

An 'Unspectacular' War?

Reconstructing the history of the 2nd Battalion East

Yorkshire Regiment during the Second World War.

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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2007.

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This thesis focuses on one battalion of infantrymen who trained for, and served during, the D-Day landings and north-west Europe campaign. Battalion histories in this detail are rare, as they usually form part of self-serving and uncritical histories produced by the parent regiment. This small unit acts as a microcosm of the infantry of the line during the period, reflecting the typical high casualty rates and long periods on the front line. The existing sparse evidence about the 2nd Battalion was enhanced by interviews with veterans of the unit, which proved central to the study. Their memories revealed a wealth of rich and previously unknown detail.

Existing secondary literature is critical of the battalion's, and 3rd Division's, efforts on D-Day and the units of the 3rd Division were dubbed 'The Unspectaculars' in the press. These criticisms are challenged in the first three chapters of the thesis, which examine the level of training the infantrymen received; the battalion's performance on D-Day; and the progress of the battalion from D-Day onwards. The performance of the battalion is argued to have been solid yet unspectacular for much of the campaign. However in February 1945 came its spectacular moment, at the Battle of the Bridge. Chapter Four and the Afterword address what life was like for the infantrymen of the battalion and assess what happened to these soldiers when they returned home, since for many, the war did not end when Germany surrendered.

The thesis provides a social and cultural history of the 2nd Battalion, albeit within the military sphere. While individual memories remain an important source, the narrative of the battalion also forms a group memory, particularly focusing on one outstanding officer, Major 'Banger' King. A group record is also apparent during commemorative events, in particular the 60th anniversary of D-Day, in June 2004.

Introduction

Chapter 1 The Training of the 2nd Battalion for D-Day and after.

Chapter 2 D-Day.

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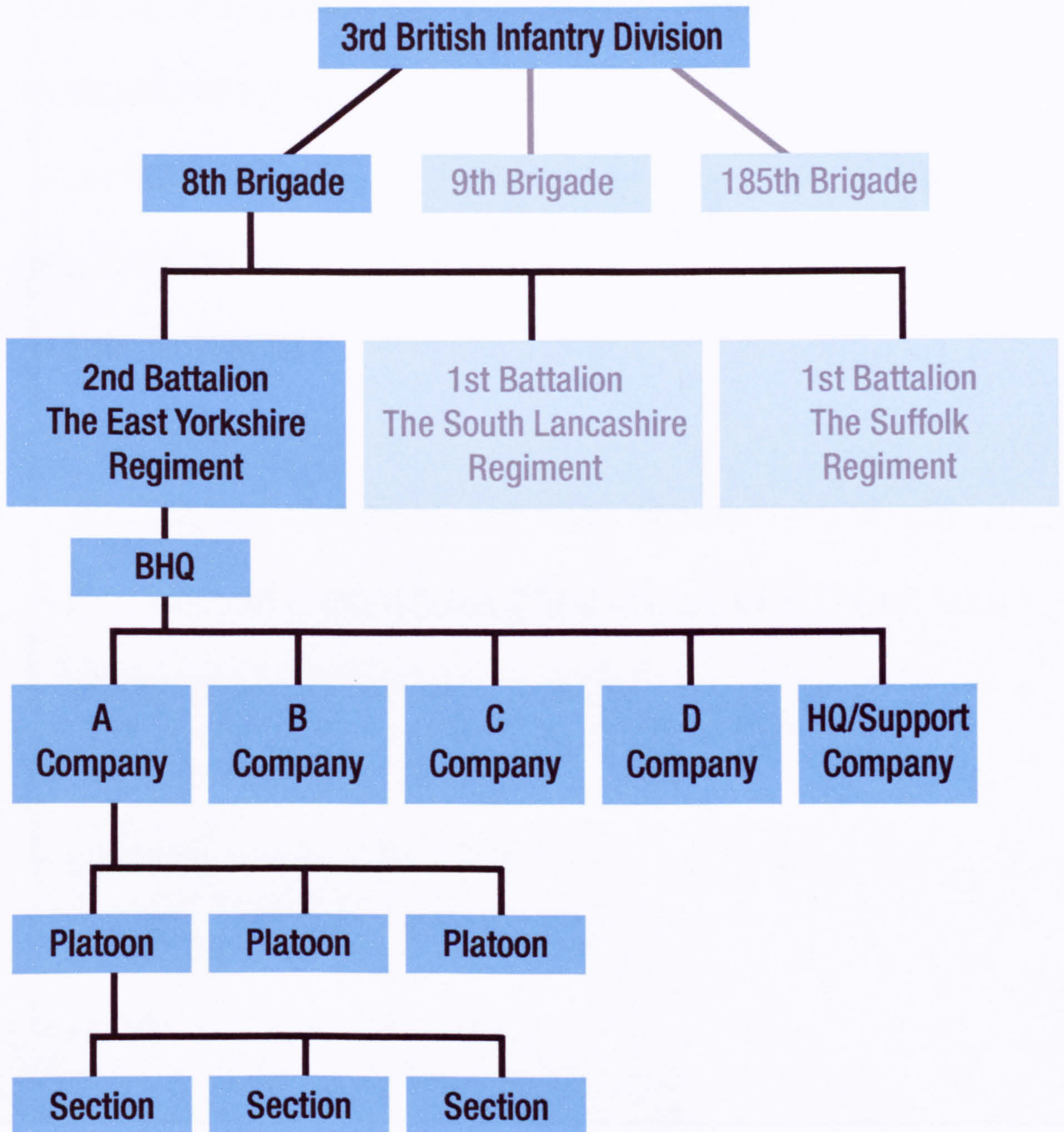
Acknowledgments

