

## Chapter 11 France

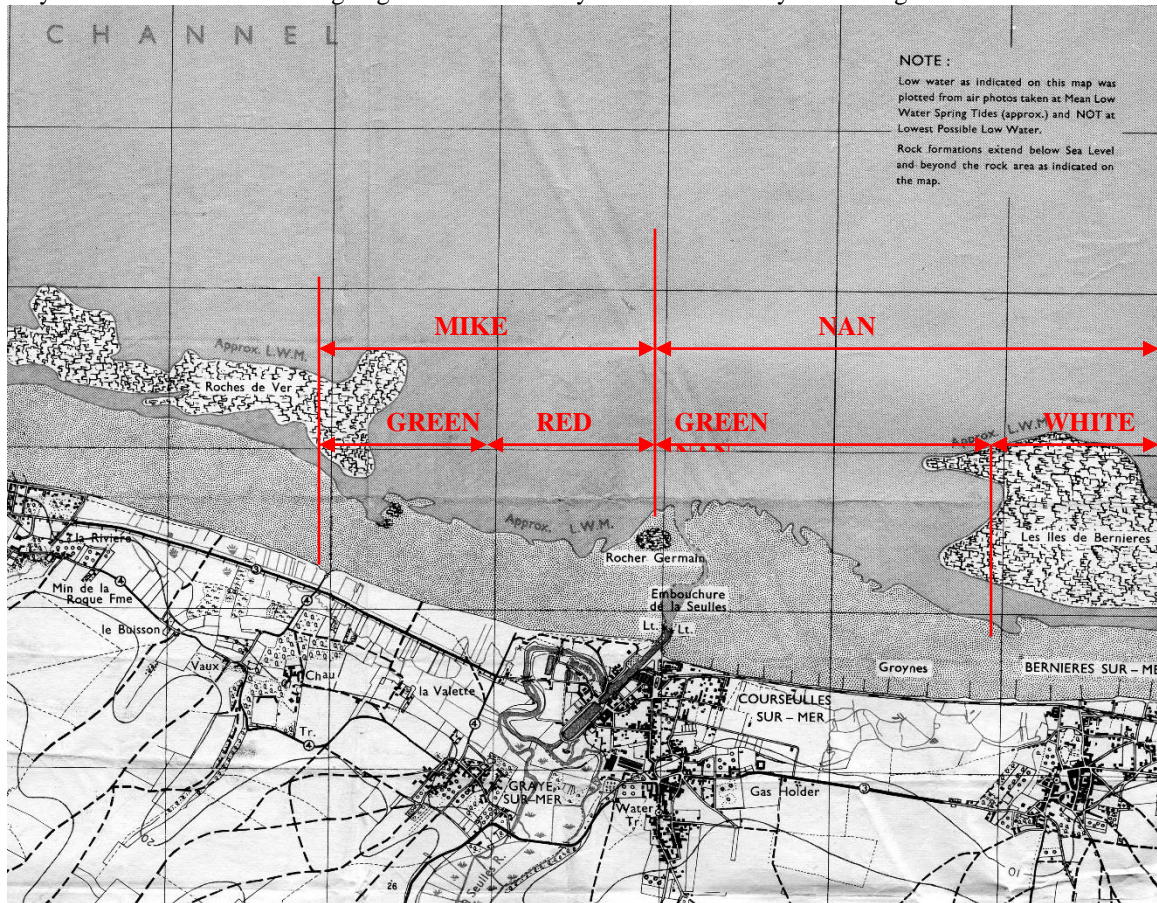


Early on the morning of June 6th 1944 2 platoon and the infantry platoons they supported were crammed into LCAs hanging from the side of a Landing Ship. The order was received to begin the attack and the LCAs were lowered. The run in began. The sea was rough. They were headed straight for Courseulles-Sur-Mer, a fortified town on the French coast. As they approached the shore the Germans opened fire. Some of the Canadian landings were lightly opposed. There wasn't.

Regina Rifles and Engineers in LCAs enroute to Juno Beach (NA)

Two and half sections of #2 Platoon, under the Platoon Commander, Lt Neil Mustard landed with the assault companies of the Regina Rifle Regiment on Nan Green beach on the east side of the town. The other sections under Platoon Sergeant Sgt Fred Emmerson supported the Royal Winnipeg Rifles during their attack on Mike Red Beach, to the west.

Lt Mustard's three 6-man sub-sections landed at 0740 hrs with "B" Coy of the Regina Rifle Regiment. Around them the landing craft were hit by mines, mortars, machine guns and a German 88. As they came ashore the assaulting engineers and infantry came under heavy machine gun and rifle fire.



Section of a 1:25,000 map carried ashore on D-Day with the beaches marked in red.

L-Cpl John T.K. (Jack) Ferguson's sub-section was supporting the Regina Rifle Regiment's 7 platoon. They were hit by machine gun fire. Ferguson was mortally wounded when a bullet hit a soft spot above his collarbone. He haemorrhaged internally and died aboard a hospital ship in the channel. Sprs Robert Jackson and William Beehler were wounded by MG fire. Spr Stanley Wilkins was also wounded. Only two members of Ferguson's team escaped injury.

