

## **A D-Day Veteran's Memories**

On May 15, 1942, the 6th Field's 2nd Platoon in England recalls receiving "two new pieces of equipment" in camp: Lt Neil ('Tiger') Mustard of Toronto, their new officer, and a brand new jeep, their first American jeep. And it was Lt Mustard who was the man in charge of 2 Platoon's assault party on June 6, assigning six of his Sappers to each of the assaulting platoons of the Regina Rifles, A and B Companies and the same for B Coy of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles in charge of Sgt F.M. Emmerson.

Although he had strong reservations about the plan of sending older R.C.E. men who had been pre-war tradesmen in with younger, assaulting troops on D-Day, his superiors thought otherwise and Lt Mustard, led the 6th Field group sent in with 7th Brigade to land on the beach. Their job was to get rid of mines and other obstacles to aid the landing craft and the landing troops, coming in, and to clear the beaches of mines etc. The result? The casualties were 31 of his 48 men killed, wounded or missing, a number gone before they could even make the shore.

Several things happened that made it especially tough for the engineer party. They landed on the Courseulles beaches where many of the German defences had not been knocked out from the preliminary bombardment. The weather was a severe handicap with waves much higher than had been anticipated. The 10-minute delay was ordered for the scheduled H-Hour. During this period, the tide came in very rapidly.

The frustration and pain at losing so many men has remained with him during the years. The war taught him many things and one of his sayings in later years has been: "From intimate contact with problems, you learn very, very quickly."

The Engineers of No. 2 Platoon who survived the beaches shared a lot of action with Lt Mustard. After the attack on Caen, on July 10 he was appointed Captain and 2 I/C of the Company. He was moved to C.R.E. in December 1944, and at the end of April 1945, was appointed to 3rd Field Park Coy, R.C.E., first as second in command and then as Acting C/O. When he brought the regiment home to Peterborough, Ont., after the war, he was the Commanding Officer.

### **Lt J. Neil Mustard No. 2 Platoon, 6th Field Coy & 3rd Field Park Coy, Royal Canadian Engineers**

"I'm a civil engineer. I graduated before I enlisted and I was about 28, one of the youngest ones in the Coy, though one of the older officers.

"I wasn't going to dwell on this, but one of the reasons that I and my two brothers enlisted early on was because of my parents. My Mother and Dad were both on the Athenia when it was torpedoed in September 1939. My Father had been over in England studying their teaching course of studies. He had been selected by the Department of Education to rewrite the curriculum for all the public schools of Ontario. (They are still using it.) He'd been over once (was chairman of the project). Then he went back to England to check some things and my Mother went over to join him and they were coming back together.

"The ship was torpedoed and Dad was lost. Mother was rescued, but was hurt pretty badly and shortly after that had a stroke. She came home and was still alive when I came back from the war.

"I had three brothers, the oldest Charlie, (C.A. Mustard) about 40. He enlisted as a gunner, the lowest thing you could be in the Artillery. He was a teacher. But he was a smart cookie and pretty soon they took that up and by the time the war was over, he was a Staff Major with the R.C.A..

Another brother Bill, about 30, became the famous Blue Baby surgeon at Sick Kids Hospital. He had a Field Surgical Unit and there were only about two of them in the Canadian Army then. They were mobile and all their gear was mobile. They were pretty far forward. And he could do some pretty fancy operations with this trailer with generators, X-ray machines and all that kind of jazz. He did some surprising things. He was the first guy to put the glass tubes in the arteries to save people's hand, legs and stuff when they'd lost the circulation in the field. Then they were sent to Scotland to be fixed. I had another brother, Donald, also a doctor, and he was in England during the war. He had been there ten years before was broke out. So I knew all about hypos and stuff and it didn't bother me. But most of the guys didn't like to fool around with those damn things.

"I went to see Bill a few times and he was a character. I helped him put together some of his equipment. I knew a little about it — he didn't. I saw him do some operations then and boy, I wouldn't have wanted to do it. I watched him do some pretty major stuff. One time I saw him fishing around and taking stuff out of a guy's head. Don't know whether the chap survived or not. But Bill said: 'These Canadians are indestructible.' He did skin surgery to remove glass from hands and arms. It's a common thing now and they use plastic.