My grateful thanks go first and foremost to the veterans of the 2nd Battalion East Yorkshire Regiment, whose encouragement and enthusiasm have sustained me through the long research process. They made me welcome in their homes and invited me to join the Veterans' Group as an honorary member. Their telephone calls and letters always provided inspiration and a sense of inclusion. Above all, the veterans wanted to tell me about their battalion as it was, and in so doing, they provided a glimpse of their lives as young men. On several occasions I was sadly too late to meet the ex-soldier of the battalion and his family would kindly supply recollections and memories, particularly the Smithson, Isherwood, Folley and Pearse families.

I also owe a great deal to my supervisor, Clare Griffiths, who took over as principal supervisor after the retirement of John Woodward, and whose criticisms and assistance have proved invaluable. By granting me a scholarship, the University ensured that I could achieve a balance between employment and study. Further thanks should go to those who have volunteered to read drafts of each chapter and give me both critical feedback, and encouragement, principally Dr Peter Liddle of the Second World War Experience Centre, and Scott Flaving of the Duke of Wellington's Regiment RHQ, who also checked each chapter for military accuracy.

Finally, without the practical, financial and emotional support of my husband, and the understanding of my children, this thesis would not have been completed. Hopefully a normal family life will now resume!

The place of the 2nd Battalion within the 3rd Division



The 2nd Battalion Command Structure



This diagram does not include the Quartermaster or Quartermaster Sergeants, or the Colour Sergeant, as these roles have not been mentioned in this thesis.

Introduction.

Part One - Aims of the thesis

The aim of this thesis is principally to examine the actions of the 2nd Battalion East Yorkshire Regiment during the Second World War in order to establish its achievements and failings, and to consider whether or not the 2nd Battalion fought an ‘unspectacular’ war. Lt Col Renison, the Commanding Officer of the 2nd Battalion from October 1944, and its Second-in-Command from the previous July, noted in his memoir that the 3rd Division had been dubbed ‘The Unspectaculars’ in the press and remarked on the adverse reaction of his soldiers to the general lack of publicity about the actions of the Division, recalling, ‘the troops felt this silence rather keenly’.¹ The word ‘spectacular’ is used in this context to denote an action or a campaign characterised by a successful military outcome under circumstances in which a unit would not usually be expected to prevail. A spectacular action would therefore be one in which the unit managed to take an objective against all the odds, or continued to hold an objective against counter-attacks by superior numbers of enemy troops. Of course, this definition assumes that the two forces were equally matched in calibre, a situation that was not always the case during the north-west Europe campaign. During the Second World War, instances of actions falling into the category of ‘spectacular’ would include the heroic but ultimately doomed defence of Oosterbeek / Arnhem by 1st Airborne Division, and the siege of Tobruk from April to December 1941, when two Brigades of 9th Australian Division held off repeated attacks.

