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The Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies

The Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies was established to foster research, teaching and public education in strategic studies and military history. Within strategic studies the emphasis is on the use of formal models to understand problems in deterrence, arms control and disarmament. The history component focuses on the Canadian armed forces and the history of conflicts in which they were engaged.

The centre was organized in September 1991 with financial support from National Defence, through its Military and Strategic Studies program, and Wilfrid Laurier University. In the field of military history the centre sponsors two conferences each year and publishes *Canadian Military History*, a biannual periodical. The new journal will introduce Canadians, within and beyond the university community, to the best scholarship on the role of the armed forces in Canada's history. The Centre will also publish occasional papers on military history.

Marc Kilgour, Director
Terry Copp, Co-Director

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Letter from the Editor

The sector of the Normandy coast code-named "Juno" gradually came into view — five miles of coastline which at low tide was bounded by wide sandy beaches. The maps, air photos and wave-top pictures had familiarized the officers with the landmarks. There, on the extreme right, were the lighthouse and wireless mast that marked the junction between "Juno" and "Gold," the area to be attacked by the British 50th Division. In the centre, two and one-half miles along a low shoreline, was the small port of Courseulles-sur-Mer at the mouth of the River Seulles which separated "Mike" and "Nan" beaches. A short distance east, high church steeples identified the two seaside villages, Bernieres and St. Aubin. Immediately behind the coastline the countryside was open, rising very gradually towards Carpiquet, the divisional objective.

It was time to go. The assault on Hitler's Atlantic Wall, was about to begin. The young men of Canada's 3rd Infantry Division, drawn from all parts of the country, were set to do battle for the liberation of western Europe. Some were to die that day and many to be wounded. In the weeks and months that followed the casualty lists would grow, men would be killed, maimed and driven beyond the edge of human endurance. Why were they there?

The Second World War engulfed the world in violence on an unprecedented scale. There has never been another conflict which has involved so many different parts of the world or brought so much suffering and death. The people who went to war against Hitler's Germany were involved in a crusade to destroy a force of such great evil that there was no other solution than total victory, no other strategy but total war. They went to war with a sense of indignation and resignation, not with any sense of adventure or quest for glory. It was a decision taken reluctantly and with a feeling of horror, but a decision which most people felt necessary. Hitler had left them with no choice.

Canadians shared both the reluctance and the horror, but there was widespread understanding of the evil which Hitler represented and a firm belief that a line must be drawn. Canada would not have gone to war unless Britain went to war, but it was a common set of values not blind imperial loyalty that led Canadians to stand at the side of Britain and France. As the war progressed Canada's role became of vital importance. By 1944 almost a million Canadians were part of the Allied forces.

If you tour the Canadian battlefields you will obtain some impression of the challenge faced by these volunteer citizen-soldiers who helped to win the Battle of Normandy. As armchair generals you would no doubt have your own views on how the battles should have been planned. Remember that the men who actually fought the

battle lacked the 20-20 hindsight which we possess. No one knew what the outcome of individual battles would be or how long the campaign in Normandy might last. And no one knew exactly what was required of them. Which actions were courageous and which were foolish? Should attacks be pressed when things were going badly or should they be called off? Discipline and courage could keep men going, but at what point did the price become too high? There were no easy answers in 1944 and there are none today. What we do know is that Canadian soldiers, sailors and airmen made a vital contribution to the defeat of Hitler and the liberation of Europe. The victory did not bring an end to war or to human misery, but it did destroy a "monstrous tyranny never surpassed in the dark, lamentable catalogue of human crime" and offered the world the opportunity to build a new and more rational social order.

Terry Copp

(excerpt from *A Canadian's Guide to the Battlefields of Normandy*)

Dear Sir,

I am a Sergeant in the Canadian Military Engineers on a 12 month tour with UNPROFOR Headquarters in Zagreb, Croatia. I subscribe to *Canadian Military History* and my wife has sent me Volume 2, Number 2 (Autumn 1993) which I was very grateful to receive and found most enjoyable to read. The articles dealing with Ortona interested me the most as I took five days leave from the UN, in August, to visit that historic town as well as the Gothic Line, Riccione, Rimini and Coriano Ridge.