"Amazingly, we all got back after the war, I was the one who was up where all the scoop was flying. Charlie was the Staff Major and of course Bill with his surgical outfit.

"The whole D-Day thing, to my mind, was done incorrectly. And I got into trouble about that.

"All my fellows were technicians, or should I say tradesmen. You might in an Engineer's platoon have 6 carpenters, 3 tinsmiths, 2 welders, 2 blacksmiths, believe it or not and they're pretty handy guys too, 6 electricians, 5 plumbers etc. These people were tradesmen and not as young as the infantry. They were usually 25-35 years old and they were valuable people. The whole plan got carried away because these people being tradesmen were adept at such things as arming mines, lifting mines, beach mines etc. They could handle these kinds of things because of their trades. But don't forget these men were not trained as infantry people; not trained as assault troops. When we got ashore, the infantry guys ran like rabbits, but our R.C.E. guys couldn't keep up to them. So the whole thing got screwed up I think.

"Civil Engineering came about in history in a different way as opposed to military engineering now. Military engineering started at the Royal Military College in Kingston, Ont., and those fellows graduated as military engineers. Now they don't have as much theory as civil engineers, but they do have more military theory and are more military oriented. So what happens when a war comes along? These fellows are quite often Army career officer types and they are in the peacetime army and all R.M.C. officers. So when a war starts all the Colonels, Brigadiers and stuff are R.M.C. guys — all your Brass — because they were in the Army to begin with. That's fine. They make a nice Corps. But they don't differentiate between civilian and military engineering. So what happens is that a guy like myself goes in this war as an engineer, takes a few months training — 3 months at Brockville, Ont., and 3 months at Petawawa (6 months total) and I'm supposed to be a military engineer. Sure I can design a bridge better than these guys can. But we're not designing bridges. We're just throwing the damn things together like a mechano set.

"The 6th Field was recruited in Vancouver and the OC was an old peacetime officer, a nice guy. He formed the 6th, took it to England, trained them and picked up guys like me. I picked him up in England as an officer and then before D-Day, they realized Maj Jermyn was not quite the man for an assault landing since he was older — 40 years — so they put in a young chap, an RMC guy of course, fresh out of Royal Military College, younger than me, and out to make a hero of himself.

"He goes along with all that assault stuff — big deal — he's going to make a big name for himself, forgetting that the guys who have to make this thing happen are a bunch of tradesmen. They're not Sappers in a military sense.

"To make a long story short, it was a bloody slaughter for No. 2 Platoon! I'm not too proud of it — that is the actual landing. Our casualties were very high.

"The way we were sent in, it was the wrong type of people for the D- Day landing because I can remember a corporal I had left on D-Day saying: 'We can't keep up with these guys' (infantry)-and I told him: "I know, but what can you do, if you're left behind?" Those guys were going through these places from the beach like rabbits and they weren't cleaning the Germans out, just going by them. Then you're sitting there with your little band of rebels. It's too bad in a way. There were some pretty good guys there and I knew them well.

"The main activity of 6th Field on D-Day landing was for No. 2 Platoon which I commanded to be brigaded with the Reginas and Winnipeggs for the landing. Brigaded means attached to the infantry for command reasons. Half were with the Reginas (A & B Coys) and half with the Winnipeggs (B Coy). Each of the infantry platoons we were with had 6 sappers attached and these various infantry platoons with attached sappers were dispersed on different ships.

"They loaded into LCAs hanging over the side of the mother ship, and each LCA hanging like that had 25-30 men in an infantry platoon plus the 6 sappers for each. The infantry were just kids, 17 to 20. They didn't have any training except infantry training.

"According to my field book, 9 Platoon under Lt Grayson of the Reginas were in LCAs 1044/1048 and my guys with them were L-Cpl Meek and Sprs Velux, Curran, Sopher, Sawdon and Cleary. 7 Platoon RRR under Sgt Schneider were in 1047/1048 with my chaps: L-Cpl Ferguson, Jackson, Arseneau, Wilkins, Brown and Beehler. 8 Platoon RRR under Lt Hepler was in 1044/1048 with my chaps: L-Cpl Cooper, Spencer, Kingsbury, Purcell, Franklin and T.G. McDonald. These were all to land on Nan Green Beach at H+5.