8 platoon of the Regina's was supported by L-Cpl George Cooper's sub-section. Cooper was mortally wounded. He was hit by a burst of MG fire in his mid-section. When things quieted down Spr Ralph Spencer, also wounded, tried to comfort him. But all he asked for was a cigarette. He didn't complain or moan but lay quietly under the edge of the earthen bank near a shattered 75mm gun. He died on June 8 on a hospital ship in the Channel. A bullet struck Spr Spencer's left knee and leg as he followed LCpl Cooper ashore. Spencer stumbled and almost went into the water. Another burst of MG fire took the forestock off his rifle and passed through the front of his battledress blouse and his Mae West life vest. Although wounded and under fire, Spencer crawled about dragging wounded up the beach ahead of the rising tide. His actions saved a number of lives and for his bravery under fire he was awarded the Military Medal. Spr T.G. (Tommy) MacDonald was hit in the shoulder by MG fire at close range. Though out of the fighting, Tommy helped Spencer pull wounded out of the water to a safe place under the embankment.

Supporting the Regina's 9 platoon was L-Sgt W.A. (Bill) Meek's sub-section. Meek was from Stockton, California. Before America entered the war he went to Vancouver and enlisted in the 6th Field Coy. When other Americans transferred to the American Army in England he stayed with the 6th. He was hit by MG fire. The bullets entered his back transversely nearly causing severe damage to his spine. He survived the landing and eventually recovered. But the wound was serious enough to keep him in an oxygen tent for a long time. Also wounded was Spr Norman Sopher. Killed was Spr James E Sawdon. He was from Winnipeg and calmly remarked to Spr Spencer before the landing: 'I will be meeting my mother in the morning.' (His mother had died a few months earlier.) He was killed at the water's edge. A bullet between his eyes.

Supporting 10 Platoon of the Regina's was Cpl Garbutt Chapman's sub-section. He was amazed he wasn't killed as he was the only member of his team that wasn't hit. Spr Joseph Poirer, Spr Ovila Bezeau, Spr Thomas McCarthy and Spr Thomas McDonald were all wounded on the beach. The only fatality in Cpl Chapman's team was Spr Alexander Bleoo. Like Chapman, Bleoo survived the beach landing unscathed. He didn't survive the day. At 1700 hrs 1 mile out of Reviere, while supporting the Regina Rifle Regiment, they came under heavy fire. Spr Bleoo was hit by a mortar round that landed on top of a ditch and killed him instantly.

Amazingly L/Cpl Norman Rundle's sub-section in support of #12 platoon escaped almost untouched. The only one wounded was Rundle himself.

The platoon commander Lt Neil Mustard landed with the Regina Rifle Regiment on Nan Green. Having studied the aerial photos he knew there were some serious obstacles on the beach. Amongst them were Tetrahedral obstacles - three iron bars intersecting at right angles. The Germans had attached anti-tank mines and explosive charges to them. As they were coming ashore Mustard saw the landing craft hitting the tetrahedrals and detonating the mines and explosives. The moment the ramp went down he found himself in water over his head. He jettisoned some of his gear and when he surfaced, he swam from tetrahedral to tetrahedral removing mine fuses. Initially the water was only a foot below the top of the tetrahedrals so he just reached up and removed the fuses. However, as the tide rose, he had problems finding the mines. There is no doubt his actions saved lives. When he swam ashore, he was missing his revolver which he lost in the water. On landing he found half his platoon had either been killed or wounded. He then rallied and organized the survivors.

Three 6-man sub-sections of No. 2 platoon under platoon Sgt Fred Emmerson landed at 0740 hrs with "B" Coy of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles on Mike Red beach. Like the other beaches the obstacle clearance teams were late as were the AVREs. The infantry and engineers were on their own. Landing craft were hit and as they landed, they came under heavy fire from the defenders.

Supporting the Winnipeg's #10 platoon was L/Cpl Earl Teskey's Sub-section. They were hit by heavy machine gun fire as they landed. Killed were Spr Arthur Jackson, Spr Alfred Martin and Spr Maxwell Adams, another of the Americans. After the landings Teskey said to Lt Mustard 'Good God, I thought I was shot.' His pants were wet and he thought it was blood. A round had hit his water bottle and the water had run down his legs. He was the only one in his team who wasn't killed or wounded. Wounded were Spr Albert Goodrum and another American Spr Frank Zarembinski. Zarembinski was carrying a Beehive when a mortar bomb exploded behind him taking off a slice of his buttock.

Cpl P.H. (Phil) Wilkinson's sub-section was in support of the Winnipeg's #11 Platoon. Cpl Wilkinson was wounded by machine gun fire during the landing and Spr Raymond R Sparkes was killed. Sparkes tried to crawl forward from where he fell when the first burst hit him. The MG kept firing until he stopped moving. He had recently been engaged to Doreen Middleton and they were to be married. Spr Leo LaCroix was also killed. Spr Robert D Tarlington was badly wounded and died of wounds later that day.

