective and hold it.

In the event, 3rd Canadian Infantry Division was the first of the five divisions in the amphibious assault to reach and secure its D-Day objective. Its task, as historians have understood it, was to sever the crucial Caen-Bayeux highway and secure the vulnerable western flank of I British Corps until a proper junction with 50th British Division and XXX British Corps, landing north of Bayeux, could be achieved. The British had the important jobs on either flank, the capture of Caen and Bayeux. The Canadians simply filled the space in between. In general, these unremarkable Canadian objectives were accomplished. One arm of the Canadian advance, 9th Brigade, failed to take its objective of Carpiquet on D+1 and was driven back by the Germans. But the positions taken and held on 7 June by 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade astride the highway and rail line west of Caen at Bretteville, Norrey, and Putot constituted ultimate success.

In the days that followed (8–10 June), the Canadians' advance into France apparently stalled. They never did get to the high ground around Point 112 southwest of Caen, as their orders suggested they might. And, as one recent British historian lamented (not the first to do so), 3rd Canadian Division failed to take Caen from the west when it had a chance.<sup>2</sup> Instead, Canadian hesitancy and tactical ineptitude and superb German defending apparently checked the Canadian advance in the aftermath of D-Day.

In the literature on the Normandy campaign, Canadian failure to get forward between 7 and 10 June is simply part of a larger narrative of the failure of I British Corps in front of Caen. In this sector of the Overlord front, hasty German counterattacks designed to stop the Allies so they could be driven back into the sea proved to be entirely successful. In particular, the skillful and ruthless 12th SS quickly cowed the timid Canadians—and their equally unimaginative and battle-shy British compatriots—into a defensive posture. Indeed, in American popular

culture surrounding the Normandy campaign, the ineffectiveness—in fact idleness—of the Anglo-Canadians has become an article of faith. Steven Spielberg even built it into his D-Day Hollywood epic, *Saving Private Ryan*.

And while the Anglo-Canadians were bungling their opportunities ashore in the early phase of Operation Overlord, the German forces in the west were being held at bay by a deception operation fronted by American general George S. Patton. Patton was the notional commander of the entirely fictitious “1st US Army Group” based in the southeast of England. This group’s task was to convince the Germans that the real landings would come in the Pas de Calais region. This was accomplished, so historians tell us, largely because Patton was the Allied general whom the Germans “feared” most.

The problem with this popular view of the early phase of Operation Overlord is that it is simply wrong, at virtually every level. In fact, changes in German dispositions rendered the I British Corps plan for the Caen sector on D-Day out of date weeks before the landings went in, and things only got worse as D-Day neared. As early as April it was clear that 3rd British Division probably lacked the combat power to capture the city by a coup de main on D-Day itself, a development that was confirmed in late May. British caution around Caen in the days immediately following the landing had a great deal to do with the presence of German armor, on a huge scale, in the I Corps sector. As for 3rd Canadian Division, its job was never generic, it never had the option to take Caen from the west, and the option of pushing 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade onto the slopes of Point 112—where thousands of British soldiers would later perish in Operation Epsom—was never more than a staff officer’s dream. The Canadian task in Operation Overlord was clear to the chief of staff to the supreme Allied commander (COSSAC), to Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF), and to 21st Army Group planners, and to the senior officers of 3rd Canadian Division if not to subsequent historians. The Canadians were to take and hold the only ground on which planners, both Allied and German, believed that an attack on the Allied landings in Normandy could be decisive. Their job was to stop the panzers.

A similar task befell the rump of First Canadian Army, the formation that until late 1943 was designated to lead the British Commonwealth

onto the beaches of France. Again, it seems that everyone at the time, including the Germans, knew this. As a result, it was possibly First Canadian Army, and certainly not Patton, that was the beating heart of the Allied deception operation code-named Fortitude South until the initial beachhead battles were over. It, too, would stop the panzers in its own way at a critical moment of the first week of Overlord.

By the time the initial beach battles ended on 10 June 1944, 3rd Canadian Division was indeed stalled on its objective, just as historians have claimed. It was exhausted, battered, and down 3,000 men. But the Canadians were utterly unshaken, and they were surrounded by wreckage from three panzer divisions, one of them the most powerful panzer division in the west, filled with the elite of the Hitler Youth. When it was all over, it was the Canadians who held the ground that the Germans needed in order to defeat Overlord.

This book tells that untold story.

