



27th IND. ARMD.BDE



8th IND. ARMD.BDE

The War Diary of Julius Neave

A personal chronical of the events leading up to, during and after the D-Day Normandy landing, during World War II.

Winter 1942/3 to May 1945

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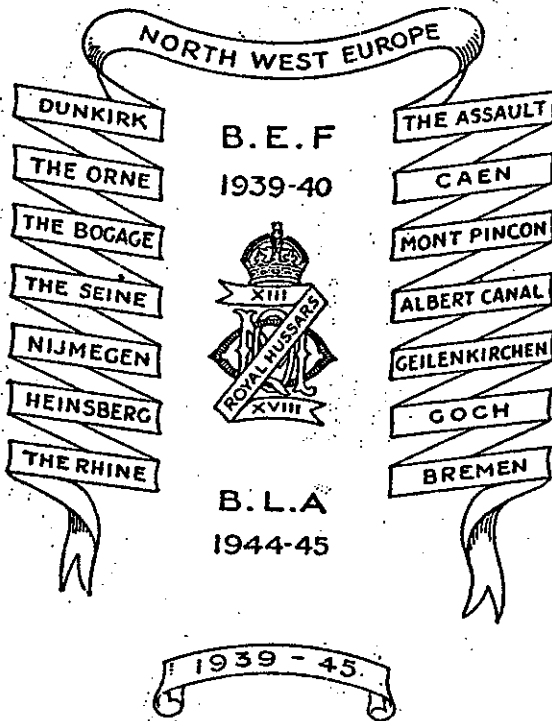
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PREFACE



PREFACE

Two events have prompted me to sort out the diary which I kept during the Normandy campaign from June 1944 to May 1945 and which has remained in a deed box in the strongroom here since 1963. First was the awareness that the 50th anniversary of the Assault Landing on D-Day, 6th June 1944 was imminent and that the Regimental Association was already making plans for its celebration and secondly I acquired a copy of the book by Bob Kiln, who I had known well in the City at Lloyds, recounting his experiences in the landing with the Hertfordshire Yeomanry on the beach next door to ours.

I found a considerable volume of unsorted material relating to these events and realised that it was of no value as it was but it might be of interest if put together in some coherent way. My attempts to do just this follow.

Throughout the period covered by the diary I was Adjutant of the 13th/18th Royal Hussars (Q.M.O.), serving under four Commanding Officers. We were an armoured regiment which I joined in 1940 immediately after their return from Dunkirk. My brother, Bob, was a Supplementary Reserve officer in the Regiment who had returned with them, slightly wounded, and my joining him was made possible by a war-time regulation under which a brother could claim to serve with a brother under active service conditions. The 13th/18th Hussars had a family connection in that Charles Miller, an uncle and our mother's brother, had commanded the regiment before the war and at the time of their conversion from cavalry to armour. Later he became Colonel of the Regiment having retired as a Major General. Later John Mangles, a first cousin and also a nephew of Charles Miller, served in the Regiment retiring as a major. Very sadly he died in 1993.

A brief explanation of the organisation of an armoured regiment under active service conditions is needed to clarify expressions in the diary which I had assumed would be understood. This is an oversimplification but will I hope serve this purpose. We were organised into three echelons, 'F'

Echelon (fighting) consisting of three tank (sabre) squadrons, 'A', 'B' and 'C' and Regimental HQ. 'A' echelon, unarmoured, which was usually in close proximity in which was carried immediately needed supplies such as ammunition, fuel and rations. 'B' echelon which we saw only occasionally carried our remaining equipment and replacements, the Quartermaster's stores, the Regimental office truck, the Officers, and Sergeants Messes etc., etc. There were of course in addition a number of detachments including medical personnel and fitters and the LAD for tank repairs and signals experts, the Padre—and a good many others.

Unfortunately today the Regiment no longer exists, having become like so many other famous names in military history the victim of the politicians' interpretation of the so-called 'peace dividend'. Their amalgamation however with the 15th/19th King's Hussars into The Light Dragoons has been happily accomplished and they have reverted to the name they had at Balaclava.

Before D-Day it had not occurred to me that I might keep a diary,¹ but finding after arrival on the other side that I had jotted some notes on an Engagement Block it seemed a good scheme to keep it going, so I took to writing up the day's events in an 'S.O Book 136 1/2'—'Supplied for the Public Service'.

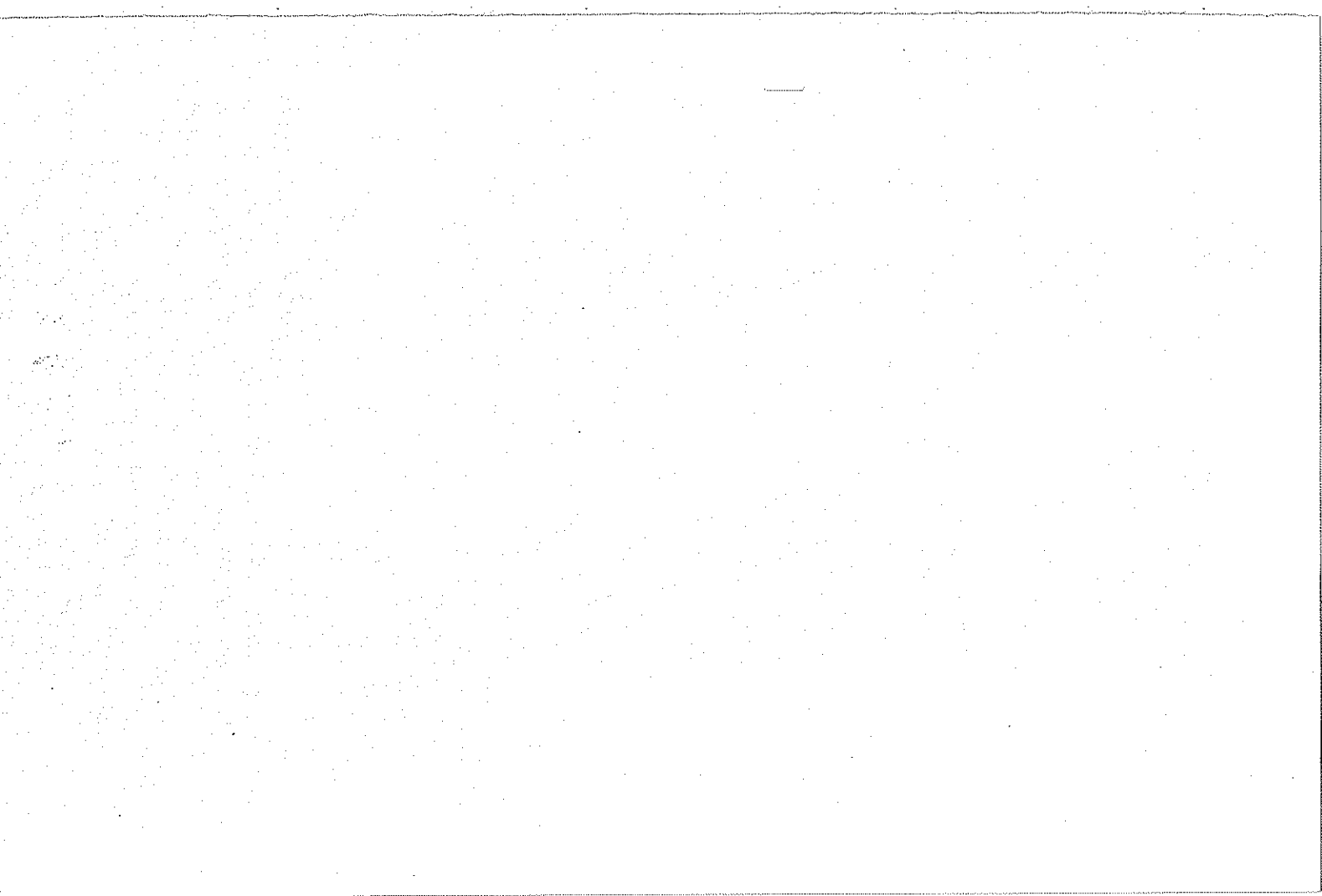
On the front page of this block which I still have is a significant entry in large blue capitals underlined in red to remind me that Friday 26th May 1944 was Queen Mary's birthday. To forget this occasion was a nightmare for any adjutant of Queen Mary's Own Regiment. It reminds me too of a signal from Her Majesty at the height of one of our operations in Normandy expressing Her Majesty's surprise that she had not received her fortnightly account of Her Majesty's regiment and could this please be rectified as soon as possible!

1 *In fact the keeping of diaries on active service was not allowed and being aware of this undoubtedly influenced what I recorded and accounts for the lack of detail particularly relating to names of people and places.*

It was never my intention that the diary, in any form, should be published but as now edited it will I hope be of some interest to my family or those who were close to the events which it describes from my own particular viewpoint.

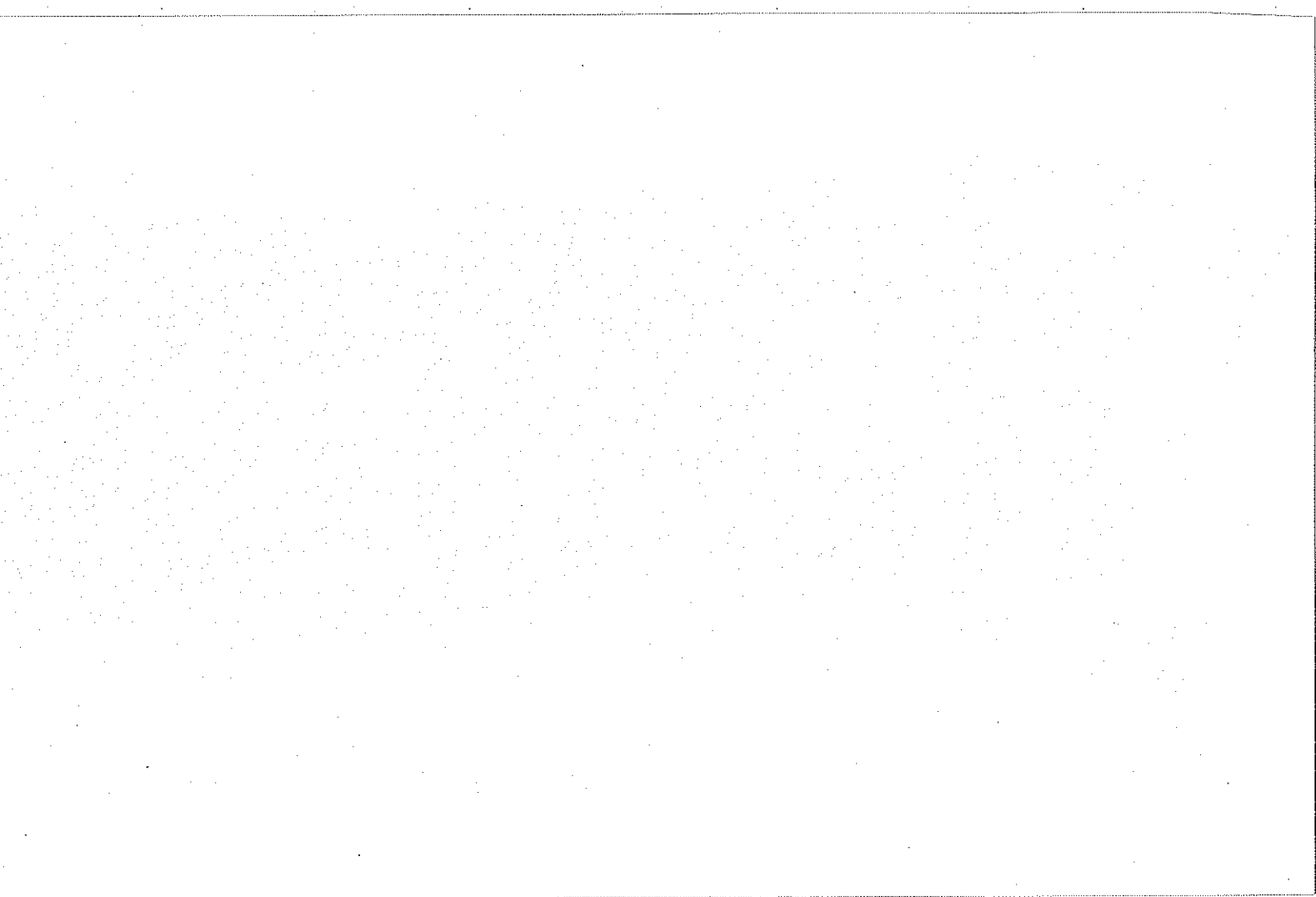
I cannot say that reading it through now that I always share the opinions sometimes outspokenly stated, or necessarily approve of these remarks, often in the broadest language, but rather than edit them for convention's sake they remain as they were—the first thing that came into my head in the mood of the moment.

J.A.S.Neave
Mill Green Park
Ingatestone 1994





*H.M. Queen Mary visits Her Regiment at Marlborough on April 25th., 1942
(Shaking hands with JASN, escorted by Tom Moulton Barrett and John Cordy Simpson)*



Mobilisation, marshalling and the events leading up to D-Day

The winter of 1942-3 found the Regiment stationed in Skipton, Yorkshire, and it was here that we heard for the first time anything at all definite about the much-discussed 'second front'. At this time we formed part of the 79th Armoured Division, which was newly formed and had come into being when all armoured divisions had reorganised with one armoured brigade, instead of two, and one infantry brigade. We in 27th Armoured Brigade had left 9th Armoured Division on reorganisation and for some time our fate hung in the balance.

As we had been sending large drafts out to the Middle East as reinforcements for the desert campaigns, we were well below strength. Ugly rumours circulated of the whole brigade being reduced to a training cadre. At that time the 4th/7th Royal Dragoon Guards and the East Riding Yeomanry with ourselves comprised the brigade which was commanded by Brigadier G.J. de W. Mullens.

At Skipton we began to be at the receiving end of intakes of new men, which gradually built up our strength, and by the end of 1942, we were engaged in the most intensive 'Individual Training' programme, which was tedious and exhausting in the extreme. However, we were told that the *'boat was sailing and that it was up to us to catch it'*. Few who took part in this high-pressure training will forget the life of charts and coloured chalks, of classrooms and blackboards, instructors and syllabi. Our noses were kept to the grindstone and it was a exhausting process. Each Squadron Leader was in charge of a school, and there wasn't a man in the regiment who was not involved to some extent. No one escaped the tolls of the chart: Officers' servants and even the P.R.I. clerk were put through the mill.

But no one will deny that all this paid a dividend and by the spring the number of our tradesmen was very creditable. Hardly a man could plead ignorance of tank maintenance,

gunnery or the intricacies of wireless operating.

At this time Lt. Col. R.A.Moulton Barrett was commanding with Major R.T.G.Harrap as his second-in-command and myself as his Adjutant. Squadron Leaders were Maj. D.B.Wormald, M.C., 'A', Maj. A.A.K.Rugge Price, 'B', Maj. Sir D.J.A.Cotter Bt., 'C' and Maj. J.R.Cordy Simpson, 'H.Q.' Capt. F.Sweeting was Q.M., Capt. A.W.P.Lyon-Clark was Technical Adjutant and Mr.A.L.Hind was R.S.M. There were no changes among the Squadron Leaders until well after 'D-Day' 1944 but command passed to Lt. Col. R.Harrap after the sickness of Lt. Col Moulton Barrett just before 'D-Day' when Major the Earl of Feversham joined from the Yorkshire Hussars as second in command. It was similar for all ranks, and after that rather ghastly winter in Skipton, we achieved a stability in personnel that was of the utmost benefit to us.

Off-duty hours in Skipton, for those who had any, were less attractive for the officers than for other ranks. This rather drab West Riding town had a number of textile factories employing many girls, which in itself was sufficient to give it blessing in the eyes of the men. The local W.V.S. ran an excellent canteen and there were cinemas and dance halls. It was immensely popular with the men. Many married local girls, and of those that brought their wives to stay there, many settled down. Even now Skipton has its 13th/18th colony which seems to grow rather than diminish.

The soldiers did not get much soccer and to compensate for lack of exercise and the hours spent in classroom and office, that most blighted form of 'sport', early-morning P.T., was started. For the officers, there was more traditional game shooting offered than could be accepted. Personally, I had two days grouse shooting out at Kettlewell, our host being a soldier recovering from wounds received in the desert, and two afternoons with General Tempest of Broughton Hall, just outside Skipton. This was the greatest fun, but many other opportunities had to be turned down on account of the high pressure at which we were living. In addition to shooting with General Tempest we were several times asked to dine there.

Here we found an almost pre-war atmosphere, with masses to eat and drink and all of the very best. The hospitality of this family was a refuge from the sordid surroundings and continual grind of life in Skipton.

At this time 79th Armoured Division was commanded by General Hobart (Hobo) late RTR, a tank expert, (old-ish), and of an uncertain temper.¹ He was however an undeniably good trainer of troops and had come to us from 11th Armoured Division which he had formed. He didn't hit it off with our Brigadier, or for that matter with us, and I had the feeling that he was determined not to. He used to nag us continually and I think he was only partly satisfied when he eventually got rid of Brigadier Guy Mullens and began to tell us how much we had improved as a result of his own successful methods.

Periodically we would be sent off from Skipton to do a spell of sheer purgatory on Midhope tank gunnery ranges. Situated close to Sheffield high up in the moors, this place was the end. Its hutted camp had partially disintegrated in the high winds that never ceased to blow, and the rain that invariably accompanied the wind seemed to penetrate everywhere. The cold was bitter, and the mud unbelievable.

From morning until last light we would stand about on this pestiferous range endeavouring to train our gunners. At this we were impeded by every sort of difficulty imaginable, not the least of which was a remarkable range officer, who held that it was hardly ever fit to fire, which made our daily hanging about more pointless than ever. However, here too was an oasis in a small pub in the village where they would

1 Major General Sir Percy Hobart was a controversial character with a brilliant and innovative mind whose awkward nature had resulted in his being sacked from command of the armoured division formed in Egypt in 1939. It was said that it was Churchill himself who discovered that he was unemployed in 1943 and put him in charge of experimental tank inventions including our DDs and others known as 'funnies' and formed the 79th Armoured Division for this purpose under his command.

cook us a meal that rationing had no idea of. It was immense—and after a day of frustration and bitter cold, we would quickly run down there and drink the whisky and eat the meal that fortified us enough to go to bed in these confounded Nissen huts.

However the most significant thing about our sojourn in Skipton was the announcement that we should cease to be part of an Armoured Division, become an independent Brigade, and train for a very special and secret role. The news was first broken to John Cordy Simpson who was acting C.O. at the time. We were to be armed with amphibious tanks of an entirely novel and top-secret design and in these vehicles were to lead the forthcoming assault against the continent!

It was made clear that we should have to go through an intensive and arduous training for an operation the amphibious part of which would last a very short time. In tactics we were to be retrained and forsake our armoured divisional training for 'T' tank work for the set piece attack. We were told it was going to be hard work but 'Hobo' was gracious enough to state that he thought we should make the grade.

He was not however at this stage prepared to withdraw his original remark concerning us 'that good grooms made bad chauffeurs' (an allusion to our regiment's cavalry past) but nevertheless he thought we had—under his able guidance—made great strides.

Speculation was rife, but the project was kept secret and at this stage it was only the senior officers who knew more than that—as 'Hobo' put it—'we were to be put on shore in an entirely novel manner'.

The facts of *DD* or *Duplex Drive* were not at that time revealed, and indeed had they been I doubt if they would have been believed.² A canvas screen raised vertically and sur-

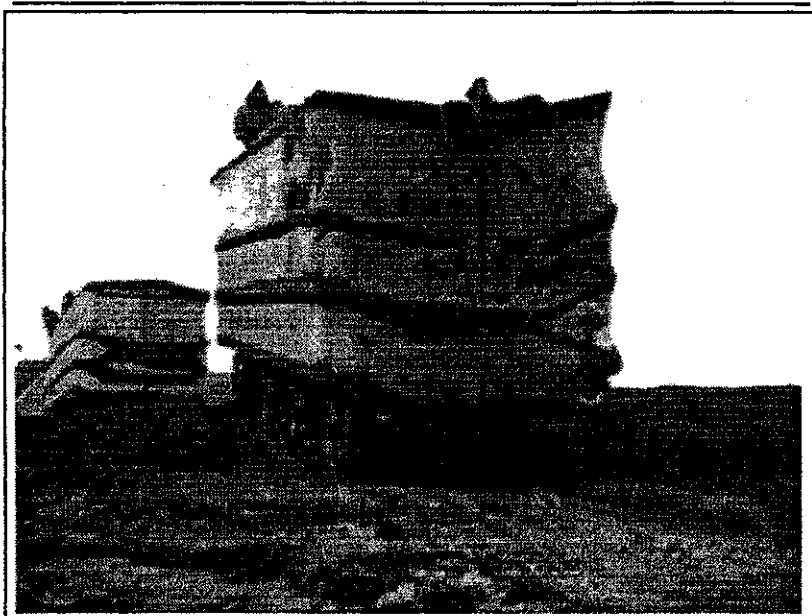
2 *The DD tank was the invention of an Austrian / Hungarian refugee from Hitler. Its amphibious role on D-Day was to launch from an LCT some 8000 yards off shore and to arrive simultaneously with the infantry and give them immediate support. Flotation was achieved by means of a canvas screen held up by compressed air and a propellor*

at the back provided propulsion, assisted by the tracks which revolved whilst swimming and lifted the tank onto the shore on arrival at the beach, at which moment the screen was dropped and the tank's guns could be brought into action. The driver of the tank was some eleven feet below sea level whilst swimming and the screen was supporting some thirty tons of tank. A more unseaworthy craft would be hard to imagine!

rounding the tank does not sound like a very convincing means of flotation.

Everyone had to sign the *Official Secrets Acts* and lectures and talks were given to the men at frequent intervals. They reacted extremely well and in the whole of our training we had nothing worth calling trouble on the security side.