The Winnipeg's #12 Platoon was supported by L/Sgt William F Stewart's sub-section. Bill was found lying inshore from the beach with his Sten gun beside him and four or five dead German soldiers in front of him. He was left for dead. Later the medics discovered he had been wounded on the left side of the head and was unconscious. He died the next day. Bill Stewart was an educated man and a close friend of Lt Neil Mustard, the 2 Pl comd. Also killed on the beach was Spr Ronald N Brewer. Half an hour after the assault Brewer was hit by machine gun fire. About 15 minutes later a mortar bomb came down and hit him in the chest. Members of his section attempted to recover his body but it floated out with the tide. It was eventually recovered and he was buried in Beny-Sur-Mer Canadian War Cemetery. Spr Jean Daussalt was wounded.

# 2 Platoon Deployment and Casualties on June 6 1944

A Company Regina Rifle Regiment Nan Green LCI 1044 and 1048 Lt N. Mustard		B Company Royal Winnipeg Rifles Mike Red LCI 1038 and 1043 Sgt F Emmerson	
<b>#9 Platoon</b> (Lt Grayson) L/Sgt WA Meek <b>W</b> Spr G Velux Spr W Curran Spr N Sopher <b>W</b> Spr JE Sawden <b>K</b> Spr M Cleary	<b>#7 Platoon</b> (Sgt Sneider) L/Cpl JT Ferguson <b>K</b> Spr RC Jackson <b>W</b> Spr W Arseneau Spr SW Wilkins <b>W</b> Spr NC Brown Spr W Beehler <b>W</b>	<b>#12 Platoon</b> (Lt Aitken) L/Sgt WF Stewart <b>K</b> Cpl A Duncan Spr J Dussault <b>W</b> Spr RN Brewer <b>K</b> Spr H Conger Spr W Campbell	<b>#11 Platoon</b> (Lt Christmas) Cpl DH Wilkinson <b>W</b> Spr RR Sparkes <b>K</b> Spr L LaCroix <b>K</b> Spr CR Brander Spr M Wiseman Spr RD Tarlington <b>K</b>
<b>#8 Platoon</b> (Lt Hysler) L/Cpl GH Cooper <b>K</b> Spr RC Spencer <b>W</b> Spr B Kingsbury Spr W Purcell Spr F Franklin Spr TG MacDonald <b>W</b>	<b>B Company Regina Rifle Regiment</b> Nan Green LCI 1044 and 1048		<b>#10 Platoon</b> (Lt Bealey) L/Cpl EA Teskey Spr AT Jackson <b>K</b> Spr A Martin <b>K</b> Spr F Zarebinski <b>W</b> Spr MG Adams <b>K</b> Spr AE Goodrum <b>W</b>
	<b>#12 Platoon</b> (Lt McNish) L/Cpl NF Rundle <b>W</b> Spr W Etchells Spr M Nobel Spr BH Trainer Spr W Woods Spr Mathews	<b>#10 Platoon</b> (Lt Ziffle) Cpl G Chapman Spr A Bleoo <b>K</b> Spr JL Poirer <b>W</b> Spr OW Bezeau <b>W</b> Spr TB McCarthy <b>W</b> Spr TG McDonald <b>W</b>	

Notes - **K** – Killed **W** – Wounded LCI – Landing Craft infantry

During the day the RCE had 61 casualties (19 killed and 42 wounded). Two Platoon had 12 killed and 15 wounded. In all the 6th had 31 casualties or half the RCE total.

In comparison to the first wave the succeeding waves and platoons got off lightly. By the time they landed most of the Germans had been cleared off the beach. Their machine gun crews, snipers and coastal gun crews had been killed, wounded or captured. The beach was no longer under direct fire from the enemy. However, mortar and artillery rounds from German units further inland were still coming down. And just inland were snipers and machine guns.

#3 Platoon landed around 1000 hrs followed by #1 platoon a half hour later. In #1 and #3 platoon there were four casualties. Spr Arthur H. Johnson was killed at Reviere. He was hit by a sniper bullet between the eyes. Wounded later that day were Sprs William Beehler, Albert Goodrum and Joseph Sweda. For a time that day the 6th was doing mine clearance. They mostly found S mines and French mines on or near the beach exits. There weren't any mines on the roads but the verges needed clearing. Inland there were few obstacles. But there was sniper and mortar fire.

The Coy HQ landed at 1500 hrs. It still wasn't easy. As they formed up and moved off the beach they to came under fire from snipers and machine guns.

At 2230 hrs that night an engineer reconnaissance section from 3 platoon, moved forward with an infantry platoon and found themselves on the outskirts of La Fresne-Camilly. They quickly discovered that they were surrounded on three sides by the German Army and withdrew. It would be the deepest penetration into France from the beaches made by any Allied unit that day.

That night Sprs Benner and Ionel went missing, along with part of their infantry escort, This happened when a German party attacked a minefield laying operation. They would be executed by the SS several days later.