However the usual actions of standard infantry battalions would not be classed as spectacular since it would be a failure of command if soldiers found themselves in such situations on a regular basis. Indeed, military doctrine subscribes to the idea that under normal circumstances, battles should take place with superior numbers of forces than

¹ Colonel J. D. W. Renison DSO TD, *Experiences in BLA with the 2nd Battalion The East Yorkshire Regiment*, IWM (PP/MCR/248) p.180.

those deployed by the enemy, to ensure the greatest chance of success, as described by 2nd Battalion officer, Major Clive Crauford:

When you are attacking it doesn't matter what you are attacking, you must bring to bear a superior force of attack. If you are attacking a section you use a platoon. If you are attacking a platoon you use a company. If you are attacking a company you use two companies, or a major battalion.²

In this thesis the performance of the 2nd Battalion, which formed part of a standard, regular, county regiment, is measured against the yardstick of the aforementioned definition of 'spectacular'.

The limited existing records regarding the battalion meant that the experiences of the infantrymen have been approached using oral history. In so doing, the research aimed to give the soldiers of the battalion a voice; a voice which has been denied them in the more than sixty years since the war's end. The infantrymen of this battalion were initial assault troops for the D-Day landings on Sword Beach. The 5th Battalion of the same regiment fulfilled a similar role on Gold Beach, which means that one-third of the initial assault troops for the British-allocated beaches were from the East Yorkshire Regiment. Yet references to the 2nd Battalion in particular are sparse in the wealth of secondary literature which continues to be produced to satisfy the on-going curiosity about this operation. Authors writing new books on Operation Overlord have relied on oft-quoted sources, leading the battalion to become overlooked at each new major anniversary. The advanced ages of those taking part in D-Day meant that this position was unlikely to alter, unless new primary sources were created.

The thesis also aims to convey what it was like to serve in the infantry during the north-west Europe campaign. The infantry was, and is, known as the PBI, or 'Poor Bloody Infantry', for the reason that these men, the 'footsloggers', serve at the 'sharp end', fully exposed to the physical elements and dangers of war. Anthony Farrar-Hockley

² Extract from interview with Clive Crauford 5th November 2000.

argues that, 'of all the military Arms, the skills required of the infantry are the most numerous and varied. Its members must be skilled in reconnaissance and sniping, in closing with the enemy in open country, woods or urban areas. They must be foremost in and the mainstay of the defensive line against enemy attack'.³ At some point the infantry will always have to take the ground and consolidate it, despite the hazards.

The 2nd Battalion was a typical infantry battalion of the period, initially comprising 800 men, but with numbers boosted for the D-Day operation. Of these 800, only half served in the rifle companies and the remainder were, for example, drivers, regimental policemen, and clerks. The high casualty rate during the campaign meant that the riflemen of the 2nd Battalion were turned over two and a half times, as the majority of those injured served with the rifle companies in the front line. Infantry warfare differs from service in the armoured corps, or in the various corps that service the front line, such as the Service, Ordnance or Pioneer Corps, because other servicemen did not endure close-up combat, or prolonged periods under shellfire as part of their usual lives in the front line. The strains of infantry life were consequently very great, possibly no greater than serving in an armoured regiment during the campaign, but certainly more dangerous than serving at the rear.

The thesis focuses on a battalion, a relatively small unit, in preference to a regiment or division, because to examine the role of a regiment during the period would entail considering perhaps desert warfare, combat in the Far East, prisoner of war experience and Home Defence, in addition to service in Europe. To interview veterans across this spectrum would not enable useful conclusions to be drawn. Likewise, to consider one Division would necessitate studying many different units, all with their own areas of specialty. In studying one, typical battalion of the period, it is possible to put forward arguments about service in the infantry during the north-west Europe campaign. This

³ Anthony Farrar-Hockley, *Infantry Tactics 1939-1945* (London, 1976) pp.7-8.

study is primarily a social history of the infantry, however the inter-disciplinary aspects are evident. In considering the training and progress of the 2nd Battalion, I have also delved into the field of military history. The concept of individual memory enters the realm of psychology and, of course, the study of leadership, how groups operate, and the relevance of class are studied within sociology.

There are four chapters to the thesis and in each there is an exploration of the theme of memory, on both an individual and group basis. The first chapter considers the issue of the training of the 2nd Battalion soldiers in readiness for active service. I compare the training of those involved in the D-Day landings, with that of the later reinforcements, and consider the preparation of new officers in light of the criticisms of their training within secondary literature. The memories of the interviewees will show that all considered their training to be adequate for the tasks they faced. However the interviewees who were trained in Scotland, prior to the D-Day landings, spoke of a breadth and depth to their training, which the reinforcements could not have received in the short time set aside for that purpose. The officers reveal that their training is comprehensive and my argument is that it was largely the high casualty rate that deprived the officers of sufficient time to settle into their roles, and lead effectively, even more than a lack of quality preparation, which led to problems during the campaign.

