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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 Museum 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 commitment to peacekeeping and the maintenance of international security." 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.

The Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies

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

Canadian visitors to the battlefields of Northwest Europe will soon have a new must-visit place on their itineraries. The Toronto Scottish Regiment, which served as the Machine Gun and Heavy Mortar battalion in 2nd Canadian Infantry Division has acquired land on Pt. 67 and on 22 July 2000 the regiment will dedicate a memorial at a site which overlooks Verrières Ridge and the Caen-Falaise plain. For the Torscots the Pt. 67 Memorial and the plaque they are placing at Place du Canada in Dieppe are part of a conscious renewal of the regiment's connection with its past. The Toronto Scottish with their outstanding pipe and drum band will first travel to London and Edinburgh to participate in celebrations of the 100th birthday of their Colonel-in-Chief, Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother who has been associated with the Torscots for 63 years!

The Torscots were kind enough to invite me to speak at a fund raising banquet in Toronto and what follows is from that brief address.

"As many of you know I have been involved in working to help create what might be called informed memory about the Canadian achievement in the Second World War. I have been especially involved in the work of the Canadian Battle of Normandy Foundation which sponsors an annual program to take a select group of university students from all across Canada on a three week study tour of Canadian battlefields and memorials. Each year the group travels to Normandy and one other area. This May they will be in Yorkshire where No. 6 Group RCAF was stationed and then will cross to France. My wife has insisted on a spring off for good behaviour to see her garden at its peak so we won't be going this month. However, we will be leading a Normandy study tour, for the general public in October.

"Our students, along with every Canadian who visits Normandy in search of informed memory will travel to the low ridge south of Caen labelled on the topographical maps as Pt. 67. From this vantage point, which the Toronto Scottish Regiment, in an act of extraordinary

significance for this and future generations of Canadians, is transforming into a permanent memorial, it is possible to see the ground we associate with the battles for Verrières Ridge which preceded the advance to Falaise.

"Many of you will recall that one part of one battle for Verrières ridge was the centrepiece of the Normandy episode of the "Valour and the Horror" television series, and the battles for the ridge continue to be a source of historical controversy. Such debate, if carried out in pursuit of the truth not television ratings, stimulates research and helps to energize the collective memory so we should welcome it.

"Permit me to take a few moments to advance the debate by situating Lieutenant-Colonel E.G. Johnson and the men of the Toronto Scottish Regiment on the Normandy battlefield. Their story must begin here in Toronto in the summer of 1939. Toronto was then a city informed by three daily newspapers, a number of radio stations and the newsreels which preceded all motion picture shows. It may be argued that the people of pre-war Toronto had better sources of information about international affairs than we do today and were particularly well served by media which insisted on trying to distinguish between news and opinion. As a consequence they had followed the rise of Hitler, worried at the annexation of Austria, prepared for war over Czechoslovakia, breathed a collective sigh of relief after the Munich agreement was announced and turned out in the thousands to protest against the Kristalnacht. When Hitler occupied Prague few doubted that war could be avoided.

"The worsening international situation brought renewed public interest in the militia. Macleans magazine sent a reporter to Niagara Camp in 1939 to try and explain why men volunteered to spend two weeks under canvas training for war. He was surprised to learn that most turned over the \$1.20 a day they earned to their unit to help pay for the equipment the government declined to provide. The 50,000 men who served in the Canadian militia in 1939 including hundreds from the Toronto Scottish



A panoramic shot looking south from the location on Point 67 where the Toronto Scottish is placing their memorial.

were the citizen soldiers who would form the core of Canada's army.

"When Germany invaded Poland every militia regiment in the country hoped to be called on to mobilize. In Toronto just three battalions were chosen, the 48th Highlanders, the Royal Regiment of Canada and the Toronto Scottish. Word of the decision was received at 7:00am on 1 September and the next day members of the Scottish were paraded and asked to enlist for the active service force. The vast majority did so immediately and then the call went out for citizens to fill out the establishment of 800 men. The rush of volunteers from all walks of life was so great that recruiting officers could pick and choose. The Toronto Scottish were to begin accepting recruits on 4 September, a Monday, but men started to line up outside the armoury on Sunday afternoon. During that week, before Canada was officially at war, thousands of men were enrolled in Toronto despite a 40% rejection rate for medical reasons. The CO of the Torscots, LCol C.C. Thompson, responded to this pressure by raising the standard height for recruits to 5 feet 11 inches so it took until 18 September to complete recruiting his battalion.

