

CANADIAN MILITARY HISTORY

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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.

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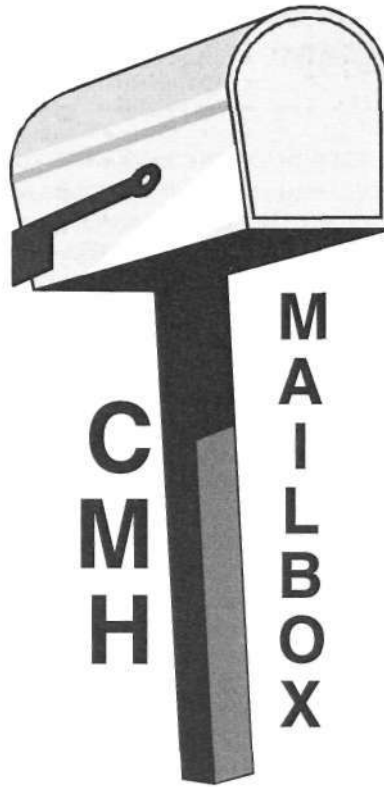
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Dear Sir,

I would like to make the following comments re: C.R. Shelley's excellent article "HMCS Prince Robert" found in the Spring 1995 issue of *Canadian Military History*.

Mr. Shelley states that the Model SW1C radar was installed in February 1942 (p.51). It was, in fact, not put aboard then. The Model SW1C was already aboard, in time to convoy SS *Awatea* loaded with 2,000 Canadian soldiers bound for Hong Kong in October 1941. That was when I was drafted aboard, one of three novice operators working a very new and unique device, and our first time to sea. Even the "RDF" was brand-new, the first to be installed on any ship on the West Coast. I recall it well because once we put to sea, the Captain had us sweep 20 degrees forward - Port to Starboard. The fog was heavy emerging from Vancouver. Now the SW1C was notorious for back-echoes. But because of the order, you could not "sweep" astern to make comparisons and therefore it "appeared" *Awatea* was 15 degrees off our Starboard bow (ahead). Stern echoes being stronger (by pointing the antenna astern) would have proved *Awatea* was indeed astern. I was ordered up to the bridge, had my mistake pointed out by an irate Captain Hart, then went below and ate crow!

Mr. Shelley, in note 41 on page 59 mentions that after the war some crew members claim to have sighted the Japanese Fleet prior to the attack on Pearl Harbour. This is what I know. I was the "RDF" operator aboard *Prince Robert* on passing the Philippines returning to Canada. That was when Captain Hart ordered me to "shut down." The Canadian soldiers had been left at Hong Kong. We were alone. This meant crossing the wide expanse of the Pacific between the Philippines and Hawaii in late November 1941 on our own. We now know the Imperial Japanese Fleet was already at sea, in fact sailing some



1,200 miles north of us on a parallel course for Hawaii. We could not have detected the Fleet anyway because our "RDF" (later called Radar) had a range of only 20 miles. In any case, Hart ordered us to remain at station but with the equipment turned off. The 2.5 metre wavelength of our SW1C could easily have been detected by any SW receiver which the Japanese doubtless possessed. They could have used us for target practice. Our Captain to his credit obviously didn't want our presence known. But the Japanese weren't yet in the war. My question is "what did the Captain know we didn't?" Certainly he suspected something out of the ordinary. Pearl Harbour came a few days later!

James W. Essex
"RDF" Operator
HMCS *Prince Robert*,
October 1941-May 1942
Petersburg, Ontario