The second chapter considers how D-Day has been viewed within secondary literature since the end of the war. The trend has been a shift in the way the operation has been perceived, from merely the start of a longer-term campaign, to an historic day deserving of a wealth of literature in its own right. This wealth of literature has not included the 2nd Battalion to any meaningful extent, and the second part of the chapter sets out to explain why that might be so. The performance of the 2nd Battalion has been criticised comprehensively by the Commandos who landed on Sword Beach, and these

criticisms have become accepted as fact, due to the lack of opportunity on the part of the 2nd Battalion infantrymen to set out what their roles were on the day. I examine the arguments and conclude that the Commandos were over-critical, although it is possible to establish where the misunderstandings may have arisen.

The third chapter considers the performance of the 2nd Battalion in comparison to the other battalions in the brigade, as well as to other divisions in action during the campaign, to establish whether the performance of the battalion was 'unspectacular'. The memories of the individual interviewees confirm the official details in the Battalion War Diary and Lt Col Renison's memoir and add another, dense layer of recollections.⁴ These memories are considered in more detail in Chapter Four, which looks at life for the 2nd Battalion infantrymen and its strains during the campaign. The details provided, form overlapping layers of memory which will clearly show the difficulties associated with service in the front line.

My final section looks at what happened to the interviewees post-war and how they acclimatised to returning home. This Afterword considers the preponderance of interviewees adversely affected by their memories of service life and how incapacitating their experiences have proved for some. I then briefly examine how the group record of the 2nd Battalion has been laid down, and reinforced, at group reunions.

Part Two - Existing literature and sources.

The two main written primary sources that exist for the 2nd Battalion East Yorkshire Regiment, are the Battalion War Diary,⁵ and the memoir of Lt Col Renison. Both documents reveal little of the individual soldier, how he lived and, in particular, how he coped with the strains of the battlefield.

⁴ This reflects Lummis' assertion that 'documentary and oral evidence are more frequently complementary than contradictory', in *Listening to History. The authenticity of oral evidence* (London, 1987) p.82.

⁵ Held at the National Archives (WO 987/1).

During the Second World War, the War Diaries were often written away from the front-line action and after the battle had finished. The record depended on the individual writer and it was that person's decision what was included or omitted. In the case of the 2nd Battalion during this period, the duty usually devolved upon the Intelligence Officer, although the overall responsibility for its completion and submission to the War Office remained that of the Adjutant. The purpose of the War Diary was to record a true account of operations to counter possible rumours, and to allow lessons to be learned for purposes of future training.⁶ As the writing up of the War Diary was one duty among many, how assiduously it was completed depended on the time available and the inclination of the person assigned to that task. As a military document, few details about the personnel are recorded in the 2nd Battalion War Diary, other than leave arrangements, as personal information fell outside its remit; a rare exception is the recording of the death of Major 'Banger' King, a 'blow', as he was 'loved by all'.⁷ Almost entire months are recorded as 'general routine' with 'nothing to report', except weather conditions or leave arrangements. It is apparent that entries were regularly made well after the event and sometimes for a few days or a week at a time.

The difference in the level of detail provided is clearly evidenced. D-Day, which could be argued to be the major action of the 2nd Battalion, is sparsely treated and yields few clues as to the progress of the different companies. Naturally, the action was confused and the battalion headquarters took some time to be established on the day. In contrast, the battles in April 1945 were recorded in great detail, although their importance was not as significant militarily. This source therefore cannot be considered in isolation, as it does not provide a complete account of events.

The memoir of Lt Col Renison is an extremely detailed account of the progress of the battalion and proved very useful. However it too, concentrates on the performance of

⁶ *Instructions for the Preparation and Disposal of War Diaries 1944*. Copy held at the Duke of Wellington's Regimental Archive, Halifax.

