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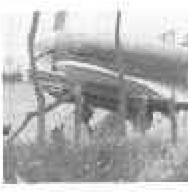

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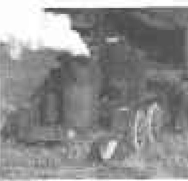

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CANADIAN MILITARY HISTORY

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Canadian War Museum

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The mission statement of the Canadian War Musuem is: "To share in the remembrance of, and serve as a memorial to those Canadians lost in, or as a result of war; to examine the war and war related history of Canada and its effects upon Canada and Canadians; and to document Canada's com-mitment to peacekeeping and the maintenance of international sevcurity." To this end the CWM maintains an exhibition facility with three floors of galleries, and a collections building housing close to half a million artifacts.

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The purpose of the Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies (LCMSDS) is to foster research, teaching, and public discussion of military and strategic issues of national and international significance. The Centre is intentionally multi-disciplinary; it has strong commitments in military history, with emphasis on the Canadian experience, and in strategic and operational studies, with emphasis on disarmament. LCMSDS supports both basic and applied research as well as teaching at the undergraduate and graduate levels. In addition, the extensive program of LCMSDS workshops, conferences, public lectures, and publications encourages informed discussion of international security and of Canada's national interests in military and strategic issues - past, present and future.

The Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies was founded in 1991 as a Research Centre affiliated with Wilfrid Laurier University. Its primary support has come from the Department of National Defence and from Wilfrid Laurier University. The Director of the Centre is Dr. Marc Kilgour, Professor of Mathematics, and the Co-Director is Professor Terry Copp, Professor of History.

From the Editor

Fifty-Five Years On

One of my favourite cartoons from last year showed a flock of people converging on the military history section of a bookstore. A weary clerk explains that the rush began every time *Saving Private Ryan* let out from the theatre next door.

Readers of this journal will know that Spielberg's story has sparked renewed interest in the Normandy campaign, and the Canadians' role in it. *Saving Private Ryan* rekindled my own fascination in Canada's military leadership, particularly those lieutenants, captains and majors who led their platoons and companies on D-Day, and beyond. In many ways, Tom Hanks was the "ideal" officer with just the right balance of military know-how and quiet charisma. He led from the front, hid his fears, and, through what the Canadian army once called "man management," lifted his men's sagging morale. Not bad for a prewar school teacher.

Were Canadian officers as good? In his "balance sheet" of the Normandy campaign, the army's official historian, C.P. Stacey, was quick to praise Allied generals, Canadian soldiers and their German counterparts. But of Canadian regimental commanders, Stacey qualified his judgment.

> As for their officers, the Canadian regimental officer at his best (and he was very frequently at his best) had no superior. He worked to make himself master of his craft, which was not his by profession; he watched over his men's welfare and led them bravely and intelligently in battle. *There still remained, however, that proportion of officers who were not fully competent for their appointments, and whose inadequacy appeared in action and sometimes had serious consequences* [My italics].[1]

Twenty-four years later, another army historian cast an even more critical gaze on those officers who went ashore on D-Day. In a brief article written to mark the 40th anniversary of Overlord, Brereton Greenhous maintained that the Canadians might have reached more of their objectives on 6 June "had they been driven a little harder."[2] To harden his point, Greenhous turned to Martin van Creveld's 1982 book, *Fighting Power,* to measure "combat effectiveness" by comparing rates of officer and other rank casualties. This gauge assumes that officers are better leaders when they take more casualties, leading from the front. When Greenhous compared Canadian casualties on 6 June to those of the German army through the entire war, as well as the Israeli army in 1973, he drew this conclusion: "Nonetheless, by German or Israeli standards the [Canadian] officer corps failed miserably on D-Day." Offered in support of this remarkable claim are the D-Day casualty figures of just two Canadian infantry battalions. Thirty percent of the officers leading the Queen's Own Rifles of Canada (QOR) went out as casualties on 6 June, as against just 17 percent of their men. In contrast, only eight percent of the officers of the North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment were casualties on that day, compared to 17 percent of their men. Should we conclude, as is implied, that the QORs were better led, or that Canadian officers failed miserably?[3]

These figures have bothered me ever since I first walked the Normandy beaches in 1984. On one occasion I was with my late uncle, a former company commander who fought in Normandy and was intelligent, brave (and lucky) enough to fight all the way into Germany. I might have shown him Greenhous' article when it first came out, though I likely didn't have the nerve. I will always recall stopping with him at St. Aubin-sur-Mer, where the North Shores first broke through the Atlantic Wall. An empty, scarred gun emplacement still points down the beach along the seawall. There did not seem much to say.