Canada's role in Normandy has been a sidebar to the history of the campaign from the outset. Canadians know this very well. My first inkling of neglect of the Canadian role came at a tender age in 1962, after watching the Hollywood version of Cornelius Ryan's epic *The Longest Day*. My father was the only D-Day vet in our neighborhood, and he volunteered to take his sons and a gaggle of boys to see the film at the Vogue theater. Three hours later we emerged bug-eyed and chattering, ready to turn a nearby vacant lot into a network of trenches and pilfered barbed wire so we could reenact the whole movie. I do, however, vividly remember my father's reaction because it was in such contrast to ours. I recall him standing on the sidewalk muttering, "We were there, why didn't they show us?" over and over again.<sup>3</sup>

Ryan had, of course, interviewed Canadians for his book. In many ways their tales were just more of the same, variations of the acts of heroism and horror common to all participants. But it was British and American moviegoers, not Canadians, who would make the film a commercial and critical success. Nothing has changed since then, for either filmmakers or book publishers. The Canadian market is too small, and it is easier to simply write the Canadians out of the story—as they were for the Hollywood film *The Great Escape* (1963).<sup>4</sup> No one except Ca-

nadians cares anyway. As this is written, the blogosphere is full of complaints about Ben Affleck's Academy Award-winning film *Argo*, which tells the story of how the CIA masterminded and ran the Iran hostage escape in 1979. Jimmy Carter, who was the US president at the time, commented after seeing the film that Affleck had it all wrong. The CIA had little to do with the affair, while 90 percent of the work—and the risk—was Canadian. His comments were irrelevant. Affleck admitted to turning the tale around to make it marketable: it is all about selling the story to the only audience that matters.

In fairness, the neglect of Canada's role in the early beachhead battles of Normandy is not unique. The history of the Second World War is replete with "missing" lesser players: neither the Australians in the South Pacific nor the Indian army in the Western Desert appear much in Anglo-American literature. But the Canadian case in Normandy also owes a great deal to shortcomings in Canada's own storytelling. This is particularly true of the ultimate purposes of the Canadian assault on D-Day and the battles ashore between 7 and 10 June. In fact, it seems that Colonel Charles Stacey and his team of Canadian army official historians never knew the ultimate purpose of the Canadian assault. They were not alone. Like most of the initial historians of Operation Overlord, Stacey's team, despite their status as official historians of one of the major combatants, never had access to all the necessary documents. Nor were they much interested in the early defensive battles. Perhaps that was because of the delicate nature of the issues discussed later in this book. It is not clear, for example, that they were at liberty to probe too deeply into what happened to the role of First Canadian Army and its commanding officer, General Andrew McNaughton, in the original plans for Overlord, or into the artillery failure that seriously marred the first major battle on D+1.

Rather, Stacey and his staff were absorbed in the "failure to move forward" paradigm that dominated the Normandy story from July 1944 onward. For Stacey, as for many of the Canadian army's senior officers, the efforts of 3rd Canadian Division after the initial landings were disappointing, and the official history reflects that sentiment. The Canadians did not advance much beyond their original D-Day objectives for a month. British, American, and German historians were content with this view of the Canadians as unimaginative, cautious, and

tactically inept because it fit well with their own agendas, both national and interpretive.

The Normandy campaign nonetheless meant a great deal to Canadians at the time. This is evident by the fact that the Canadian Army Historical Section, led by Stacey, published an account of the Normandy campaign within two years of the event. The booklet, *Canada's Battle in Normandy 6 June–1 September 1944*, appeared in 1946,<sup>5</sup> and was one of only three brief books published by Stacey's section in the Canadian Army at War series before the official summary, *The Canadian Army 1939–1945*, emerged in 1948.<sup>6</sup> Both of these—the booklet on Normandy and the summary—were based on a series of historical narratives (now available online) developed as events unfolded. It is significant that these early works were written with only a cursory knowledge of the actual Overlord planning, scant access (if any) to higher-level documents, and little knowledge of what the Germans were up to.

Not surprisingly, both accounts are primarily narrative and descriptive, and both accounts of the 7–10 June period are quite brief. If Stacey and his team were aware of the contretemps in 1943 over the fate of First Canadian Army in the overall Overlord plan, or the ultimate objectives of the Canadian landings, none of that emerged in these early works. *Canada's Battle in Normandy* states emphatically that Second British Army was designated to lead the assault “at an early date . . . even before exercise Spartan” in April 1943.<sup>7</sup> This is strictly true, although it misses the period in late 1943 when First US Army replaced Second British, leaving First Canadian Army as the lead British Commonwealth formation. *The Canadian Army* comes closer to the truth on this. First Canadian Army's task was exploitation, but “there was some discussion of the possibility of the Canadian Army Headquarters taking part in the assault, with its own divisions under command.” With General Bernard Law Montgomery's return in January 1944, however, First Canadian Army reverted to its exploitation role.<sup>8</sup>

In both of these early books, Canada's role once ashore was unspectacular. The British on either side had the key tasks of capturing Caen and Bayeux. The Canadians—in the words of *Canada's Battle in Normandy*—held “the Army's central sector between the two places.”<sup>9</sup>

*The Canadian Army* summation of the ultimate task of the Canadians in the D-Day plan was not much better: the Canadians were simply the connecting tissue between the main thrusts on the British front.<sup>10</sup>

It is likely that Stacey had seen the key components—but not all—of the final Overlord plan and the operational order for 3rd Canadian Division before *The Canadian Army* appeared in 1948. Neither would have clarified things much for him without some wider context. Certainly the cryptic instruction in the operational order to “defeat the counterattack” would have been no cause for excitement: that’s what everyone was supposed to do. But Stacey and his team of Canadian army historians had no access to British Cabinet Office planning documents, special intelligence—especially Ultra information—and Operation Fortitude, or it seems even 21st Army Group intelligence documents, none to key COSSAC planning material, and little to captured German documents at this preliminary stage.