The next day 27 reinforcements arrived to replace men killed and wounded on the beaches. Most went to #2 Platoon. 10 more vehicles landed to supplement the handful of unit vehicles landed on D-Day.

Unit vehicles and personnel would continue to arrive for weeks, but it wouldn't be until July that full strength was reached

On the 7th and 8th attempts to lay protective minefields in front of the 7 CIB positions failed due to enemy fire.

The night of 8-9 June saw fierce fighting on the left sector of 7th Brigade front. Just before dark Panther tanks attacked along the general line of the Caen-Bayeux road, and in the first shock of the attack, parts of the Reginas' position were overrun. Some of the Panthers got to within 300 yards of the Regina's HQ in Brettville. Here they stopped and shelled and machine-gunned the village. At midnight, two Panthers entered Bretteville one of which reached the Regina's HQ and was knocked out. Maj Tom Murphy, Sgt-Maj Ted Thomas, Spr Bill Weston and Spr Gregg got called to clear the damaged tank off the road. By then the other enemy tanks had pulled back and disappeared. Two Teller mines were put inside the Panther and attached to a plunger 100 feet away. And since the tank was off the side of the road, they simply blew it up.

After the initial landing June, the bridgehead battle settled down to a routine. The biggest engineer task was beach maintenance and the development of roads and transit areas. However, being inland and in support of one of the frontline Brigades the 6th saw little of this. Most of their work involved the laying of protective minefields to blunt German counterattacks. For most of June the Canadians reinforced the bridgehead and beat off German attacks. There weren't any sizeable operations just lots of shelling, mortaring, probing and patrolling. In the bridgehead battle engineer field companies were never very busy. They made and mended roads, laid and lifted minefields, opened and operated water supply points. There were more engineers than work. That would change.

*505 UNIT CENSORSHIP*

*The following additional instructions on Unit Censorship are published for the information of all ranks:*

- (a) No picture postcards will be used.*
- (b) No reference to location, whether direct or by inference, except that, on arrival in the Theatre of Operations, writers may use the phrase "SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE".*
- (c) Descriptions of personal experiences in combat may be passed by unit censors provided that:
  - (i) 14 days have elapsed since the time of the incident.*
  - (ii) No mention is made of dates, locations or casualties.*
  - (iii) No details are given of units or formations other than those which form part of part of the writers official military address*
  - (iv) Censorship regulations and security are observed in all other respects. (Part 1 Routine Orders 10 June 1944)**

From D+1 through D+10, the unit laid mines nearly every night to protect the infantry from German counter-attacks. In that time 6th Field Company laid 7,336 anti-tank mines. The minefields were laid to a fixed pattern so that later they could be lifted safely. The officers and NCOs did the reces and planning during the day. The platoons went forward and laid their mines from dark to 2 or 3 A.M. and mapped and recorded the minefield as they did so. Their truck was parked as close as possible. White tapes were laid out to mark the rows, and where the tapes crossed was where the mines were laid. The tapes were roughly six feet apart — the width of a tank or car. Usually one engineer was on guard with a Bren gun covering the mine laying group. It was dangerous work as they were often in front of the forward positions.

On 19 Jun the rear party of 7 vehicles and 25 ORs under CQMS Flatt arrived from England. It had originally planned that they would arrive on the 12th but had been delayed in holding camps and on ships for weeks. This was typical. Most spent a week aboard ship before they could disembark. The unit was still not complete. The residual party was still in England.

At this time it was noted that after nearly three years in England the average sapper showed great reluctance to fell trees or tear timbers out of shelled buildings. They however were rapidly losing this point of view.

July came and the decision was made to break out of the bridgehead. To do that gaps had to be made in the minefields in front of the Canadian positions so as the infantry and armour could flow through. To do that the engineers first marked the gaps with tape. They then taped the rows and marked the individual mines. Safety pins were inserted into the mine fuses and the mines loaded onto a stretcher and removed to the side of the field with two men to a stretcher.

On the evening of July 7th, the 6th witnessed, at close quarters, the bombing attack on CAEN by 450 Lancaster Heavy Bombers. The planes went in over the target through a hail of anti-aircraft fire, with flack bursting all around them. They never swerved from their bomb run until they had dropped their bombs. Then and only then did they turn away and head back over the Channel. Out of the 450 bombers that went in over Caen they only saw one crash and three, evidently damaged, continued on their way back.

The unit moved forward in support of 7 CIB. In the early part of the Carpiquet-Caen attack, Spr Gregg was with the unit recce officers near Buron as the attack went in. As they were off on a recce Spr Gregg stayed with the scout car behind a rock wall. He had a perfect view of the assault. As he saw men dropping, he realized the shots were coming from behind, not ahead. This meant there had to be a sniper. He spotted him and when the sniper raised his rifle Gregg started to fire at him. The sniper spotted Gregg and began to fire back. Which took some pressure off the troops. An infantry NCO who saw his men dropping, then saw Gregg firing at the sniper's right, took three men and following Gregg's line of fire and crept up on the sniper. As the quartet were crawling up, Gregg kept trying to attract the sniper's fire. The sniper was killed. He had been shot through the head from the right side, so the NCO gave Gregg the round-fingered 'OK' and pointed to him and the sniper.