That gun position was one of many problems the North Shores faced on 6 June 1944. The battalion was ordered to capture the beach, the town and then form the left flank of the 8th Brigade landings. After British commandos had passed through, the North Shores were to capture the village of Tailleville, several kilometres inland. The battalion's "A" Company went ashore west of St. Aubin, and reached its first objective by mid-morning, losing 24 men storming the beach and clearing nearby houses. Among them was Lieutenant Merle Keith, who was badly wounded clearing the mine-laden beach. "B" company had an even rougher go. Its forward elements hit the beach at the village proper, and as the men dashed to the seawall, they found intact the gun positions that were to have been knocked out by naval guns and aircraft. Leadership from the rear just didn't apply here. Lieutenant Gerald Moran of No.5

platoon had likely never led men in action, but he did know enough to dress like them. As his men began to bunch up along the seawall, he "stood in the open and shouted at the top of my voice and, making vigorous motions with my arms, urged the sections around the wall and forward..." That motion gave a sniper enough time to target Moran, who was badly wounded. That left Lieutenant Paul McCann in charge of two platoons, whose surviving members somehow survived the heavy gunfire and, with the help of the Fort Garry Horse, worked their way into the village. As McCann later remembered, "Now came the test. Things weren't going as planned and unless we captured those heavy guns Jerry was potting landing craft with, things were going to get worse. And worse they got, for there we were with nothing heavier than Brens with which to attack heavily-fortified enemy posts."[4]

Moran and Keith became casualties that day; McCann did not. Is this somehow a measure of effective combat leadership? Despite the odds, the North Shores and the Fort Garries silenced those gun positions and captured St. Aubin. The battalion formed the brigade's left flank, and its forward elements reached Tailleville by day's end. There, Major Archie McNaughton, the commander of "A" Company, was killed. The hope of reaching a radar station further inland at Douvres faded with the day, but the North Shores carried out its orders. This was not enough in Greenhous' judgment, for not only did the North Shores not lose enough officers, the battalion "only got to Tailleville."[5]

Believing that subsequent casualty figures were "impossible to develop," Greenhous only guessed that officer casualties in later campaigns outstripped those of the men they led. "Given our British-inspired doctrinal propensity to direct from the rear rather than lead from the front—better control is the rationale—I think that reflects very favourably on the calibre of man we were commissioning."[6] Faint praise indeed.

In fact, First Canadian Army staff officers kept careful track of Canadian casualties, both officers and men. The figures confirm Greenhous's hunch: officers consistently took a far greater proportion of casualties than the men they led. The numbers are startling. From 6 June 1944 to early March 1945, officers of 2nd Canadian Infantry Division suffered casualties equal to 90 percent of their establishment; the equivalent casualty rate for the enlisted men was 74 percent. Some 85.7 percent of the officers in 3rd Division suffered casualties through the same period, against 71.1 percent for the enlisted men. In 4th Armoured Division, the relative casualty rates were lower (63.4 percent for officers, 40.1 percent for enlisted men) but the gap between the ranks was considerably higher. Officer casualties in 2 Armoured Brigade, represented 84.8 percent of its establishment, against only 33.7 percent of enlisted men. If one considers that the forward echelons, where 95 percent of the casualties took place, employed only 56 percent of the officers in the theatre, against 63 percent of the enlisted men, it is clear that a far smaller fraction of officers sustained far more casualties by proportion than the enlisted men they led.[7]

One such summary found its way to General Crerar in December 1944. By then Canadian officers of the rank of major and below had lost the equivalent of about 69 percent of their war establishment in Northwest Europe; the comparable rate for the enlisted ranks was 51 percent. Lieutenant-Colonel J.W. Weir, General Crerar's personal assistant, suggested that the findings be sent to the *The Maple Leaf,* "to correct the impression that the private soldier, N.C.O. takes the 'rap.'"[8]

Fifty-five years on, we're still learning.