By the time serious work began on the major Canadian official history of operations in Europe, Stacey’s army historians had better access. Major T. M. Hunter’s masterful and highly informative narrative, “Preliminary Planning for Operation ‘OVERLORD’: Some Aspects of the Preparations for an Allied Re-entry to North-West Europe, 1940–1944,” Army Headquarters Report No. 42, completed in March 1952, draws on Overlord, Combined Chiefs of Staff, and some COSSAC and 21st Army Group planning documents. Much of the discussion in Hunter’s 210-page, single-spaced report focuses on the larger issues, such as sorting out Round-Up and Sledgehammer (two previous plans for landings in France) from the final Overlord plan. Hunter’s discussion is driven by debates at formal conferences at Washington, Quebec, and Tehran in 1943, and it is informed by notes from selected British Cabinet Office documents provided by Canadian army liaison staff in London. In his final description of the Overlord plan, Hunter drew heavily on Lieutenant Colonel H. A. Pollock’s Cabinet Office narrative, “Invasion of Northwest Europe 1944,” a 140-page document completed in 1949, and on discussions with Pollock himself.<sup>11</sup> Significantly, Pollock’s narrative of the planning for Overlord contains no references at all to Canada, Canadians, or the Canadian army: it is entirely an Anglo-American story. It was likely that this was no oversight but rather part of a deliberate British policy of subsuming the Canadian story

under the larger “British” umbrella. And although Hunter clearly saw some COSSAC files, there are no signs in his narrative of the key staff appreciations from 1943 or of the detailed COSSAC planning documents anticipating when and where the panzers were likely to attack. It remains unclear what Hunter really knew and, perhaps just as important, what he felt he could say.

In the meantime, the very cursory and unassuming versions of the Canadian role described in the two summaries published in 1946 and 1948 held sway. As for color, Ross Munro, a reporter with the Canadian Press who landed on D-Day with the Canadians, provided that in his popular account of the northwest Europe campaign, *From Gauntlet to Overlord* (1946). Munro described 3rd Canadian Division—suggestively—as virtually a “pocket corps” with all the attached troops, but without much context and comparison this was a hollow claim. For Munro the Canadian task was straightforward: “The Canadians were to thrust inland to the Caen-Bayeux highway and hold the slopes astride the road.”<sup>12</sup> So at best, then, the Canadians were to hold the road and presumably deny it as a lateral route for German movements.

More might have been expected from Milton Shulman’s classic work *Defeat in the West* (1947).<sup>13</sup> Shulman was a Canadian army intelligence officer during the war who joined First Canadian Army shortly before D-Day and stayed with it to the end. His job was tracking the Wehrmacht order of battle, and as a serving intelligence officer he interviewed many senior German officers in 1945. As a result, *Defeat in the West*, which deals with the whole campaign in northwest Europe, is a gold mine of first-person accounts and insight from the German perspective. His nine-page “Chapter XV: The First Days,” dealing with the initial beachhead battles against 1st SS Panzer Corps, still rewards reading. But only once in that chapter does Shulman say who the panzers were fighting against, and it is not the Canadians but the British. That lone reference to early battles is to the struggle around Tilley-sur-Seulles on 10 June, which cost Panzer Lehr about a hundred tanks.<sup>14</sup>

The Normandy story was so vast, so fascinating, so complex, and, in view of the very public spat going on in the international media over Montgomery’s role, so political that in the immediate postwar years, no one other than Canadians was interested in the Canadian role. This was certainly the case with Chester Wilmot, who was busy preparing

his seminal work *The Struggle for Europe* (1952) during this period. As a correspondent Wilmot was also a witness to the events he described, and he had a long association with the British army during the war. Much of what he knew he learned firsthand or was fed by friends who knew what he was writing. While preparing his book, Wilmot actively corresponded with British officers of all ranks and sought background information on Anglo-American operations. For his account of the Canadians, however, Wilmot was content to rely almost entirely on material sent to him by Stacey's Army Historical Section, including preliminary narratives and drafts of the first histories.<sup>15</sup>