On the 10th Major Murphy and Lt. Millen entered Caen to recce for a bridge across the ORNE River. They hadn't been told the enemy was still in possession of the far bank and when they stepped out of the armoured car both officers were hit by enemy weapons fire. The light armoured car driven by Spr. E. W Gregg along with L-Cpl. Weston, the wireless operator and Bren gunner, was badly damaged by MG fire. Both men had narrow escapes. The variometer on the wireless set had been moved to its new position the day previous and so was instrumental in stopping a bullet that had been heading directly for Spr. Gregg. Major Murphy was just able to reach the car before collapsing and was taken in the damaged car to a Dressing station before they returned for Lt. Millen. Gregg and Weston were forced to stay under cover as both mortar and sniper fire were very heavy. Eventually Lt. Millen was able to crawl out and was taken to hospital for treatment. With Maj Murphy now in hospital Capt Miller became the A/OC

#### *11 549 OUT OF BOUNDS - CAEN*

*CAEN is out of bounds for all tps unless on duty. Under no circumstances will any looting take place in CAEN. The citizens have suffered enough during the past without us adding to their misery by taking their belongings.*

*It has been directed that any soldiers caught looting will be tried by FGCM.  
(Part 1 Routine Orders July 11 2012)*

On 12 July the 6th's Residue party from England under Sgt. Hamlin finally arrived in Normandy. The Company was finally together again. They brought with them 16 vehicles. And as was noted by Sam Flatt the CQMS *"It was a most welcome addition to our strength as excess "baggage" was piling up all through the Company."*

On 18 July Operation Goodwood the British/Canadian attack on Caen began. That morning 1 platoon of the 6th accompanied the Reginas in assault boats in a attack across the Orne into the centre of Faubourg de Vaucelles. In the late afternoon they worked their way into town taking it against light resistance. That day the 6th took 27 prisoners.

As the infantry took Caen the engineers found that the Germans had placed Teller mines on the sides of buildings with fuses on the doors. When the door opened a whole wall would go. The engineers took to opening doors with rope. In one street, the Germans had booby trapped house furniture on the road, including a sewing machine. When one of the 6th sappers cleared it, he found a mine in the drawer and defused it. And as Spr Fleger said *"And I like a damn fool stood there and watched him."*

Lt. Burnett and Lt. Savage, along with four ORs, arrived from the Reinforcement Unit on morning of July 18th. Lt. Burnett made what is believed to be the shortest stay on record with the Company. His first job was to recce roads near Vaucelles with a party from No. 2 Platoon. He completed the recce. On the way back they came under fire. Their vehicle and a motorcycle were destroyed and Lt. Burnett, Spr. Lowe and Spr. Steele went to the hospital. Lt Burnett had been with the unit less than 12 hours. He never returned.

With the advance underway the engineers were busy. There were water points to set up, mines to lift, debris to clear off the roads and the laying of the infantry's protective minefields to supervise. The good roads in the area required proper repairs to fix the damage caused by the shelling, bombing, fighting and the passage of heavy vehicles.

On the 25th Operation "Spring" began. It was the last of a long series of holding attacks designed to keep the bulk of the German forces in the Caen area facing the British and the Canadians while the Americans built up their forces in the south. The same day the Germans finally cut off the water supply to Faubourg de Vaucelles and the engineers now had to establish new water points. It had been nearly a week since the town had been taken. That night a German aircraft dropped Anti-Pers bombs on the unit bivouac. Sapper Kingsbury was killed and Sgt Maddy and Spr Monty wounded.



On the 30th the 3 Div was pulled out of the front and sent to the rear to rest. As can be seen from the war diary it was no rest.

### Block Timetable for 1 to 7 August Rest Period

Date	Time	1 Platoon	2 Platoon	3 Platoon
Tues 1 Aug	0900 -1215	Build and dismantle	Kit Inspection	Gas Training
	1330 - 1700	80 ft Bailey Bridge	Mines & booby traps	Recreational trip to Bayeaux
Wed 2 Aug	0900 -1215	Demolitions	Build and dismantle	Kit Inspection
	1330 - 1700	Recreational trip to Bayeaux	80 ft Bailey Bridge	Mines & booby traps
Thurs 3 Aug	0900 -1215	Kit Inspection	Demolitions	Started 80 ft Bailey Bridge
	1330 - 1700	3 Division parade and inspection by 3 Div GOC Major General Keller		
Fri 4 Aug	0900 -1215	Mines & booby traps	Mines & booby traps	Mines & booby traps
	1330 - 1700	Mines & booby traps	Recreational trip to Langrune-Sur- Mer	
Sat 6 Aug	0900 -1215	Individual Training	Individual Training	Individual Training
	1330 - 1700	3 Division parade and inspection by 2 Corps Commander Lieutenant General Simonds		
	Evening	Beer Parade		
Sun 6 Aug	0900 -1215	Assault Crossings on the river at Courseulles		
	1330 - 1700	Constructed 4 Anti-tank gun rafts, 2 FBE rafts and 2 Close Support Rafts		
	Evening	Some unit personnel attended the Canadian Army Show at Fontaine-Henry		
Mon 7 Aug	0900 -1215	Road Clearance	Road Clearance	Road Clearance
	1330 - 1700	Road Clearance	Road Clearance	Road Clearance
Tues 8 Aug	0900 -1215	AFV Recognition, Patrol and Personal Hygiene training cancelled at 0800 when unit placed on 1 hour notice to move		
	1330 - 1700	Recreational afternoon cancelled. Unit left rest area at 1340 for operations.		