"B Coy of the Reginas was also to land on Nan beach at 11+5. This group had 12 PI RRR under Lt McNish in 1050/1054. The Engineers were: L-Cpl Rundle, and Etchells, Nobel, Trainer, Woods, Matthews; 10 PI under Lt Ziffle in LCAs 1050/1054 with Engineers Cpl Chapman, Bleoo, Poirier, Bexeau, McCarthy, B.R. McDonald.

"With B Coy Winnipeg Rifles on Mike Red Beach for 11+5 were 12 Platoon R.w.Rs under Lt Aitken in 1038/1043 with Engineers Cpl Duncan, Sprs Daussalt, Brewer, Conger, Campbell, L-Sgt Stewart. 11 Platoon, under Lt Christmas in 1038/1043 along with Engineers Cpl Wilkinson, Sprs Sparkes, LaCroix, Brander, Wiseman, Tarlington. 10 Platoon under Lt Bealey in 1038/1043 with Engineers L-Cpl Teskey, A.T. Jackson, A.J.L. Martin, Zarebinski, Adams, Goodrum.

"I landed with the Reginas and my Sgt F.R. Emerson landed with the R.C.E. group with the Winnipeggs.

"So we were hanging on the ship before H Hour and there was a delay. The craft was rocking back and forth on the side of the mother ship and we were crouched down with a canvas cover over us. It was pitch black and some of the guys were sick. It was not very pleasant. Half the guys were sick and the ones who weren't wished they were dead. It seemed as though we were hanging there for an hour, though the book says 10 minutes. But I'm sure it was more than that.

"I knew what was facing us when we were dropped off because I had studied the air photos very carefully before we left England. Before the Army even, I was something of an expert in air photo interpretation which I had specialized in. You can read stereoscopically and you could see these things on the beaches. The Germans had these bloody things like huge jacks in the water. They were made of railway ties about 20 feet long, so no matter how you stood them up, there was always a

point sticking out. And on the end of this point a flagon (a 3-quart bottle). I could see these things in the air photos. And I examined this obstacle because I took some of them off.

"I was suspicious of these obstacles and they had explosives in that which was bad enough. They also had a detonator on front. That was bad enough. But these bloody Germans were smart. That would not destroy the boat. So they had attached plastic high explosives to a mine which was on the forward side. A big mine. So your ship comes in to the beach, touches this thing and sets it off and it blows the craft to bits and right out of the water.

"So when I saw the ships blowing up as the landing craft went in, I knew exactly what was happening. But this is why I believe we were delayed more than 10 minutes because we were supposed to come in when these were on dry land and the tide down; then tear the detonators off these things. Had these conditions existed, when the tide came up and the other tank carriers and stuff came in, they'd have had clear sailing. As it was, these obstacles were just about awash. I know!

"So what happened in my particular craft was that I got the young officer to drop 'the gate' in front of these obstacles, because I could see ships blowing up all over the place. So he dropped the gate before he got to the obstacles and of course then the guys all had to swim out of our craft. We had been practicing this landing and swimming ashore and all of us equipped with Mae Wests. So that was no great problem. The only trouble was with all the equipment we had on. Though we had practiced with equipment on, we had extra equipment on D-Day — grenades and bombs and every other bloody thing and you couldn't swim with all the stuff.

"We had a battle jerkin (I think it was called) like a vest or bigger and sleeveless made of heavy canvas. I had my revolver and some grenades and stuff like that hung on this vest. I dropped my vest off so I could swim better and the other guys did too. But then we landed without any guns or anything. Most of the boys had dropped guns and rifles. Those that didn't, well a lot of them drowned.

"When we went in the morning of the invasion I had my own personal list in my pocket of the equipment we were carrying and what each man was carrying ashore. There were the Bren guns, which were not very heavy but the bloody ammo for it was. So he's got about 30 pounds right there. Then there were the Wade charges. But they weren't small and were shaped like a car 14x6 inches and this is chuck full of dynamite (plastic high explosive as they call it upstairs). They had those on their backs on a kind of packboard. That bloody thing also weighed 30 pounds. And if a shell were ever to hit it, it would be goodbye! The purpose of those things was for blowing up a pillbox. It could blow a hole right through six feet of concrete. When you detonated a thing that shape, it's almost like focusing a flashlight. The force of your charge goes in that direction. So on my list every time you see a 'W' opposite a man's name you know that chap is carrying 30 lbs of high explosive on his back. The enemy are shooting at him at the same time. How ridiculous can you get!