As a result, *The Struggle for Europe* adds color but little insight into the Canadian role. Echoing Stacey, Wilmot's account of Canadians simply finds them in between two British formations that were trying to capture key urban areas. In the process, the Canadians are rather inadvertently attacked by 12th SS Panzer. The latter, apparently, was trying to exploit the gap between 3rd Canadian and 3rd British and "was distracted to the west by a Canadian advance."<sup>16</sup> In this view, it was the *advancing* Canadians who drew the panzers to themselves. What followed over the next two days was a Canadian defense of Putot and Bretteville forced on them by 12th SS, while the Germans held the front "against repeated probing attacks by the British and Canadians." Like many subsequent "British" and American historians (Wilmot was actually an Australian), much of Wilmot's explanation of German responses to the Allied landings centers on how the Germans reacted to the actions of the dominant Allies, and especially the key urban centers of Caen and Bayeux. According to Wilmot, 21st Panzer focused on fighting *British* 3rd Division—not strictly true—while 12th SS was apparently in search of the *British* left flank west of Caen. Meanwhile, Panzer Lehr moved to stop the *British* near Tilley-sur-Seulles, in an attempt to retake Bayeux.<sup>17</sup> Thus, for Wilmot as well, the Canadians were simply the "connective tissue" between places and stories that matter.

Subsequent Canadian, American, and British official histories add nothing to the role of the Canadians (except details) and do much to diminish it. The first substantive official history to appear was Gordon Harrison's *Cross-Channel Attack* (1951), part of the massive United States Army in World War II series—the so-called Green Series for its

canvas covers. It was not Harrison's task to provide detailed coverage of action on the Anglo-Canadian front, but events there were naturally mentioned. His comments were brief: "British troops were to take Bayeux and Caen on D-Day, and then push the bridgehead south and southeast." Harrison made no specific mention of the Canadian role on D-Day or subsequently. For Harrison, the operational plan allowed for no exploitation of "the favourable tank terrain at any phase of the operation for a direct thrust southeast towards Paris." True, but it did allow for defending the beachhead against panzer attack. Later on, Harrison noted that three panzer divisions were assembled around Caen, but the Canadians played no evident role in stopping them. His only comment on the battle between the Canadians and 12th SS on 7 June is in footnote 20 on page 348. Referring to a Hitler Youth "reconnaissance battalion" operating northwest of Caen, Harrison says: "Apparently this reconnaissance unit tangled with the 3rd Canadian Division near Authie and an engagement resulted heavy enough to give the Canadians the impression of an enemy counterattack." His authority for this was British Cabinet Office files and the war diary of Seventh German Army. The latter was "emphatic on the point that no attack by I SS Panzer Corps took place on 7 June."<sup>18</sup>

Harrison's volume, and indeed all the volumes of the Green Series relevant to Canadian operations, circulated in draft form to Stacey's Army Historical Section in Ottawa. What Stacey and his historians thought of Harrison's comments we will never know. The drafts, with minor annotations in the margins (some from senior Canadian generals), were shredded in 1983 by a junior historian at what was then the Directorate of History, National Defence Headquarters, Ottawa. I know this with certainty because I shredded them. My protests that the destruction was outrageous were met by reminders that I was still on probation and any attempt to remove the documents would be punished under the Official Secrets Act.<sup>19</sup>

But we do know that Harrison's volume had an impact on Stacey's later account. Until it appeared, he had little idea, for example, that 21st Panzer's counterattack on 6 June reached the sea.<sup>20</sup> Beyond that, Stacey was uninterested in 21st Panzer, probably because research by his German-language expert, Captain A. G. Steiger, failed to discover its presence in the Canadian sector. By the end of 1951, Steiger had

produced two lengthy reports for Stacey on German forces in Normandy, one dealing with the pre-D-Day situation and the other with events from 6 June to 22 August. It is significant that the position, movements, and role of 21st Panzer on the Canadian front are almost completely ignored.<sup>21</sup> Steiger based his reports largely on captured German records held in Washington, and on the interviews and reports prepared by German officers for the US Army Center of Military History. The latter project focused largely, but not exclusively, on what the Germans did in front of US troops. Although it remains a remarkably useful compendium, it was not shaped to answer everyone's potential questions, and the reports, subsequently published, do not present a balanced view of the war.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps not surprisingly, then, Steiger knew little of what 21st Panzer did in the early beachhead battles and also failed completely to uncover Panzer Lehr's presence in front of the Canadians on 8 June. In fact, he went on to admit in his narrative that he had no idea whatsoever of what the Germans were doing on the Canadian front between 9 and 11 June.