0745 - 0800 Platoon Commanders inspection

0800 - 0830 Company Commanders inspection

There was a full training programme plus numerous inspections and parades. Three parades however were reportedly enjoyed, a bath parade, a beer parade and a parade to the Windmill Theatre to watch a Canadian Army Shows concert. The theatre was in a cave near Fontaine Henry and was a natural amphitheatre with the sloping rock floor for seats and the flat portion at the bottom for the stage. The show featured five CWACs and the soldiers later joked that it should have been called "Five CWACs in a Cave".

The 7th marked the 4th Anniversary of the 6th leaving North Vancouver. Of the 240 in the unit four years ago only 40 of the "old originals" were still left. The same day Operation "Totalize" began and 2nd Div broke through the German lines.

The next day 6 Field Company RV'd with the R Winnipeg R prior to going into action.

On the 10th 3rd Div joined "Totalize". Beyond Caen and in the Falaise fighting, the 6th picked up the Canadian mines in front of the tanks and put out tapes for the Falaise attack. One of the dangers with our mines was the Germans would come through in the night and booby-trap them. So it could be dangerous work.

Then there were the German Schu mines which were difficult to spot. They were small wooden boxes with a lid with a slanted notch. A striker just at this end sat on the pin and when the lid was stepped on, the pin pushed out and the mine exploded. They were almost no metal in them so they couldn't be located with a metal detector.

Over the next few days the RCE was heavily tasked with route maintenance and clearance As the History of the RCE Vol II notes *"Pot-holes and little patches, bomb-holes and huge patches, gravel, rubble, tar, heat and dust - for most engineers these days were sheer boredom. There was plenty to do on the roads and tracks, but hour by hour the task was similar. Hardly were there enough mines to liven matters up - just enough to make it necessary to sweep every inch of every verge and check all paved surfaces with a careful eye. The replacement of the sections of road torn out by the saturation bombing of enemy positions was a heavy task"*

On the 15th No 3 Platoon stumbled into a small party of the enemy near Olendon. A quick fire fight ensued. Spr. Buckmayer was killed by a rifle shot between the eyes and L-Sgt Adams was wounded and evacuated to the rear.

On the 17th the unit war diary noted that *"We are checking so many miles of road these days that the supply of signs is running low. The 3 Fd Park Coy RCE is making every effort to keep up with the demand. At the present moment they are using captured German sheet metal and captured brakes and shears to make the signs."*

On the 18th the 3rd Div reaches Trun and the Falaise Gap is closing on what is left of the German Army in Normandy. The 3rd Div is given the task of holding the line. The remnants of the German Army in Normandy are now in full retreat and being pounded by artillery and air attacks.

#### *590 MINE DETECTORS*

*There is considerable evidence of carelessness in the handling of mine detectors in this unit. Since 11 Jul 44 there have been 14 cables broken at the amplifier plug and 3 at the wand plug - almost all of which could have been avoided if the socket had been unscrewed properly. The situation has become so critical that the parts have to be flown in, and hence any evidence of such maltreatment of equipment will be reported immediately. As there is NO excuse for damage of this kind to such valuable equipment, these incidents will be dealt with severely.*

*Amplifiers which have been exposed to dew, should be taken out of the haversack and dried slowly.*

*(Part 1 Routine Orders 23 August 1944)*

After the German defeat in Normandy the Canadians were to move north along the French coast towards Holland. In the process they were to take or lay siege to the Channel ports and capture or destroy the V1 launch sites that were firing on London.

The 2nd Div began their move toward the Seine on 21 Aug. The 3rd Div meanwhile remained put. And as Sam Flatt noted in his book, having lots of abandoned German equipment around was a good thing. *"The amenities of camp life had been improved a lot by the acquisition by most of the troops of a number of discarded German pup tents. These were made of a waterproof camouflaged canvas. Four of them were easily converted into a comfortable shelter. Most of the boys managed to obtain possession of two portions and the four pieces made good covering for two men and all their equipment."*

On the 23rd the Falaise Gap finally closed. 3rd Div begins to move east on the same day. On 26 Aug they arrived at the Seine. There was little contact with the enemy. On the 25th 1 and 2 Pl of 6 FC built the unit's first two operational bailey bridges and installed a culvert in a third gap. All the gaps are small - around 25 feet. So Single-Single Class 40 Baileys were used. Due to heavy one-way traffic moving forward over their bridges, they weren't able to get back to unit lines until the next day.