In April 1943 we moved south to Wickham Market in Suffolk near Woodbridge. We moved without Squadron Leaders and the C.O., who had gone off to Barnard Castle on a special course of infantry and tank co-operation. We were badly hotted on arrival by Brigade H.Q., who took Glevering Hall from us to live in themselves and pushed us out into



DD Tanks with buoyancy screens inflated

Nissen huts and tents in the park. Our quarters were far from good, as the place had been made for one regiment—and now the equivalent of nearly two was in it. This set-up was bound to be unsatisfactory as Brigade H.Q. could look out and see all that we were doing: a situation which no one will willingly endure. We didn't mind the tents at this time of year, but by December when we left, they were damp and cold and we cursed them every time we went to bed.³

At this time Brigadier G.E. Prior Palmer ('P.P.') took over command of the Brigade. He came straight from Sandhurst and it wasn't long before we felt the influence of his reputation.

He proved more than a match for 'Hobo', which was a pleasant change, and the old man had appeared at Saxmundham not ten miles away having now reorganised his rather bogus armoured division on different lines. Now it was to co-ordinate, train, and experiment with all specialised forms of armour, and as such—without our blessing—was charged with our D.D. training. The first stage of this was to be done at Fritton, near Yarmouth.

Brigadier Prior-Palmer's first act was to inspect the regiment and this was all rather unfortunate. We had moved without the senior officers, and squadrons were under command of junior captains and subalterns. We were crammed into unsuitable quarters and had been there just a week.

P.P. was hot from Sandhurst. Almost everything went wrong. The inspection took that most dangerous form '*Don't lay anything on specially, I just want to walk round.*' As is customary on these occasions, a detailed programme was laid on, but P.P. chose to ignore this. It all blew up in the end with a shouting match with the Quartermaster and was followed

3 *Thanks to the initiative of Mason, who was my servant, my winter under canvas was not so bad as this description might indicate. We slept in bell tents which were pitched inside small marquees and a paraffin Valor stove more or less permanently burning in the outer marquee kept the bell tent remarkably warm and dry even in cold weather.*

by a 20 minute prowl between P.P. and the C.O., and then he sent for me. I was told that as Adjutant it was largely my fault that the visit was a flop; while this was probably true I was so exhausted after his sharp two hours hack canter round the camp, that I didn't argue and promised to try and do better.

The blitz that followed was I suppose inevitable, however we learned a lot as a result of that morning.

Whenever the Brigadier left his H.Q. he had to pass our main guard and thanks to an ally in Major Jimmy Delius at Brigade H.Q., and a system of telephones, we were able to ensure that the guard were always at the 'Present Arms' by the time he passed them. This went a long way to correct his somewhat unlucky first impressions.

In May we received our first Sherman tanks and came onto a new establishment. This increased our strength and a large draft arrived from the 148 Regiment R.A.C. The Sherman was quite a new proposition for us. Hitherto we had been equipped with Covenanters of various marks and these being English tanks suffered from all those bad qualities that made them the subject of so much controversial comment, and we suffered accordingly. The Shermans were a big improvement, they were American, much bigger and mounted a larger and better gun (75mm), they had more armour, a 5-man crew, but above all they were *reliable*. At once we started conversion courses, and by June were ready for collective training.

The training areas were excellent, and at Orfordness there was a large-scale battle practice range as well. Training followed conventional lines, Squadron training following Troop training till we were ready for Exercise 'Thet'—which was due to be staged at the end of July. This was a mammoth project, and the first time the Regiment had been out complete with all echelons since we were reorganised with new tanks on our new establishment. It was to be on a Brigade level and last about a week.

The scheme opened with a 'review' on Hollesley Heath just outside Woodbridge, the entire Brigade was drawn up in

open order with tanks in front, D vehicles behind and on the flanks the various services including the Field Ambulance, the R.E.M.E. workshops and the R.A.S.C. company. We were then subjected to the somewhat unorthodox procedure of 'drill under the Brigade Commander'. This involved traversing tank turrets, lowering and elevating guns and generally being made to perform a number of extraordinary gyrations by wireless control. After this pantomime we moved off to the Newmarket area some 50 miles away for the exercise proper. For practically the whole seven days we were kept hard at it and as was customary in those days the exercise finished with a set-piece attack on Frog Hill, a well-known feature in the Thetford training area. When we got home most of us were pretty exhausted but we had got a lot out of the scheme and now had the greatest confidence in our new tanks which had behaved admirably.

On the 20th August, we were off to Linney Head for our annual fortnight's firing practice in South Wales.⁴ We had good weather and got an immense amount of training done but we were made to work rather harder than was pleasant! We did some novel training with the secret searchlight tanks or *CDLs*. This remarkable invention enabled tanks to operate at night, and although never used operationally in the late war, had great possibilities. In preparation for our D-Day role we did an amusing firing practice on the beach, each squadron in turn lining the high water line and pumping its entire load of ammunition into the cliffs in the most spectacular

⁴ *Linney Head was a remarkable and very beautiful place on the extreme south west coast of Pembrokeshire. We were the first regiment to use it as a gunnery range and as the gunnery officer I was sent down as an advance party to get the shooting organised. It was wild and unspoiled country on open farm land high above the rocky coast line. We could drive our tanks where we liked and shoot where we chose, within reason! The camp was at Castle Martin and we were billeted in Stackpole House, owned by Lord Cawdor. A favourite off duty expedition was to the guillemot rock which was home to thousands of these birds which were fascinating to watch. I always enjoyed our annual visits to Linney Head.*

manner. It gave us a pleasant surprise in demonstrating fire power, and was encouraging for D-Day.

It was decided that the return from Linney Head should be organised and controlled entirely by the WOs and NCOs and that no officer would be allowed to take part at all! This project suited us very nicely and having appointed the RSM as C.O. and the QMSM as Adjutant, the officers took themselves to London for 48 hours leave lightly given a veneer of respectability in a scheme known as *Ex Enigma*. This meant one morning at the Department of Tank Design at Egham. The move, meanwhile, was carried out without a hitch under the RSM's direction.

Before returning to the Regiment, I went to stay with the 24th Lancers in Bridlington to discuss the problems of mobilisation which they in 11th Armoured Division had just completed. Col. Mike Aird was commanding the 24th at this time and later we got to know him well as Second-in-Command of our Brigade.

At Wickham Market there was little enough for the men to do in their leisure moments, they would go to Woodbridge and sometimes to Ipswich, but neither of these places could really offer what they liked in the way of entertainment. However, dances and a few shows were organised in the village, and we were kept pretty busy.

The officers were able to get some good shooting on the training area at Orfordness which was well stocked with most varieties of game. The area, being completely evacuated of civilians was very overgrown, but it was the greatest fun to go out 'pottering' and we had one or two successful days with about 12 guns. It was quite well run by Division, and made a pleasant break from our Nissen-hutted Officers' mess.

Otherwise the only place we really found to go to was the Felix Hotel at Felixstowe. In spite of the war conditions it was really quite good, and of course a change from camp life. Fritton, where we went on 1st Nov. 1943 to learn the first and only fresh-water stage of DD, was a large inland lake, originally a duck decoy, and surrounded by woods. It was, how-

ever, overlooked on the one hand by private houses, and in view of the secret activities of the place, the unfortunate owners were subjected to considerable curtailment of their liberty. But since they could see all that was going on, perhaps that was just as well.

The school was run by a Canadian staff under 79th Armoured Division. We lived in Yarmouth and came in the 10 miles each day for training. The actual training involved meticulous and detailed instruction in preparation, handling and navigation, both by day and night. The keynote of it all was safety as these vehicles were incredibly unsafe, and neglect or omissions in carrying out the simple drills might sink the ship with every possibility of loss of life. Nautical jargon soon sprang up in conversation, and such as expressions as 'port your helm' came naturally to us. At this stage we were still using Valentine tanks which were the original experimental models, and had many imperfections.

The whole Regiment was involved in this training and it was done in two halves. A and B Squadrons first for a fortnight followed by C and RHQ. On the whole, the training went well, there were no fatal accidents and nothing occurred at this stage to upset our confidence. One incident however will not be forgotten by Lt. Eric Smith and Brigadier Prior Palmer during a night exercise on the lake. The very important point of being full of fuel at all times had been stressed clearly and often to us.

Hence it was somewhat unlucky the Brigadier should choose Eric's tank from which to view the night scheme, since a series of oversights resulted in his tank coming to a gentle standstill in the middle of the lake. The atmosphere was a bit unnerving at the best of times, for in the blackout with nothing but a tiny pilot light at the rear of the tank ahead to guide one, and a craft whose response to the helm was rather unpredictable, the chances of collision and the sinking of both craft were fairly high.

Thus the scene on the wretched Eric Smith's tank can be imagined. When eventually Brigadier Prior Palmer was taken

off in the rescue launch, Eric's future looked poor and the incident became a '*cause celebre*'. It was never forgotten, and the expression '*to be up Smith's creek*' was taken into normal usage.

This side of Fritton training was only a part, however, for in addition we were all required to qualify in the use of the Davis Submarine Escape Apparatus (or shortly *DSEA!*). We were lucky, for by the time we arrived the proper water tanks were made and heated water was available, and this—since the year was well advanced—was just as well. In any case, it was an alarming piece of apparatus, so few were relishing the thought of this training. A sawn-off tank complete with turret and driver's compartment was placed at the bottom of a 30 foot well, and into it were put a full crew dressed in overalls and with *DSEA* adjusted at the 'ready'! The hatches were shut down and at a given signal, water at the rate of 3000 gallons a minute was poured in on top of the crew in the tank till the well was full. The apparatus had to be fitted, the hatches opened, and then using all their gadgets correctly the crew had to 'surface' at the top of the well. Once the art of dealing with the thing was mastered, this operation was not as alarming as might be imagined, and some people even found it quite enjoyable.

On our return to Wickham Market we started on November 14th to take part in a series of extremely dull, and as it turned out, unrealistic exercises against a dummy 'west wall', known as *Exercise Hedgehog*.

It was a 'set-piece' show in the most literal sense and all arms took part. The infantry came from 185 Brigade of 3 Division with whom we were to become well acquainted later on. Every sort and kind of specialised armour was represented, Armoured Vehicles Royal Engineers (AVRE), Flails (anti-mine device), Crocodiles (flame throwers) and all manner of gadgets and devices. Each day we would solemnly proceed according to a minutely worked out timetable across an open piece of ground, onto a complete replica of the German channel coast defences. We learned little or nothing from

this rather lullie practice.

Before setting off for Gosport to do 'Sea' DD we did one more tactical exercise known as 'Alde', on the 12th December. Despite the unkind time of year it went well, and although small in scope was profitable. I remember all the 'staff employed' and echelon personnel turning out as enemy under the direction of John Cordy Simpson and they got a special mention from Errol Prior Palmer at the end of their spirited performance.

We were due to have Xmas at Gosport and all plans were made for the tank crews to go there for a fortnight whilst the remainder of the Regiment left for Hoddon Castle in Dumfriesshire, where we were to stage for about a month before going on to Inverness. On leaving Wickham Market we ceased to be part of 79th Armoured Division, we became instead an independent Armoured Brigade (having our own sign, the Seahorse), and were to join 3rd British Infantry Division on arrival at Inverness. With them we would do our combined training for the assault, before landing under their command on D-Day whenever that was to be.

However, just as we were about to set off for Gosport a modification to the plan was made, as a result of General Monty's arrival.⁵ He decided that instead of all three squadrons being amphibious, now only two were to be required, and the third with RHQ was to land after them and be trained in 6ft wading from LCTs. Thus 12 hours before the move took place, and after the Colonel and I had already set off for London en route for Gosport and all the orders had been published, a signal was received telling us to send only two squadrons down to Gosport.

Naturally there was a certain amount of chaos as extra trains had to be ordered and baggage to be changed around, all of which I was heartily thankful to miss, and enjoyed my 48 hours in London. However all went well, and the variously reorganised parties eventually reached their destinations and

5 *General Montgomery, later Viscount Montgomery of Alamein, was commander in chief of 21 Army Group.*

the only losses as far as I know concerned my own baggage; which toured England, before eventually arriving down at Gosport.

The training at Gosport was hard work and meant little or no break for Christmas, and working all hours of the day and night to catch the tides. Twice in each 24 hour period we would go out in LCTs which would collect us from Stokes Bay taking the tanks across the Solent and launching them onto Osborne Bay on the Isle of Wight. This form of DD was quite a different cup of tea, and although we were lucky with the weather it soon became obvious that the tides, wind and currents were very important factors in the way that the tanks handled.

Of course at this time the whole business was novel and to some extent experimental and our exercises were watched by many of those both Naval and Military, British and American who were concerned in the planning of the assault. I can remember one bleak morning at dawn in a launch with General (US) Omar Bradley and Admiral Vian when neither had had any breakfast and the exercise was not going too well. General Hobart was there and the air was pretty tense and filled with acrimonious comment. But from our point of view the training was excellent, and although we were still tied down by the dogmatic teaching of the school, we were able to benefit from it and develop our own ideas on arrival in Scotland at Fort George and the Moray Firth.

At Hoddum where we all foregathered on about the 1st of January 1943 we were ordered to mobilise. Hoddum Castle is an enormous place built on strictly romantic lines and a desperate place to live in. It was impossible to keep warm, there was never any hot water and the cooking arrangements were archaic. Naturally it was the Officers' Mess! The men meanwhile being well housed in a good hutted camp in the grounds. Since we were only there for three weeks, we did not have to put up with much! At this stage, mobilisation meant little or nothing but submitting the returns in a different way and indenting for an enormous number of new vehicles. We

soon settled in to Fort George, which although vastly overcrowded was an excellent barracks and the peacetime depot of the Seaforth Highlanders. It was 'super heated' which was a valuable asset in view of the time of year and its geographical position. The tank park, however, was a nightmare; and situated on the north-east of the Fort on the hards, it caught the full blast of every wind straight from the Arctic Circle.

The set-up for organising the combined training and rehearsals was on a bigish scale. The 3rd Div. under General Tom Rennie had all its troops under command in the Inverness area, and in addition to its three infantry brigades, it had ourselves, innumerable sappers, additional gunners, commandos and specialist units all involved in some particular aspect of the assault. The Navy, for their part had a force that was much the same in both size and diversity, and it was known as 'Force S'. They were distributed all round the Moray Firth, at Inverness itself, Fort Rose opposite to Fort George, and at Invergordon. The two headquarters lived side by side in Cameron Barracks, Inverness, and between them they turned out a veritable mountain of paper. They prepared and executed between them a series of combined exercises-cum-rehearsals which were in their way masterpieces, and certainly gave us a very fair idea of what we were in for.

'Smash', 'Grab', 'Crown', 'Anchor' and 'Leapyear' were all more or less full-scale shows, all on much the same lines and successively more intense and more complete.

As can well be imagined, Fort George and the Moray Firth are not best suited geographically for naval and military exercises in February, especially as they involved 48 hours on virtually open landing craft followed by another 48 hours on open and windswept moorland. However by dint of wearing every garment possible, and keeping a full flask, we managed to survive; and in any case it was perhaps worse in imagination than it was in reality.

The organisation and control of these exercises was really remarkable. Considering the vast numbers of men,

vehicles and craft, the diversity of equipment, and the strangeness and novelty of the training, their success was surprising. This was all the more so because at the time it was going on, no one could be said really to know his job in the many ways he was required to.

We would embark from the hards of Fort George, usually at night on a rising tide, and steam out to sea in a big sweep, and then the following dawn, if we were lucky and not kept on board for longer, make an assault landing on Burghead Bay which is just east of the Findhorn River and Culbin Sands. Once ashore we would move almost exactly as we should have to on D-Day itself, and then motor home to Fort George after the exercise. It all sounds so simple now but in fact it was far from being so! The chaos on the beach itself was on each occasion quite unbelievable, but this strangely enough was an asset for on the day itself chaos reigned and our experience had taught us that it was the normal thing. We learned all that we had to about waterproofing vehicles, about cooking compositions and about the bedlam of the wireless set-up, we learned the most practical clothes to wear and what 'comforts' came in really useful. We got to know the infantry with whom we would be fighting and the Navy who would take us in. Also we got an insight into the marshalling and loading problems, and the briefing and planning that would be necessary when we got south.

After each exercise a vast conference would be held in Inverness attended by all the officers and run jointly by the Army and the Navy. These were notable for the complete disregard of personal feelings that the Navy seemed to hold for their subordinates, who would be slayed in the most outrageous manner in front of the assembled company of about 1500. The Navy certainly knew how to put these conferences over and showed up the vagueness of the Army to a remarkable degree.

One example is noteworthy to demonstrate the pettifogging attitude of the Army. A Brigadier on the staff was detailed to watch the hygiene discipline on one of the exercises,

and when it came to his turn to make his comments he rose with a long face. He said he was horrified at the apparent utter disregard of the most explicitly given orders on the subject. When he went inland, he said, with a party of high-ranking spectators including the Corps Commander and the Army Chief of Staff, what should he see as he topped the first sand dune, not thirty yards away, but a soldier, obviously from some ill-disciplined unit, attending to the needs of nature. At that moment the C.O. of the 1st Norfolks who was sitting next to me whispered "That was me and I had been longing for it since 5 o'clock in the morning!"

However the Naval staff was more impressive and we got to know a number of them well. We had two naval liaison officers attached to us, Lindsay Thompson and Russell Brown, and two more opposite characters would be hard to find.

Neither lasted long however, due to the odd method of placing staff officers that the Navy employed. They would sack an officer from his first job on the slightest pretext, but when next you met him the chances were that he had been promoted, and was now holding a more senior position in some other branch! The actual craft skippers and crews were we found at this time far from efficient, and indeed I think we put to sea at very considerable risk on each occasion, most of them had by this time only about six weeks' service, and since this was the sum total of their seafaring experience, their skill can be estimated. But in fairness, we were nearly as ignorant of our peculiar job and by degrees the show improved and gradually everyone settled down and fitted in.

General Montgomery came to see us on the February 5th on his well-known tour, a particularly cold day, and he kept us waiting for about two hours. The parade which included all troops in Fort George and neighbourhood, numbering about 3000, was laid on with special care. Hence the order to break ranks as soon as he arrived and face inwards to gaze on the familiar face, came as rather a cold douche. We as senior regiment in the fort had been given the job of making all the

arrangements and laying on the parade. This was a monumentally impossible job since it appeared to be beyond the powers of the Brigade and Divisional staffs to say who was supposed to be on our parade and those who were coming seemed quite unable to say how many of them there would be. Thus the problem of fitting them into ranks in the prescribed hollow square was a veritable nightmare, it nearly drove the RSM demented and we were all heartily thankful when the visit was over.⁶

At Fort George there was an immense amount of work to do for apart from the training which was more than enough on its own. Mobilisation was still continuing with new equipment and vehicles steadily rolling in. Furthermore, the actual assault planning had now begun.

Brigadier Erroll held an opening planning conference at his HQ at Moy Hall, miles away in the moors south of Inverness. We eventually got there after a dreadful journey over ice-bound roads and through snow drifts. This was the first really detailed conference on a regimental level, and we spent an interesting and enlightening day. At this time, the Brigade consisted of ourselves, the East Riding Yeomanry and the Staffordshire Yeomanry, who had returned from the Middle East and taken the place of the 4th/7th Dragoon Guards. This was in accordance with Monty's plan of leavening the battle-experienced (weary) troops with the 'novices'. All this meant extra work; and on many evenings, all Regimental departments and squadron offices were in full blast after midnight.

6 *This is a much edited account which fails to get across the frustration caused by Monty's behaviour! No one doubted the brilliance of Monty's generalship and he knew that he could rely on the unquestioning loyalty of the officers. He was concerned to be popular with the men and had no compunction in debunking the officers in front of them by implying that his visit was quite informal and that to have the men standing in serried ranks for hours while knowing that he was late, was not what he had intended. We knew perfectly well, however, that had we arranged anything less formal, coals of fire would have brought down on our heads!*

The pace was such that there was little time for pastimes or pleasures.

However the Wrens would turn up in force, from Inverness, for dances in the Regimental canteen and Sergeants' mess and also to a very successful dance that the officers threw in Nairn. Otherwise there was little that we did of interest with our spare time (such as it was), and in any case the normal Scottish pastimes were somewhat out of season.

When we left Fort George on the 16th April 1944 and moved down to the south of England, it was for the preparatory concentration on the preliminaries to the invasion itself.

I say the 'south of England' advisedly for the Regiment was split to start with in three different places, and as the time drew nigh and marshalling began, we were even further dissipated. 'A' and 'B' squadrons, (the two DD ones), were down at Gosport, and they were still without their new Sherman DDs the production of which seemed abysmally slow.

'C' Squadron and RMQ were put into Petworth Park in Sussex, and the various Echelons were sent off to Aldershot. From an administrative point of view for us it was very difficult, but obviously on a higher level, the problem was an extremely complex one.

The Colonel was on leave when we moved, and when he returned to Petworth after we had settled-in, it was only to say 'goodbye'. He had not been well for some time, and while he was on leave, his doctor had told him he would have to have treatment and might take a long time to recover. He was therefore forced to hand over command to Dick Harrap, just when he was about to see the Regiment put into practice the training he had so assiduously given us in the previous three years.⁷

7 *The loss of Tom Moulton Barrett at this crucial stage of our preparation was a cruel blow. Tom had suffered from a form of amoebic dysentery while serving in the far east before the war. During one of the Fort George rehearsals at sea a naval rating had been caught in the winch which lowered the LCT's door, and this had killed him. Tom had gone to his rescue and had severely strained himself in his unsuccessful efforts, and this strain brought on a recurrence of his dysentery.*

It wasn't till the fighting in Normandy had been going on for some time that what we all owed to Tom Moulton Barrett was generally recognised. It is, however, detracting from no one to say that the high reputation that we gained in the early fighting was the direct result of his training and influence while he was C.O.

At Gosport 'A' and 'B' Squadrons were, amongst innumerable other things, being given a conversion course onto Shermans; and at this, the eleventh hour, they were still without the tanks that they would be taking over the Channel.

At Petworth the activity was equally intense with waterproofing to be tackled and endless loads of fresh equipment to be dealt with, also there was seemingly endless paperwork and landing and loading tables to be worked out. At Aldershot however, life seems to have been reasonably leisurely, for not being concerned in the actual D-Day venture itself no one seemed to nag them unduly. In fact for all concerned and particularly those at Petworth and Gosport, it was a period of the most intense activity.

Planning notes and directives, Top Secret orders for which special precautions had to be taken, odd stores, and officers and men from the most obscure units, kept coming in at all hours.