"It is important for this generation of Canadians to understand that while many factors entered into the decision to volunteer, including peer pressure, unemployment, and a spirit of adventure, the purpose of the war, to stop the spread of the Nazis was clearly understood by everyone. Their was none of the euphoria evident in 1914, few believed that the war would end quickly, and most were free of the romantic illusions about battle which had fuelled the public response to the outbreak of the First World War.

"We must fast forward to July 1944. The volunteers of 1939-40 have spent almost four years in Britain training for their role in the liberation of France. The Torscots, the machine gun and heavy mortar battalion of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division reached Normandy on 7 July on the eve of Operation "Charnwood", the battle which forced the enemy to evacuate Caen and retreat across the River Orne. The Canadians and the British were now confronted with the open countryside between Caen and Falaise which consists of cultivated fields with a scattering of fortress-like stone walled farms and villages. A series of low ridges rising from 67 to 200 metres at Falaise offer excellent observation and a series of reverse slopes both of which the enemy could use to great advantage.

"The German commanders knew that if Montgomery was able to break through their defences in this sector Allied armoured divisions would race south and cut off much of the German army in France. They therefore reinforced the area with the strongest concentration of panzer divisions ever employed in a defensive role in the Second World War. In the summer of 1944 when the great Soviet offensive ripped apart Hitler's Army Group Centre, Field Marshal Model had one panzer division available in reserve and a front of hundreds of miles to defend. South of Caen, in an arc of less than 20 miles in length, Rommel had deployed six panzer divisions with a seventh in reserve. The terrain and the force ratios suggested that no Allied advance was possible in this sector and the best Montgomery could hope for was to hold the German armour here until the Americans could stage a breakout in the west. To do this he had to order a series of operations which would engage the enemy

without destroying his dwindling reserves of British and Canadian infantry.

"This was the situation confronting the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division when it entered battle on 18 July.

"Historians have had little to say about the role of the Toronto Scottish in the battles for Verrières Ridge. C.P. Stacey mentions them only once and Terry Copp has been almost as neglectful. The reasons we all give for this omission is that the companies of the Torscots were usually parcelled out to Brigades and subdivided again with platoons assigned to infantry battalions. This is in fact a poor excuse for it is evident in interviews that the men of the infantry battalions who fought in Normandy have no trouble recalling the contribution of the Torscots. One of the problems the Allies faced in France was the enormous superiority of the enemy's tanks and infantry-support weapons. Our air force may have commanded the air but on the ground the enemy's Panthers, Tigers, self-propelled guns, mortars and nebelwerfers wrecked havoc. The heavy mortar companies of the Torscots were one of the crucial antidotes to enemy mortars which were responsible for 70% of all casualties in Normandy. As the battalion War Diary reveals counter-mortar was one of the crucial roles and from the top of Pt. 67 one can see many of the places where the battalion mortars dug-in to engage the enemy. The machine gun companies were equally important to the infantry. When 4 Brigade attacked Louvigny, 'B' company's harassing shoot bolstered morale and helped the Royals reach their objective.

"Point 67 itself was captured by the Calgary Highlanders of 5th Brigade supported by 8th

platoon of the Torscots. The next day the regiment was heavily involved in the struggle to advance from Pt. 67 to Verrières ridge suffering four fatal and twenty-two non-fatal casualties. The War Diary records one story from that day in these words, "5 pl. 'A' Coy under command of Lt. J.O. Nesbitt in the area of Troteval Farm stayed in posn when inf. Withdrew and beat off a counterattack."

"On 25 July, the day of Operation "Spring" the second attempt to secure the ridge, the Toronto Scottish provided crucial support especially on the left flank where the Germans overlooked our line of advance. Torscot machine guns fired harassing fire tasks to neutralize the enemy helping to prevent a total collapse but the Regiment's greatest contribution came in stemming the German counterattacks which surged around Pt. 67 for the next three days.

"When the ridge fell to 6 Bde on the 8th of August and in the advance to Falaise the regiment provided what one battalion commander described as the glue which, along with the artillery, kept the understrength division from coming apart and helped it to maintain combat effectiveness.