The same day a party from HQ Platoon went out under Lt. Bartlett to clear DIAMOND route of road blocks consisting of booby trapped fallen trees. Much to the surprise of the Platoons and to the satisfaction of the HQ team, the task was completed as per schedule. A job well done.

On the 26th the two captured German cars the unit had were left at the roadside. The Division Movement Section had found that their planning did not come out right as practically every unit in the Division had several extra vehicles. With the Division on the move, it stretched a couple of miles further than it should have, causing mix-ups at rendezvous points and endless delays and irritations. So, in due course orders arrived to dispose of all captured vehicles.

On the Canadian front the crossing of the Seine River on the 27th and 28th was not a set-piece battle as planned. The Germans were retreating so fast they hadn't time to prepare a proper defence and the Canadians were advancing so fast they had little time to plan a deliberate attack. So it was a somewhat disorganized scramble crossing. On top of it, although tasked with the initial crossing, the 6th had little training in assault river crossings. Therefore the 34th FC RCE with , experience using Stormboats was placed under command. However, it wasn't until 430 AM before the 7th Brigade decided where they wanted to cross. Then when the boats arrived the engines were still packed in their shipping grease. They hadn't been cleaned, oiled or fuelled. So it was 830 before the engines were operational and the first troops crossed. Fortunately there wasn't any German opposition as the French Marquise controlled most of the far bank.

The signs of a rapid and disorganized German retreat were everywhere. The retreating troops commandeered any kind of transport they could, from private motor vehicles, farm wagons and horses down to baby carriages. Motors were run as far as the petrol would take them. Horses were used until they were exhausted. Baby carriages were pushed until the tires fell off. All of these the engineers had to get off the roads as part of their route clearance work.

In the streets of Elbouef horses lay dead with the hind quarters cut off. These were being used by the local population for food.

But the German rear guard was still active. On the 28th the unit ran into mortar fire from a hilltop north of Tourville. L-Cpl. Robert and Spr. Mueller were wounded and evacuated.

Shortly after they crossed the River Seine Maj Murphy was back in the unit, freshly recovered from his wounds.

And as Sam Flatt noted in his book *"It was in this area that we had our first contact with the Partisan procedure of shaving the heads of the French female collaborators and then forcing them to parade around the main streets of the city. From here on, the badge of the collaborator was a kerchief wound tightly around the head."*

It was now September and movement beyond the Seine was rapid. It was the engineer's job to keep it so. There was lots of route clearance and bridge building plus the removal of bodies, carcasses and equipment from the road. This was a recurring and unpleasant task.

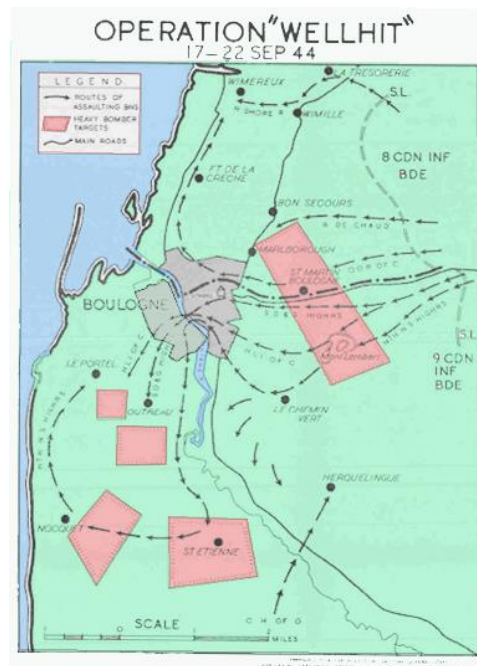
The 3rd Div moved with an engineer platoon under the command of their lead brigade and a RCE officer with a section assigned to each of the other two brigades. The 6th and 16th, each with a dozer on a transporter, followed the lead brigade. Only road surfaces were checked for mines while the verges were ignored. Few mines were found. The main delays were when road blocks had to be removed.

On the 3rd the 6th crossed the Somme at Abbeville - 60 miles beyond the Seine and bivouacked on the far side.

On the 3rd Div arrived at Boulogne. It was a fortress with 10,000 defenders. The Division stopped. The attack was to be delayed because most of the air support, heavy artillery and APCs had been committed to the siege of Le Havre. In the meantime the city was to be encircled and the Germans kept from escaping. A platoon of the 6th accompanied 7th CIB when it seized the high ground between Boulogne and Calais. The rest of the 3 Div engineers, including the other platoons from the 6th, filled the gap between the 8th and 9th brigades as infantry.

Boulogne is ringed by hills, which were the basis of the German defences on the land side. The approaches were heavily mined with S-mines, tellermines, improvised wooden box mines, buried shells, deeply buried mines, stacked mines and dummy mines.

On the 8th it rained continuously. Sitting in their trenches the engineers were cold, wet and miserable. To improve morale their first rum ration in France was issued. It worked. The next day the weather cleared and stayed clear for the rest of the operation.