Based on Steiger's work, Stacey's primary focus for the first days ashore was therefore the battle with 12th SS.<sup>23</sup> As a result, Stacey's final word on these battles, which appeared in *The Victory Campaign: The Operations in North-West Europe, 1944-1945* (1960), the third volume of the Canadian army official history, was cursory, ill-informed, and rather dismissive. This work is largely to blame for the similar attitude shown by subsequent historians to the early phase of Canada's battles ashore. Even Stacey's account of D-Day ends with disappointment. It was a remarkable accomplishment, and he lauded the men and their commitment. But Stacey lamented that the Allies were slow to exploit their success, and he accepted German criticism that Allied infantrymen were too "hesitant and careful."<sup>24</sup> His accounts of the beachhead battles echo that tone. Stacey devoted seven pages to 9th Brigade's battle on 7 June: four and a half setting it up, and most of two analyzing why the brigade "had been caught off balance and defeated in detail."<sup>25</sup> In Stacey's view, the Canadians fought with "courage and spirit, but somewhat clumsily" against "an unusually efficient German force of *about its own strength* [my emphasis], and had come off second best." The result was a "severe local reverse" that—in words that damned the whole of 3rd Canadian Division's efforts for genera-

tions—“helped to ensure that Caen remained in German hands.”<sup>26</sup> In fact, Stacey’s account of the advance of the vanguard of 9th Brigade on 7 June is an eighteen-line paragraph, and six of those lines are devoted to brigade consolidation at the end of the day. His entire description of the struggle for Authie consists of eleven words: the vanguard “fought hard but were overrun: only a few men got away.”<sup>27</sup>

Stacey’s account of 7th Brigade’s battle at Putot, Bretteville, and Norrey from 8 to 10 June is more detailed, but he set the tone of those three days right off by describing the battle as “a series of violent *local* [my emphasis] counter-attacks.” And he ends with an emphatic statement, echoing Harrison and the Seventh German Army war diary, that “the large armoured counter-offensive planned on D-Day (discussed on p. 123) had never come to pass.” In the strictest sense, all this is true: most of 12th SS’s counterattacks were designed to clear the start line for the 1st SS Panzer Corps attack, so they were technically local. But Stacey was unaware that the larger panzer corps attack remained a consistent German objective until 10 June, unaware that Panzer Lehr and about one-third of 21st Panzer were present on the Canadian front during this period, and unaware that Canadian fighting helped thwart the German’s plans.

Stacey was also apparently totally unaware that II Canadian Corps played a key role in Operation Fortitude South, the deception scheme to both retain Fifteenth German Army in the Pas de Calais and deflect panzer reserves from the Normandy front following the landings. His accounts of II Corps training in April and May 1944 are described as preparation for crossing the tidal estuaries of the Seine and the Scheldt Rivers as part of the general advance of First Canadian Army along the coast of Europe.<sup>28</sup> It would seem that none of Stacey’s historians were aware of the Normandy deception operation.

In the end, Stacey never discussed the 3rd Canadian Division operational order at length, and of course he had not seen all the COSSAC and 21st Army Group planning documents that set the context for the Canadian role. In addition, his knowledge of the German side of the beachhead battles was, as noted, extremely limited. His accounts of Normandy (the 1947 booklet, the 1949 summary history, and the 1960 official history volume) were primarily interested in attempts by the Canadians to push forward. As my colleague Lee Windsor re-

mind me, the whole postwar generation of historians was focused on movement as the basic measure of success: failure to gain ground meant failure. After all, Montgomery set movement as the standard metric: no battle of attrition in Normandy. And so Stacey describes battles with 12th SS as attempts to stop the Canadians from advancing, not as part of the failure of a larger German scheme.<sup>29</sup> Other historians do the same. In this paradigm, the disastrous Canadian attack on 11 June at le Mesnil-Patry represents the ultimate failure of the army in this early phase—indeed, the culmination of a general failure to get forward.

The British official history of the Normandy campaign, the first volume of Major L. F. Ellis's *Victory in the West*, published two years after *The Victory Campaign*, did nothing to illuminate the Canadian role in the opening phase of Overlord. Ellis's writing is more descriptive than analytical, but it supports the view that the initial beachhead phase was all about movement, about country to be seized.<sup>30</sup> Ellis does say that on 7 June the Canadians "bore the brunt of a strong counter-attack by the 12th SS Panzer Division." This he described as the "second armoured division to be opposed to the *British advance* [my emphasis]."<sup>31</sup> His choice of words reflects two critical elements of Ellis's wider interpretation, and indeed the larger theme of all British accounts of the Normandy campaign since 1944: the Canadians are British, and the British are advancing. The absorption of the Canadians into the British fold is often assumed: Canada was part of the Commonwealth family, after all. But in the struggle for legacy—and for influence in the postwar world—it was vital that "British" power be seen as a unified force, not a fractured and decaying amalgam of empire, dominions, and associated lesser countries.<sup>32</sup> The strength of this British policy is evident in Ellis's foreword, in which he lists the countries that contributed to victory in Normandy: Britain, the United States, France, Poland, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Czechoslovakia. Canada is not on the list, so presumably there is nothing uniquely Canadian about Canada's role in the D-Day plan.<sup>33</sup>