"Those of you who are travelling to France this summer will participate in a kind of pilgrimage involving remembrance, but it must also be a journey in search of informed memory. We owe that to the veterans of the Torscots and all those other men and women who served on our behalf."

Terry Copp
May 2000

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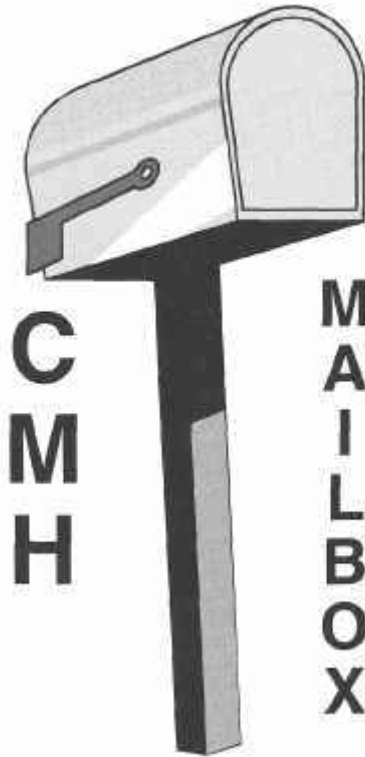
Canadian Forces Photographic Unit; Canadian War Museum; Directorate of History & Heritage, Department of National Defence; Security and Defence Forum, Department of National Defence; National Archives of Canada; Wilfrid Laurier University

Dear Sir,

After reading the *CMH Mailbox* in the Winter 2000 edition of your magazine I was "seeing red." I realize that *CMH* is not the magazine in which to carry on detailed discussions of the kit and equipment of Canada, her enemies and allies during the 20th Century, but I could not let Mr. R.F. Anderson's letter go unchallenged. First let me state that there is not a day that goes by that I am not thankful and appreciative of the sacrifices and accomplishments that Mr. Anderson and our Canadian veterans have made to make this country a free and better place to live. I also respect him and his opinions as he is a combat veteran and I consider these men to be national treasures. I do feel, however, that his statements that German WWII equipment was superior to Canadian are incorrect to say the least.

I have 22 years in the Canadian Armed Forces and am a Warrant Officer in the Canadian Military Engineers. I have never seen combat although I did spend a year in The Former Yugoslavia from May 1993 to May 1994. I also have had deployments to Uganda and Honduras. As a hobby, I collect and write about Canadian-issue Field Equipment; and I have an extensive collection of Second World War Canadian and British uniforms, equipment and insignia. All of these pieces are of authentic WWII production, with many being in new, unissued condition as if they were still in QM. I have also balanced this collection out with pieces that I have obtained from veterans that are in used condition, but have some history behind them as they were actually employed by a person that I can put a name to, during WWII. In other words I have first-hand knowledge of how the average soldier thinks and I have "hands on" experience with the actual uniforms and equipment that were issued in the 1930s and 1940s.

As far as all German equipment being superior to what the Canadians and British were manufacturing, I think Mr. Anderson better sit back and consider some of the facts. I like to say that "the kit is always better in the other man's QM" and this even applies today as the modern soldier secretly and at times openly covets what someone else is producing for



their military. For instance right now, many in the Canadian Military would like to see the US manufactured "Hummer" 4x4 Truck adopted by the Canadian Armed Forces to replace some of the vehicles that we are now using. I think that to write and say that all German kit was better than Canadian is somewhat of a "kick in the teeth" to those Canadian manufacturers who worked hard to produce the equipment required by Mr. Anderson to defeat the Germans in WWII.

I will not argue that the sound of Panther (Panzerkampfwagen V) and Tiger (Panzerkampfwagen VI) tanks forming up was unnerving (by the way the Panther had a 75 mm L70 gun and the Tiger an 88 mm KwK 36 L56 gun) but the whole German Panzer arm was not composed of these models of armoured fighting vehicle. Even in 1944, most German armour was older model Panzerkampfwagen IIIs and IVs with 50 mm and 75 mm guns respectively. What am I getting at is that not every tank encountered by the Canadians in WWII was a Panther or a Tiger and not every anti-tank Gun was an 88 mm. Let's get the facts straight and put an end to this embellishment of WWII German capabilities and weapons. For some reason, as Canadians we are not only

content to sit back and doubt the leadership and tactical abilities of our WWII commanders, but we also want to downplay the equipment we used! Are we not happy enough to know that Canada, probably the least militaristic nation on earth, forced the Germans into unconditional surrender in May 1945?