⁷ 2nd Battalion War Diary 16-17th April 1945.

the battalion at company level, as well as matters of strategy. Lt Col Renison's memoir proved a vital document in 'fleshing-out' the battles and confirming the details and gives a more in-depth impression of which actions were the most exhausting, confusing and difficult to prosecute. Written in April 1946, the memoir uses positive language throughout. The most accepting of the circumstances was when he wrote 'the battalion as a whole were in a pretty bad way'⁸ in describing the atrocious weather conditions near Troarn, which led to flooded slit trenches in which the troops were forced to remain. It was, of course, produced with the benefit of hindsight and the knowledge of the war's successful military outcome. However he provides a more detailed version of events, outlines the difficulties of being in command during the battles, and offers an impression of the level and quality of the opposition facing the battalion at each stage. The two main secondary sources which detail the actions of the 2nd Battalion during the Second World War are firstly, the Regimental History, and secondly, a history of the 3rd British Infantry Division, the Division to which the 2nd Battalion belonged during the period. Both have their limitations. The Regimental History⁹ was published in 1952 at the behest of a Regimental Committee. A thorough and respectful account, it was written by an officer who served with the regiment. A detailed factual book, it does still contain minor inconsistencies and makes much of celebrating the role of the regiment in action. The circumstances under which the study was commissioned go a long way towards providing an explanation for its overwhelmingly positive slant. The foreword to the book, written by Brigadier R. J. Springhall OBE, who was the incumbent Colonel of the Regiment, states:

Although this History has as its main purpose the placing on record of the activities of all units of the Regiment during the War, it is also designed to do honour to those who fought in its ranks, and to be a memorial of those who

⁸ Lt Col Renison's memoir, p.29.

⁹ Lt Col P. R. Nightingale OBE, *A History of the East Yorkshire Regiment (Duke of York's Own) in the War of 1939-45* (Howden, 1998).

gave their lives either whilst serving with the Regiment or with other units.

An honourable sentiment, but one which does not allow for the voice of the individual in action, what it was actually like for those in the frontline, or for the display of any human characteristics which may have been detrimental to the Regiment. Lt Col Nightingale found that the official War Diaries were scanty, even dubbing some as 'nothing but a bad joke'¹⁰ yet managed to produce a testament to the East Yorkshire Regiment which outlined only the achievements, leaving the reader to assume that as a regiment it remained a disciplined and successful force at all times. There was no room within this history for individual acts or viewpoints as it was not the intended purpose of the book to consider the individual beyond the group setting. The only individual contributions were those of the Commanding Officers.

Prior to this Regimental history, an account of the 3rd British Infantry Division, was written by Norman Scarfe.¹¹ Although very accurate factually, when referring to 8th Brigade the author usually outlines the movements of the South Lancashire or Suffolk Regiments, for whom more information was available. The 2nd Battalion is mentioned but less frequently, due principally to the dearth of records. Two later Divisional histories are useful sources, but share the same difficulty associated with Scarfe's account.¹²

There is also a lack of 2nd Battalion sources within the wealth of secondary literature concerning D-Day. To take one example, in *D Day - Piercing the Atlantic Wall*,¹³ Robert Kershaw quotes only one 2nd Battalion source, attributed to an earlier work by

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Preface p.viii.

¹¹ Norman Scarfe, *Assault Division. A History of the 3rd Division from the Invasion of Normandy to the Surrender of Germany* (London, 1947).

¹² Robin McNish, *Iron Division* (London, 1978) and Patrick Delaforce, *Monty's Ironsides: From the Normandy Beaches to Bremen with 3rd Division* (London, 1999). Delaforce's book includes some oral accounts, but these had to encompass all the units in the 3rd Division, therefore the 2nd Battalion input is limited.

¹³ Robert Kershaw, *D-Day – Piercing the Atlantic Wall* (Annapolis, Md, 1994).

Philip Warner.¹⁴ The shortage of available accounts in the public domain means therefore, that existing ones have to be ‘recycled’ for new literature. There are four main personal accounts¹⁵ quoted in secondary literature, and three of them are held at the IWM, together with a small collection of letters written by the Battalion Second-in-Command, Major ‘Banger’ King.