Dear Sir,

The aerial photographs of Authie, Franqueville, Cussy and the Abbaye d'Ardenne that accompany my article "The Capture of the Abbaye d'Ardenne by the Regina Rifles, 8 July 1944" in the Spring 1995 issue of *Canadian Military History* (pp.91-99) have served to clarify the confusion I had earlier about what appeared on the photos to be a substantial defensive position between Authie and the Abbaye. It seems likely that it is the SS position in "the mounds," the intermediate objective taken by Baker Company of the Regina Rifles before "C" Company, under Stu Tubb, and Dog Company, under me, passed through en route to the Abbaye. I mentioned what "a devil of a time" we had getting through "the mounds." In fact, we had to fight our way through the mounds and trenches there before our companies could concentrate on the Abbaye. Baker Company had lost at least 60 of their 95 men in attacking "the mounds" and I am surprised they didn't lose more. The position really was much better defended and prepared by the SS than I realized at the time, and I tended to down play its importance in my story. My concentration was focused on *our* final objective of the Abbaye where I knew that the HQ of the 25th Regiment of the 12th SS was located. Further, it is more apparent than ever to me that Charlie Company and Stu Tubb were extremely vulnerable to SS positions and dug-in tanks between Franqueville and the Abbaye. It is little wonder that "C" Company lost all of its officers and about 90 men killed and wounded. My Dog Company had the good fortune to have the Can Scots on our left and the wheatfields in front of the Abbaye with the result that we lost only 30 men in capturing the place.

I can recall "the mounds" with much horror because of the many bodies, both ours and theirs, that were there. I remember one of "B" Company's men being killed and falling on me as he tried to escape

machine gun fire by running over a mound instead of around it. So it was indeed a "devil" of a problem at that intermediate objective and in the final few hundred yards to the Abbaye.

sincerely,

Gordon Brown
Red Deer, Alberta

Editor's Note: A recent trip to France has shed further light on the question of "the mounds." In a discussion with M. Vico, who was a teenager living near the Abbaye during the war, he recalled that there was an anti-aircraft site built early in the war between Authie and the Abbaye to defend the airfield at Carpiquet. Prior to the invasion the guns were removed and the site was abandoned, but it remained a formidable defensive position due to the trenches and barbed wire that were left behind. It is undoubtedly this position, which is clearly visible on the air photographs taken two days prior to the Reginas attack, which Gordon Brown refers to as "the mounds."

.

Dear Sir,

In the article, "The Defeat of the 12th SS" by Oliver Haller in the Spring 1994 issue it states that "tanks from the Elgin Regiment" engaged a number of German Panthers, (p.22) The Elgin Regiment is a fine old county regiment, but I doubt that a tank delivery unit (First Canadian Army Troops: 25th Armoured Delivery Regiment) would have been in action around Norrey that day. I was not there but I would be willing to bet that the unit involved was the 1st Hussars. The attached award recommendation confirms this:

On the 7 June 44 Capt GK Henry was a troop commander, 6 Cdn Armd Regt. [1st Hussars]

Daring the night 7/8 June 44, the Regina Rifles of Canada who had reorganized in BRETTEVILLE L'ORGUEILLEUSE and NORREY-en-BESSIN were heavily counter-attacked by enemy tanks and infantry and one company was driven from the east of BRETTEVILLE. On the morning of the 8 June 44, the counter-attacks continued and the situation became serious, "C" Squadron 6 Cdn Armd Regt was ordered to attack around the east of BRETTEVILLE to spoil the counter-attack. Capt Henry was commander of the point troop protecting the left flank of "C" Squadron. Moving across the high ground east of BRETTEVILLE, he observed five enemy Panther tanks about to attack our infantry positions. Although out-numbered and out-gunned, he opened up on them and was successful in knocking out four with four shots, and sharing in the kill of the fifth. All five were destroyed.

This display of daring, skill and cool determination typifies this officer in every action. His successful handling of this particular engagement undoubtedly saved the position of the infantry which was rapidly becoming untenable.

All the best,

Frank Hull,
Colonel
1st Hussars
London, Ontario

Dear Sir,

As a former soldier of the 1st Canadian Army Tank Brigade I was terribly disappointed with Hugh G. Henry's treatment of "The Calgary Tanks at Dieppe" [*Canadian Military History*, Spring 1995, Vol 4 No 1). He, following the lead of several other academic

predecessors, continues to harp on old chestnuts such as complicated and inflexible plans, ineptitude of COHQ, over-reliance on tactical surprise and so forth. It is unfortunate that few ever tried to discover the flavour of thought and human feelings of those early war days; or indeed just how deficient we were of up-to-date armaments and production capabilities. It seems they jump or seize upon conclusions without having any understanding of why things worked out as they did. They also seem to think that perfection and preparedness can be achieved through more analysis, more tests, and of course better brainpower, failing to recognize that is a recipe for doing nothing and in war, that is fatal.