Geoff Hayes
University of Waterloo
February 1999

Notes

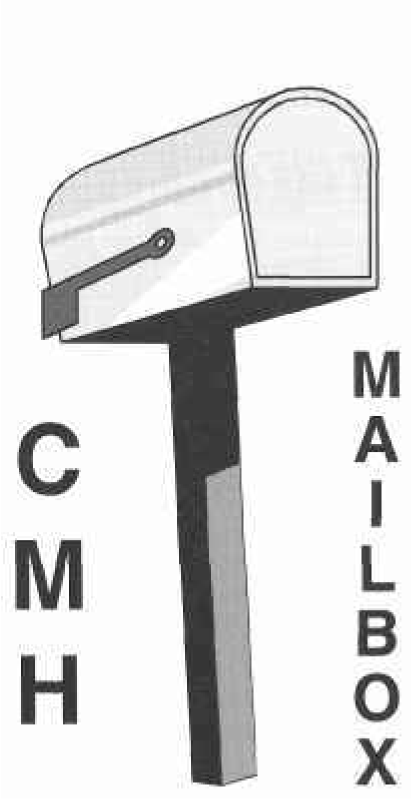
1. C.P. Stacey, *The Victory Campaign. Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War.* Volume III (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1960), p.275.
2. Brereton Greenhous, "Canadians on D-Day: "Forty Years on, Growing Bolder and Bolder..." *Canadian Defence Quarterly* 13 (June 1984), p.40
3. *Ibid.,* p.41.
4. Will R. Bird, *North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment* (Brunswick Press, 1963), pp.203, 201.
5. Greenhous, p.41.
6. *Ibid.,* p.42.
7. National Archives of Canada, Manuscript Group 30 E 157, H.D.G. Crerar Papers, vol. 5, file 958C009(D121), "Battle Casualties Canadian Forces 21 Army Group, 6 June 1944-26 February 1945" 9 March 1945. Table II. Though dated to 26 February 1945, the figures in the tables go to 11 March 1945.
8. Crerar Papers, vol. 5, file 958C.009 (D121) "Battle Casualties - By Formation, from 6 June 1944 to 10 December 1944"; Lt. Col. J.W. Weir (PA) to GOC in C, January 1945.

Dear Sir,

I was delighted to receive and read the paper on "Batty Mac" *(Canadian Military History,* Vol.7, No.4, Autumn 1998) by Ian McCulloch. As you may remember, I was concerned about the lack of recognition for one of Canada's finest soldiers.

Ian McCulloch's paper is effective, being well-researched, written and illustrated and, all in all, achieves what concerned me. This recognition for MacDonell was richly deserved and I was pleased to have read McCulloch's paper. Wouldn't it be appropriate for him to attempt a book on Sir Archie?

sincerely,
Dr. W.G. Breck
retired Chemistry Professor
Queen's University &
Royal Military College
Kingston, ON



Dear Sir,

I would like to submit two corrections to my article on Sir Archibald Macdonell. The photo caption on page 12 with Mac in a lambskin cap is incorrect. It shows him as a 2nd Lieutenant of the Canadian Mounted Infantry of the Permanent Force, not a major of the Canadian Mounted Rifles as stated.

In the text of the article (p. 12), I state that in South Africa, Mac was a squadron commander with the Strathconas. In fact, he was officer commanding "D" Squadron, 2nd Canadian Mounted Rifles.

Thank you,
Ian M. McCulloch
Ottawa, Ontario

Dear Sir,

Reading the debate on the Normandy Campaign in the latest issue of *Canadian Military History* (Vol.7, No.4, Autumn 1998) has prompted me to write. First of all I would like to openly state that I do not have the time and resources to delve into the archival information held on the Canadian, British and German formations that operated in Normandy during the summer of 1944. Nor do I think that Mr. Milner really needs my support for his side of the debate on this topic. In fact I think he summed it up perfectly with his last statement, "And those slow, bumbling, artillery-addicted soldiers in Normandy found a way to beat the best, and they should be judged by their accomplishment." I would, though, like to make a few comments concerning this discussion.

Mr. Jarymowyz seems to like to compare the accomplishments of the Soviet Army during the Second World War with those of Canada and to a lesser extent the United States. We should certainly not downplay the important contribution that our Eastern Allies made in the defeat of the Nazis, but to compare the combat styles of the East and the West is like comparing vodka to calvados.

As we all know, the Canadian army was an army from a democratic state in which the army commanders had to ultimately answer to politicians; and these politicians had to answer to the public. This naturally created a great concern over acceptable combat losses, and for a country with a population of 11 million, there was not much room for large manpower losses. Also the outlook on human life was very different between East and West; the family at home In Canada certainly expected their men in uniform to return home, while those in the Soviet Union could only hope that they might see their men in uniform return home.

The Canadian army was fighting an enemy that had not invaded Its homeland, but one that had occupied Western Europe; so the fighting spirit may not have been as highly motivated as the Soviet soldier who was actually defending his homeland. Later, as the Soviet Army moved into Germany, revenge may have been the motive for fighting spirit rather than the actual defeat in battle of the German military.