We had one more final exercise called 'Fabius', and from our point of view it was admirable for ironing out marshalling and loading problems. True to the traditional dress rehearsal it went about as badly as it possibly could have done. 'A' and 'B' Squadrons had no marshalling problems since they were already on the hards at Gosport and merely had to load themselves onto the craft there. RHQ and 'C' Squadron on the other hand had to motor down to Portsmouth and there were subjected to the most infuriating procedure. We were chivvied from dreary tented camp to dreary tented camp outside Portsmouth without apparent rhyme or reason, split into tiny groups without cohesion or means of communication and subjected to absurdly petty restrictions by those who ran the camps.

One couldn't, however, help feeling sympathetic towards these unfortunates, who were ordinary line troops detailed for this particularly difficult and exacting job, for they must have felt very much out of things. The situation was so bad that it became impossible to transmit vital orders round the Regiment, thus when we were at sea and half-way through the exercise it still wasn't known how many tanks had started; and as it turned out, hardly any of the 'C' Squadron had got on board their craft at all!!

By a stroke of great fortune I knew the Brigadier in whose charge our series of camps was. He readily agreed to do what he could to make things easier for us before we had to do it all again for the real thing. Secondly who should turn up but General Charles Miller—who was in charge of all the camps, and whose intervention on our behalf made all the difference in the world when the day came.⁸

That the marshalling staff had an immensely hard task wasn't hard to see, but inevitably they had interpreted the instructions to the letter and the result was chaos. For security reasons they had to be extra careful, but we were treated like small children, even to the extent of having loudspeakers blaring our every move in advance for us. This coupled with uneatable food and unnecessary discomfort in the lack of ordinary human needs would have been a very poor send-off for D-Day, but between Fabius and the day itself, much was done and next time we found a vast improvement.

The exercise itself involved a cruise in the Channel under an immense air umbrella designed, unsuccessfully, to tempt the GAF into the sky. This was followed by a landing just off Littlehampton and it was finished off with antics on the South Downs.

'Antics' is about what they were, for Brigadier Erroll

8 *Charles Miller, (who was my uncle), had commanded the regiment before the war and during their conversion from cavalry to armour. He had taken the last remaining cavalry division out to Palestine in 1939. When this was disbanded he remained in the ME and was Major General Administration to the 8th Army.*

kept us moving at the rate of knots for 48 hours in the pouring rain before we returned to Petworth. 'A' and 'B' Squadrons were not allowed to compete in the final stages and returned straight away to Gosport, for fear that their DD tanks should be seen and the secret leak out. Monty and many American and other Generals were watching, and I can only hope that they were impressed.

We were by now quite hardened to the ensuing muddle, but to them the chaos must have been complete. For Sim Feversham, however, the newly appointed second-in-command, it must have been completely bewildering for the first few hours ashore!

When we got back from Fabius we had just under a month in which to complete everything. There was still a great deal to be done and after Fabius the vehicles had to be re-waterproofed and the usual after-exercise repairs to be done. The operation orders (which promised to be a bumper issue) had to be written, and the marshalling and movement orders to be published. Also, we were still short of vehicles. At Gosport 'A' and 'B' Squadrons were still incomplete, and they would have remained so but for the timely intervention of the War Office direct.

However the weather was lovely, and slowly but surely daylight began to appear; the X room at Brigade was thrown open, and the Operation Order began to take shape, movement control arrived and we began to see how we should eventually be put on board. Final batches of vehicles and stores came in, and plans for briefing and subsequently sealing, to prevent security breaches, slowly materialised.

Certain incidents in this month stand out in contrast to a time otherwise spent almost entirely in a dreary Nissen-hutted Orderly Room. We were inspected by the King in Petworth Park when he drove down the Brigade, drawn up in line with representative vehicles, in a half-track which we specially tarted up for him. General Ike Eisenhower also came to wish us luck, and made a short but quite excellent speech. The Regimental band arrived, presumably to imbue

us with military fervour, and were nearly sealed into the camp with us after briefing and narrowly missing a lucrative BBC engagement. We all went up to London for Billy Wormald's wedding and enjoyed ourselves a lot. By and large, however, it was a hardish month and we groped for light and guidance through avalanches of paper from above concerning every aspect of the forthcoming venture from beach obstacles to correct behaviour on the continent.

On the 1st June we got our orders to move off to the marshalling area and in perfect weather rumbled down to Portsmouth and moved into our appointed camp, where we found a much more amenable atmosphere and reasonable attitude than the last time.

I very clearly remember this journey on minor roads through the heavily wooded Sussex countryside in early June. I suppose it was only natural in view of what was ahead of us to wonder whether one would ever see England again, and to make the most of it under such rare and quite beautiful conditions. Portsmouth was an incredible sight. Along all roads to it and every little suburban street were tanks and assault vehicles, bull-dozers and infantry carriers and vehicles of every sort. Every few yards there was a camp and the place was a display of military signs, while loud-speakers blared continuously.

After being in the marshalling camps for two days, we moved down to the hards, to load onto the LCTs. Each craft load was called forward by its serial number, and after an early start we were on board by about 10 o'clock. All this time we had been surprised and pleasantly so, that the GAF had paid Portsmouth so little attention. It is true that they did come over the place each night in ones and twos and drop an occasional bomb, but the damage was negligible in spite of a bomb on movement control HQ.

'A' and 'B' Squadrons meanwhile were still living in their own billets, but they were still feverishly working to get their tanks ready: and right up to the moment of loading onto their craft they were still hard at it. The Signal Officer

Stuart Watson was also involved in the hectic last-minute rush in organising the 101 sets and nets that were required for the assault. The communications were immensely complicated and for security reasons all netting had to be done by wavemeter. This meant a personal visit, since there was only one to each set and these were distributed between Tilbury, London and Aldershot, Portsmouth and Gosport, and indeed some of the sets were already at sea. The Technical Adjutant, Tony Lyon Clark, was also dashing at increasing speed between Ordnance depots and manufacturers in frenzied attempts to collect the spares and parts that we should otherwise have had to go without.

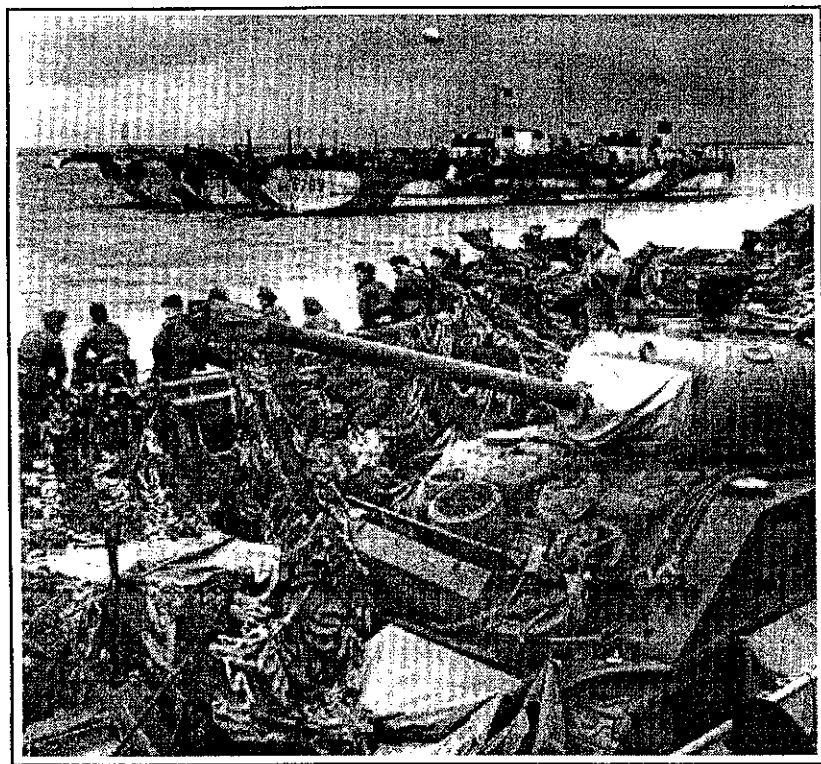
At last we were all on board and then there was nothing that we could do till the order to 'Go' was given. This would be the signal to undo the top-secret packages containing operation orders and maps and then we should really be able to see where we were going and what it was all about.

Briefing—which had been done with bogus maps and bogus names—did no more than give details and information as to the lie of the land. Only those on the 'X' list knew our real destination.

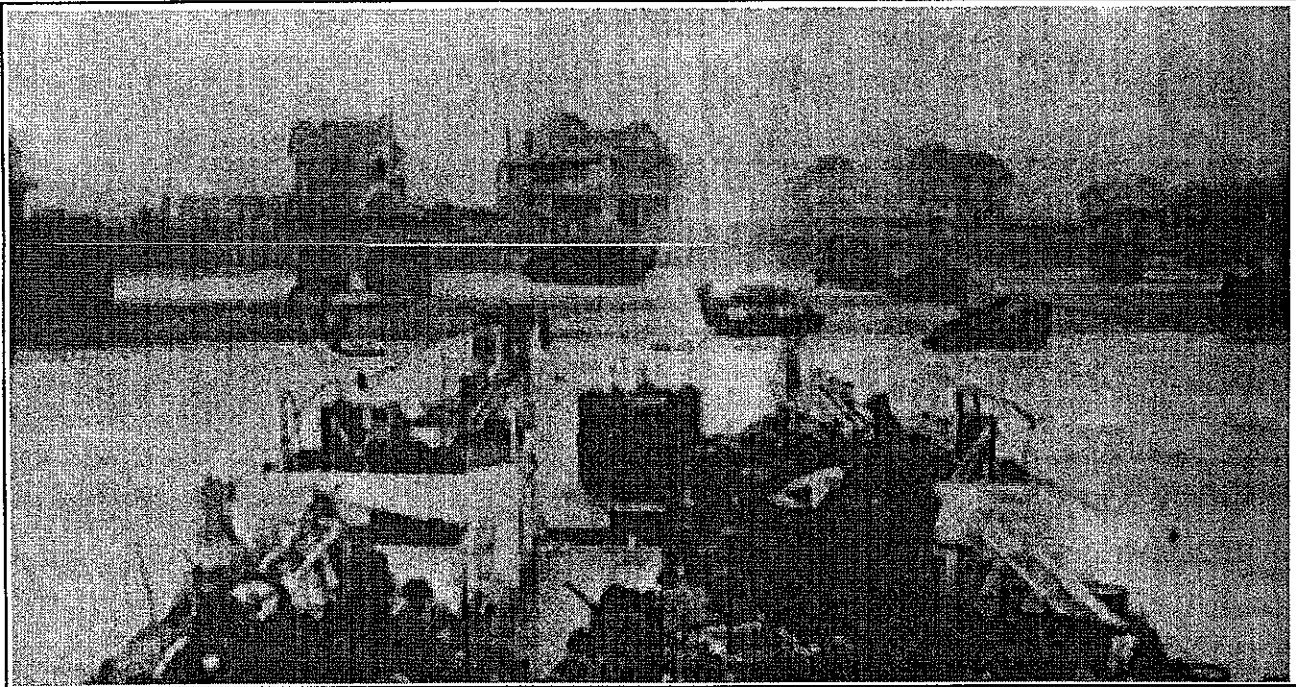
No sooner did we get on board than a sharpish breeze got up and it looked as if the weather was breaking up. It was shortly afterwards, on the 4th June, that we got the news of a 24 hour postponement. This meant a longer wait in our uncomfortable LCTs, and was not welcomed by many. There were 8 tanks and several carriers, 8 jeeps and numerous small carts on board and with 10 officers and men there was hardly horizontal space to go round. We passed the time in mild games of cards, sleeping and eating, but we were so crowded that there was really hardly room to move.

The weather did not appear to get any better, but on the morning of the 5th the Admiral's HQ ship gave the signal that we were off, adding 'Good luck and press on'. By now Portsmouth was filled to overflowing with landing craft and small ships of every kind, as they acknowledged the signal it was a brave sight, and really rather a lovely scene.

Soon A & B Squadrons sailed out through the harbour boom. We waved them luck as they passed us and shortly followed them out ourselves.

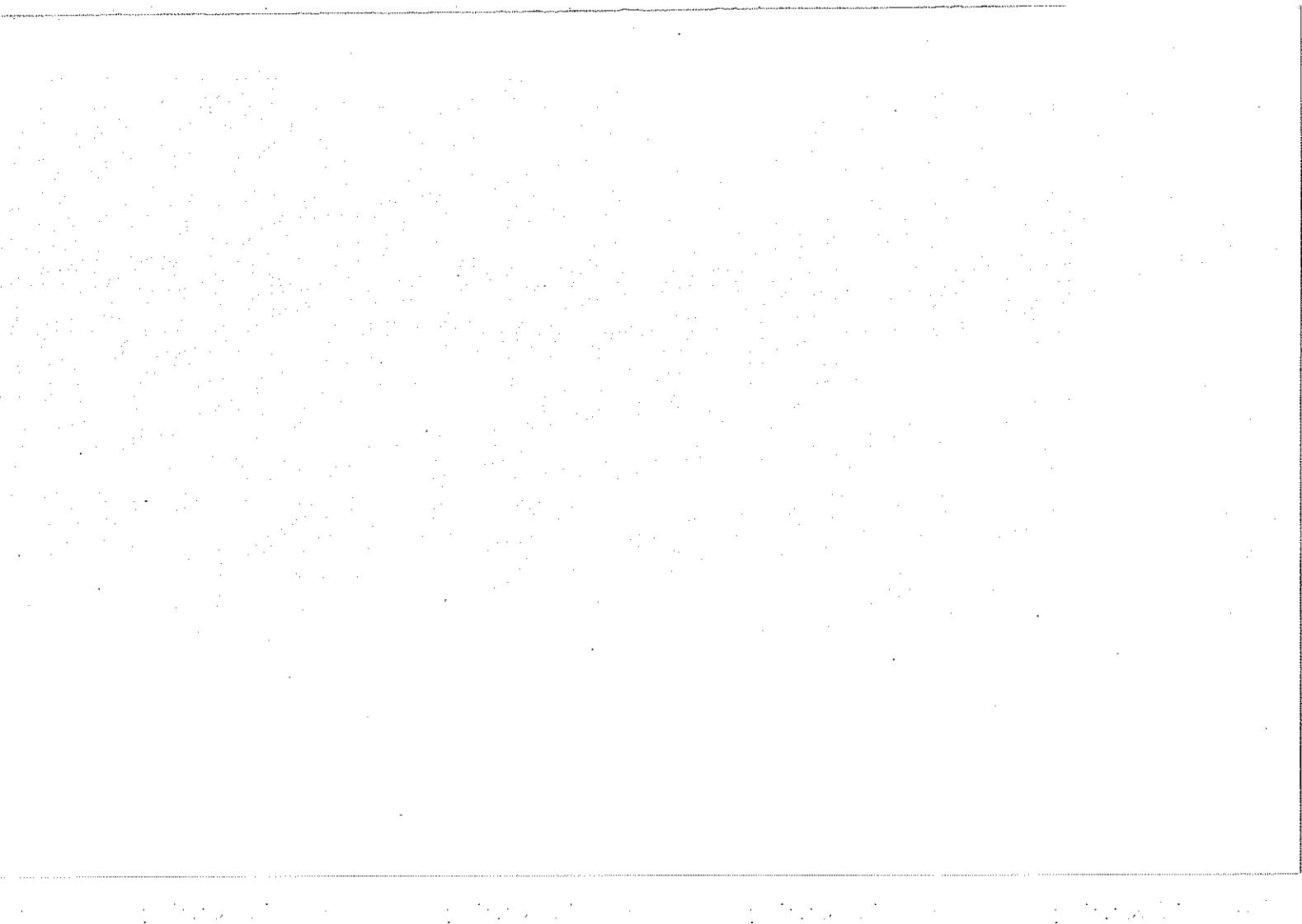


Tanks of the Regiment and LCTs in Southampton Water on June 5th 1944 setting sail for Normandy



The landing on Queen Beach, June 6th., 1944

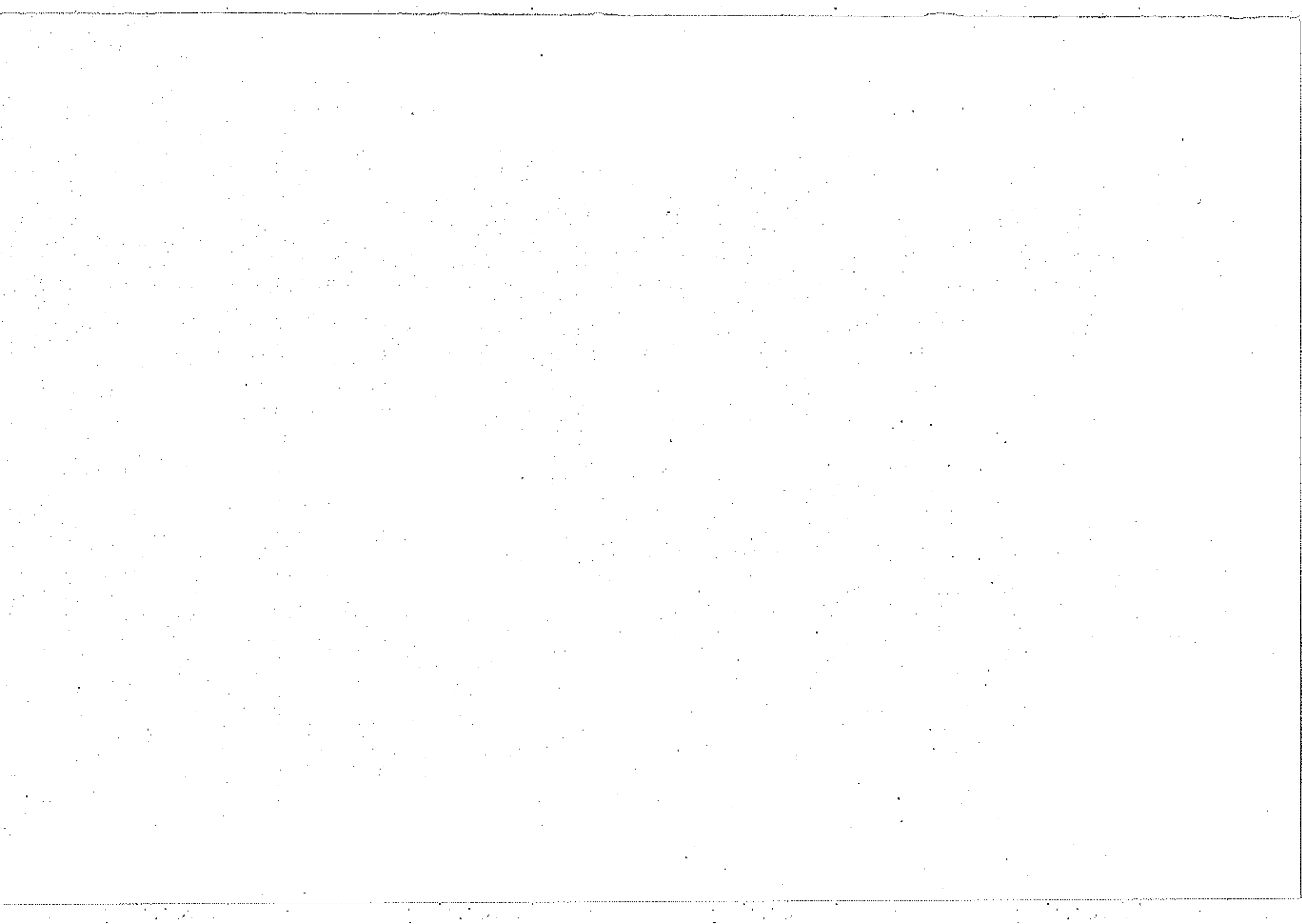
D-Day!



D-DAY



A DD Tank moves inland



D-DAY

The whole focus of our lives had centred on D-Day for almost a year, it had dominated all our military activities and indeed its influence was felt in our private affairs as well. This intense preoccupation with D-Day was due to our role which was to be an entirely novel one and at the same time both exciting and rather alarming. Amphibious tanks, which we were to man, were to form the leading assault wave of the invasion against a fortified and defended enemy coastline. This involved a long training with the D.D. tanks, as they were called, which left us in little doubt as to the part we had to play. The whole project was 'TOP SECRET' and security was the watchword of the time.

It is hardly surprising therefore that we should all have our own ideas on what D-Day itself would be like. Few had been in action against the enemy before and none had taken part in an invasion, and despite intensive training and many rehearsals, speculation on what would happen proved a lively stimulant to the imagination. D-Day was our horizon and rightly or wrongly we didn't look much beyond it. All this makes it very hard to give an objective and unadorned account and, looking back, it isn't easy to distinguish the wood for the trees; there was chaos but we expected that and had many times seen just the sort of thing that happened on rehearsals, and there were impressions and these are far more lasting and make the writer's task still harder.

Quite shortly the set-up for the attack was as follows. The Regiment was to support the assault Brigade of the 3rd British Infantry Division who were allotted the extreme or eastern flank of the invasion coast between Lion sur Mer and Ouistreham on the western bank of the River Orne. Their ultimate objective was the high ground south of Caen about 15 miles inland. This Brigade was the 8th and its battalions were each to be supported by one of our Squadrons, the 1st South Lancs by 'A' Squadron, the 2nd East Yorks by 'B' Squadron, and the 1st Suffolks by 'C' Squadron. The attack was to be made with two battalions up, the South Lancs right

and East Forks left, each with their Squadron of D.D. tanks. In fact, these two Squadrons were the only ones to be amphibious, as the third battalion, the Suffolks, with 'C' Squadron were landed forty minutes later with RHQ, and these tanks were specially waterproofed for seven-foot wading.