Now thanks to Hugh Henry, we have to add one more defect. That is his inference that the Churchill tank was a lousy piece of equipment. As for his opening comment that previous historians have not "examined accurately...", he obviously was unaware of *Dieppe, Dieppe* by Ben Greenhous (Art Global, Montreal, 1993). In truth Henry's knowledge of the Churchill tank is pretty shallow.

Army tank brigades and the tanks they used were developed to work directly with and in support of infantry operations. The tanks were known as "I" tanks. They were heavily armoured so as to be able to fight in the furnace of a battle. The main weapons for that type of operation, in those days, were the Churchill's two machine guns. The 3-inch howitzer was in each of three tanks of the squadron headquarters. It was used solely to deliver smoke and was located low in the tank, in the driver's compartment. The tank's main gun, in the turret, was for countering enemy tanks, or other appropriate targets. When the 75 mm high explosive (and smoke) shell became available later (thanks mainly to the Americans) our tanks had another very useful weapon for dealing with soft targets.

For infantry-cum-tank operations there had to be close cooperation between the two arms. It was never perfect under the best of circumstances. Believe me, most training did emphasize cooperation and joint exercises were developed to test it. Henry's comments about street fighting by tanks seemed to imply the tank was on its own. Not so, in addition to alert infantry, each tank in a troop was expected to provide mutual fire support, especially in built-up and closed up areas. As for his hilarious statement about "a tank cavalry charge" he seems to have forgotten that the Churchill was a relatively slow moving turtle-like monster. He is also out on a limb (see endnote 7) when he interprets E.L.M. Burns comments in *General Mud* about a lack of British tank policy. Henry should have known that Burns was speaking about the year 1940, NOT 1942. As for tank commanders being easy targets for snipers, such was not the case. Granted some of us did get hit. I cannot think of a single occasion in the short time I was in action that I ever fought my tank closed down; and I think that was true for the majority of tank commanders. In war you cannot expect perfection. Risks become a fact of life.

In 1941 the Churchill tank was Britain's best tank. It would remain so until the end of the war. Few are aware that it went into production directly from the drawing boards. There were no pilot models to play with. There was simply no time to play around with tests! The first armoured formation to start receiving the Churchill, in early July 1941, was the Canadian Army Tank Brigade. During the next year the Armoured Brigade Workshops, unit technical adjutants, unit mechanics and drivers, worked most of the mechanical bugs out of that tank. Once it got into action, the ultimate testing ground, many more deficiencies and improvements would appear. It is fair to say that the majority who were in that brigade from 1941 to early 1943 thought we had a bloody



Lieutenant John F. Wallace in front of his Churchill Tank on the South Downs, England, 1942.

good tank. Further we were young, naive maybe, and chomping at the bit to get at the Germans. In spite of all the totally irrelevant and negative statements attributed to German, and other sources, the Churchill gave a first rate account of itself, not only at Dieppe, but also later in North Africa, Tunisia, Italy and Northwest Europe.

Henry generated a lot of steam over his findings about the composition of the Dieppe beach, namely chert. It was quite interesting stuff but again hardly relevant. The simple truth is that the Churchill's track could be broken on any sort of soft ground, sand or small stones. A lot had to do with the skill of the tank's driver. A total of 29 tanks landed on the beach. Only four came to grief on the chert. I submit that is not a bad rate of failure during an opposed assault landing. The Churchill tank proved to be quite a formidable fortress. All crews inside their tanks escaped injury. Of the two which were holed, one was on the side and one was in the rear. I doubt the author's assertion that the Germans had actually tested tanks on that particular beach. But there was one among

the tankers who knew something about the beach. That was Lieutenant-Colonel John Andrews, commander of the Calgary Tanks, who had holidayed on it before the war. He also told us during his lecture on Combined Operations, in Worthing, shortly after "Rutter" had been cancelled that he, as well as other commanders, had agreed that any heavy bombing before the actual assault would have negated the use of tanks. No, he did not mention the name of Dieppe.