Is Mr. Anderson trying to tell us, that the trucks manufactured by Ford and General Motors in Canadian in WWII, the famous Canadian Military Pattern (CMP) line, respected for their innovative designs and interchangeability of components, was inferior to the often complicated and unorganized truck manufactures of the Third Reich? I hope not! Perhaps not everything the Germans made was superior to what we had.

Now, the real reason for this letter - Canadian uniforms versus German. I will not argue with you that the German design of helmet is the best that there is, look at every model of ballistic helmet today and you see that "Fritz Design"; but did you know that one of the prime considerations for Allied helmet development in the 1930s and 1940s was for easy recognition of "friend and foe"; the Allies did not want a helmet that looked anything near to the enemy's. German weapons, yes I will concede that one too, they certainly did develop a large number of automatic weapons and were leaders in this field; but have a deeper look into how many different and foreign models they were using and what sort of equipment the 2nd and 3rd line units were getting. Like the Panthers and the 88s, not every German soldier carried a 9mm MP38 (Schmeisser) or touted a Panzerfaust. The Germans were also fighting a defensive war in Italy and Northwest Europe, so there would be a higher proportion of automatic weapons and anti-tank weapons in these defensive positions. Have a look at the equipment and weapons issued to the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion, an elite Canadian unit if there ever was one, and compare this to one of the regular infantry line regiments in any of the Canadian divisions. Compare the numbers of Sten and Bren Guns that were available and tell me if there is not a difference with more automatics being used by the Airborne. Plus the Airborne were
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CMH Mailbox

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since 1941 and by 1944 they had developed a multitude of winter gear to help solve the problem. Mr. Anderson states that the Airborne were lightly equipped for fast in and out roles without the luxury of a supply train to the rear. Unfortunately, the one cost of this light role is the reduction of kit that is issued or can be issued to the man. Of course Airborne soldiers are expert scroungers as survival and initiative are part of their make-up, and there is no doubt that 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion was one of the best at scrounging.

Mr. Anderson states that his unit found some nice warm clothing in a German QM in Graven, well I know that if he had been allowed to investigate the QMs in the rear of the Allied lines, he would have found comparable items of superior manufacture and warmth.

The standard Canadian web equipment was the 1937 Pattern, which was manufactured from a tightly woven cotton duct material. This web equipment was cheap to manufacture, durable, waterproof and adaptable by adding and subtracting different pieces of web. The comparable German WWII leather equipment was not as well made as 1937 Pattern Web and due to leather shortages latter on in the war, the Germans had to switch to using cheaper canvas for many of their components. In 1944 when the Germans switched from high to low boots in order to save leather, they even copied the 1937 Pattern Gaiter for wear with their low boot. Again, is Mr. Anderson really sure that everything the Germans produced was superior to that of the Canadians?

I could go on and on, but I will state that I think that Mr. Anderson's statement "that the German equipment and weapons were in every way superior to anything we had," is a fanciful statement that has little grounding in fact. Does Mr. Anderson really believe that his British-produced Parachute Helmet was inferior to the German Fallschirmjager Helmet, I hope not, because it wasn't! Let's put to bed these myths of

German superiority, they had some good designs, but they wasted resources on too many things. Canadian industry in WWII had a reputation of superior quality, give them that credit.

I have a whole basement full of "inferior" Canadian-produced uniforms and equipment, and I am more than willing to entertain and inform interested parties on the background and design features of this equipment.