Briefly, it was planned that this should be the sequence of events for the actual assault. 'H-Hour' was to be 0725 hrs and this was the moment at which the infantry in their craft reached the shore. The D.D. tanks, which were to be the first arrivals on the beach were to 'touch down' at H minus seven and a half minutes, they would launch from their LCTs at 8000 yards and swim in, in six columns, one column from each LCT and three columns in each Squadron. Just before the tanks touched the beach they were to fan out into one long line of forty tanks and then, dropping their canvas screens, were to open fire. Their task was to make the beach habitable for the infantry due to arrive seven and a half minutes later, they were to subdue all pill-boxes, knock out any machine-gun posts and generally terrorise and keep under cover any opposition that there was and would thus produce the fire support that would otherwise be lacking as the infantry arrived. At this moment it would be too dangerous to continue the close-fire support from the battleships, destroyers, rocket ships and 25-pounders on LCTs out to sea. The volume of fire that could be produced by forty tanks on the waterline was immense, with 17-pounder and 75mm guns and each tank with two machine guns. We had seen the effect on training and it was truly colossal. The tank crews had gained both skill and confidence in their weird craft during training in the Moray Firth and they were certain that as they dropped their screens on the waterline and revealed their true identity that the morale effect of a coracle turned into a tank pumping every kind of missile into the beach defences would enable them to accomplish their task. However, they had first to reach the waterline.

The LCTs that carried the D.D. tanks were led across the Channel by Motor Launches fitted with radar equipment

to guide them to the launching point approximately 8000 yards from the beach. This was marked with special buoys laid beforehand by midget submarines and which emitted signals that the radar equipment could detect. On arrival at the launching point the craft, having made due allowance for wind, sea and tide, turned into line abreast, lowered their ramps and the tanks launched themselves by driving out of the craft one at a time into the sea. This was a tricky moment, for with a keel that weighed over thirty tons and a superstructure that was of canvas only, the tanks could hardly be described as seaworthy. They had little enough steerage way, and were easily affected by currents, tides and waves, and a reasonably calm sea was essential. The whole way in the tanks would be a simple target from the shore and even a near miss from anything larger than small-arms was liable to sink them like a plummet. Another snag was the beach obstacles: these were erected by the Germans to prevent craft from landing and consisted mainly of posts and iron rails, often bedded in concrete, and placed along the waterline, to these were attached mines and fused A.A. shells. Thus the swim in of nearly five miles, which took over an hour to complete, was somewhat of an ordeal and tank crews were glad to have their Davis Escape apparatus in case of accidents.

Immediately behind the D.D. tanks and in front of the infantry came the A.V.R.E., and these were special tanks and armoured bulldozers manned by sappers and equipped to destroy concrete and other obstacles and clear the exits from the beach. With them came the 'Flails' again specially fitted tanks whose task was to deal with mine fields. This party together with others all of whom had specific tasks were landed from LCTs that were to beach alongside the D.D. tanks. Then came the assaulting infantry battalions in small flat bottom craft in which they had embarked about ten miles out from their large and comfortable LSTs. Behind came the support battalion with its wading tanks, the various headquarters, the S.P. artillery, the beach group responsible for

organisation on the beach, and numerous arms, personnel and equipment all with a special part to play. By about H plus forty the beach would appear to be an utter shambles of men and vehicles and on the waterline further out to sea there would be every sort of ship from liners and battle cruisers to cutters and small but speedy motor boats.

Once off the beach, the assaulting battalions had to turn outwards and still with their tank support their task was to secure the first lateral road before moving inland to take on a number of dug-in, fortified and defended positions known as 'hedgehogs'. By this time the third battalion of the Brigade with 'C' Squadron in support were to be off the beach and attacking the furthestmost hedgehog which was given the codeword 'Hillman'. Once these hedgehogs were secured, the Brigade would have achieved its primary objectives and support Brigades behind would pass through on their way to the Divisional objective.

Here it is necessary to give an outline of the bigger picture. On our right but due to arrive half an hour after us was the 3rd Canadian Division, to their right and landing slightly after them was the veteran 50th Northumbrian Division and their assault brought them opposite Bayeux. From there westwards was the American front stretching as far as the base of the Cherbourg peninsula. No seaborne troops were to be on our left and in order to secure this vital eastern flank the 6th Airborne division was to be dropped during the night before D-Day just east of the River Orne in the wooded country halfway between the coast and Caen. To reinforce and support these lightly equipped airborne troops a Commando Brigade was to be landed on our beaches at about H plus 1 hour to push southwards to the village of Benouville where were the only bridges over the River Orne and the Caen canal. In order to give these troops armoured support, at least one troop of 'B' Squadron was to connect up and go with them. It was anticipated that the 6th Airborne Division would very soon be up against stiff opposition and provided that the Orne bridges were intact it was thought likely that

the Regiment would be sent to their support.

The fire support from all arms of the service for the assault itself was to be on a most generous scale. The Navy provided two battleships, a number of cruisers and destroyers and the monitor '*Lord Roberts*'; in addition there were large numbers of rocket ships and flak ships of immense fire power. The Airforce bombing and strafing programme read like a railway timetable and even the Royal Artillery was to produce fire support from the sea, firing their S.P.25-pounders from LCTs. All this was most heartening and encouraging, for a study of the overprinted maps of the enemy's fixed defences along our section of the coast revealed some admirable targets in the form of numerous pill-boxes and concrete gun emplacement as well as machine-gun posts and weapon pits all cunningly sited to command the beach. Furthermore, the Le Havre peninsula to the east with its heavy-gun batteries loomed unpleasantly close.

As the invasion fleet sailed at about midday on the 5th June 1944, the feeling uppermost in nearly every mind was that this was just another exercise. This was the result of the many rehearsals and exercises we had done both in Scotland and the South and our rather phlegmatic attitude had been somewhat intensified by a twenty-four hour postponement spent with little or nothing to do in overcrowded and uncomfortable LCTs. Even such dramatic moments as the hoisting of the Admiral's signal 'Good Luck and Press on' or the opening of the sealed packages of operation orders and maps which told us where we were going failed to ruffle anyone's outward calm.

The weather was definitely rough and although the sea had subsided a deal since the day before, when a postponement had been ordered, it was probably rougher than anything we had experienced on exercises. However, had the attempt been made at the next possible date an even worse storm was blowing and, as we later learned, the Germans would have been very much better prepared. By the time we had passed out of Portsmouth harbour and had crossed the

boom the wind seemed to be slackening and low clouds hurried across a rather watery blue sky. The scene was rather remarkable - but again we had seen it so often before that we accepted it without wonder. The sea was crammed with small and weirdly-shaped craft of every description, moving rather slowly in long columns one behind the other and being shepherded along by corvettes and destroyers who would dash up alongside and shout instructions over the loud hailer. All were painted in blue and white camouflage colours and with the signals flown from the mast-head and the Divisional signs painted on their bridges, it was a colourful picture.

The afternoon and long evening passed quickly, setting up maps, giving out and receiving orders and final briefing. Later there would probably be 'Housey-Housey' in the 'Army Shelter' but this miserable bunk was at best an unappetising place and usually frequented by those who felt seasick. All this time the air above had been filled with aircraft. It was hard to hear them above the steady throb of the LCT's diesel engines, but fighter patrol after fighter patrol passed up and down and back and forth over the long lines of craft, while medium and heavy bombers passed above them flying south.

When we settled down to sleep that evening, occupying every available surface on the craft, nothing in the least unusual had occurred. The night itself was equally peaceful but everyone was up early in readiness for what lay ahead. There was preparation and launching drill for the D.D. tanks, and final waterproofing and sealing for the waders, there was breakfast and the wireless sets to be warmed up before the breaking of wireless silence. Before it was light we could see away to the south the flashes of the guns of the battleships and cruisers and the burst of their shells as they landed on the coast. Although the wind dropped, the sea was till rough and was in fact rated at 'sea five' which was in some conditions too much for D.D.s. As it became lighter and the time for launching drew near we anxiously awaited the signal from the Brigadier on the headquarters ship for 'BUNKER' or 'FLOATER' that would tell us if the swim was on or

off. This was a moment of mixed feelings in which seasickness somewhat eclipsed the excitement that everyone felt.

Shortly before 0630 hours the signal 'FLOATER 5000' came over the sir, this shortened the swim to 5000 yards and the LCTs closed to this distance and the D.D.s launched into the sea. All except one craft load got off to a good start and despite the rough sea, made steady but slow progress to the beach. By this time the supporting fire had intensified and the rocket ships and 25-pounders were all in action; the rockets had an alarming habit of falling short and several narrowly missed the tanks on their way in. The villas along the beach some of which were converted into strong points were being severely handled and many were on fire. Due to the weather the D.D.s touched down a few minutes later than scheduled, this rather telescoped the timetable and the AVREs were on top of the tanks almost as soon as they got into action; some of the craft carrying them actually rammed the D.D.s as they neared the beaches. At this time the only opposition came from pill-boxes in the shape of small arms fire. The Boche however recovered quickly from his initial shock and it wasn't long before his mortar O.Ps were bringing down an unpleasant rate of fire on the waterline. This was extremely accurate, and soon shells from further inland were arriving on and around the beach in increasing numbers.

The infantry went in with great dash and started to winkle out of the bunkers the few 'bomb-happy' Germans that were left there, few of these put up much resistance except on the left where the East Yorks had a stiffish fight. By the time that RHQ and 'C' Squadron touched down at H plus 45 (i.e. 0810 hours) the beach was clear of Boche, but the mortar fire and shelling had intensified. However the LCT commanders drove their craft hard for the beach and only one tank failed to get on shore. Clearing the beach itself, was a toughish problem and despite the frantic endeavours of the bulldozers and AVRE it wasn't till 0900 hours that the tanks were clear of the beach and moving inland to rendezvous with their infantry. The beach as we left it thankfully behind us was the

shambles we had anticipated of burning craft, vehicles and houses and there was hardly a square foot that wasn't involved in activity of one sort or another.

Henceforth, the day developed into separate actions fought by Squadrons with their infantry battalions. RHQ moved inland about half a mile to its appointed rendezvous and endeavoured to maintain control by wireless of the Squadrons fighting their way forward, and with Brigade and Divisional Headquarters who at that time were still at sea. On the left 'B' Squadron, once off the beach, sorted themselves out and after being joined by their Squadron Leader, (the Squadron Leader's craft had been unable to launch and he had had to persuade his LCT commander to ram his craft onto the beach so that they could get ashore), they tied up with the East Yorks in preparation for their attack on the first of the two 'hedgehogs' assigned to them. One troop had already been dispatched to support the Commandos on their way to the Orne bridges and the Airborne troops at Benouville. This troop had an exciting day and proved invaluable to the Commandos who were entirely successful. Later in the day two tanks of the troop were knocked out in an engagement on the southern approach to the bridges, however the remainder of the troop succeeded in accounting for the gun that did this.

The remainder of the Squadron went into the attack with the East Yorks. The infantry were depleted from their engagement on the beach but, encouraged by the appearance of the tanks inland they showed great dash. By the middle of the afternoon the position was captured, and since it was here that the mortar O.P.s shelling the beach were situated there was considerable relief with its capture. Squadron HQ played a more prominent part in this attack than possibly in any of the other battles that followed during the campaign and this was due to exuberance as much as shortage of tanks after the events of the morning.

The next objective was a heavy gun emplacement 1500 yards further on. The attack was ready to go by 7 o'clock that

evening and since there was little effective opposition was soon in our hands. This was fortunate as by this time the East Yorks were reduced to little more than company strength and the Squadron with only about eight tanks were extremely short of ammunition.

On the right 'A' Squadron had suffered heavy tank casualties during the beach fight and of the sixteen tanks that beached, four having sunk on the way in, only six were able to move inland to the support of the South Lancs. Several became bogged threading their way one behind the other to avoid mines and beach obstacles, and several had their canvas screens blown off by mortar fire whilst still on the waterline, allowing the sea to swamp the engines. However, the six remaining runners which included the Squadron Leader and the Second-in-Command, were soon on their way to support the battalion attack on the village of Hermanville. The attack was successful and after consolidation the Squadron took up positions south of the village. This village was on the main lateral road and its importance as a traffic route was great.

In the meantime 'C' Squadron who had left the beach complete with all their tanks had been fighting with the 1st Suffolks. Here there was perhaps more cohesion as neither the armour nor the infantry had been engaged in the beach fight. Their first objective was a relatively small locality which was in their hands by 1200 hours and had yielded between forty and fifty prisoners under a white flag before it had received any serious attention. The hedgehog 'Hillman' was the next objective and this, it was anticipated, would be a tougher nut to crack. It was, for the enemy showed a marked keenness to fight and had a number of anti-tank guns in their defensive system. It later transpired that the local commander was in 'Hillman' and despite his very unimpressive appearance when seen in captivity, was able to conjure up some spirited opposition. The first attack failed and two tanks of 'C' Squadron were knocked out and at 1700 hours that evening the position was still intact. However a second attack

was mounted and with additional fire support, by 2100 hours 'Hillman' was in our hands.

At ten o'clock that night RHQ moved to harbour on the southern outskirts of the village of Hermanville and Squadrons were drawn into adjacent positions. On taking stock it was found that our tank losses had been 'A' Squadron 14, 'B' Squadron 10, 'C' Squadron 7 and RHQ 1; this represented about fifty percent, but many of the casualties were only temporary and the fitters soon made the position look more healthy. In personnel the situation was somewhat similar and preliminary figures looked depressingly great at twelve killed and twelve wounded and five officers and seventy-eight other ranks missing. A large number of 'missing' were 'unhorsed' tank crews who had not yet caught up with the Regiment again and when eventually the actual figures were worked out it was found that we had suffered 1 officer and 15 other ranks killed and 1 officer and 18 other ranks wounded.

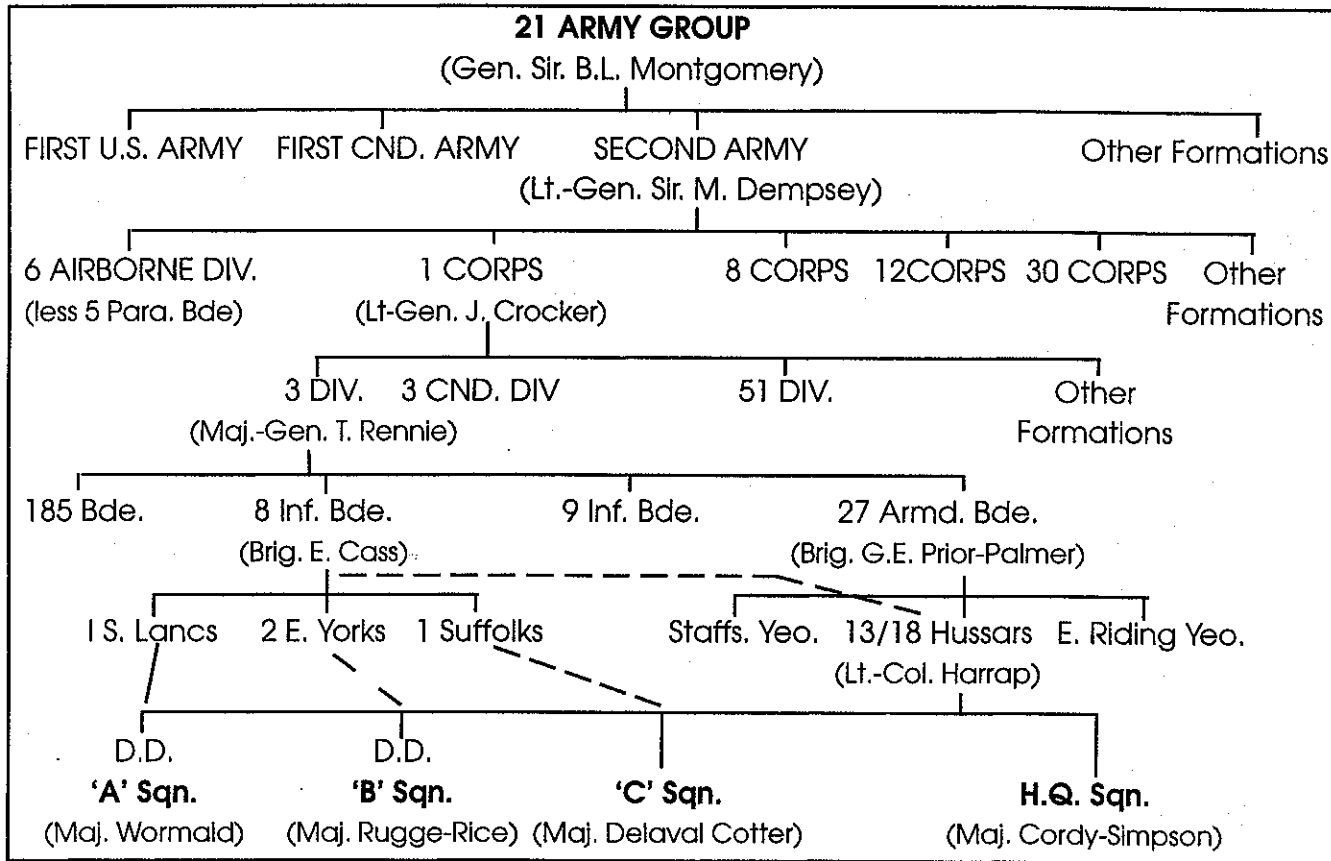
Thus ended a memorable day for us all and whilst the telling of it now is a lengthy catalogue of events, in our minds it is imprinted with far more clarity by impressions and feelings which have tended to eliminate chronological sequences by their very intensity: the bows of a sunken destroyer sticking up vertically in the sea as we approached the beach; the notices with the Death's Head sign and 'Achtung Minen'; the King's speech on the wireless as those at RHQ listened with the Brigadier in a sunlit orchard; the first German prisoner, a dejected and frightened spectacle, sitting on the beach; the fleets of aircraft, tugs and gliders bringing reinforcements and supplies to the airborne troops; the brightly-coloured parachutes, a different colour for each type of supply; and the returning aircraft passing through a vicious belt of flak further west; the feeling of being on French soil, through the 'West Wall' and actually fighting the Boche; the beach obstacles that had been studied and looked at from every angle in photographs and drawings, seen now in reality. All these tend to blur the actual events. But of all these and other impressions of that day, by far the most pronounced at

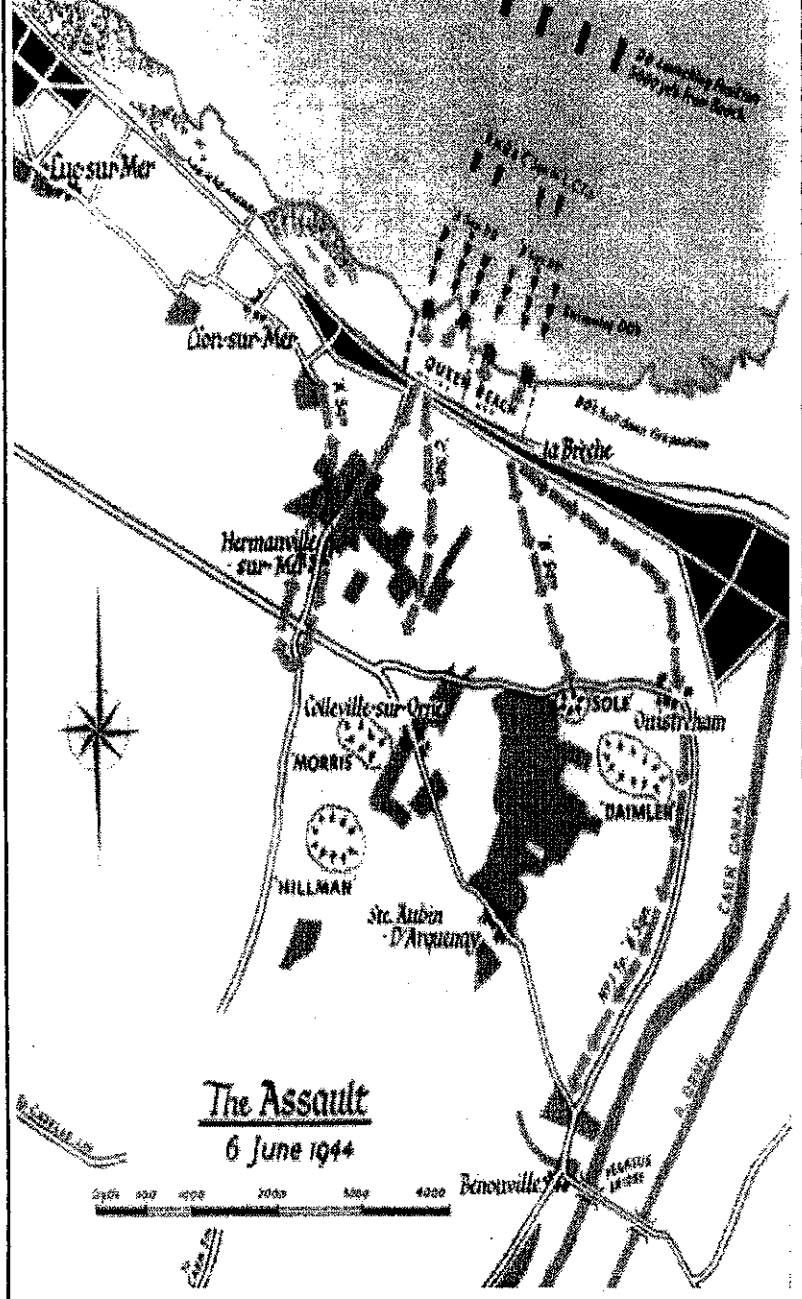
D-DAY

the end of it was a feeling of surprise and thankfulness that we were still alive to tell the tale.