Visual references to the battalion’s actions on D-Day are equally sparse, as there were few external recorders of events on Sword Beach during the initial landing period. A small number came in with the second wave troops and it was these men who recorded the few photograph and film images available of the chaos presiding at the top of the beach, as well as the film of the 2nd Battalion HQ Company flag being carried ashore. There were casualties among these men of the Army Film and Photographic Unit. Wilf Todd recalled the death of a photographer alongside him during the assault,¹⁶ and Sgt O’Neill, a cameraman, was wounded. However, the Commandos received good coverage as a photographer, Captain Leslie Evans, was on board Brigadier Lord Lovat’s LCI¹⁷ (S) 517 and Sgts George Laws and Ian Grant were responsible for film coverage. As a result, much of the surviving film footage depicts the actions of the Commando troops during D-Day. In respect of the 2nd Battalion, there are no surviving photographs of the initial assault phase, only of the follow-up period, and certainly nothing to rival the evocative photographs of troops sheltering behind beach obstacles while under fire, taken by Robert Capa on Omaha Beach. This then was the main reason for undertaking responsible research and interviewing in this area; to fill in the substantial gaps left by existing sources and to use oral techniques as a check and balance system for those sources, in order to reconstruct the history of the 2nd Battalion.

¹⁴ Philip Warner, *The D Day Landings* (London, 1980).

¹⁵ The accounts found in secondary literature are that of Clive Crauford, Jack Pearse, Hugh Bone and Ron Major. Dan Van Der Vat’s book *D-Day. The Greatest Invasion – a People’s History* (New York, 2003) included a short extract about Peter Brown.

¹⁶ Wilf Todd recalled, ‘A photographer from one of the newsreels climbed up at the side of us to take some film and he was shot right between the eyes’, during his interview 1st May 1999.

¹⁷ LCI - Landing Craft Infantry.

We cannot assume however, that a more accurate or full account can be obtained from an individual infantryman involved in the action, because grand strategy was not his concern. Usually a soldier would only be able to see what was going on in the immediate vicinity; he was permitted no more information than the next objective, whether it be a section of woods or a farmhouse. What he can give us therefore is personal; the weapon he carried, what he ate, things he can remember seeing or taking part in. It is precisely the human aspect that current written sources regarding the battalion are unable to provide.

On studying more general secondary literature pertaining to the Second World War, in particular, the north-west Europe campaign, it is apparent that the 2nd Battalion East Yorkshire Regiment receives few direct references. The scale of the Normandy campaign, and the sheer number of individual units taking part, mean that authors are largely forced to write of higher formation levels than regiments or battalions. The activities of the 3rd Division do rate inclusion within the literature, but any discussion of the progress of the Normandy campaign invariably concentrates, in the British sector, on armoured thrusts, and thereby, armoured regiments.

This then, is the extent of the information available about the 2nd Battalion in the public domain. The Museum of the East Yorkshire Regiment, which was amalgamated into the Prince of Wales' Own Regiment of Yorkshire, is in York. However details of the 2nd Battalion during the Second World War are confined to two large scrapbooks and back copies of 'The Snapper', the Regimental magazine, held in the Regimental Archive.

To produce a history of the 2nd Battalion that was unfettered by the need to show the battalion in an overwhelmingly positive light, and could focus on the battalion rather than a higher formation level, the best route was to interview men of the battalion. By following the oral history route, interviewees could be asked what serving with the battalion was really like. Did the Regimental History reveal an accurate history of the

battalion? What was missed from the Battalion War Diary, and what could the interviewees remember that could not be found in those short daily entries? In answer to this latter point, the interviewees were to provide a wealth of human detail, enlightening, entertaining, and sometimes tragic.

Although the interviews provide the human element missing from the official history, it was interesting to discover that when interviewees were asked to contribute written records of their experiences to a museum in their training area of Inverary, these accounts were more detailed factually than their oral interviews. A five page account by Wilf Todd,¹⁸ outlines the differences in training once it became clear the battalion would be used as leading assault troops on D-Day. From concentration on fitness levels, after which his girlfriend Mary 'was quite surprised at the fact that I had lost a lot of body-fat and replaced it with muscle', the emphasis changed and 'we spent more time on exercises on a Brigade level. . . Most of the time, three or four hours in bed at night was the norm because we always seemed to be just falling into bed after finishing an exercise or getting up in the early hours to start one'. The oral interviews have not revealed the interviewees' fatigue, although the written account and letters do. It is apparent that the respondents were more anxious to stress their extraordinary fitness and the different types of training undertaken during the period, rather than how tiring this strenuous training proved. Perhaps too, the interviewees compared youthful good health and physical well-being to their current states of health.