The Soviet army, on the other hand, represented a dictatorship just as evil as that of Nazi Germany, but was on the side of the Allies, so politics was overlooked for a few years as the Western Allies needed the help. The Soviet army generals had to answer to the Soviet government, but the government did not have to answer to the people. Did this not mean that as long as the Soviet army achieved its aims, the cost in human life did not really factor into the equation, as there was a much larger population pool to draw from? As well, if the average Soviet family does not really expect their men in uniform to return home as they are fighting for Mother Russia, then does this not mean that higher casualty rates by the Soviet Army were tolerated?

The Soviet military may well have been better at maneuvering larger formations as they had the huge manpower pool in which to draw on to create these large formations. Did not the Soviet army rely on massed attacks to overwhelm the enemy? This would mean that to make these massed attacks work, higher casualty rates would have to be accepted and; the army commanders would have to be comfortable with dealing with large formations.

It should also be remembered that the Soviet army would not have been able to achieve its military gains without the lend-lease agreement with the West. By 1944 the average Soviet infantry soldier was eating Western-supplied rations, marching on Western-produced footwear, and was being supplied by a Western-

manufactured truck, which was running on Western-produced petroleum. Without the logistics tail that was paid for by the West, the Soviet army would have been unable to maintain its large Army that it used to steamroll into Germany.

So how does this relate to the Normandy Campaign? It is certainly important to study the tactics and administration behind a campaign; but it is also necessary, I think, to balance this with the background information on the fighting force. What made the average man fight, what was expected of him, what did he expect to get out of his military service and the political system and home-front environment that he came from?

As far as I am concerned, it is pure speculation on how the Soviets would have done in Normandy and rates up there with what would have happened if the Germans had joined with the Allies in 1945 to have a go at the Soviets.

I would also like to make a technical correction to Hugh Halliday's article on Exercise "Musk Ox" (Vol.7, No.4, Autumn 1998). Mr. Halliday states on page 39 that "The "Penguins" (officially known as the Canadian Armoured Snowmobile Mark 1) had been developed as a two-man armoured reconnaissance vehicle; for "Musk Ox" they had been modified to carry five persons." This is not correct, as the Penguin and the Canadian Armoured Snowmobile are two different vehicles. Also, the Armoured Snowmobile was not very well received during Exercise "Eskimo" and although the suspension system appears to be the same between the Snowmobile and the Penguin, the Penguin was a new vehicle and not a modification of the Armoured Snowmobile. As far as the Army was concerned in 1945, the US manufactured M29 Weasel was a better vehicle than the Armoured Snowmobile.

I also believe that the Army subsequently recovered the Penguin that broke through the ice at Port Radium; and that the Officer in charge of the recovery was given a sterling silver model of the Penguin to commemorate the successful recovery.

Sincerely,
Ed Storey
Nepean, ON

Part II *(continued from Vol.7, No.4)*

Dear Sir,

I now switch coats myself and join the naysayers with a few comments from personal experience. Lamentably, these also seem to show that the command handling of Canadian Combat Units improved very slowly, if at all, in the decade following the Second World War. Much of what Professor Bercuson writes of the Jamestown Line in 1951 still held true in 1952-53. And it seems to have continued in peacetime, at least into the early 1960's.

In 1952-53 platoon and company defensive positions in Korea were still too isolated from one another. This dispersion precluded much effective mutual support, or the "locking of the front by fire" in the event of an enemy attack. In an effort to gain observation and long fields of fire battle positions tended to be dug on forward slopes instead of being hidden on reverse slopes. In the reverse slope model, long used by the Germans, your own riflemen would defend your front while flanking platoons/companies (also defiladed) would bring enfilade fire on anyone crossing over the crest to attack you frontally. And you likewise protected your neighbors.

In the Canadian (and Commonwealth) Korean model too much emphasis was placed on firing straight ahead in your own defence and too little in providing flanking fire for others. Since the heavy bombardment and automatic weapons firing which preceded an enemy attack were most effective in keeping the defender's heads down this fighting of platoon battles in isolation was a sterile defensive concept.

Little established doctrine existed on how a platoon was to conduct its defence with the result that most platoon commanders were forced into ad hoc planning and solutions if, indeed, they had any at all. In the event of an actual attack the solution all too often consisted in ducking low in your trenches and calling artillery fire down on top of yourself. While sometimes heroic this was not an ideal way to illustrate how a platoon should fight a defensive battle, except as a last resort.