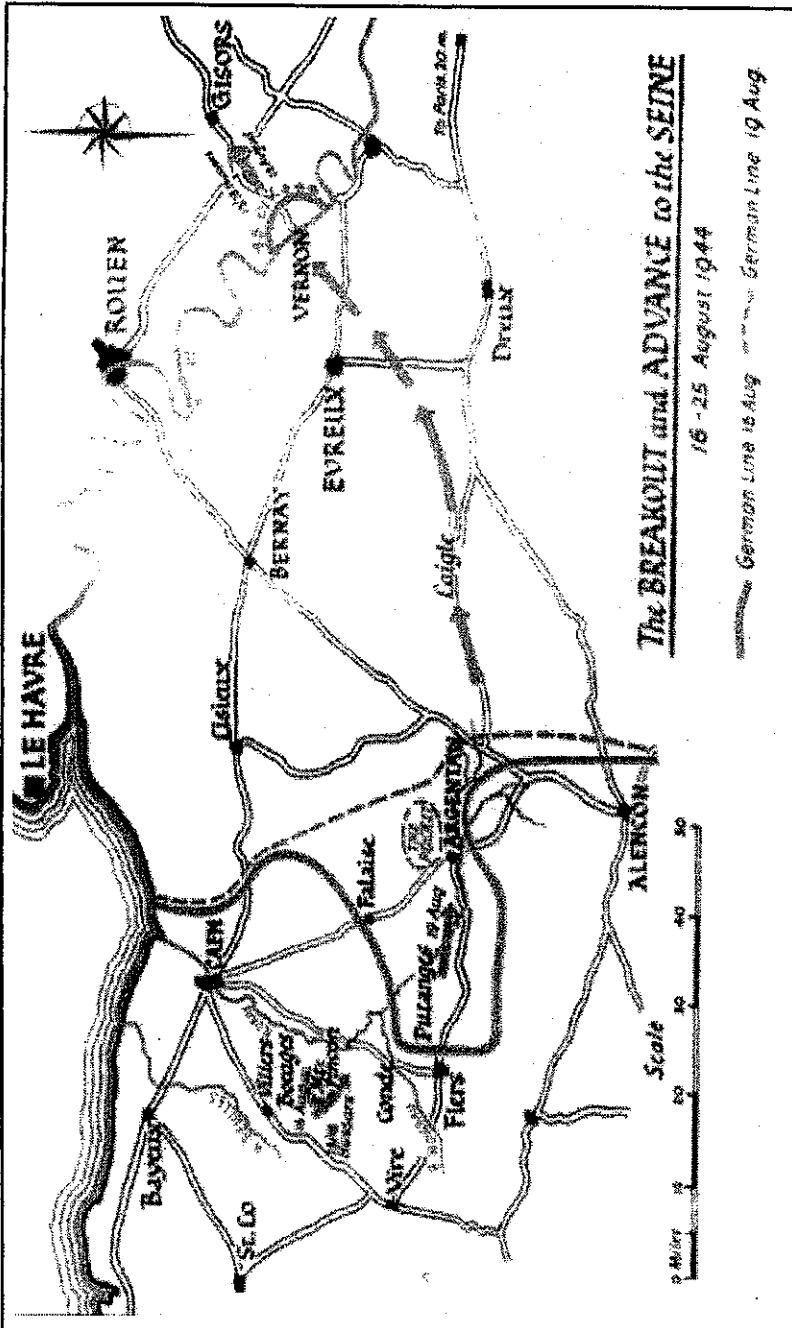


A disabled DD Tank

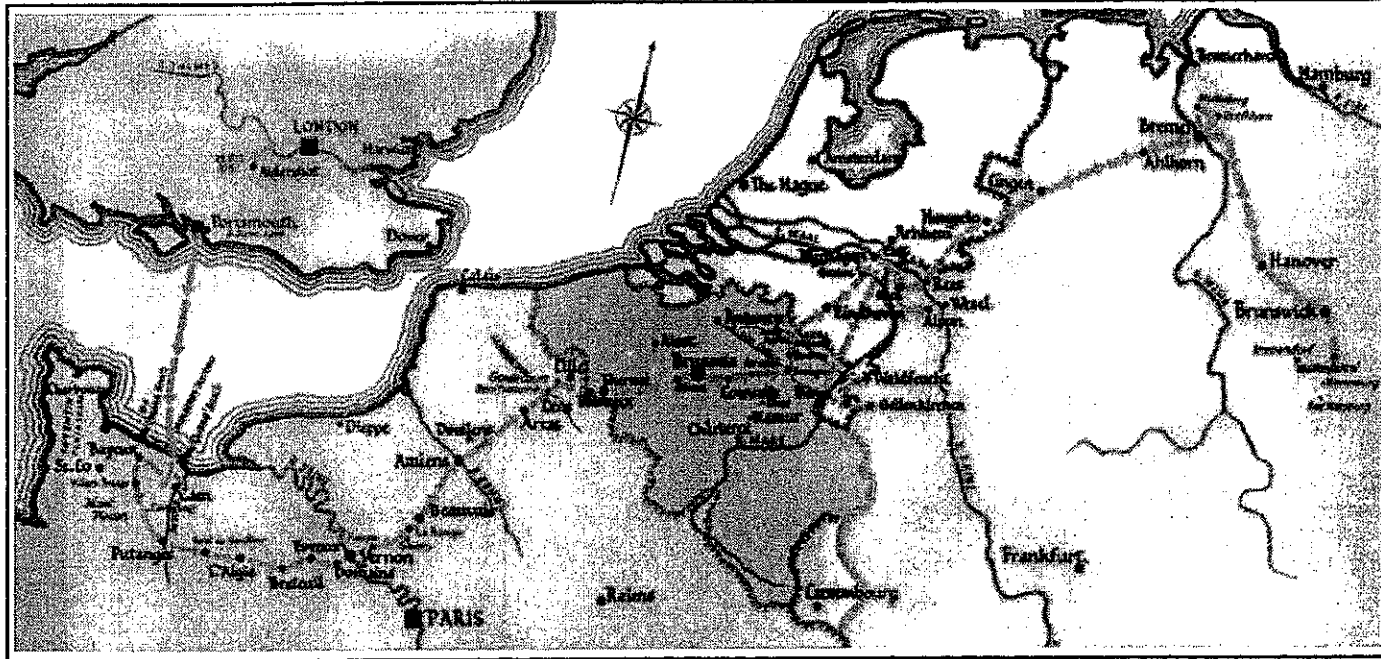




The Assault on Queen Beach,
June 6th 1944



The Breakout and Advance to the Seine
16-25th August 1944



*The 13/18th Royal Hussars (Q.M.O) in NW Europe,
June 6th., 1944*

Appendix to D-Day entry

Looking back on D-Day from the personal angle recalls incidents and events which are not mentioned in the article published in the Regimental Journal.¹

An L.C.T. is not a luxury form of vessel and we were extremely crowded on board. However, the skipper was good enough to allow the officers into his cabin since he had to spend his time on the bridge. In this box-like space, not much more than 8 by 6 feet, eight officers, I think it was, spent the afternoon and evening after leaving Portsmouth playing mildly at poker. John Cordy Simpson was the senior officer on our craft and Peter Jury as R.I.O was also on board.

It was roughish but after a seasick tablet which only served to make me feel ill in a different but almost equally unpleasant way I remember sleeping rather well. We got up at about 4.00 a.m. and it was dark, blustery, cold, rough and uninviting on deck when I went down to my tank at the rear end of the well of the craft to find Goodall, Cook and Suggitt trying to do something about breakfast.² There was quite a

1 *The article referred to was published in the Spring Issue of 1946 when the Regiment was in Vienenburg in the Harz Mountains and this Appendix was written by me more or less at this time as far as I remember!*

2 *The crew of a Sherman tank was five. In the case of the CO's tank named 'Balaclava' various modifications were made to make it more suitable as a command vehicle and take an extra wireless set. Sgt Goodall was not a cavalryman but a superb specialist driver trained in the RTR a few of whom were posted to the regiment on mechanisation. Although grumpy at times Goodall was worth his weight in any commodity and in peacetime had been Stanley Baldwin's chauffeur / valet though he never spoke of those times. His driving skill for certain saved us being blown up at on at least one occasion when under 88mm fire from a German tank we were stuck balanced on our tracks across a fallen tree. Sgt Cook was a skilled w/t operator with charm and cheerful competence but not as phlegmatic as Cpl (later Sgt) Suggitt, officially hull gunner but actually a reserve for both driver and w/t operator. I never knew an occasion when he was unable to produce a cup of piping hot tea which meant lighting a stove of some kind in the bottom of the tank a procedure that was prohibited but universally practised! The other two crew members were the Colonel and me, his adjutant, and as such I travelled in the gunner's seat. This was not first class travel by any reckoning, cramped, airless and smelly, and a very rough ride. If it had a plus factor it was the ability to catch up on sleep with someone else having to drive and map read. Unfortunately, however, the times when I was not occupied on a wireless link of one sort or another were all too rare.*

lot to do by way of warming-up the various wireless sets ready to break wireless silence and putting the final touches to the wading apparatus. By this time the seasick tablets had properly turned my inside into what seemed to be plaster of Paris, I certainly could not have been sick but felt awful which had the compensating effect of deflecting my attention from the somewhat alarming prospects of what lay ahead.

In the general gloom and bluster around, there was little enough to be seen at this stage except the occasional dimmed lights of both near and distant accompanying craft both those of our own convoy and further out of the warships and the vessels carrying the infantry. Overhead, however, and above the sea's noise could be heard the aircraft and the sky seemed full of them. Away ahead one could clearly see the sky lit up by flashes as the bombs exploded and on our flanks, particularly on the left we could see also the flashes of the battleship's guns as they built up the general bombardment.

I had always been told that going into action for the first time produced in one a feeling of calm, rather than fear and a state of nerves, produced by the realisation that nothing outside the events of the moment mattered. This I looked on as reassuring information from those who had experienced the ordeal of a first introduction into battle, that is, a planned attack on the side of those who have the initiative rather than the passive submission to an enemy attack which we had all experienced in bombing raids. One's chief fear was that of being afraid and the uncertainty of one's own reaction to the battle, though I would not deny that there were times during D-Day when I was very thoroughly alarmed. It was not long before it was light enough to see the infantry's LSTs stationary ahead of us, lowering their assault craft. This was about eight miles off shore and at the same time one began to make out the coast ahead. By now I was manning the wireless sets and had heard the Brigadier give the order to 'A' and 'B' Squadrons 'FLOATER 5000'—meaning launch their DD tanks at 5000 yards.³ We were about 20 minutes behind them and making steady progress

straight for the coast.

As we neared the shore I was fully occupied on the air trying in all the obvious confusion ahead to establish wireless touch with the leading Squadrons and report progress back to the Brigadier on the rear-link. No command on a regimental level could be exercised at this stage and we were in difficulties already since the C.O., Dick Harrap, had failed to turn up on our craft. The plan was that he should travel with 'A' Squadron on Derrick Wormald's craft until the launching of the DD tanks when he would be taken off by a motor launch (L.C.P.) and transferred to my craft, to take command from our tank. I had never favoured this complicated plan and on the day it failed and it was not until we were off the beach and on the first lateral road that Dick appeared. Furthermore Sim Feversham, the Second-in-Command, was drifting in his craft which had broken down about a mile and a half out. This craft however was got under way again quite quickly and Sim joined RHQ on the beach shortly after our own arrival.

In point of fact this breakdown of command did not affect the battle since all Squadrons and the various miscellaneous groups had their allotted tasks to carry out in support of their respective infantry and there was little or nothing the C.O. could do to influence the course of events. Nevertheless from my point of view trying to work a forward and a backward link amongst all the turmoil on my own and in the face of almost hysterical cries for information from Brigade HQ I could not regard this situation as a satisfactory one!⁴

On the way in and about a mile out I well remember

3 *The original plan was to launch from the LCTs at 8000 yards from the shore but the DD tank being a very unstable craft could not survive, theoretically, in more than force 6 on the Beaufort Scale, the conditions on D-Day were reckoned to be between force 7 and 8, so there was a considerable risk in making the decision to launch at all, hence the swim was restricted to 5000 yards. In the event the risk was fully justified given the success of the operation and the importance of the role.*

seeing the bows of a destroyer sunk by one of the new acoustic mines, as we later learned, sticking up out of the water and I can also vividly see the Ouistreham Lighthouse on the left flank sticking up in contrast to a lightening sky behind.⁵ As we came nearer to the beach what had seemed a dense mass of smoke on the horizon resolved itself into clumps of burning houses with long sheets of yellow flame resulting from the bombing and naval guns. The noises—when one removed the wireless headphones and stopped for an instant shouting down the mouthpiece for reports of signals—were immense, and of every variety and intensity from the rocket ships' barrage and the 25-pounders fired from the LCTs and the bombardments of cruisers, battleships, monitors and the light and medium bombers—and as we drew closer, the crack of rifles and machine-gun fire in a rather desultory manner on the beach itself.

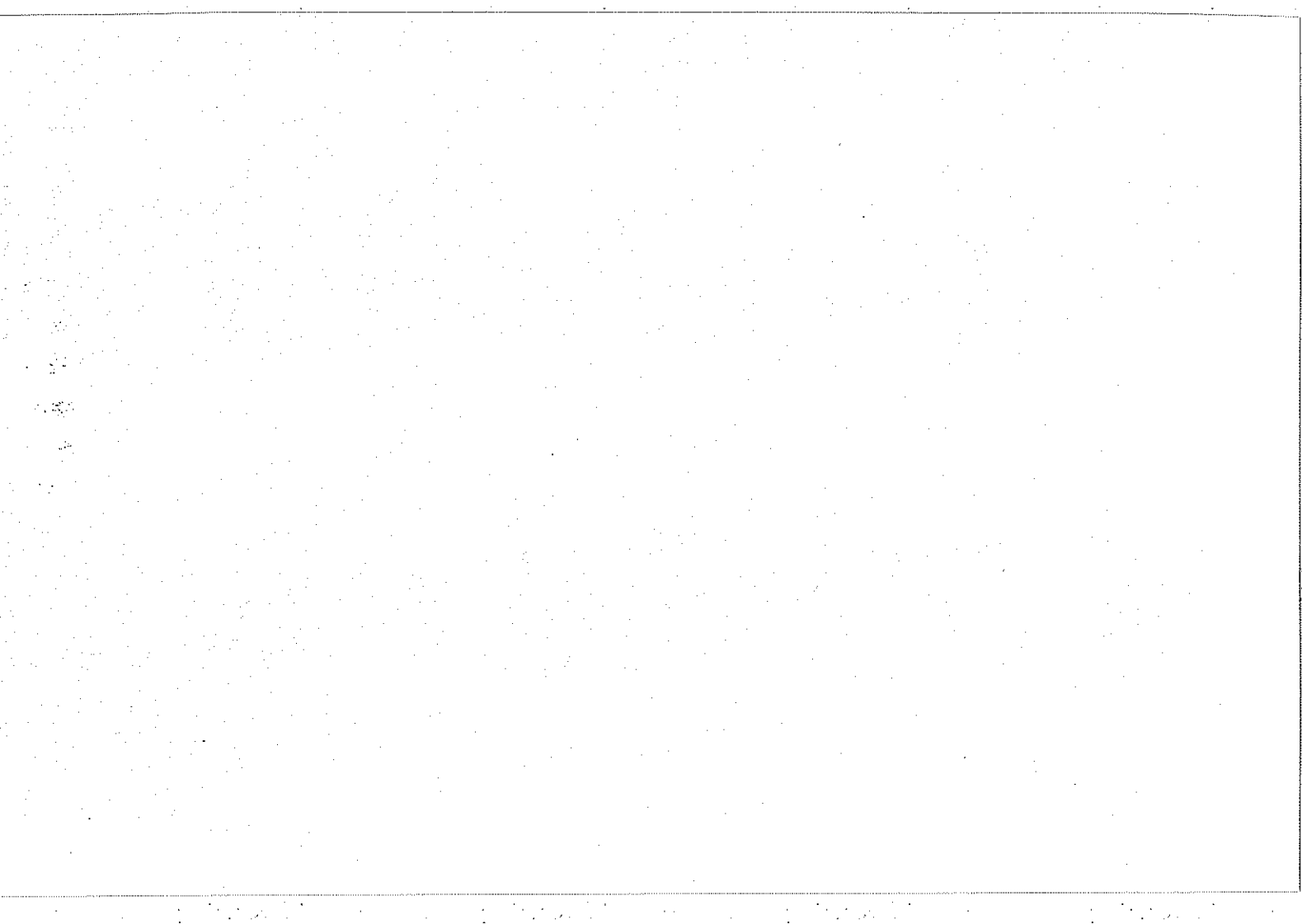
4 *From my own point of view the highlight of my fairly short spell on the beach occurred shortly after our arrival there after wading from our LCT in about 8 feet of water. When we were stationary and waiting to move forward who should I see peering over the top of the turret on the seaward side whilst I was still yelling on the w/t link to Brigade HQ but the smiling face of brother Bobby. He had to keep bobbing up and down as mortar shells came whistling over but there he was safe and well. He had been, in his DD tank, the very first person to arrive on the beach by any means! It was in fact for his crucial work, after his highly successful swim in, in getting the beach exits clear that earned him the MC.*

5 *It is interesting that the picture by Charles Cundall commissioned by the regiment after the war has all these features in it and is reproduced following this.*

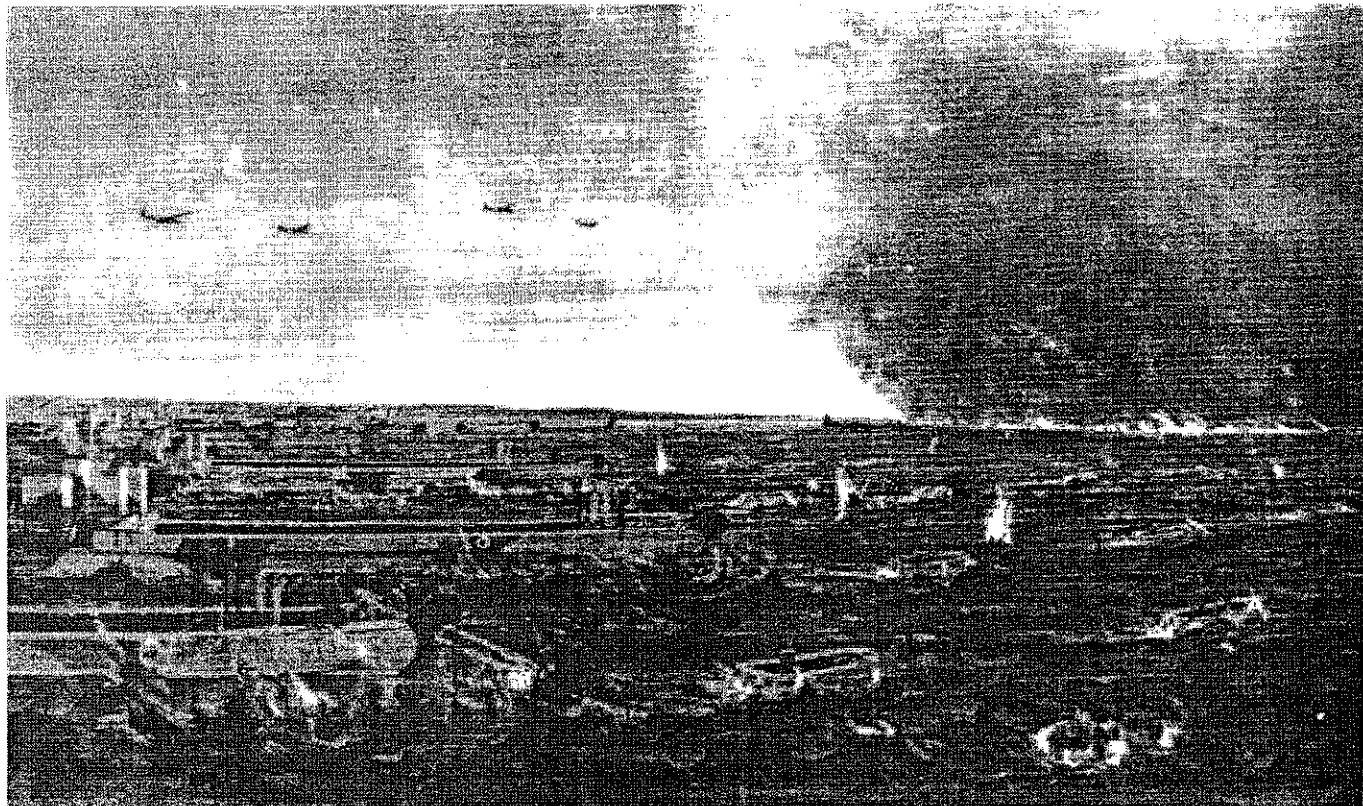
31st May 1944 - 30 June 1944: D-Day

The War Diary of Julius Neave

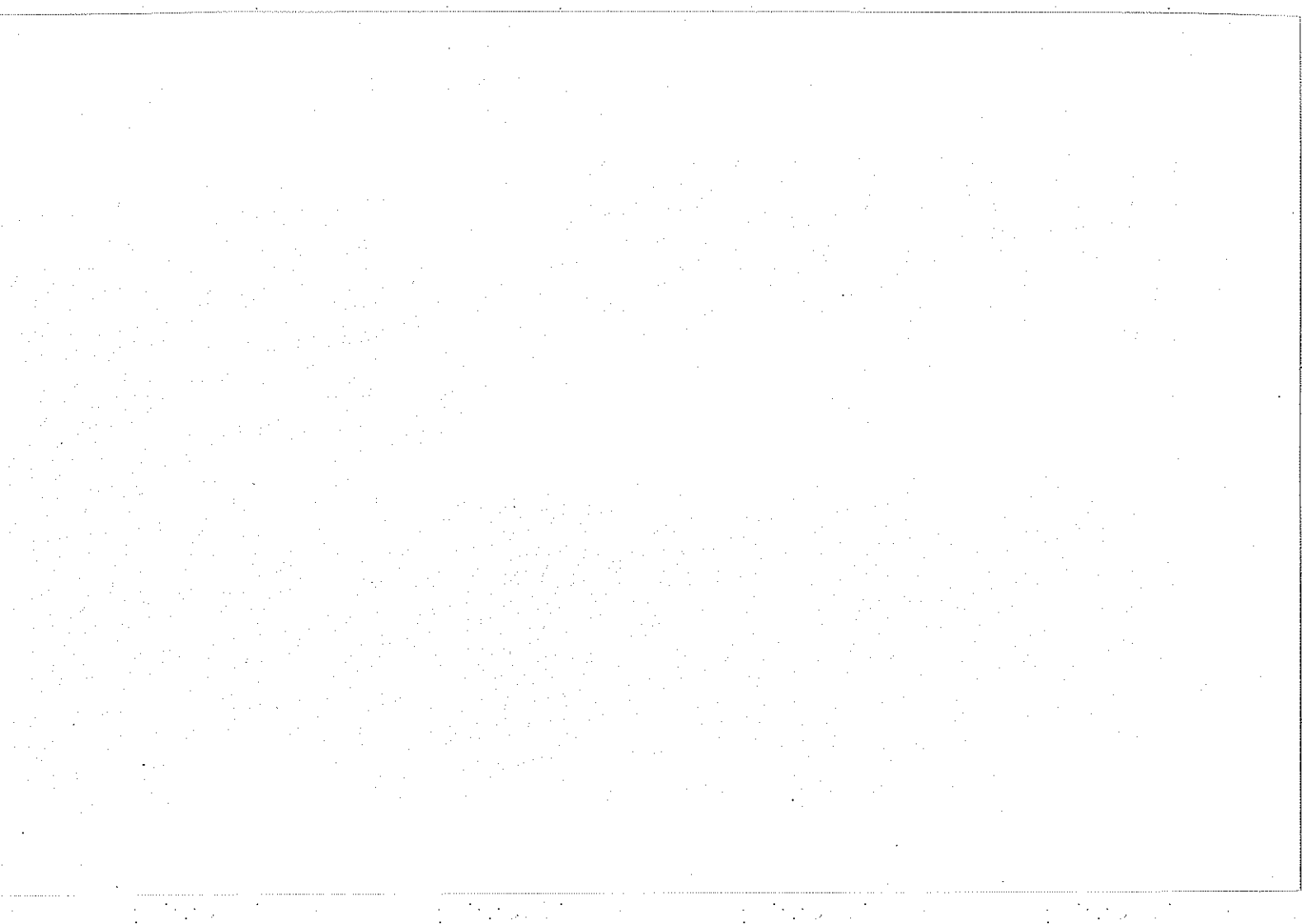
May and June 1944—D-Day



The assault on Normandy, June 6th 1944.
The Regiment launch their amphibious DD tanks. From the painting by Charles Cundall, R.A.