"Then we have Beehives (BH). You'll see Spr Wilkins had two of them. He got wounded. Now Beehives are another kind of shaped charge. Not quite as big and they had a cone-shaped hollow when they were detonated from the rear. Everyone carried detonators and they are not even mentioned. Now detonators are very sensitive things, about 2 inches long, and that's what you start your dynamite with. We had these detonators in our pockets and if you put them in the sunlight and drop them, they go off. They are pretty damned sensitive and that too would give a directed blast and blow holes in things.

"There were some beach obstacles, like a wall among other things, that they wanted to breach so they could drive their tanks and gun carriers up the walls. And the theory was that you'd put these Wades and Beehives on the walls and blow holes in 'ern. That was assuming no one was shooting at you which of course was a bloody fallacy. The way we had been practicing with these things was to use smoke grenades and that creates a cover, and then lay a charge on a pillbox and blow it up. That

was fine in theory, but I've got scars all over my face and arms from smoke grenades — phosphorous burns. These are in a can and burn when exposed to air and you can't stop them.

"The infantry had mortar bombs with smoke bombs too which were better. They could throw them quite a piece to give you cover. But the trouble is that you can't see what you're doing anyway. So a lot of these things were great in theory but didn't always work so well in practice.

"The Beehives and Wades were good and would do the job. The trouble was to get them in the right place at the right time. Very few of those guys with these things ever got through on the landing, and when they did, they didn't have their charges anyway.

"When we came in I didn't catch up with my fellows right off the bat. I landed with the Reginas and there was a breakdown in the chain of command. Chapman and Bleoo were killed later, not right on the beach. But we had 7 fighting guys left at the end of the first day, including me with the Reginas. Sgt Emmerson with the Winnipegs, had about 3 or 4 left. His infantry took a hell of a pasting and the Reginas didn't do much better, though a little better. However on checking back, I know I had 7 guys left with one lance corporal and Sgt 'Bushy' Emmerson with the Winnipegs had about 3 or 4. But we didn't have any explosives so we couldn't do anything much. We could dig up mines and debug booby traps which we did.

"I remember I pulled some of the detonators off those jack things in the water before I went ashore. After I dropped off the jerkin I was swimming around as I was a good swimmer and I kept pulling these bloody things off as fast as I could. One of the problems was the enemy were shooting at us with these Bofors guns — an ack-ack gun (British). The Germans had captured a bunch of those at Dunkirk. In a way that saved my bacon because I recognized they had five rounds per clip and every fifth round was a tracer and showed up in daylight. So whenever they swung, a bullet falls at the same speed. An ordinary round dives. Bofors are high powered things with a shell about 6 inches long and they come at such speed. You would see where the shooting was from the tracers and when these were fired you could duck in the water, way down. When they'd swing the thing away then you could do something. It was the same thing on the beach. When the Germans were shooting over your head, you'd crawl underneath something and if it was too low, you had to skip through them.

"Anyway, I took some of the detonators off the jacks (mines) before I went ashore. They were just about a foot out of the water, just the right height to reach up at that stage. But the tide was coming in very fast and I only had about 10 minutes and then the damn water was too high and you couldn't find them. But if we had landed when we were supposed to, we could have run onto the beach and pulled those things off. Except that the Germans were shooting at us. Our particular ship must have been half an hour late going in.

"The Reginas I went with were on the left at Courseulles; the Royal Winnipeg Rifles on the right; and the Canadian Scottish (one coy) on the right. Boom — and like rabbits the infantry hit the beach and just ran forward. They had a first objective about three miles in. I was in there that first night with my little band of 6 or 7 guys. I had the maps and knew where they were supposed to be. We had a pretty restless night because we couldn't find any infantry around there.

"That was another of the problems. We weren't on the radio net with the infantry.

So we didn't know what the hell we were doing. We had our radio but it wasn't much good to me because our radio was connected to our own Coy HQ which wasn't even there at the time. They hadn't even landed yet. We ended up spending the night in a little place called Camilly. We sat there with our guns cocked in a barn because we could hear Germans wandering around. In the morning we looked out and there was no infantry in sight. Then in about an hour, they started coming up the road again with their advance troops. We were there all by ourselves. It was crazy.