Henry has plenty of disparaging comments about the tank's armaments. Some are justified but the light in which they are projected raises many questions. "Stowage of ammunition was insufficient" he suggests. His reference speaks of an extra box of ammunition being provided. Was it the way in which ammunition was stored, or was his observation about the mix between machine-gun ammo and the solid shot. Assuming it was the mix, it would have been helpful to say what the mix was for the operation. He also suggests that the crews were firing their 6-pounders "as quickly as possible." That too requires clarification. In those days there was no real stabilizing equipment to bring the gun back onto target after firing. The tank main gun is not an artillery piece firing or lobbing shells at some geographic target where precise accuracy was not really a factor.

It is easy to criticize the calibre of the tank guns in those days. We all did it. Unfortunately the subject is quite complicated and calibre is only one of many aspects of projectile delivery. Apart from giving a lift to the troops' morale it is doubtful whether a larger calibre gun would have given the edge needed to smash the concrete road blocks. Was it possible that COHQ had guessed right that there would be no enemy tanks, hence it did not really matter what major gun was part of the tanks equipment? In any case those "puny armour-piercing shells" as Henry called them came from a 6-pounder which

had a muzzle velocity of 2,600 feet per second and at 500 yards would have penetrated 87 mm of armour plate. Henry's vaunted German long-barrelled 75 mm had a muzzle velocity of 2,300 feet per second and would be able to penetrate 84 mm of armour plate. At that time the US 75 mm on the M-3 General Lee had a muzzle velocity of 2,000 feet per second and could penetrate 68 mm. The point of all this is to emphasize that there is a lot more to understand than just demanding larger calibre guns.

Henry was not the first to ridicule the 2-pounder as "a pea-shooter" which happened to be on several of the Calgary's tanks. One may wonder what was in the minds of the designers. Here is one case where they were not at fault. The decision was made by the British Ministry of Supply. Interestingly, the first Canadian Rams appeared with 2-pounders. In our case the cracking new 6-pounder tank gun was not quite ready.

When you get to the bottom line of the tank participation in "Jubilee," the reasons that the tanks were not successful are two-fold.



Lieutenant Wallace in the turret of a Churchill as a crew commander with ear phones. "According to Henry the tracks were too noisy for communication - Not so."

The Navy failed to put the tanks on shore *on time*. The Engineers failed to blow the concrete road blocks. All mutterings of "what if" are totally irrelevant.

In conclusion I wonder where the author got that piece of

information that 14 CATR had "performed the most satisfactorily of all the armoured units" in Exercise "Beaver III," and was therefore chosen for the Dieppe raid. From impeccable sources, who are now dead, I understood that two of the three unit commanders in the Brigade tossed a coin. Johnny Andrews won! Or did he?

sincerely,
John F. Wallace
Ottawa, Ontario

John F. Wallace was a troop leader in the Three Rivers Regiment. His unit was equipped with the Churchill tank and he attended a number of Churchill tank courses at Bovington and at the Bedford factory in Luton. Mr. Wallace is the author of Dragons of Steel: Canadian Armour in Two World Wars (General Store Publishing House, 1995).

In Memoriam

James Lawton Stokesbury

On 14 September 1995, Dr. James Lawton Stokesbury of Acadia University died in his home as a result of injuries received in a car accident. Jim served in the United States Navy as a signaller from 1953-1956, participating in the 1954 evacuation of North Vietnam. He received his BA(H) from Acadia in 1960, an MA from the University of Western Ontario in 1962, and a Ph.D. from Duke in 1968. He served as Assistant Dean of Arts and Sciences at Acadia from 1965-1966 and as Head of the History Department

from 1980-1986. He was the author of numerous books including: *Masters of the Art of Command*, with Martin Blumenson (1975), *A Short History of World War II* (1980), *A Short History of World War I* (1983), *Navy and Empire* (1984), *A Short History of Airpower* (1986), *A Short History of the Korean War* (1988), *A Short History of the American Revolution* (1991), *World War II Personal Accounts: Pearl Harbour to V-J Day*, with Gary Yarrington (1992), and *A Short History of the Civil War* (1995). He is survived by his wife Elizabeth, and his children: Kevin, Brianna and Michael. Jim was a valued member of the military history community and will be sorely missed.

The editors of *Canadian Military History* wish to thank the following people and organizations for their contributions to this issue:

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