Ortona has always been on my list of historical places to visit and little did I realize when I picked up my rental car in Zagreb, that it would be a 9 hour drive to get there. I also wish that your magazine had been out at that time as I was only armed with some photocopies of the maps from Mr. G.W.L. Nicholson's "The Canadians in Italy." After having braved the Italian autostrada drivers and the +30 degree Celsius heat, I rolled into

Ortona around 1800 hours only to find that late August is when every Italian goes to the coast on vacation and just about every hotel is booked solid. A rather hurried reconnaissance of the



town provided me with the very pleasant and reasonable "Hotel Modern," which I quickly settled in to.

After breakfast on the following day I picked up some tourist information on Ortona and asked the owner of the Hotel about the location of Casa Berardi and the Moro River Canadian Military Cemetery as the 1:500 000 maps I had borrowed from the UN were not quite detailed enough to pinpoint those locations. The owner was very helpful and in broken English gave me directions to both; he also informed me that the Canadians had fought a big battle in Ortona. . .

Since 1984 I have had several trips to France, Belgium and Holland to visit the Great War and Second World War Canadian battlefields in those countries, so I figured that the Italian Campaign battlefields would be much the same. Since the early 1980s, the battlefields of Western Europe have become the "Mecca" of Veterans, arm-chair historians and militaria collectors in that they are very close to England, always a

pleasant staging point, both the Great War and WWII battlefields are relatively close to each other and it is these campaigns that have received the majority of the attention in books and movies since WWII.

I was not prepared for what I saw. After walking through some of the newer sections of Ortona I made my way to the harbour and the remains of the fortress which once had protected it. Several sections of this part of town remain as they had been left in early 1944 with only the battered shells of the buildings remaining (just like parts of war torn Croatia). Many of the repaired buildings are replastered and painted on the first couple of floors, but higher up, above eye level, the scars of the intense fighting can still easily be seen. Nowhere in the very prosperous and extremely touristy French, Belgian and Dutch battlefields had I experienced the sense that, yes there was truly heavy fighting in this location and the inevitable reconstruction and development progress had actually, slightly less than 50 years later, left me some untarnished evidence of that event.

Casa Berardi proved just as exhilarating, the roughed terrain, I could just picture the "Vangt Doos" holding that position. Now the Casa is just within view of the Autostrada, yet nicely tucked away "off the beaten trail" and out of harms way. The Moro River Canadian Military Cemetery, like all Commonwealth War Graves' cemeteries is in immaculate condition, sobers you up once again that the cost in Canadian blood was high and no one should forget that.

Every spot that I went, whether tracing the Royal

Canadian Regiment's advance to the Gothic Line or driving along the Adriatic Coast to Rimini, I truly felt that the Italian Campaign is a sadly neglected part of Canadian WWII military history and that it has unfortunately been upstaged by the events in Western Europe. I hope that Volume 2, Number 2 of *Canadian Military History* has started to change this trend and will cast more light on Canada's participation in this important theatre.

Several weeks after my trip, I started to look back and thought that my excitement over what I saw and experienced in Italy could very well have been the novelty of a first trip. By this time I had received some return correspondence from a number of friends who have spent as much or more time exploring the battlefields in Western Europe than I have. They all agreed that the Italian Campaign is interesting, but it is just too far to travel and anyway, Normandy is only a short ferry trip across the Channel.

Canadian Military History is a good read, my wife has sent in my subscription for 1994, and I look forward to reading future editions.