"We did do a little bit of mine-lifting and stuff. The Germans were smart, they didn't leave

much. They did something to their big tractors so we couldn't get the darn things going. We could de-booby trap them and start the engines, but we couldn't make the bloody things move. I don't know to this day what the enemy did to them. They must have pulled a pin out of the driveshaft or something like that.

"One of my lads who got through was L-Cpl Teskey. He was a short, stocky, little guy. He came up to me and said: 'Good God, I thought I was shot.' His pants were all wet as he had gotten a round through his 40-oz water bottle and the water had all run down his trousers. And he was the only one of his group alive. Cpl Duncan made it though he was wounded; Conger got through, but Campbell was captured. L-Sgt W.F. Stewart was a sad thing. I spent from 1941 to 1944 with these boys and this was a personal friend about 45. He was well educated and Irish. He was killed ... shot by a sniper later on D-Day.

"Just after we got on the beach we didn't have guns or much of anything. So we just took them off the Germans as they were captured. The infantry had left some of the enemy on the beach and some of them were coming out of the pillboxes, with their hands up. Thanks to the tanks more than anything else. I'm not too sure now who was shooting at who. They lost quite a few tanks on the way in, but those that made it managed to silence the pillboxes. We had used blacking on our faces just to take the shine off. You do this sort of thing because it's the shine that shows up at 100 or 200 yards. I don't think I had any stuff on. By then it would have been washed off by the water, but some of the others still had black faces. We did this for night patrols too. The moonlight would shine on your face and if you darken your skin, there's no reflection from the moonlight or from parachute flares that light up the whole countryside. Geez, you'd feel like you were standing out there naked because it would be so bright. But if you are darkened down, then your chances are better.

"This is how my field book in my hip pocket on D-Day shows what my men were carrying in on D-Day and what happened to each man. The abbreviations are the key to equipment men carried and what happened to them.

R.R.R. - Royal Regina Rifles R.W.R. - Royal Winnipeg Rifles

Sgt F.R.R. Emmerson landed with R.W.R. Lt Neil Mustard with RRR

Double numbers under Inf P1 Cdr's name are of assault craft

First letter after the Sprs names show equipment they carried ashore. Br (Bren gun); W (Wade charge); TH (Beehive charge etc.)

The last letter after each name means: W- Wounded X - Missing (captured) K - Killed V - Got through

| <b>A Coy RRR</b>             |                   |             |                            |       |   |
|------------------------------|-------------------|-------------|----------------------------|-------|---|
| <b>9 P1. Lt W.D. Grayson</b> |                   |             | <b>7 P1. Sgt Schneider</b> |       |   |
| L-Sgt Meek                   | 9 (Detonators)    | W           | L-Cpl Ferguson             |       | K |
| Velux                        | Br                | V           | Jackson                    | Br, 9 | W |
| Curran                       | W                 | V           | Arseneau                   | W     | V |
| Sopher                       | 9 2 BH            | W           | Wilkins                    | 2 BH  | W |
| Sawdon                       | W                 | K           | Brown                      | M     | V |
| Cleary                       | MU                |             | Beehler                    | W9    | W |
| <b>8 P1. Lt Jack Hysler</b>  |                   |             |                            |       |   |
| L-Cpl Cooper                 |                   | K           |                            |       |   |
| Spencer                      | 9&W               | W           |                            |       |   |
| Kingsbury                    | 2 BH              | V (K later) |                            |       |   |
| Purcell                      | W                 | V           |                            |       |   |
| Franklin                     | 2 BH              | V           |                            |       |   |
| MacDonald T.G.               | 1 box 75 grenades | W           |                            |       |   |

| <b>BCoy RRR</b>         |                     |   |                             |      |   |
|-------------------------|---------------------|---|-----------------------------|------|---|
| <b>12 PI. Lt McNish</b> |                     |   | <b>10 PI Lt Herb Ziffle</b> |      |   |
| L-Cpl Rundle            |                     | W | Cpl Chapman                 |      | V |
| Etchells                | W                   | V | Bleoo                       | Br   | K |
| Novel                   | MU                  | V | Poirier                     | W    | W |
| Trainer                 | 2 BH                | V | Bezeau                      | 2 GH | W |
| Woods                   | W                   | V | McCarthy(MacKay?)           | 2 BH | W |
| MatthewA                | 2 boxes 75 grenades | V | McDonald BR (TG?)           | W    | K |