With Canadian historians so ill-informed and laconic, and Canada's efforts subsumed under the British in British official histories, it was too much to expect later historians of the campaign to probe deeper into Canada's role in the Overlord plan. Indeed, as a rule, Anglo-American

historians are not intellectually curious about Canada's often important role in the Second World War, on land, on sea, and in the air. Few—if any—non-Canadians working on the Normandy campaign have ever even looked at Stacey's final volume of official history, *Arms, Men and Government* (1971).<sup>34</sup> It was there where he wrestled, obliquely to be sure, with the sacking of Andy McNaughton, the collapse of the central role of "McNaughton's Dagger" in the Overlord plan. In fairness, the discussion is set entirely in the context of McNaughton's fitness to command. Again, there is no evidence even by this stage that Stacey saw the COSSAC planning documents of late 1943 that gave First Canadian Army a major role in the Overlord assault. His one reference to the impact of the redirection of Canadian formations to Italy in the fall of 1943 was a reference to the fact that First Canadian would now likely become an Anglo-Canadian army for Overlord planning purposes.<sup>35</sup>

The first full-scale, intensely researched account of the Canadians in Normandy appeared in 1984 with the publication of Reg Roy's *1944: The Canadians in Normandy*.<sup>36</sup> A combat veteran of the Italian campaign, Roy had joined Stacey's staff around 1950 and had completely reworked the account of the Normandy campaign. It was Roy's compressed work that appeared in *The Victory Campaign*, and he finally got permission to publish his complete work—revised and updated—by the early 1980s. Roy added great detail to the story, but his narrative style did nothing to shift the odor of failure from the initial Canadian battles. As a result, Roy's *1944* seems to have had little international impact. Anglo-American historians were quite content with the negative tone of Stacey's operational history of the northwest Europe campaign, and it was their books—not Roy's—that garnered the limelight on the fortieth anniversary of D-Day. Max Hastings's old standby, *Overlord* (1984), is a case in point. When interviewed by Peter Gzowski on the CBC radio program *Morning Side* in 1984 during his international book tour, Hastings said he was hard on the Canadians because he was simply repeating the criticism in the Canadian official history. Canadians, it seems, fought hard but not well. In his book Hastings described the Canadians' battle with 12th SS as wild and confused, apparently because the Canadians were basically brawlers. He says emphatically of these battles, "While the Germans co-ordinated

armour, infantry and artillery superbly, the Canadians did not.”<sup>37</sup> The only “Canadian” Hastings quoted extensively in his book was Corporal Dick Raymond of the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa. In fact, Raymond was an American farmer from upstate New York who joined the Canadian army in 1942. Raymond thought the Canadians “went at it like hockey players.” That seemed to fit the paradigm.

The notion that the Canadian army in Normandy was a combination of “lions led by donkeys”—or perhaps more appropriately “hockey players led by donkeys”—was reaffirmed for a new generation in 1991 by John English’s extensively researched and powerfully argued book *The Canadian Army and the Normandy Campaign: A Study of Failure in High Command*. Like Stacey, English never looked closely at Canadian combat performance at the battalion level. Rather, his critique evolved from the discontent evident among grousing senior officers who were not happy with the way the war was run. His book’s subtitle summarizes the point: Canadian “failure”—and the campaign was apparently a litany of failures—started at the top, with the army’s senior generals. English agreed with Stacey’s conclusion (presumably derived from his discussions with senior Canadian officers) that the Canadian army overseas “got rather less than it might have” from its training. This was because of “a proportion of regimental officers whose attitude toward training was casual and haphazard rather than urgent and scientific.” English pushes responsibility for that problem back up the chain of command. Canadian shortfalls in Normandy, English stated, stemmed from the Canadian high command, which “did not know how to train them properly.”<sup>38</sup> His critique of senior Canadian generals very much echoes that of both Alan Brooke and especially Montgomery.

The result of all this is much ill-informed and gratuitous criticism of the Canadian effort in the first beachhead battles. The historian of 12th SS, Hubert Meyer (the former chief of staff of the division), chastised the Canadians for failing to seize the initiative and for not surging onto Point 112, north of Evrecy, on 7 June. The Germans would have done this, Meyer asserts. Perhaps. But the German army was no font of wisdom on large-scale amphibious assaults: Who would have filled in behind the Canadians if they had charged madly off to Point 112? As things turned out, 3rd Canadian Division’s flanks were in the

air throughout this period even at Putot, Bretteville, and Norrey. Perhaps the most bizarre dismissal of the Canadian effort between D-Day and 10 June was that of British historian Stephen Badsey, whose reappraisal of the first week of battle in a collection of essays asserts, rightly enough, that “it was in its first week that the battle [of Normandy] was won and lost.” His entire assessment of the Canadian role during the critical period then consists of one grotesquely ill-informed sentence: “For D Plus 1 and the following days, attention has mostly been paid to 12th SS Panzer Division’s *prevention* of 3rd Canadian Infantry Division *reaching Caen from the west* [my emphasis], while 21st Panzer Division blocked the British advance from the east.”<sup>39</sup> Clearly, neither Meyer nor Badsey read the Canadian operational order.