My own plan, in the event of the enemy penetrating my position, was to insist that the sections stand fast in their fire trenches and defend themselves while, by pre-arrangement, the reserve platoon would sweep the top of my position with fire. I then planned to lead a three-man trench clearing party (one machine gunner and two bombers) along the encircling communication trench and eliminate any enemy who had entered. That was the plan! However since my sections, especially at night, would have had great difficulty in trying to distinguish the trench clearing party from the enemy, and since the grenades of the bombers could not distinguish friend from foe it is fortunate that I was never forced to translate my decidedly ad hoc plan into action.

Lamentably, the actual putting of things into practice often did not go any better than the planning. On one dusky evening, while holding an isolated hilltop blocking position in the Naechon "bowling alley" my sentries reported an enemy patrol in the valley moving toward a neighboring position. Hurrying forward, I spent many precious moments examining the spasmodic movement through field glasses while my eager troops impatiently fretted (no doubt muttering imprecations at my seeming vacillation).

Having at last decided that the figures were indeed enemy and

CMH Mailbox continued on page 32.

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

Serge Bernier, Shelly Blom, Deborah Campbell, René Chartrand, Robert Cotey, Christopher Evans, Mike Evans, Elizabeth Millar, Ian Miller, Natalie Osterberg, Steve Osterberg, Laurie Peloquin, Jade Robinson-Leduc, Kirsten Sheffield, Scott Sheffield, Allan Thurrott, Diane Tomas Pat Zuk.

Canadian Forces Photographic Unit; Canadian War Museum; Directorate of History & Heritage, Department of National Defence; Security and Defence Forum, Department of National Defence; National Archives of Canada; Wilfrid Laurier University

CMH Mailbox - continued from p.6.

knowing that they were out of normal small arms range I ordered my platoon Browning machine gun to open fire. This it did with shattering effect on the quiet evening air and on our own protective barbed wire.

I do not know what effect this fire had on the enemy but it had an almost immediate effect on me. Within seconds I was summoned to a violently ringing phone to answer demands from what seemed everyone from the GOC down as to why, and on whose authority, my MMG had fired. When I lamely replied that I thought the purpose of that gun was to shoot the enemy I received a short but blistering lesson on the special nature of war in Korea:

- "Don't fire your MMG unless your own position is under attack." To which my unvoiced reply was that I thought that the primary role of that gun was to fire in support of others.
-"Don't fire your MMG except in an emergency or you'll give away your position." Fair enough except that when patrolling in the valley you can identify nearly every UN position and few of the enemy's.
-"Report all activity, unless directed against you, before you engage." To which my rueful, but unspoken, reply was " I wish I had done so in this case by which time the enemy would have disappeared and I'd have been spared all these rockets."

On another time and place one of my platoon's three-man night standing patrols had relocated its valley position after being sited. Since, in the interest of wireless silence, they were equipped with a field telephone this relocation stretched the telephone line back to platoon. A Chinese patrol which was covering a propaganda sign planting party bumped into the wire and followed it to where our patrol lay hidden. The Canadians fired, at least one Chinese fell and our patrol dispersed. The enemy artillery commenced a heavy bombardment of our hill.

I reported the loss of contact and was about to lead my Quick Reaction party (the three trench clearers but armed with Brens and Stens instead of grenades) down on a search when I was summoned back to company headquarters to be briefed on a fighting patrol sweep I would now lead instead. The night was pitch black, company HQ was some 200 yards back and the Chinese were still shelling so the whole thing took a long time. By the time I had been briefed, reviewed a hasty fire plan, returned and briefed the fighting patrol and started off at least an hour had been lost and the Chinese had flown the coop.

On the plus side we swept the valley until daybreak and brought back our missing standing patrol members. On the negative side the long time delay in changing plans and teeing up a formal patrol resulted in a ponderous, overly controlled, slow operation when only a lightning reaction had a chance of real success. As was often proven in the First World War, a small two or three man lightly armed snatch patrol usually achieved greater success than did a formal raid involving a platoon or more. It was a lesson usually forgotten in the Second World War, except by commandos, and almost ignored in Korea.

I should emphasize that none of this is in any way a criticism of my company commander or battalion CO. Both were first class officers. It was simply the nature of semi-static trench warfare where the smallest warlike action resulted in intervention and over control from above derived from concepts of command honed at Verrières and the Hochwald.

Yours faithfully,
A.D. McKay
Stittsville ON