| <b>B Coy RW</b>            |      |   |                         |                     |   |
|----------------------------|------|---|-------------------------|---------------------|---|
| <b>12 P1. Lt Aitken</b>    |      |   |                         |                     |   |
| Cpl Duncan                 |      | V |                         |                     |   |
| Dussault                   | 2 BH | W |                         |                     |   |
| Brewer                     | W    | K |                         |                     |   |
| Conger                     | 2 BH | V |                         |                     |   |
| Campbell                   | W    | X |                         |                     |   |
| L-Sgt Stewart              | M    | K |                         |                     |   |
| <b>11 P1. Lt Christmas</b> |      |   | <b>10 P1. Lt Bealey</b> |                     |   |
| Cpl Wilkinson              |      | W | L-Cpl Teskey            |                     | V |
| Sparkes                    | Br   | K | Jackson, A.T.           | W                   | K |
| LaCroix                    | W    | K | Martin                  | 2 BH                | K |
| Brander                    | W    | X | Zarembinski             | 2 BH                | W |
| Wiseman                    | MU   | X | Adams                   | W                   | K |
| Tarlington                 | 2 BH | K | Goodrum                 | 2 Boxes 75 grenades | W |

"One time, around D+2, I guess, the Pioneer Platoon officer and I were strapped for people and they were afraid the enemy tanks were going to advance. This crazy guy and I got these mines, five to a case, not fused. We were hurrying, so we took and fused all the mines. Then we put them in a jeep in a little box in the trailer. He drove the jeep up and down and I was putting the fused mines like planting potatoes. We didn't have any time to go by the book. If anyone had seen us then with the fuses on them they'd have run like mad. They have a fairly stiff spring on them and it takes quite a bang to blow those things up. You can almost walk on them. So I just walked behind the jeep, picked them up and put them down. We had trained the Pioneers on booby traps and mine laying and that's the way they should have gone. They should have those guys who lived with the infantry all the time to do this kind of stuff, rather than a bunch of tradesmen.

"I remember the night they bombed Caen July 8. It was quite a sight. Those bombers just shook the ground. We went in there too because we had to build a bridge over the Orne, the river in the middle of Caen. I went in on a survey recce to measure it, but the city was just a pile of rubble and it stank — dead bodies. I remember quite distinctly smoking cigarettes (and I was not a cigarette smoker), so I wouldn't smell the dead 'meat.' There's nothing worse than dead 'meat.' Caen was such a pile of rubble we couldn't even see where the streets were and we had to build a road in there. So we had an armoured bulldozer in which the place where the driver sat was all armoured and they just had a hole like a turret for the driver. This driver was white haired and we called him 'Whitey.' He was a young fellow but he had a big head of white hair. I was up there on my little motorcycle as far as I could go.

"I walked over the rubble trying to get a look at the bloody river. But the Germans were still there on the other side and they were throwing mortar bombs over. So here I was trying to get an idea of how big a bridge to order for them, and Whitey's machine got hit with a mortar bomb. It didn't hurt

him and he was out from the bulldozer and in a ditch. So I picked him up on my motorcycle. There was a long hill coming out of Caen and I had him on the back of my motorcycle and they began shooting at us with an 88. The first one missed us, but the second one was close, so close it blew us in the ditch, along with the machine which was all right.

"I was wearing a leather battle jerkin and it was scratched with shrapnel it was so close. I still have that thing somewhere. The next thing I knew, there was Whitey and he's on the motorcycle. So I jumped on the back. He had never ridden one of these things and he's screaming and yelling 'how do you stop this thing?' and I had to reach over his head to the front brake and we got it stopped that way. There was a back brake on the foot pedal, but when we went in the ditch, it got bent back off and he couldn't use that. I can still hear him roaring 'how do you stop these damned things?'

"In the Scheldt, I remember one night we had to build a Kapoc bridge across a canal. It was like a big raft full of kapoc. It goes down, but you don't get wet and you can walk on it. It is in blocks like a long mattress and hooked together. The bridge is light and quiet, and sits on the banks and goes across the canal and the infantry can run across the top of it in the middle of the night.