Sincerely yours,
Ed Storey
Nepean, Ontario
(613)825-1248

e-mail: edstorey@hotmail.com

Dear Sir,

I agreed with everything R.F. Anderson had to say [CMH Mailbox, Winter 2000], except for one bit. Some of us learned to platoon our mortars at the 3 inch mortar battle school, and when I eventually got out of the rifle company and into commanding the mortar platoon of the South Saskatchewan, we very quickly found that we could outpunch the German 81 mm. He had a great reputation in Normandy, partly because he had lots of mortars, and lots of moaning minnies. He especially made good use of his 50mm light mortar, which he had well forward. It WAS better than the Cdn 2 inch, for HE. But it lacked the smoke bomb, which was highly useful. But we quickly discovered that our 10 pound bomb for the 3 inch was generally superior to his 7 pound bomb. Once we started platooning, i.e., using the whole platoon, especially after we learned how to properly locate our weapons, or use them TOGETHER, from more than one base-plate position, we used to try to suck in the Germans to fire on us, whereupon we would BURY them with 5 round rapid fire, or when we got enough ammunition, ten rounds from each mortar, or 60 rounds at a time. We found we could get nearly 30 rounds per mortar in the air at once, provided we had the ammunition. By scrounging German bombs, we also found that they

could be fired 4200 yards with our secondaries, and we constantly drove some "rear area" (they thought) German positions nuts by dropping bombs into their "safe" valleys the gunners couldn't hit. We found one dump of 6000 rounds near Mook, in the Nijmegen area, plus a few British rounds and some US para flares. We had a ball, and annoyed the Germans more than a little. I'm afraid we brought a bit of retribution on our replacement units, when they weren't aware of our nasty little minds and tricks. I still have some mortar plotter sheets from those days, and promise to write it up one day.

Sincerely,
Cecil Law
Kingston, Ontario

Dear Editor,

I am enclosing a copy, my typed interpretation, of a handwritten poem, which I found in an old encyclopaedia. I believe it is signed or attributed to Rifleman Patrick Magill, although I am not sure of the last name.

I think the poem is quite good and you may want to publish it again.

Sincerely,
Robert Hahn
Czar, Alberta

Givenchy Village lies a wreck
Givenchy Church is bare;
No more the pleasant maidens come
To say their Vespers there
The altar rails are wrenched apart
With rubble littered o'er
The sacred sanctuary lamp lies
Smashed upon the floor.
And mute upon the crucifix
He looks upon it all
The Great White Church, the shrapnel
scarred
Upon the Eastern Wall.

He sees the churchyard deluged by
shells
The tombstones flung about
And dead mens' skulls and white
white bones
The shells have shovelled out;
The trenches running line by line
Through meadow fields of green
The bayonets on the parapets

The wasting flesh between.
Around Givenchy's ruined church
The levels poppy red
Are set apart for silent hosts
The legions of the dead.

And when at night on sentry I go
With danger keeping tryst
I see upon the crucifix
The blood stained form of Christ.
Defiled and maimed the Merciful
On vigil all the time
Pitying His childrens wrath
Their passions and their crime
Mute mute He hangs upon His Cross
The symbol of His pain
And as a man scourged Him long ago
They scourge Him once again.
There in the lonely war lit night
To Christ the Lord I call
Forgive the ones who work this harm
O Lord! forgive us all

Rifleman Patrick Magill

Dear Sir,

I very much enjoyed the Winter 2000 edition of your journal. I appreciate the issue's editor's desire to keep the silences minimal. I particularly appreciated the re-printing of the 1928 report on Tumplines ["Army Supplies in the Forward Area and the Tumpline System" by F.R. Phelan]. My father, Captain Melville F. Thompson, MC, served in France with the 102nd Battalion, North British Columbians in the 11th Brigade, 4th Division. He was appointed Officer Commanding 11th Brigade Tumpline Company by Brigadier-General Victor Odium. He won his MC while leading the company near Lens. Over the years he stressed that the great advantage of the Tumpline was that with it a heavy load could be shed easily and quickly if men came under fire and had to seek cover.

As a young man I used my father's tumpline to carry my gear while mountain-climbing.

The 102nd Battalion and 11th Brigade are long gone so, as I had served during World War II with the Canadian Scottish, and as I considered my father's Tumpline a rare and historic military artifact, I gave it to that Regiment's museum some years ago for safekeeping.

I also enjoyed the article on James Peters ["James Peters, Military Photography and the Northwest Campaign, 1885 by Owen Cooke and Peter Robertson, especially the comment re. the scouts [p.28]. Both my grandfathers rode north from Calgary in 1885 as scouts. At the outbreak of hostilities my Mother's father owned a ranch near that of Major-General Strange.

Yours truly,
M.G. Thompson,
Vancouver, BC