Sincerely yours,

W.E. Storey
UNPROFOR Headquarters,
Zagreb, CCUNPROFOR

Dear Sir,

Having finished my first reading of *CMH*, I write to congratulate you on a superb publication, all that it should

be, (to qualify for its rather ambitious title!) Clearly written yet with sufficient detail to permit old soldiers like myself to follow the events described, as they happened; the mixture of textbook history (Copp's "Fifth Brigade"), personal accounts (Simonds' "Spring") and folk history (Morton's "Frank Maheux" is a happy one, adding to my enjoyment of several continuous hours of reading with your new publication, (not something I could do with most Canadian pub's, I'm sorry to say.))

Frank Maheux's story struck a highly personal chord in my own memories: a father who endured, with the 1st Division, most of the same battles during four years in the trenches. In 1918, he took command of the Special Hospital at Witley, where poor Matheux had earlier been treated for V.D. My own first Second War unit, the 21st Canadian Field Ambulance, had recruited many men of backgrounds paralleling Maheux's. I, a "gently-raised" doctor's son, had some difficulty in adjusting to that unit's lumberjack culture, so much like that described in Maheux's story; however, I soon made close friends (and useful protectors) of some of the most violent men by helping them with their letters home.

Thank you again for launching this very interesting and eminently readable journal. My subscription is enclosed.

Yours very sincerely

James Stone
Ottawa, Ontario

Dear Sir,

For many years I have often wondered about a mystery that occurred during my service with the Canadian Expeditionary Force on August 26/27 1918.

I was with the 42nd Battalion The Royal Highlanders of Canada (The Black Watch) on that date. I was a rifle grenadier with No.5 Platoon, Lt. Dobell in command, Sgt. George Hope, platoon sergeant.

In the early morning hours of August 26 we went up Columbus Trench, overland through the 5th CMR and into Pick Trench. Our Objectives were to bomb and clear Pick and Tape and part of Saddle trenches.

At the junction with a road, the trench had been blown in and to get through, it became necessary to get over the road to continue along Pick Trench. Lt. Dobell took 1st section of No.5 platoon consisting of nine men (including myself) and we made a dash individually out of the trench and across the road. However, there were three Jerry

MGs waiting for us, at a distance of about 300 yards. Lt. Dobell was seriously wounded, two of the ORs were killed and 4 other ORs were badly wounded. I was the last to attempt the crossing as I was trying to score on the Jerries with my rifle grenades. However, I made it after getting some holes in my kilt, water bottle and cutting off the straps in my bomb bag.

We eventually picked off the enemy MGs with smoke and continued on up Pick to Tape and then into Saddle which was a German support line. What we saw at this time really puzzled us all. There were no Germans in the trench. It was a really good trench with everything neat and orderly. Four Maxims were sitting on the parapet, all loaded, and on the firestep there were cowhide German packs all laid out as though for kit inspection. We left a sentry at each dugout entrance after throwing a couple of Mills grenades down into the dugout. However, there was no one in them. As it was getting on to darkness and we had done

the job we were supposed to do, we settled down and did a bit of scrounging and souvenir hunting. All was quiet at our end although we could hear sounds of Lewis gun fire and the occasional grenade blast. At about 0230 hours we were rudely brought out of our siesta by a shower of Potato mashers some of them being five in number, all tied to a stick and all the strings tied together. I was standing beside Major Topp, our company commander, when one of these potato masher bundles dropped between us. The Major had his jaw shattered, two other ORs were killed and I wound up with a face and chest full of splinters. I figured that I was blinded as I couldn't see for the blood in my eyes. Our stretcher bearer, Keily, stripped off my webbing, bandaged me up and I made my way as best as possible out of the area. I was picked up by one of our trench mortar people who got me back to the dressing station where they found I was also hit in the back and legs.

As an afterthought, some 5 years later I had occasion to go to Ottawa for an interview with the Board of Pension Commissioners in regard to my pension claim. To my surprise I found out that Major C.B. Topp was the Chairman of the board. Needless to say I had no problems with my claim.

I don't know as to whether this anecdote is of any use to you but use it if you can.

R.E. Henley
Sidney, BC

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