"I recall this chap 'Jonesie,' I think he must have been a major with the Reginas at this time. We're on this dyke in the middle of the night and we could hear the Germans talking on the other side of the dyke, and they had girls in there, you could hear them. When he got his Regina troops in there, there was enough noise that the Germans got wise and started throwing grenades over. They had handles on them and Jonesie would pick them up and throw them back. I thought 'this guy's a cool boy.' He had to be quite good.

"The Scheldt was a dirty place to fight with only dykes to walk on and the Germans in the right place. If you were going to go from that point to this point, down this damn road, they've got you cold.

"At Nijmegen in Holland they had these polders and we had control of the pumps and could start or stop the pumps depending on whether we would be going to advance or retrench. My little engineering group had recouped by then and we were called 'Polder Joes' because whenever they wanted to start the pumps we'd do it to drain some of this land for the advance. Then they'd decide 'No, we're not going to advance. Stop the pumps.' I can remember one night getting three messages: one to start the pumps; one to stop the pumps; and one to start them again, all in the same night.

"At one point later on Brig Melville, boss of the Engineering Corps had a party for the Engineers. At this thing there was free booze and I got into the suds too soon I think. But I had it in my mind I was going to talk to Melville about this using of these tradesmen as infantry people. By the time I'd had a few drinks, I think I said something like 'Sit down you little Bastard, I want to talk to you.' I was paraded the next day to our OC to explain and I couldn't remember anything. My boys had rescued me and got me the hell out of there. But the irony of it is that the Major I had to report to was a lush and he paraded me to Maj J.F. MacDougall who said the right thing: 'If you can't hold your liquor, you'd better not drink too much.'

"Somewhere early on there was a fast river and we didn't have the overall picture but had to get the troops across. So we got a line from a tree there to a tree here and there was one little Dutch skiff over here with about 10 guys. Then we put a pulley clothesline to the boat and one sapper in the back with a paddle to steer it. That's how we got a whole infantry platoon across."

Later the Company moved to a location near Gorssel. No 1 Platoon checked the Division route and also worked on a 30-ft SS Bailey bridge which was opened at 1400 hours. No 2 and No 3 Platoons were standing by awaiting orders for another bridge. The Division was moving up toward Deventer (Holland) and the roads were almost solid with convoys, the main road being about 100 yards from where the Company HQ was bivouacked. Suddenly the German 88s began to shell the

Division route and 6th Field Coy bivouac sporadically for about three hours. Two serious casualties were suffered when a shell landed near the Orderly Room truck usually occupied at that time of day by Sgt J.L. Roberts. Fortunately, he was taking a coffee break. Not so fortunate was CSM T.C. Thomas and Spr F.J. Poulin, both badly wounded! Capt Mustard was close to both of them when the shell landed.

"Sgt-Maj Thomas and his batman Spr Fernie Poulin were in a little forest just deciding where to put the troops for shelter for the night, and the trailer was about 100 yards away. The Germans sent the Moaning Minnies over — six at once, and it landed among us in the forest. The Sgt-Major had both legs badly bashed up, so badly that he was to spend nearly three years in hospital and treatment centres before discharge. Fernie Poulin was hit in the chest. I caught him in my arms and I got the pair out. I didn't get a scratch. Don't know how I escaped. The Orderly truck was full of pieces of shrapnel. I caught Fernie before he fell.

"Thomas was hospital boarded back to Canada and his skin wouldn't heal for years. He fell in love with a Canadian nurse and married her!"

Thomas was just about the last of the N.P.A.M. that formed the original Unit in 1939. There were other narrow escapes that afternoon, among them Spr Giddins, an HQ driver who had just left the rear of his truck where he had been grabbing a few minutes rest. A shell landed nearby and when he returned, he found that his bedroll and blankets were riddled with shrapnel. Two more casualties were suffered that same day during the construction of a 120-ft-TS Bailey over the Schipbeek River where there was considerable shelling. Spr A. Cook and Spr A. Etchells were wounded by shrapnel and sent to hospital.<sup>6</sup>

Like many veterans, Neil Mustard was very successful in postwar years in his chosen field. On his return to Canada he joined the staff of Ontario Hydro in the Research Division in the concrete control section. As the years passed he became one of Canada's leading experts on concrete construction, in dams, power generating stations and the Seaway.