31st May 1944 - 30 June 1944: D-Day



31st May 1944

Moved from Petworth to marshalling camp A7. Road convoy by craft loads, went well, no accidents, turn-out and march discipline very good. Marshalling camp typical and food bloody, particularly for the Officers. However, had the office truck and Mason which improved things in the comfort line.¹

1st June

Another day's marshalling, i.e. nothing to do.

Spent the time largely in tearing up paper. The Brigadier came round and told us the bombing was going well.

2nd June

Marshalling again. Spent my time in marking up operation maps. Great difficulty in preventing others from seeing; but Sim Feversham, Peter Jury and I managed to get most of our map markings done.

3rd June

Embarkation day. Time of leaving marshalling camp changed about twenty times, resulting in little sleep. We got on board at about 1200 hours. Trouble towing the Porpoises, and chaos on the roads through Portsmouth and Gosport. Our craft turned out to be overloaded and we had to return in the afternoon and off-load two tanks.

4th June

Operation postponed for 24 hours. Sat about on board

1 Mason was my soldier servant, on the establishment at this time, one per officer. He was splendid and immensely loyal, but almost completely silent and clinically shy. He was with me virtually all the time I was in the regiment and one of my great regrets is not having kept in touch with him. This was not for want of trying, he once sent me—out of the blue—a photo of himself and his wife and child, but never sent an address. He lived in Wigan.

with nothing to do, the weather was foul. Played cards; very dirty ship and rather a dull skipper.

5th June

Sailed for France. We slipped at about 13.30 hrs. Very rough and felt ill and in no form for the beach fight. Still felt like another exercise. We had no enemy interference during the passage.

6th June

D-Day for Operation Overlord—Bigot—Neptune. Landed at H + 45 (0830). Made our way inland from Ouistreham to Hermanville. Enemy 'hedgehogs' were encountered for the most part but there were reports of tanks in the evening. Regimental casualties were relatively light in personnel but very heavy in vehicles.

7th June

Defensive position taken up in Hermanville facing west to counter a reported Panzer threat. Nothing developed.² Then later a panic move to the bridge at Benouville and Ranville to assist the Airborne Division who said that Panther and Tiger tanks had broken through them. Again nothing developed. Rumours of insecurity on the right flank also came to nothing. We were sniped at (and bombed) in harbour during the night and subsequently captured three prisoners.

8th June

Defence of the bridge became our responsibility. Later we were told to be prepared to support the Stafford Yeomanry

² *During the morning Peter Jury and I were sitting outside my tank seriously discussing something or other when the w/t operator sitting on Peter's tank and cleaning his sten gun let it off and a stream of bullets went between us. This was a very near miss! The prisoners mentioned below we had heard bleating in the dark to one another obviously lost and crying 'Rudi' or 'Hans' at intervals.*

in their attack on the Hedgehog 'Vermouth', north of Caen. This, however, did not come off; and consequently we remained all day by the bridge.³ The general position is now more stabilised and the 3rd Division front seems to have drawn most of the fire, leaving the rest of 30 Corps to manoeuvre.

9th June

Look like remaining here all day. Captured two prisoners amongst the gliders. 9th Infantry Brigade and the East Riding Yeomanry are to launch a co-ordinated attack on Le Contest. There will be full support from artillery and naval guns.

The attack was only partially successful against very heavy opposition. Another flap on the bridge which the Gordons now hold, again it came to nothing.

10th June

A great deal of enemy air activity and bombing since yesterday afternoon. It culminated in four bombs 20 yards from our tanks under which we were sleeping at 0530 hrs this morning. Brigadier arrived and laid on for 'B' Squadron to fight an action east of the river. We went over and formed up and attacked at 1600 hrs. supporting a battalion of the Airborne Division. The attack was extremely successful but we were heavily shot up from the left flank and four Shermans and two Stuarts were set on fire and destroyed. Coming back we had a fairly exciting time and were unpleasantly mortared when our tank broke down temporarily.

11th June

All objectives in yesterday's attack were captured and there were 300 Boche killed or wounded. 'A', 'C' and RHQ were moved to the Perrier le Dan feature to watch for enemy

³ Now known even on maps as 'Pegasus Bridge' after the Airborne Division's badge.

movement. There was a flap at 1000 hrs. when Rommel was reported to be putting in a two point counter attack to recapture Ouistreham and prevent us from using it as a port. 'B' Squadron were ordered to the other side of the river again. It all came to nothing and was very quiet.

12th June

'B' Squadron still in position. 'A', 'C' and RHQ moved off the crest of the feature about 500 yards to the rear into reserve.⁴ At about midday 'A' Squadron moved over to join 'B' Squadron at the other side of the river; later at 1700 hrs. 'C' and RHQ followed, halting on the way in Benouville. 'A' and 'B' Squadrons were both involved in separate attacks with the Airborne Division. 'A' Squadron on the 'Breville Gap' and 'B' Squadron to the right of this. Both were successful. 'A' lost nil and 'B' three. We were bombed fairly heavily during the night. Caen was being bombed by the RAF and shelled by the Army and the Navy all night.⁵

13th June

A quiet morning. Troop of 'A' Squadron still up in Breville. Shelled off and on all the morning, just missed our soft transport. Very little enemy activity till the evening when following allied air attacks south of Caen the beachhead was liberally bombed.

14th June

Still no move and still troop detached in Breville. Dumps of petrol and ammunition being built up this side of the river in case the bridges are blown. Tom Welstead, Godfrey

4 *This was particularly welcome because of the appalling stench of dead cows all over the ridge killed in the preliminary bombing before the Airborne landed, after 48hrs within a few feet of several we had all had more than enough!*

5 *The Navy's contribution came from the monitor HMS Lord Roberts; they pumped huge shells more or less all night right over us who were about half way between them and their target, Caen.*

Stewart and Scabbard (Major E. S. Sword) turned up from the Airborne Tank Squadron. Went round to Airborne Division HQ to discuss the situation and our counter-attack role, which is to fall right back to the high ground surrounding the bridges. Gen. Gale accompanied us on our own reconnaissance: he is just like Fred Emney.⁶

We were heavily shelled late in the evening and 5 men of 'A' Squadron were wounded. Less activity however that night.

15th June

'B' and 'C' Squadron moved into prepared and static positions covering the approaches to the bridges. Stayed inside the regimental lines all day and did office work! Mike Aird came round and explained that a big attack west of the river was contemplated for Saturday (17th), with maximum bomber support. Shelled rather unpleasantly.

16th June

This has been a thoroughly bad day. This morning Dick Harrap was killed in his jeep.⁷ A German counter-attack started at 0430 hrs this morning and the whole area was heavily shelled. The attack got no further than Herouville, and a troop of 'A' Squadron was sent to support our counter attack, and was subsequently cut off. Dick was on a recce with the Infantry Brigadier organising the party and came round a corner to meet a German Mark IV tank. Brig. P.P. arrived with this bitter piece of news. He told us also that tomorrow's big attack is cancelled having been first on and then off about five times.

6 On arrival at his HQ in a country chateau he was having lunch but took us out through the house to the conservatory, climbed on a chair and opened one of the windows, whereupon a hail of bullets came from the woods some 200 yards away. That he announced was the nuisance he wanted us to get rid of!

7 A more detailed account of this tragic event is given elsewhere.

17th June

Sim Feversham has taken over command with Dag (Major A. A. K. Rugge Price) as second-in-command. Peter Lyon is in charge of 'B' for the time being. We still await the great German counter-attack and are all ready for it, I hope! No shelling today which is pleasantly surprising. The 'A' Squadron troop was successfully evacuated this afternoon. There is great gloom about poor Dick who was buried today at Hermanville. More Boche reinforcements reported—perhaps the attack will come tomorrow. No plan for the resumption of our attack yet. Had a bath! Quiet night, very little bombing and no attack developed after all.

18th June

Went up to the echelon to see the Delivery Squadron and laid replacements. Little activity. Big regrouping plans this p.m. and now the Regiment less 'A' Squadron is under command 51st (Highland) Division. 'B' Squadron remains with the Airborne. 'C' Squadron moved into their position with 155 Brigade, having a troop with each Battalion (2 Battalion Gordons and 5 Black Watch). A certain amount of shelling this evening. Reports of an attack by the Boche on Breville but nothing materialised.

19th June

CO went on recce at 0300 hrs. for 'B' Squadron op. in the afternoon which was later cancelled. Vile day pouring rain and cold. All yesterday's plans about regrouping of Airborne and Highland Divisions cancelled. Gen. Bullen Smith called and confirmed this. Hence quiet morning. Own Brigade held a big 'post mortem' conference in the 'Hillman' position this afternoon. Patrol activity. Quiet night. Two letters from home. No big plans pending for the moment. Little shelling.

20th June

Bit better day. Conference at HQ 152 to lay on an attack

on Thurs. (22nd) on St. Honorine La Chardonnette. 'A' Squadron are to support 5 Cameron. 'B' may also help if 6 Airborne release 'C' still in support of 153 Brigade around Le Mesnil. RHQ are still static, trying to construct a dug-in command post. St. H attack now off for 24 hours and 'B' Squadron now definitely involved. Gives a bit more time for reconnaissance. Sim went off to conference at 152 and on to see P.P. Quiet night, a few shells.

21st June

Everything very quiet and everyone recce-ing hard for the forthcoming battle. Now rumours of other big actions which should come off at the end of the week if the weather improves and helps the shipping position. Office moved into the dug-out. All squadrons in the same positions, very little shelling.

22nd/23rd June

Moved at 0400 hrs. to Command post overlooking St. H. 5 Camerons crossed the startline at 0300 hrs. to attack the village silently. 'A' Squadron behind was to move into preselected positions by 0440 hrs. 'B' and two troops and HQ of 'C' were to move to positions on the flank N and NE. On the right was a troop of 'A' Squadron with the 2nd Seaforths in Longueval. 5 Camerons failed initially to get into the village and 'A' Squadron had to come forward and take the village themselves without infantry. This they successfully did and got into position without loss by 0530 hrs. There was a considerable amount of mortaring and shelling on the village and approaches, and the Command post was properly stonked.

The infantry were eventually persuaded into the village but due to very well concealed cross-fire from MGs and Spandaus they had suffered about 160 casualties. Sim Feversham who went ahead to 152 Brigade Command post to watch the infantry attack with the Brigadier saw numbers of them coming back wounded and it was apparently a pretty sorry sight.

Whole operation was planned to withstand the counter-attack and self-propelled guns and Sappers were with the 5 Camerons for this purpose and 'B' and 'C' Squadrons were reported to be coming in from the NW while mopping-up operations were still going on. These had to be vigorously pursued, with some difficulty, till armour started to move about 1100 hrs. Two woods N & S of the village were not held by any infantry, and snipers bothered the tanks a certain amount.

Tanks were first reported by Tac. R moving west to Caen from Troan and then turning N towards us. This was later confirmed by an observation post of ours—John Wardlaw in a tree with a wireless jeep south of Escoville—who saw them moving NE from Cuverville and reported first 20 then 30 then 35, and then another 8; I think 43 was the most, and this included all types and self-propelled guns. All then halted in line-ahead behind the ridge in front of us. They then turned westwards and moved NW for St. H-la-C, and as the leading tanks came into sight 'A' Squadron opened up hard and managed to get in some quick shooting—the SPs never opened fire. The leading two tanks were knocked out as also were some half-tracks that came into view as well. It was about this stage that the medium artillery was turned onto them and they halted. This was a pity as what might have been a first-class shoot for us from concealed positions was severely curtailed by this fire although it knocked out seven. The tanks then split into two halves, 14 retired E to hull-down positions facing W just below a troop of 'C' Squadron (Roddy Norris) who managed to bag two on their way. The remainder turned N and gave 'A' Squadron a magnificent shoot; it was estimated that they got another eight. Sgt. Cooper certainly got 4 with his Firefly, Spencer's troop got another 2, and Derrick himself one and possibly another. 'B' Squadron also got a shoot at long range, killing one. We suffered no casualties of men or vehicles.

The enemy then turned away S to behind a ridge and tried to join up with the others by going E along the ridge. Air

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attack by Typhoons was then asked for and promised for 1215 i.e. in half an hour. In the meantime the whole battle had been carried out under intense artillery fire from both sides, St. H and the Command post were heavily plastered and 'B' Squadron got a lot as well, however the enemy tanks got most of it and certainly had it hot and strong.

When the Typhoons arrived they fairly plastered the enemy tanks with rocket and machine gun fire, their crews having dismounted into the open. Results could not be observed but the attack was in three waves and most impressive.

Not much else occurred except for artillery and mortar fire which hardly ceased, and calls for artillery support on prepared programmes continued. We remained in position all day till 2300 hrs. when I went off with Sim to give out the next day's orders and meet our own Brigadier. Was in my tank for a total of 18 hours today with only two breaks—essential to nature—very exhausting particularly with the bloody wireless and a couple of telephones that Sim insisted on from 152 Brigade.

We got in at 2330 hrs. and barely had time to eat, wash and get to bed before being off again at 0330 after all the bumf and orders had been fixed up. Fortunately we had a quiet night and actually had two hours sleep.

June 24th

Moved into practically the same positions 0400 hrs. Everyone was a bit tired and there was a certain amount of difficulty in getting under way! 'B' & 'C' went slightly further W as an attack was thought likely through Escoville. However, nothing developed during the day and it was very quiet with little or no enemy shelling but plenty of our own. There was a little more in the evening and 'C' Squadron fitters' vehicle was written off. A BBC reporter arrived rather reluctantly this p.m. (Chester Wilmott) to see the battlefield and was given the story.

A fairish flap in the evening with continual changes of

orders. Originally we were to have been withdrawn and put at 4 hours' notice, but this was cancelled and at about 2300 hrs what was described as a heavy attack went in on the Black Watch at Escoville who had 3rd troop 'C' Squadron in support. After an immense amount of noise and shelling all quietened down, the Boche bombers were active and there was a great deal of noise from the SW.

A dawn attack was expected and 'A' Squadron were made to remain in situ in St.H. 'B' Squadron moved up to the Command post at about 0200 hrs but were off again by 0330 hrs. 'C' Squadron after numerous counter-orders had to go back to 154 Brigade having a bad journey there with mine-fields and other horrors including a stonking during the Black Watch attack.

Sim had some adventures whilst touring about in his jeep trying to get orders from 2 Divisional and 2 Brigade Commanders, which is certainly a highly trying business.

June 25th

The expected dawn attack did not come off—instead all was quiet except for the battle away in the SW, but we had to put up with the excruciating smell of a dead cow. Got some sleep in the morning but by p.m. a considerable number of tanks were reported from all around. However, nothing happened and in the evening a certain amount of reorganisation took place. 'A' Squadron pulled two troops out of St. H and concentrated them behind Seaforth Corner and near where RHQ is.

'B' Squadron moved into the 153 Brigade area, i.e. from Le Mesnil to the 'Triangle', at 2030 hrs. to relieve 'C' Squadron who were now pretty tired. On relief, 'C' Squadron returned to the RHQ area by two bridges.

Plans were made in case of an enemy counter-attack in the morning. 'C' Squadron were to remain in reserve and get some rest, 'B' were to send two troops into the 'Gap' where 'C' had been and 'A' were to cover 'B's front while sending two troops into St. H.

We were all really rather tired and got into bed as soon as possible in case we were roused again at 0330 hrs.

June 26th

Slept like a log and there was no flap—there was some shelling in the night but it never woke me and there was nothing to report from any part of the front in the morning. The office truck arrived and the day was spent trying to sort out some of the vast amount of bumf that had arrived, and deal with all the office work that had accumulated since we landed. In the evening we bulldozed the office truck into reasonable security from shelling and did the same for our petrol dumps which had suffered pretty severely. The big attack by 8 Corps went in today about 10 miles west of Caen. There was the hell of a noise from the artillery barrage which must have been terrific. I gather they have achieved what they set out to do which, although it does not sound very spectacular, is nevertheless against very strong opposition and is according to plan.

Heard this evening that the Brigadier of 152 and the CO of the 5th Camerons have got the sack for the St. Honorine show—not altogether surprised but it strikes me as a bit hard on Sandy Munroe, the CO., who struck me as a first-class chap. The new Brigadier is a man called Cassels.⁸

Very heavy rain in the evening which was perfectly bloody but had a bath in a shelter made by Duffy (RSM A. L. Hind) from compo boxes, (and in a bath taken from a French farmyard!) and a change, as Mason has also arrived—very pleasant.

Quite a lot of shelling during the night, about 20 rounds not more than 200 yards away and certainly aimed at the bridge—very noisy, rather alarming and sounds like an express train coming along.

⁸ *Jim Cassels was a splendid man, very tall, who eventually became a Field Marshall.*

Quiet night till about 0430 hrs. when there was a terrific barrage from our guns—got up to find what it was all about, fortunately it was all our own barrage to help the 8th Brigade and Staffordshire Yeomanry forward in their attack on La Bijude and Epron, which has been a bit sticky. News from the 8 Corps front is that they are across the Vieil Odon and are making steady if slow progress.

Went over with Sim to the Highland Division HQ in 'Daimler' SW of Ouistreham. They are living in the German dugouts in fair comfort. Sorted out the business of knocked-out tanks which they seem very keen on but isn't easy for us as it is very difficult to tell when a tank is Ko'd or not.

'Daimler' is a queer place which was never finished, fortunately for us as it had a very commanding position overlooking the beaches. Although all the emplacements were made there were no or very few guns, and only mortar positions; the batteries at Ouistreham were much the same; they even had the shells there ...*but no guns!*

A conference was held at Divisional HQ to discuss a further push down the river bank towards Colombelles. This may or may not come off and very much depends on progress the other side of the river. The Boche is still fighting hard everywhere and shows no sign of pulling out.

Monty is rumoured to have said he wants to break the 'Ring'—he will be well away and in Paris by D+40.⁹

Spent the afternoon in the office with nothing much happening, Sim went off to recce ground with 152 Brigade.

Sim went to a further conference at 1900 hrs, and then on to our own Brigade. I spent my time working out a new system for demanding and getting supplies, over several whiskies in the dug-out with Dag. Sim returned about midnight and then we all went to bed. We are still, and very wisely I consider, sleeping under our tanks, it has several

9 *The 'Ring' was the enemy opposition which was surrounding the allied bridgehead.*

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advantages not the least being that it keeps us dry. Goodall has made a priceless trench entry to our pit which is a big improvement; Sim and I sleep one end and Goodall and Suggitt the other with our feet all meeting in the middle!!

29th June

Completely quiet night and apparently morning also. Mike Aird arrived to discuss various things including an indirect shoot on Lebissey on Sunday next as a preliminary to 'do' the following day—he went off with Sim to have a look-see. A certain amount of our own artillery warmed up later in the morning and this was followed by some enemy air-bursts in our area, a couple of AA shells fell on the ground which luckily slightly injured only one man.

There are various plans and rumours of plans which change hourly—it's quite useless going out to make a recce or trying to lay on any plans as by the time one is back the whole scheme is changed again. It gives one the impression that there is lack of decision higher up but I dare say this is quite wrong if one knew all the moves. I gather however that the order is that Caen must be taken quickly. Efforts in this direction however have not been awfully good so far, as the 8th Infantry Battalion attack on the 3-division front (La Bijude, Epron, etc.) has now been called off as the opposition was much heavier than expected.

30th June

Quiet again, more and bigger plans but still just as vague and since they are dependant on moves on other fronts nothing can be definite yet. It looks rather as if we should try our hand at artillery the day after tomorrow which might be fun but they are pretty windy of 'reprisals' over here so that it may not come off.

152 Brigade had a regrouping conference this p.m.. After it we went on to 154 Brigade and back for a Squadron Leaders' conference here. Mike Aird came over again this p.m. to discuss the shoot but there is still nothing definite. The plan

if it comes off is a big one with the whole of 51st Division and the rest of our Brigade looks like joining us over here but, as said before, it is still fearfully vague.

8 Corps seem to be doing well and they are now established across the Odon and consolidating. It seems that they have drawn off four Panzer Divisions which even though they are not complete is pretty formidable opposition. It might well be that we are fighting 'the 2nd Battle of France—or of Western France' here, as I don't really believe he has the hell of a lot further east for some way.

'B' Squadron has come in here in reserve now and 'C' Squadron has gone out to the 'jungle'—the Recce Troop is going to do a job by relieving the 'C' Squadron in Longueval.

There are now rumours of enemy reinforcements in the north i.e. north of Breville. What this means I don't know, but it caused a flap in the night. Tac R have reported a column about six miles long around Varaville—whether they will try a push east of Breville again is not known.