Russell Hart, who echoed both Hastings and, more important, English in his important book *Clash of Arms: How the Allies Won in Normandy* (2001), is worth quoting at some length because his description of the early Canadian battles so nicely encapsulates conventional wisdom about the Canadians and those crucial first few days west of Caen:

After D-Day, however, the British advance quickly stalled as powerful enemy reserves massed at Caen in an effort to drive the Anglo-Canadians back into the sea. In the process, these Allied forces suffered a number of local reverses, the Canadians especially so. The most serious of these occurred on 7 June as the Canadian 3d Division pushed boldly inland toward its D-Day objective of the Carpiquet airfield, despite the known movement of powerful German armored reserves toward Caen. The Canadian spearhead was ambushed and outfought by the vanguard of the 12th SS Panzer Division Hitlerjugend and thrown back in confusion. Further local Canadian reverses followed as German armor conducted an aggressive defense, probing for weak spots in the Allied lines that they might subsequently exploit in a planned, general offensive. On 8 June SS troops defeated the Royal Winnipeg Rifles and retook Putot.<sup>40</sup>

This passage is a complex mixture of simple errors of fact, a muddled story line, and a predisposition to see the Anglo-Canadians as bungling incompetents. But it fits well with the sharply negative tone of Hart’s

chapter titled “Canada 1939–1944: The Politics of Neglect,” which concludes that the Canadian army was so poorly prepared for modern war that “SHAEF wisely assigned First Canadian Army the subsidiary role of landing only after the Allies had established a successful bridgehead.”<sup>41</sup> In fact, of course, First Canadian Army had been preparing for just that follow-on, breakout role for over a year, and SHAEF had little to do with it. Not surprisingly, popular accounts simply pick up the tone set by these more authoritative accounts.<sup>42</sup>

In recent years Canadian historians have “counterattacked” this “hockey players led by donkeys” school. In particular, the work of Terry Copp has shown that Canadians fought very effectively indeed, at least as well as anyone else. His *Fields of Fire* (2003) tackled the whole Normandy campaign and shed much new light on issues from tactics to operations and strategy. In fact, Copp contributed three crucial elements to the debate over Allied performance in Normandy. He operated on the assumption that the official histories were not proper, academically rigorous histories at all. They were either incomplete, wrong, or too didactic and, even in Stacey’s case, compromised by the requirement to obtain approval to be published from a General Staff composed of the men who made the history he wrote.<sup>43</sup> Copp also flatly rejected the staff college approach to military history evident in books like English’s and sought to understand people and events in their historical context. Based on those assumptions, Copp believed that it was necessary for historians to go back to basics, back to the surviving documents, and back to the veterans to create a new narrative. Finally, a crucial element of Copp’s process was the use of the ground itself as a key document.<sup>44</sup> Over the last twenty-five years, Copp has revolutionized how Canadian historians do military history, especially the way they employ close analysis of the battlefield itself in their research. His work has been far-reaching and has profoundly affected generations of historians.

However, Copp, like most other historians of Normandy, had much to cover and was not primarily focused on the early defensive battles. He did not assume that they were failures or that the Canadians fought badly. Indeed, like the Canadians who fought these battles, Copp is sharply critical of 12th SS. But Copp did not explore these battles in detail. Mark Zuehlke’s  *Holding Juno*<sup>45</sup> (2005) provides the best nar-

rative of events between 7 and 10 June, and it is filled with gripping anecdotes. But Zuehlke, too, had little idea of the larger context of the Canadian effort from 7 to 10 June and simply set his account within the existing Normandy narrative.

Fortunately, much of the German side has now been well mapped in Brigadier Michael Reynolds's *Steel Inferno: 1 SS Panzer Corps in Normandy* (1997). In fact, the Canadians fought the SS so consistently throughout the Normandy campaign that Reynolds's book is a kind of semiofficial history of the other side of the Canadian story. Reynolds, too, is critical of German combat effectiveness in the early beachhead battles and is much kinder to the Canadians. It was Reynolds, after all, who asserted that the Canadian defense of Bretteville and Norrey "must surely go down as one of the finest small unit actions of WW II."<sup>46</sup> Clearly, some part of Canadian training, motivation, and leadership worked well.

This work therefore builds on much that is new and exciting in the literature on Normandy, and especially the work of Copp and his efforts with the Canadian Battlefields Foundation. Indeed, the opportunity to work on behalf of the latter and guide students around Normandy for many years provided much of the genesis of this book. I have seen, driven over, and walked the ground often enough to be very familiar with it. That experience opened my eyes to the fact that trying to reconcile most history books with the actual battlefield results in a lingering mistrust of accounts derived solely from archival sources.