On the 11th the German commander ordered the French civilians to leave Boulogne. A temporary armistice was arranged to allow for the civilian evacuation before the attack. The main refugee route came right past the farm where the 6th's HQ was. A refugee collection point was set up in the wheat field across the road. In five days over 5,000 civilians of all ages, men, women and children walked out of Boulogne. They came, bringing their belongings in baby carriages and wheelbarrows. CQMS Flatt used up all the emergency unit supply of hardtack biscuits in their feeding, and when that was gone the Supply Depot sent up more. It was all distributed before the last civilian departed in RCASC trucks to refugee camps near Samer.

Once the Armistice ended the bombing and shelling resumed. The British guns in Dover joined in. The AVREs and APCs arrived from Le Havre. Final preparations were made for the attack.

On 17 September at 0955 Operation "Wellhit" the attack on Boulogne started. 8th CIB (with 16 FC in sp) attacked on the right. 9th CIB (with 18 FC in sp) assaulted the left flank. After ten days as Infantry, the Engineers were being used as Engineers again. For this operation 6 FC was held in reserve in case the River Liane had to be bridged. The attacking brigades met heavy resistance.

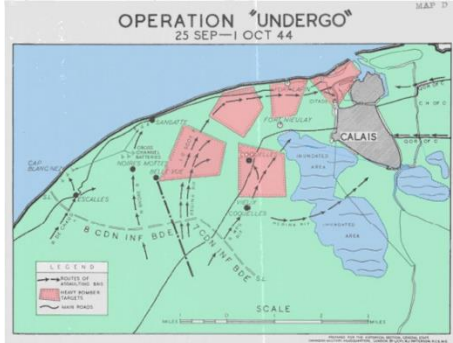
On the 18th the citadel in Boulogne surrendered. Fighting continued and it wasn't until the 22nd that the last pocket of German troops in the area surrendered.

Throughout the operation the unit was held in reserve and saw little action. But they still took casualties. On the 22nd a 1 platoon half track was returning in the afternoon after a road clearance job. It was destroyed by a concealed bomb beneath the tarmac of a well travelled and supposedly cleared road. The vehicle did a complete flip and was a write-off. Killed were Spr Berry, Spr McConkey, Spr Prestlien, Spr Sambells and Spr Gourlie. Wounded were LSgt Hannah, LCpl Rundle, Spr Abbott and Spr Kelly. It was theorized that the bomb had been buried deep and the fusing arranged so only a heavy vehicle would set it



off. For there had been other vehicles over the road but nothing as heavy as the half-track. The tarmac had also been warmed and softened by the sun and it was felt that this too was a factor.

With Boulogne captured 3rd Div was then ordered to take Calais. 8th CIB (with 16 FC in sp) was to take the westerly defences. 9th CIB (with 18 FC in sp) was to move against the Gap Gris Nez. The 7th CIB (with 6 FC in sp) was to attack the inner defences. The problems facing 3 Div at Calais was similar to what they faced at Boulogne. And the battle followed a similar pattern.



On Sep 25 the attack on Calais began. Half way through the battle Maj Murphy was to become acting 3 Div CRE and carry out LCol Cssidly's plan. Cassidy was to leave on the 27th for Canada. Like Boulogne most of the engineer work involved the clearance of roadblocks. By end of the first day the outer defences were cleared, but there were still the inner defences.

On the 26th 1 pl of 6 FC began removing 5 large roadblocks in the town of Coquelles. In the centre of each roadblock were 6 inch naval shells in groups of 3 and grouted into the road. One of the shells in each group had a press mechanism. The press mechanisms were removed from the shells. The logs were then pulled out with a dozer and attempts

were made to pull out the shells. When shells could not be pulled because they had been grouted in place they had to be blown. The explosions seriously damaging the French houses nearby and left a trench 6 ft deep, 5 ft wide and 30 ft long in the middle of the road. However, with dozers and tippers at hand the trenches were easily filled.

On the 27th Lt Savage was the IC of a recce party and was checking a moat bridge when he was wounded in the legs by German MG fire. He was evacuated with difficulty.

The 28th found 3 pl pinned down in Les Baraques with the Can. Scots They weren't able to get out until the next day when a 24 hour armistice was arranged. Meanwhile the Reginas made good progress across flooded terrain with 2 pl in sp.

On the 29th negotiations for the surrender of Calais started. Germans won't surrender but agree to a 24 hour truce so as civilians could be evacuated. The civilians then left.

The next day the attack on Calais resumed. But resistance was crumbling. Thousands of Germans came out of CALAIS by the back roads to surrender. As Sam Flatt said *"It made a strange sight to see a lone Infantry Corporal, armed with a sten gun, marching down the road followed by as many as one thousand German troops headed by Generals and other officers of high rank and proceeding quite placidly to the POW cages."* At 1900 hrs the German commander surrendered. At 0845 the next morning the last of the Germans in Calais became prisoners.

On October 2nd the 3 Div engineers move to concentration area prior to road move north to Belgium and Holland. This was the end of French operations for 3 Div.