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Normandy and the battle for Caen

1st July, 1944

On the whole a very noisy night and a flap. It poured with rain all the time and was in fact perfectly bloody. This morning our F.O.O. who has been down in St. Honorine with 'A' Squadron reports that he can see no movement in the enemy FDLs where usually there is a lot going on. He suggests this means they have pulled out; we have heard that they intend to hold a line running roughly SE from the factories at Colombelles, but this doesn't tie up with their activities around Escoville and Herouvillette moving E of Breville.

Talk of another Division coming over the bridges to free the Highland Division and the Airborne. The Airborne must be pretty whacked by now; they have had a lot of casualties and no reinforcements. They were only supposed to be here a week and so far have been in the line for three. There is no doubt that they are magnificent men and wonderfully led. They fight the most unorthodox battle extremely successfully, only live to kill more Huns. They have had tremendous success and the Boche is definitely scared of the maroon beret.

The other night they suddenly piled into two lorries, roared up the road to a cross-roads which they knew was held by machine guns, halted just round the corner from it, jumped out and dived into the ditches, let off everything they had in every direction and then got back into their trucks and off they went. The Boche have steered clear of that place ever since.

The Highland Division is a very different cup of tea. We expected great things from them with their reputation, but they are still far from being acclimatised to this sort of warfare. In the desert they could see the Boche and get their bayonets into them, here all that happens is incessant shelling and mortaring from an unseen foe. They don't begin to compare with the Airborne and there have been some incidents already—to wit, St. H. However, there is no doubt that they are now getting angry and they must be good to have this vast reputation. Their officers are delightful and most hospitable to us when we are under their command.

Sim has gone off to another conference with the General—I suppose to discuss another and even vaguer plan. The wind about the major counter-attack on the 8 Corps front still prevails and I feel the indications are that it will take place either today or tomorrow.

Went off on a tour this p.m., first to Brigade then to John Cordy and finally the Corps Delivery Squadron. Found they have virtually got no reinforcements at all here, either officers or other ranks and they don't look like getting any! This is absurd and when in future we get tanks knocked out we shall not be able to accept new tanks which are in good supply for lack of crews to man them.

Sim and I then went off in the staff car to HQ21 Army Group—Monty's headquarters—to see Dan Riviere and his troop doing protection and bodyguard duty for the C-in-C. All we knew was that it was somewhere west of Bayeux and off we went. The roads were absolutely solid with every kind of vehicle. The coastline which we could see during some of the trip was black with shipping and pretty well every field was full of stacks of ammunition. It certainly gave us the impression that there was the hell of an army on shore and that was after seeing the British and Canadian lines only.

It was very noticeable that the further west we went the less evidence there was of fighting. In 3 Division sector every village is practically flat but there is little damage to show in Douvres and towards Bayeux none at all.

Bayeux is a fair size and stuffed with British and Canadian troops. It is practically impossible to get through in spite of a highly geared up traffic control plan. Every road we wanted to take had a 'No Entry' sign on it, maps were no use and neither was the information bureau near the station.

West of Bayeux the roads were straight and completely empty and we found our way in the end quite easily. Monty's HQ was practically unsigned (unlike all other HQs which have the most enormous signs of every colour, and stretch for miles) and when we got there all there was to be seen was a few tents in an orchard and an enormous 'Tiger' tank which

had just been pulled in and was being looked over by our troop. It is a most impressive vehicle and certainly looks as if it would go. Its 88mm gun is vast and so is everything about it, but its size doesn't strike one till it is seen alongside a Sherman.

Dan seemed quite happy with very little to do except keep guard on Monty's caravan at night. He took us over to the Mess where they were very pleasant and did us well. We were given gin, beer, bread and brandy, none of which we had seen since D-Day!!

It seems that this Tac-HQ is quite a small affair and pleasantly informal, no shouting or stamping or rushing about but the great man did not put in an appearance himself. The head 'T' man was interesting about the flying bomb which is clearly the most original of this war's weapons so far and opens up a lot of fairly unpleasant possibilities. Only London, we gathered, has had it so far, and only about 30% have got through; the RAF reckon to shoot down about 50%. The remainder either just don't arrive or are shot down by our AA.

Coming home was bloody, it was pouring with rain and these ridiculous 'No Entry' signs made it impossible to get onto the right road! However, after eventually motoring practically in our own FDLs all down the line we got home about midnight.

A pretty poor night too as I was woken about 0100 a.m. by a pestiferous despatch rider and then we had to 'stand-to' at 0400 hrs, added to this it was a great deal noisier than it need have been.

The bigger war seems to be going quite well. I gather the Boche has counter-attacked five times today on 30 Corps' front and not 8 Corps' as was expected. Each attack was in a different place and about an hour between them — the results were highly successful for us.

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2nd July

There is little or no news today—no sign of movement on our front and nothing coming in from any other.

Various people have looked in, Brig. Cassels, the Gunner CO, Jim Eadie and Col. Walford of the Camerons. Cassels says he hopes to God the Boche attack us with two Panzer Divisions. I suppose he might but I can't say that I personally look forward to it.

Sim has gone off again, this time with EPP.

News now is that we are to go back across the river, spend a few days resting at Luc-sur-Mer and prepare for a battle at the end of the week. We are to be relieved here by the 148 RAC of 33 Brigade. What the reason for all this is hard to see but imagine that they will make another try at getting a bit nearer to Caen.

3rd July

A bloody night—pouring rain—very hot, muggy and damp, very noisy and a veritable plague of mosquitos. Really got extremely little sleep by the time we had stood-to at 0400.

Recce and conference etc., etc., with new information and all very involved and not at all clear.

Relieving CO came to find out the form and Sim took him round. Went over to Brigade this p.m., absolutely nothing doing.

It had poured with rain again all day and only stopped at about 1600 hrs. This weather is perfectly bloody and keeps our aeroplanes on the ground.

Incidentally, a 'buzz bomb' was overhead this morning and every idiot rushed out to have a shot at it, this was most alarming and quite absurd as it was heading straight for the German lines! Luckily no one hit it.

All preparations for going over to Luc-sur-Mer are now made. It sounds quite pleasant but is very badly bombed. This next attack sounds rather bloody as it has failed twice already, but it is on a much bigger scale this time.

4th July

We were all ready to be off to Luc for our 'rest' when news came that we were to stay put as they wanted to send us to Ouistreham. This caused a few grimmish laughs as the place is under constant shell fire and even in range of small-arms fire from Sallenelles while the route there is under observation the whole way.

However, it was all settled and RHQ and 'B' Squadron set off for Luc at 1000 hrs. An uneventful journey along a well-marked route and we arrived about midday.

We occupy bombed houses and there is literally not one complete house in the town at all along the front. The place is packed full of mines and booby-traps so one has to be rather careful.

We have a Mess and an office under cover which is highly satisfactory and tonight looks like a 'pyjama' night between sheets which is really luxurious after exactly a month.

It is exactly a month since we landed on the beach about two miles further east.

To look at the beaches is a potent reminder of D-Day—particularly seeing all the obstacles at low water. There are relatively few French left although I gather they are beginning to return.

It must have been rather a pleasant little French seaside town in peacetime—exclusively French and not a tourist place. But there's very little of it now and it will take a long time to get it going again.

We have dug ourselves in, in most of the empty rooms of jerry-built shelters and bombed houses! The mess is the last two rooms of a large house; there is practically no roof at all on the sleeping quarters and the office is downstairs only! However, everyone is very happy and delighted to get a rest and change. Only on arrival here did one really realise that one was bloody tired.

'C' Squadron arrived about tea-time.

Went round and had a drink with 'C' and 'B' and then to

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bed—slept like a log—I am told through an A.A. barrage of immense proportions—the nearest battery is only 50 yards away.

5th July

Felt 100% better this a.m. Went along to the office at 0930 having sent a message to Monkey Sellar on the 'Locust' asking him to come and dine.¹

Squadron Leaders went off on a reconnaissance with Sim this p.m. preparatory to the 'La Bijude' operation. Not much form on this yet.

Had a stroll round the town—behind the front it's not too bad and there are still shops functioning. We have managed to set up the Mess with wine, cheese, butter and fruit, which is really rather a triumph.

All taking life very easily and there is an air of holiday in this place.

The DUKWs go roaring about the place and charge into the sea and out, as lighters all day. They really are the most wonderful vehicles. You see them tossing about 5 miles out to sea in quite rough weather and next you see them going over the most appalling country in the forward areas about 5 miles inland!

I've rather lost touch with the battle in the last 24 hours but gather all is relatively quiet.

6th July

Fairly hectic preparation for this 'Operation Charnwood'. 'O' Gp. in the morning—conference in the p.m., reconnaissance in evening and waiting operation order until well after midnight! Missed lunch as well—so this rest has not been so complete for some as it might have been.

¹ *Monkey Sellar was the naval officer i/c of the LCTs that took us over for the assault. Later he became senior partner of the stockbrokers W.I.Carr, the firm in which David Stapelton and Roddy Mcloed were partners, and I occasionally saw him in the city.*

The 176 Brigade who we are playing with this time are anything but impressive. They are a Territorial Brigade and really very amateur. It is the first time they have been in action however, so perhaps they'll go great guns thinking it's rather fun.

They certainly need to as it's a pretty tough nut to crack and the Boche reacts violently to any attempt to push him out. Also—as usual—information is very vague—it seems that we shall never get good information till the Infantry patrols improve. La Bijude, Epron and Couvre Chef are known to have elements of the 21st Panzer Division and 16 GAF Division there and I shan't be surprised if we meet upwards of 40 tanks in the area.

The country is of course most unsuitable, frightfully enclosed and wooded with bad visibility and very little scope for manoeuvre. To add to our difficulties the Infantry have laid minefields in every possible direction which makes the natural limitations of movement even more restricted. They are all rather jungly and don't appear to know just where the minefields are either!

Teeing up is going on hard and I think we might have quite a fair battle really. We have got AVREs, Flails and Crocodiles under command which is a novelty and might be quite amusing.

At any rate the thing is committed now and we shall see what we shall see!

8th July

The Battle for Caen! We moved into our Assembly Area leaving Luc-sur-Mer at 1100 p.m. and arrived at the command post at about 0300 a.m. under cover of a barrage from Mediums. The command post was with Brigadier 176 Brigade (Fryer) and bulldozed in, about two fields, short of La Bijude.

At 0420 (4th hour) the barrage came down and (the fun began) the Infantry (7th North Staffs) went in with 'B' Squadron shooting them in and 'C' Squadron were also supporting from the left.

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They appeared to be having not much trouble and our supposition was pretty correct that they had pulled out to the west and were now getting in some deep-dug trenches west of the village in very strong positions. Then 'B' Squadron troops went into the village and then the Infantry turned their attention to the trenches where they immediately became stuck.

The result was nil and eventually the troops in Bijude began to get a bit anxious as the Infantry had left them and they were surrounded by about 50 Boches. One of their tanks was knocked out and, after killing quite a number with Browning fire they withdrew further into the village.

Meanwhile on the left and right things were going rather well. The East Riding Yeomanry and 197 Brigade were in Galmanche on the right—but the Infantry again were short of the objective, leaving the ERY on their own. (They lost 5 Crew Commanders and a Squadron Leader today from snipers). On the left the Staffs had got into Lebissey with the 135 Brigade.

At 0730 Phase 11 was ordered and the 7th Norfolks moved off to take Epron. What they did I still don't know but it appears to me that none of these Infantry can read a map. At any rate 'C' Squadron couldn't get forward because they couldn't link up with them. Communications with 176 Brigade were practically nil.

By teatime, after continual and confused, but hard and severe fighting, the position was really unchanged. The first phase battalion was still not into the entrenched position and the second was not in Epron. The tanks were sitting on or near the positions and fairly uncomfortable. The Brigadier who had gone off to view the battle and had left Sim to command, returned and we all went up to 'B' Squadron to view the situation.

It was decided that a planned attack on the trenches with the reserve Battalion was the only way to fix it and the General (Lines) arrived with our own Brigadier to plan the Operation.

Why the Operation was so slow up to this stage I cannot

say except that there is little doubt that this Brigade is far behind what it ought to be in fitness for battle; they seemed to lack a proper grasp of things and this in addition to their other shortcomings had caused them an enormous quantity of unnecessary casualties. But the opposition as far as we could make out at this stage was not more than two companies in the trenches and a bunch of well-trained snipers in Epron.

However, the result was as usual and we were left sitting on objectives without support and our tank casualties were about 8—Delaval's tank was knocked out by a bazooka and Toto had his arm broken.²

At about 2030 the big attack went in on the trenches and at the same time Delaval pushed into Epron. The barrage was terrific and flame-throwers and Flails performed with some success as well.

Sim and I went up in the tank to watch and pushed on down into Epron. Again the tanks reached the objectives first and it was dark shortly afterwards and Peter Lyon withdrew to forward rally before the Infantry had taken over.

We then all rear-rallied on the crossroads at Cazelle and settled down to a short night's sleep. Got up to go to a conference at 0530 with Old Fryer of 176 and our own Brigadier.³

9th July

It has been decided to attack the trenches again in exactly the same way. Why, I don't know as, despite the rather feeble efforts of the Infantry, I am confident that the barrage, the Crocodiles and ourselves must have dealt them a sharpish blow.

'B' Squadron were to go in with the Infantry again and 'A' to support from Epron with 'C' in reserve east of the Chateau de la Londe.

² Delaval was Major Sir Delaval Cotter, Bart, commanded 'C' Squadron on D-Day and throughout the campaign. Toto was Anthony Akers-Douglas.

³ Brigadier Fryer commanding 176 Brigade.

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Net result—barrage went down, Infantry went forward and we all put down smoke (I am getting my eye in now and last night in Epron and La Bijude let off some Browning and a bit of H.E. through the muck and mess of the barrage). I don't believe there were any Boche there at all and I fear that a lot of our Infantry were killed in our own barrage because again—I imagine—they couldn't read their maps because their axis was oblique to the barrage.

When the party died down we went back to forward rally and sorted ourselves out. We had no casualties today.

The battle for Caen has gone well and all the town north of the river is captured. This is a big success and everyone is delighted.

Vincent Dunkerly arrived this evening to take over the Regiment and we had been expecting him for several days.

We were told that we were to be out of battle for a week which is great news, and moved back to Cazelle to a perfectly delightful chateau and settled down for the night—very tired and very glad to get to bed.

10th July

Today we start sorting ourselves out and settling down. The chateau is really delightful and used to be a German Mines School. They must have left it in the hell of a hurry because it is quite the filthiest place I have ever seen. It beggars description. We have set to work to clean it up and should be very comfortable. However, I wish we were to be here for a month and not a week.

The new Colonel is also sorting himself out and trying to get to know people, and held a short Squadron Leaders' Conference this evening. The mess truck and all 'B' Echelon have arrived in France which is very satisfactory and means that we can get ourselves organised.

In the evening, Peter Chance arrived to say that there was a chateau down the road full of drink and furniture, pictures and silver being looted and would we put a guard on it. Sent Peter Jury off to get the form and then followed

ourselves later.

Nothing like such a good chateau as ours and much more knocked about; in fact ours is really the only habitable building for miles around. Rommel is said to have lunched here on Thursday! Pity we didn't know!

We managed to get a bottle of 1870 Eau de Vie out of them, which was very good!

Really feeling quite civilised now having bathed and sat down to a normal meal in the mess even though it is still Compo!

11th July

Marvellous thought—no real work today. Colonel walked all round the Regiment and saw how things were going on.

This p.m. we had the most interesting time. Col. Sim and I went off in the jeep sightseeing. We went down past La Bijude and Epron, and found the shambles awful. There were quite a number of civilians creeping back, presumably from Caen, and it was a very pathetic sight. The story is that during Thursday night's monster bomber attack the population collected in the Cathedral for a service. After the attack, which was in daylight, the Cathedral was the only place practically speaking left intact and they all emerged singing the Marseillaise—much to the discomfort of the Boche!

It isn't possible in Epron and La Bijude to tell which was a house or which just a wall. No sign of life of any sort and a vile smell of dead Boche, cows, horses, etc. Delaval's tank was sitting in the middle of Epron with a neat hole from the bazooka in the side of it and the whole bottom blown out.

We then went to Lebissey, the bloody place that had nagged us for five weeks, and climbed the water tower.

Why it was still standing is a mystery—it must have had a hundred shell holes in it and was really a mass of rubble and mess but we ventured up the rickety iron step ladder and reached the top and perched on the roof.

The view was terrific—we could see north to Perrier le Dan, the feature we had sat on a few days ago—and every

stick and stone of it. East—over the river the whole factory area and Colombelles was plainly visible. There was a battle going on there ('Findhorn'—which we were to have done) which we later heard was a dismal flop and the 153 (H) Brigade and 148 R.A.C. took a bit of a knock.

South—over Caen the famous 'high ground' was clearly visible and most interesting. A certain amount of movement going on and we thought we saw some guns under a railway embankment. West we could see 9 Corps being pushed out of Maltot, and for miles beyond the view was first class.

It really is a super observation post and the Boche who used it must have been brave men! I should hate to have been third relief climbing up that tower in the early morning. It is literally pockmarked with holes! Our gunners were hanging about in the village and not at all keen on moving into the tower as an observation post.

Actually the Boche were much nearer to us than we thought sitting up there—in fact they can't have been more than 1 1/2 miles away—hence the ranging shells which dropped around about two fields away!

We went into the Lebissey woods where the Boche had put up the hell of a fight. The trees looked just like the last war, and the place was a ruin and consequently nothing really to see. There is no doubt it was the most commanding position and held with only about two companies who fought bloody hard.

We looked at Colombelles again and the factories, but couldn't make much out of it, and no signs of movement visible.

We returned to the jeep and set off for Caen, a couple of miles away over the hill. The nearer we got the more the road was cut up, and the more civilians we met creeping out with their few belongings.

Eventually we got into the town having made numerous detours, and the sight was really staggering. There can be only a few people at this stage of the war who have seen the results of our own bombing at close quarters, and this was

2,300 tons in an hour in an area a mile square.

It was like H.G.Wells or worse, and piles of debris were just everywhere.

We could however distinguish streets and buildings—unlike Epron—and the Cathedral—apart from the windows, was reasonably intact, but it was pretty grim.

The inhabitants seem to have been pleased to see us, but I felt personally pretty sorry for them and can't quite understand their feelings. They weren't involved in '14—'18 and saw no fighting in '40, the Boche bought all their produce and kept them going on much as normal, and now the 'Forces of Liberation' have completely flattened them down and left them virtually destitute.

12th July

A quiet day. Promotions conference a.m. This afternoon C.O. and I went off on a round first to the forward Delivery Squadron; to see some new officers and find out about reinforcements and then to the Field Cashier and on to Brigade who have set themselves up in an isolated field outside Douvres. Various people have been into Caen which is just beginning to get the C.M.P around who are trying to prevent us going there at all.

13th July

We were to have gone to a conference at HQ 59 Division, at 0900 but this was cancelled so set off to see 'A' Squadron Tewt. at Epron, but missed them, so carried on and went to 21 A Group to see Dan Riviere and Troop looking after Monty. Everything was much the same as the last time we went there and his HQ is still no larger than a Brigade HQ! The roads were just as crowded but we managed to by-pass Bayeux on a bulldozed track that has been made. Heard at Army Group that a certain amount of what was described as 'reorganisation' was going on, but many sprats failed to catch a mackerel.

Lunched in Le Lion d'Or in Bayeux on the way back—

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rather moderately. But fresh meat was a pleasant change.

Then went on to see the 23 H the Colonel's old regiment and saw Perry Harding and Monkey Blacker. On the way we ran into Jeff Taylor who showed us the way and was really in very good form. I hadn't realised he was now parson to the 23 H. They told us (over there) that they had shot at a Panther from 200 yards with 17 pounder with great success and an encouragement as stories to the reverse effect had been circulating.

The whole countryside through which we motored i.e. from just short of the Odon (23 H) to our chateau at Cazelle is devastated. There are dead tanks littering the countryside and half-tracks and vehicles of every sort. The usual foul stench is everywhere too. It is all an appalling sight and really makes one quite sick. The battle-fields are only too easy to find and the actual fields and countryside between the villages seem fairly free. I suppose this is because of the high corn which covers up all the mess. The villages are however quite pathetic. No sound houses left whatever, and no signs of human life at all except a few forlorn and bedraggled objects groping about in all the muck and ruin. You occasionally see a very emaciated and scrawny cat or puppy. Possessions such as bedclothes and ordinary clothes, tables (and jars) and the inevitable pot are around all over the shop. The latter item seems a common one, and for some reason is never broken even though it's in the middle of the street.

Back at the chateau all was quiet and really quite civilised now. Sim and the Colonel went off to dine with the Staffords and Jimmy Delius came and had dinner here.

14th July

A day in the office. Sim and the Colonel have been off on conferences at Brigade and with Old Cass who has just had another decoration from the Yanks! Rumours of moves again in the area but all fearfully hush hush and cagey. All quiet.

Michael Bell and Bill Riley from 4/7 Dragoon Guards came over to dinner with 'A' Squadron.

15th July

Another morning in the office without much incident. Colonel and Sim went off on recce for next operations which are still kept extremely secret. The C.O. has told me the form but apparently no one else is allowed to know.

Jeff Taylor came to lunch which was pleasant to see him again. He was in good form and much the same as ever.⁴

More office in the p.m. and evening and then a dinner party! Really very funny. Old Copper Cass and Mike Aird, Bob Dayer-Smith, Jim Eadie and Mike Farquarson came, the Brigadier and Tom Williamson and Victor couldn't make it. We haven't succeeded yet in getting Errol to dine with us in the 15 months he has commanded the Brigade.

There is now no doubt that this Operation is on and we move tomorrow. I had to go off in the middle of the dinner party to collect orders from the Infantry Brigade living in a chateau on the other side of the village.

Heard last night that Bobby has got his M.C. which is great news. Derrick has got a D.S.O. and Peter Lyon, Billy Wormald and Peter Hunter all got M.C.s, also about 12 others—all DD and D-Day awards which is a really good show.

16th July

Hectic day of conferences. 'Hardly time to turn round.' Brigade Conference at Divisional HQ (3 Div.) at 1000 hrs. and then straight on to Copper Cass's 'O' Group at 8 Infantry

⁴ Jeff Taylor had been regimental padre in England and had left us, I believe, on sick leave and had been posted elsewhere. He was a very popular padre, but death to any vehicle that he drove, and was known to the fitters as the Rev. Halfshaft Taylor! There was a lovely story told of his efforts to get some ATS to come to a regimental dance. He detailed a three-ton truck and driver to collect some ATS girls from their nearest camp and the driver duly carried out this task and on his return saluted Jeff Taylor and announced 'Three ton of fluff, Sir,' or words to that effect...