This project began as a simple attempt to find out what my father's unit, 13th Field Regiment, Royal Canadian Artillery (RCA), did in those first days ashore. He was a veteran of the battles described here, and he remembered them as the most harrowing days of his eleven-month war. By the time I started serious research on this subject, most of the key actors in this story were long dead, although astonishingly 13th RCA's commanding officer, Colonel Freddie Clifford, was alive and well when I interviewed him in 2002. Clifford's regiment kept good records from the outset, but nothing survives from the other RCA regiments involved (12th, 14th, and 19th RCA) except their basic war diaries. Curiously, I soon discovered that the war diary of the division's artillery commander for the first two weeks ashore was a complete fudge (it was not written until thirteen months later),

and that no one from 14th RCA seemed to remember what happened on 7 June. Then my graduate student Dan Malone passed me a copy of the Canadian artillery operational order for Overlord, with its remarkable layout of the division covering position, and Doug Hope began to share his findings on the gunnery problems with 14th RCA on 7 June during the advance of 9th Brigade. More discovery and questions followed from there. Why were Canadian field artillery regiments all equipped with American self-propelled guns (SPs), apparently drawn from American stocks in the United Kingdom? (And the corollary to that question, Why was Canadian assault artillery completely and exclusively equipped with American SPs while the US Army's assault artillery on D-Day was primarily towed?) Why was so much artillery assigned to the Canadians and massed behind their front? Why did the guns fail on 7 June? Was the ground on either side of the Mue River seen as crucial counterattack country by Overlord planners? What did the original COSSAC appreciations say? How were they changed as a result of Montgomery's return? And what did the Germans plan—and do?

The process of answering these and many more questions simply piled revelation upon revelation. It is clear that historians have been content with a rather superficial analysis of the pre-D-Day plans, little more than a description of the Initial Joint Plan of 1 February 1944. That the dominant paradigm for understanding the initial phase of the Normandy landings was set decades ago and has endured virtually unchallenged. That much of what has been written is narrative and descriptive, not reflective and analytical. That the diminution of the Canadian role in the early phase of the campaign stems in part from shortcomings in Canadian accounts. That these shortcomings resulted from an inability to access and use all the necessary sources, from a focus on movement as the ultimate measure of success, and perhaps from a reluctance to probe too deeply into the breakup of First Canadian Army in the fall of 1943. For it is clear that a cabal of gunners from the Canadian Corps of the Great War nearly succeeded in having First Canadian Army lead the charge onto the beaches of France in 1944. And finally, that politics—domestic Canadian, interservice, and international—conspired to reduce Canada's role, and to some extent even reduce the recounting of what was accomplished.

Popular notions of Anglo-Canadian incompetence and idleness in Normandy persist. They will, no doubt, die hard—if at all. Given what Ben Affleck did with the truth in a film that won the Best Picture Academy Award in 2013, it is difficult to be optimistic. In that sense it was probably best that my father never saw Steven Spielberg's Hollywood blockbuster *Saving Private Ryan* (1998). Two elements of that film would have angered him greatly. The first was the gratuitous criticism offered by the Ranger Captain Miller, played by Tom Hanks. When asked by US airborne pathfinder Lieutenant Fred Hamilton (Ted Danson) how things were going, Miller responded, "Monty's taking his time moving on Caen: we can't pull out 'til he's ready." Even more curious is Hamilton's response. After saying that Monty was overrated, Hamilton says, "You gotta take Caen so you can take St. Lô." It is hard to know what to say about that one. The notion that the British were responsible for delays in Americans getting forward is an old canard in American popular perception of both the war in general and Normandy in particular.

This would have been bad enough, but the second overt bit of license taken by Spielberg would have sent Gunner William "Bill" Milner over the edge. Having slagged the British (and Canadians) for being slow to take Caen, Spielberg then moves heavy German armor west to fight his heroes. Some assault guns or antiquated French tanks bearing Iron Crosses would have added verisimilitude to Spielberg's story at this stage. Instead, he conjured up Tigers. When this scene appeared during a private screening of the film for my students, the audience broke out in muted, derisive laughter: not a common response to Spielberg's epic. The appropriation of the panzer threat, which those idle Anglo-Canadians were wrestling with at that very moment of the campaign, and the gratuitous criticism about the Anglo-Canadians being slow speak to the politics of history and the struggle for legacy. My father respected any man (on either side) who fought in Normandy, and he would not have traded the openness of the plain around Caen for the lethal embrace of the bocage. But he knew where the tanks were, and he would have been apoplectic with anger with Spielberg's historical license. Film is art, make no mistake. But film that takes on historical themes becomes the truth for the masses. And so it is for Normandy, from Cornelius Ryan to Steven Spielberg.

The Canadian moment in the early phase of Operation Overlord was brief but vital. Third Canadian Division did not storm Juno Beach simply to hold the space between British formations, it did not fail to take Caen when it had a chance, and it was certainly not forced into a tenacious defense because of the scale and quality of German counterattacks. The Canadians came to Normandy on 6 June 1944 to kill those counterattacks: to kill panzers. Over four intense days of brutal, close fighting, they did just that. When those initial battles were over, 3rd Canadian Division was indeed a spent force: fought-out, down 3,000 men, and exhausted. But it had stopped the panzers. It is time someone noticed.



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