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Brigade which was just typical of him. He is a very gallant old man and very unorthodox. He has just been given an American decoration and was very funny about it. We lunched there and got back in time for a quick regimental 'O' Group and then on the move to a preliminary concentration area. Plum in the open. Everything has been done in a fearful hurry today and no time to really sort things out. As usual we have been rushed into the battle—I gather for security reasons—can still only tell Squadron Leaders the form.

Had a priceless interview with the Corps Commander John Crocker—in the concentration area—he was really angry that we had put a few bundles of drying mustard seeds onto our tanks as camouflage in a completely open field. He said we were damaging French property and valuable crops. I hadn't the energy to protest very strongly—wisely too, I think, as he was a very angry man.

We move again at midnight to East of the Orne again!! to old Escoville (alias Stonkville) and hope we will have a good do. We are back again with our old 8th Brigade which is a good thing but not time—as usual—to lay on the battle properly. It is nonsense not to brief until after recce—and we are not going to be able to do much recce as the order is 'no movement tomorrow!!'

17th July

My birthday! And a very hectic day indeed—at least another four conferences and 'O' Groups. To start with, up all night moving, and an absolutely bloody and pestiferous journey in a thick wet mist and also a dust which all agree is comparable to the desert. It took us five hours—visibility was 5 yards at best—however I was in the bottom of the tank and had a pretty average sleep there.

Area crammed with other troops. This is a big do—a tremendous effort with armour predominating and a terrific air bombardment—the greatest ever—an armoured thrust also the biggest in history so there ought to be fun! As usual we lead—an honour! I doubt it, at any rate it all remains to be

seen.

It has been a very hot and trying day but the weather portends well.

We are undoubtedly on the eve of a battle much bigger than Alamein.

However, again everyone is calm, the crush east of the Orne has to be seen to be believed. There isn't an orchard or field empty and if it is postponed, life will be intolerable, as the place will be nothing less than a muck heap.

18th July

A fairly bloody night—the mosquitos were appalling and a despatch rider woke me up I suppose twice every hour, However on the tick of 0600 the bombers came over i.e. heavy Lancasters—their aim was accurate—thank God—as we were only 1 1/2 miles away. It was a terrific sight and they streamed over for 45 minutes to attack 5 small villages—Couverville and Sanneville, Demouville and Ennerville, Giberville—and the Colombelles factory area.

This over, swarms of fighter-bombers, Bostons etc. started fragmentation bombs scattered over a wide area.

We moved off 0715 just as 1500 Fortresses arrived to plaster the gun areas to our south and east of Troan. It was terrific support and most effective.

As we moved forward to the gaps in the minefield the Corps' barrage started and the battle was on. 'B' Squadron moved quickly forward to the entrenched areas south of the S.L. and west of Touffreville and started to shoot them up—before long prisoners started to appear and the trenches gave us no more bother.

The Staffs Squadron under command then whistled forward and went straight for their objective at Lirose which they took with only minor opposition, knocking out some 50mm anti-tank guns on the way. At the same time 'A' Squadron moved to support the South Lancs in the wooded country S of the triangle which the 152 (H) Brigade was taking on. 'C' Squadron moved through the minefield into

reserve and RHQ went to the high ground S of Escoville.

The usual confusion took place for the next four hours while the infantry got into the various objectives supported by us and by midday they were sufficiently held for the Staffs Yeomanry with Kings' Scottish Light Infantry on the back of their tanks to push down to Ennerville. By 1500 the ERY were moving through with the 9th Brigade to advance on Troan.

Meanwhile, the armour was going through well: 11 Armoured Division down the right flank; the Guards Armoured Division to the right for Argences.

So far all well but no news from Canucks mopping up the Colombelles and factory area before going on to Caen. The support was immense and more and more prisoners rolled in—the day's bag for the Regiment i.e. those passing through RHQ alone was 6 officers and 176 other ranks.

In the late afternoon 'C' Squadron had some bad luck and lost 4 tanks quickly in Sannerville against 5 Boche tanks which pushed off to the south.

Gradually each Squadron was released and the Regiment re-formed in reserve in the area of 'Piccadilly Circus', S of Escoville, all are highly delighted—but news of advanced formations is still uncertain.

Having been shelled on our ridge all day by every kind of gun and werfer and missed, we are shelled in harbour and bombed quite heavily too, after dark. Tired—but the mossies still so bad sleep is very difficult. No news of further movements—apparently we were armoured reserve in event of armoured counter attack towards Courville and the triangle.

Tony Lyon Clark was killed today which is a bitter blow and the MQMS has lost a leg. The RAP etc. got a very heavy strafing which was unlucky and lost us a certain number of chaps. Heard also that Jimmy Delius has been killed by a stray shell which is another bad blow. Our casualties, considering our role, have been light, but even so they are another 1 officer killed, 2 wounded and 5 other ranks killed and 12 wounded, bring our total casualties to 120 all ranks, all types.

19th July

On the whole a quiet day after a short and rather bloody night—the mosquitos were awful. Stood to from 0400 hrs, onwards but nothing happened and our role is the same—after some sporadic shelling at about 0800 hrs. we seemed to settle down with nothing much happening. South of us was mostly consolidation and sorting out of yesterday's party—the 7th Armoured Division has yet to be launched and there is no news of employing it yet.

A flap in the evening about Touffreville which turned out a complete hare but we have to put a squadron (Derrick) at 15 minutes to help the 3 Recce who have got a squadron in the village.

Other wise a quiet night and an uneventful 'Stand-to'.

20th July

Still no news and no shelling of any note so far today. Lovely morning and hot. Colonel and Sim went off to find out any news and I stayed in our beet field. Various Intelligence officers turned up to get information—apparently knowing nothing themselves so we told them what we could.

Went off to the Staffs at about 1400 hrs. for an 'O' Group with P.P. but nothing to tell us and no move so far.

Just got back in time for the rain—it rained absolutely buckets and in ten minutes everything was soaking wet—bedding, clothes—everything perfectly bloody—the shelter I put up for the the sun—has come in handy for the rain! It never looked at all like rain at lunch time and everyone is properly caught out.

Had a most uncomfortable night in the front of the staff car which is uncomfortable to sit in let alone lie or try to lie on.

The Colonel and Sim slept in the back and I had to give them each an occasional tweak to stop them snoring! On the whole a very poor night.

21st July

'Rain has held up operations in Normandy'. I should think it bloody well has—it hasn't stopped yet and our frightful beet field is a quagmire and everything is under 4 inches of thick mud. The Brigadier states it has produced 3 inches since 5 p.m. yesterday.

No news and nothing happened in the morning at all, just sat under a tarpaulin beside the tank and hoped for the best.

Everyone seems to be ridiculously cheerfully and I can't think why. Personally I have been soaked from the navel down since yesterday, but am not more bad tempered than usual and the troops positively seemed to enjoy it.

Brigadier arrived this afternoon in good order and chatted and stayed to tea, discussed various things including the lack of news and apparently a plan of any sort, the losses of the 11th Armoured Division and the news from Germany.

There is no news of any sort except that the line S of Caen is being established and the armour withdrawn chiefly I gather to refit. The 11th Armoured Division lost 118 tanks on their move south which is a pretty serious affair. I gather their orders were just to 'go' and keep going and the result, a second 'Knightsbridge'.⁵ Either it was just gross bad handling on the part of senior commanders or else very bad 'crystal gazing'. They may have thought there was only a thin crust and once through it they could bum on. However, I feel it is monstrous that a Division trained for three years—very highly—should lose two thirds of its tanks and 300 tank crews in its second battle.

The news from Germany is quite fantastic, but so far we haven't managed to get the wireless geared up to hear it properly. However, for Hitler to tell the Germans that he has had a bomb thrown at him and to obey only his orders and not pay attention to any bogus instructions must seem that

⁵ 'Knightsbridge' was a battle in the desert where a formation of tanks was caught unawares and badly mauled!

there is something brewing inside and that it is more serious than anything that has happened so far. However, to anyone who says that the German Army is in revolt the only answer is to tell them to take a walk for a few miles to the South.

Heavy shelling fairly close went on spasmodically from 1700 to 1900 hrs. Then some bombing in the evening about 1020 and then bed in the office truck. Probably very unsafe but at any rate it's dry. The rain has stopped at last but it's ankle deep in mud, and the trench under the tank is still uninhabitable—however, thank God I am not an infanteer who has to choose between keeping 'dry' above ground or dodging the mortars by jumping in a trench with three foot of water in it!

22nd July

A quietish night after a noisy start and really very comfortable in the office truck with Peter and Stuart also, so used mosquito cream and somewhat deterred the brutes who have bitten me to hell.

About 0815 some aerial activity. When half a dozen Messerschmidts came flying over—presumably taking photos—imagine we can resign ourselves to having a bloody day of shelling. A tremendous fusillade went up and one had its tail knocked off by a Bofors and fell about 400 yards away—it looked just like a toy airplane chucked up in the air coming tumbling down. The pilot had parachuted and landed close beside it—his parachute only opened about 150 feet up.

Still appallingly muddy and unpleasant but I feel it may improve today as it hasn't rained—so far.

The shelling started about 1100 and went on pretty well without stopping till we left at about 6 o'clock. Two men in 'B' Squadron were killed and 7 wounded. It was raining big stuff from at least two directions so eventually decided to push off which we did but had to leave 'A' Squadron behind keeping a look out.

On the way to our new harbour 'B' Squadron blew up a couple of tanks in an unmarked minefield which was unlucky

particularly as the sappers had told them it was clear.

Our new harbour is just behind a regiment of 25-pounders and just in front of a regiment of mediums so the noise is incredible. However, it's better than being shelled all the time even though the mosquitos are worse here than in the last place—if possible. Almost eaten alive during the night under a tank which was perfectly bloody. Poor Sim says he didn't sleep a wink and Stuart Watson looks like nothing on earth this morning.

The news has broken now that the 27th Armoured Brigade is to be broken up. No inkling of this had been seen till now though in England we had rather anticipated that we should be considered 'expendable'!! However they were just bloody well wrong—and no doubt about it—I think it unlikely that any other armoured brigade had fought so many successful actions in this campaign with such success and light casualties and they must be mad to do this. Monty, Dempsey, John Crocker and everyone else has said how sorry they are but the War Office are apparently adamant.⁶

It is all very depressing as the 'Pregnant Prawn' had become well-known in the Second Army particularly east of the Orne.⁷ The Staffs are going home to DD training probably this week. The ERY's fate is not yet known. We are to join the 8th Armoured Brigade and taking Erroll P.P. with us as Brigadier. Actually we come out of this very well as we rejoin our old friends the 4th/7th Dragoon Guards and take our Brigadier and half his staff with us. They are an old Middle East Brigade with a great reputation but practically nothing left of it. The Sherwood Rangers are the tried regiment who

⁶ Dempsey was Lt. Gen. Sir Miles Dempsey, Commander 2nd British Army.

⁷ This was the nickname of our formation shoulder flash. In our case, that of the 27th Armoured Brigade, it was a Seahorse and worn by all ranks. It was entirely appropriate to our DD role, as an independent armoured brigade. Most flashes were divisional ones. When we became the 8th Armoured Brigade, also independent, our flash was a Fox's Mask.

are reputed to be a good Yeomanry regiment—Sim knows them well.

Apparently we will move to an army area SE of Bayeux to refit and collect all we want off the Staffs who will be leaving everything behind here.

23rd July

Bloody mosquitos again—perfectly pestiferous—I am covered in bites and so is everyone else, if it wasn't for these pests we would be very 'comfortable' and having a very pleasant rest.

Tripped off to see Brigadier with the Colonel—found them all sitting around the A.C.V with Mike and rather gloomily gambling at cards.. They are pretty cut up about this breaking up of the Brigade but are now resigned to it. It's hard luck on chaps like Bob Dayer Smith who has done Brigade Major for a year now, but then no one will listen to reason.

On the way back went and drank a gin or two with Godfrey Stewart and Tom Welstead and really got quite tight—great fun to see them all and hear their news. They have had a letter from their General telling them not to criticise the 51st Highland Division. This is really rather amusing and we feel a bit left left out not having been sent a copy ourselves! Feelings must have been pretty high!

Brigadier came to tea and discussed various subjects. General opinion now is that so-called revolt in Germany has gone off at half-cock and that they have pretty well restored the position now. Hope it's wrong and I feel it may be as the BBC still report 'disturbances' in Berlin, Frankfurt, etc. Kiel and Hamburg have also been mentioned.

No more news of our future yet—I gather the 8th Armoured Brigade have got both a Motor Battalion and a regiment of gunners, which is good news.

24th July

A very noisy night from our guns after some aerial

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activity early on. Otherwise nothing much and the mosquitos were a little less persistent.

There is now talk of another battle to come off tomorrow early in the 'Buggerbus' (Bourgebus) area. 27th Armoured Brigade is to watch the Canadian Corps' right flank. What it's all about we don't yet know. Personally, I think it's really rather nonsense as the orders are to disband the Brigade forthwith—however their methods are quite beyond comprehension—the Staffs are to be swapped with the 148 RAC which is a very poor deal!!

It is rather a pleasant harbour this on the whole apart from the mossies. It looks down on Herouville and up into the high ground over St. Honorine and it is called La Carrefour de la Madeleine. It's odd to think that three weeks ago when Delaval was up here we used to creep along on our stomachs to avoid being seen, expecting to be stonked good and hard any second and frequently were. We used to curse it as tank country—the best field of fire being a very doubtful 200 yards!

25th July

A busy day although we expected a quite uneventful one. We had rumours that they wanted us for a battle last night and this a.m. it was confirmed when P.P. sent for the Colonel to meet him S of Demouville. I went with him in an AA TK after an early lunch—the whole way down there the place was just stuffed full of troops.

Apparently we are to move down tonight to the area of Le Mesnil Fremental to be in support of 8 Canadian Infantry Brigade who are a firm base for a Canadian Corps attack. The Canadian Corps which has 243 Canadian Infantry Division and 7th Armoured Division and Guards Armoured division under command are apparently going to push on South for the high ground South of old Buggerbus. We are in a counter-attack role and 148 RAC have taken the Staffs' place. Why on earth they are employing the Brigade like this after ordering its disbandment, goodness knows. No one would mind a

fight and finish up the 'Pregnant Prawn' in a 'whirl of glory' but really this is nothing more than friggery.

We recce'd the area and 'Fremantle' is rather a nice little village, though very badly blitzed, and once Boche-occupied. It has or had a perfectly delightful farmyard in it. We called up the recce troop to hold onto our area while we went to see the Canadians, who are living in a chateau down the road—also much blitzed. In the chateau was some very nice and undamaged furniture. The Canadian Brigadier was, I thought, a good sort and quite on the spot.

Returned to the Regiment to give out orders to move, and away we went again to a Brigade 'O' Gp. Went through St. H and Colombelles which was rather interesting in view of our previous battles and found them both pretty well flat.

Brigade are sitting behind a railway embankment and digging like mad. I hope we are too as we shall undoubtedly get a pasting or a 'going over', as the Canadians call it.

After orders, got back to the Regiment to find them all digging in just the same as Brigade and we have an enormous hole under the tank—which I am now sitting in! Eventually went to bed—saw a most extraordinary scene in the field we are in—an escaped white rabbit having a hell of a game with a couple of magpies—it really was quite fascinating to watch and a bit of comic relief.

Hardly got to bed before the trouble started—the usual few Boche aircraft came over first and dropped a few and then some shelling. Our guns are really making the hell of a noise just behind us and our heavy bombers were going over for about 40 minutes.

In the middle of the night someone started bombing us good and hearty—who or what I don't know—personally I thought at the time it was our own side but now I think I may be wrong. A stick or two dropped unpleasantly close and Sgt. Molan in 'B' was wounded—then I went to sleep but the trouble wasn't over because we then got very heavily and accurately shelled by a bloody great gun east of us. I slept through it!! But some literally landed only 20 yards away.

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Maurice Cornwall wounded in the neck and Sgt. O'Brien most unluckily killed—a shell went into the turret of his 'honey' tank in which he was sleeping.⁸

26th July

Maximum medium bomber effort this morning followed by the same as last night on the woods SE of Buggerbus. Last night, half were delayed-action and these went off at 0700—it sounded like a jolly good crump and with any luck will flush the 1st S.S. Panzer tanks which are thought to be there.

The battle is a bit behind schedule so far but we are sitting in our trench and waiting for something to happen.

26th July

(Something odd has happened to the dates again—it is very confusing and I confess to not knowing most of the time if it's Tuesday or Sunday, Xmas or Easter!)

Really a boring and bloody day. Spent most of it under the tank and dodging the mortars and shells. Whenever we got out, which we did periodically to walk round and see Squadrons etc., it always seemed to start again.

The battle has not gone well. Two Infantry divisions and two Armoured Divisions have failed even to get their first objectives (2 & 3 Canadian Divisions and 7th and Guards Armoured Divisions).

There is of course no doubt that the Boche are fighting very hard indeed for every inch of ground. However, I can't help feeling that our tactics must be a bit out if we can't bust through him with our superior strength and air support. The infantry are the weak link to my mind—and while sympathising with them for the bloodiness of their job there is no doubt they must be made to go harder. Tactics want a jolly furbish up from the very top in my opinion. This close country is the

⁸ Sgt O'Brien was a splendid man and had been Officers Mess Sgt and had taken on this active role. His loss was a serious blow to our comfort!

anti-tank and a Spandau gunners' paradise and might have been built for defence.

However the Ruskie will certainly be in Berlin before us now unless something very spectacular happens here!! The Yanks are supposed to have launched an attack today—hope they get on the move—they ought to—there is, practically speaking, no opposition and, I gather, attack is on a very big scale.

Various visitors during the day. An RAF Group Captain looking for a Typhoon. Squadron Leader told us quite a funny story about Churchill when he was here the other day. Apparently someone was trying to persuade him to accept a bottle of brandy as a present, which, much to everyone's surprise he consistently refused. After a final refusal he said 'I may be a selfish man—but in this at least I have made adequate provision!'

Alan Jolly, CO of 146 RAC, due to relieve us, also turned up.

The shelling and mortaring hasn't really stopped all day but the night was quite quiet or at least I slept through whatever noise there was.

26th July

'Stand to' as usual—and no pleasanter than usual. Sent off the advance party for our new area where we are supposed to take over the kit we want from the Staffs, before they go home and refit, and equip ourselves and push off and join the 8th Armoured Brigade. Means having to completely repaint all our bloody signs which is the Dickens of an awful grind!

Some really rather unpleasant shelling pretty well all the time but stopped in time to have one of the best lunches since arrival, ordinary Compo but supplemented by some delicious runner beans and globe artichokes.

Orders took hours to come through but eventually came and we 'pulled out of the line' on relief by the 144 RAC at about half past three.

The march back to Coulombs, a small village SE of

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Bayeux I didn't see much of—as usual. Bouncing along in the bottom of a tank is certainly not my idea of fun. It's hot, smelly, uncomfortable and one has no idea in which way you are going. Personally I think it's hell but there it is—I always end up in a thoroughly bad temper!

The march was made, as all are these days, on the specially-made tank tracks they have got running across the area—they are very dusty and not good going at all.

At Coulombs we are all round the village in orchards and farmyards. Really priceless and a typical Normandy village with its rather attractive stone.

The Colonel and I share a bedroom in a barn loft—probably full of rats but none seen yet—very primitive but a lot better than nothing.

The office is just the same the other side of the village street. The Mess is in a lean-to in an orchard-cum-farmyard with an ante-room in the farmer's house.

The highlight is Sim's bedroom which is the church porch, by special arrangement with the Curé. It has a curtain across the front and all the little girls look in as they pass and shriek with laughter. Actually it's a very good spot.

July 27th

A wonderful sleep and prepare for a day in the office. Sent out orders for work programme and walked round Squadrons. After lunch the Colonel spoke to all ranks behind the orchard at RHQ. New vehicles—or replacement ones from the Staffs are coming in and we are now set for a major sort-out and reckon on about a week to do it in.

Went over to say good-bye to the Staffs who are returning to England tonight—and not sorry to be going—saw Jim Eadie who was in good form. He was most amusing about the troops' reaction to the shelling.

He said if you watched them they were exactly like rabbits. The first shell came down and they all sat up and looked and remained looking and if nothing happened went on with whatever they were doing. If another dropped they

would change their stare to where it landed, and one man would then make a dive for his trench, followed quickly by everyone else. Then, ten minutes later a head would poke up and have a look-see—stay watching for a bit while other heads poked up—then, deciding all was clear they would all get out and have a 'brew-up' or coffee house and then 'CRUMP'—the shell would come down in the middle of them!

July 28th

Woken by Mason with a warning order to be ready to move midday tomorrow. Perfectly ridiculous and nonsensical having been given a week to reorganise in. Steamed off to Brigade after breakfast; found the Brigadier, having just had a row with 'Fish', in a towering rage and just tearing off to 2nd Army and 30 Corps to sort it all out. This reorganisation game is quite haywire at the moment. No one will make any decisions as to responsibility or who is to carry it out and what we are supposed to do. The result is endless rumours which spread madly and the latest lunch-time one today is that we are to return to England with 8th Armoured Brigade. It has received the attention which I hope is its due—nil.

Leaving Brigade we sped off to Army Group again to see Brian Edwards and the Monty troop. Found all in good order and just the same as last time except for a new G1 who we didn't meet. The Yanks are doing very well against light or even less opposition and look as if they have pushed quite a handful into the bag. Monty's HQ in Normandy at the moment is merely a sorting house of information and an Officers' Mess for Liaison Officers who he sends off each morning in a jeep with a map and says 'Come back tonight sometime and tell me what's coming off' I can imagine the only part he plays apart from his serious social responsibilities is to send for Bradley and Dempsey and say 'You take St. Lo and you take Caen.'

Roared off to see the 24 Lancers next where we stopped to lunch. W.A.C. Anderson commands from the 17/21st Lancers and it is undoubtedly a very good show. It is criminal that