The difficulties in assessing the performance of the 2nd Battalion were most apparent in the D-Day and north-west Europe campaign chapters. In respect of D-Day, to achieve a clearer idea of what happened to the battalion members, and how successful they were in achieving their objectives, I studied 26 accounts from the participants in the landings. Some of the nine written accounts are very short, others are rich in detail. Several of the

¹⁸ A copy of Wilf Todd's account was reproduced in the 2nd Battalion Veterans' Group newsletter 2003.

interviews are also sketchy, where memories are poor, due to advanced age or illness. Others among the interviewees possess extremely good memories, in one or two cases almost rivalling the level of recall reproduced in Hugh Bone's letter home.¹⁹ This letter, held at the IWM, recorded the progress of events on D-Day, in rich and thick detail, as remembered by Bone, who was at that time the Battalion Signals Officer. It proved a challenge to access further accounts due to the dearth of records in the public domain, the small number of men from the battalion taking part in the D-Day landings and the advanced ages of the surviving veterans. The usual level of a hundred men per company was boosted for the initial assault, although records no longer exist of the exact figure. Based on the realistic training operations held prior to D-Day, it is probable that the total number of infantrymen involved within the four Rifle Companies in the first wave was approximately 460. This figure included the reserves, and encompassed a small number of stretcher-bearers, runners, and Regimental Policemen, although half of this number landed 20 minutes after H-Hour. From the total, 60 'other ranks' were killed on the day, with a further 137 wounded, which constitutes a high casualty rate. Others, who survived the landings, were killed later on in the campaign.

The casualty rate meant that access to surviving participants proved difficult. More than half of the accounts, 15, have been obtained by means of interviewing, and were therefore recorded between 55 and 60 years after the event. The remainder have been obtained by reference to the IWM, SWWEC, The Liddle Collection at the University of Leeds, 2nd Battalion Veterans' Group newsletters, and relatives of the participants. Only two accounts were written shortly after the event, those of Lt Hugh Bone and Lt Arthur Oates, both officers. Of course, the men who comprised the 'other ranks' were not permitted to keep diaries or write letters home which included military details. On the rare occasions that primary documents are available, it can be frustrating that further

¹⁹ Hugh Bone, letter to mother dated 4th July 1944 IWM (87/31/1).

research to clarify and expand the accounts, cannot be undertaken via the donor. The diary of Pte Harold A Rowland, 2nd Battalion East Yorkshire Regiment, is held at the Second World War Experience Centre and reads:

4 June Church service on board.
5 June Cleaned all weapons. Received invasion maps.
6 June D Day. Left boat at 6.5am. LCA hit beach at 7.20am. Captured beach. Became a casualty.
7 June On board LCT converted to hospital ship.
8 June Docked at Tilbury. Arrived Romford hospital.²⁰

It would be more rewarding historically if we could ask this infantryman about his injury, the company he was in and what he was ordered to do, as well as his impressions on landing, which is one of the main strengths of oral history. Certainly, for the purposes of my analysis of the battalion's performance on D-Day, 'captured beach' does not reveal anything other than the operation's ultimately successful conclusion.

As approximately 460 2nd Battalion men took part in the initial assault, it would appear that examining just 26 accounts would inevitably fail to provide a cohesive view of the events of that crucial operation, especially as they have been provided by, among others, signallers, drivers, a Regimental Policeman and only a few from the first wave ashore. However from these accounts it did prove possible to formulate an historical opinion on the 2nd Battalion's performance. It is rare to find this number of accounts from one unit, other than recollections supplied by the American forces, particularly from Omaha Beach, which have assumed importance within secondary literature due to the high casualty rate and difficulties experienced during the landing. The secondary literature on D-Day is forced to adopt a 'scattergun' approach in response to the fragmented nature of the available accounts and is unable to offer a comprehensive overview of individual units. Of course authors would argue that such an approach is necessary to ensure inclusion of all the different units and services involved. However the reality is that this approach is the only one available to authors. These difficulties render the 2nd Battalion

²⁰ Pte Harold Rowland diary SWWEC (2000.631).

accounts valuable historically on a group basis rather more than individually, although this is not to denigrate the individual importance of some of the recollections by the interviewees, whose memories have not been included previously. Nor is it the case in this instance that the written accounts are richer in, or provide more, detail. Two of those interviewed²¹ provided particularly full accounts of their experiences on D-Day and were of necessity interviewed on several occasions in order to capture their memories of the period.

Several accounts have been included singly within existing secondary literature but have not been considered on a group basis until now.²² It is only when all the recollections are considered collectively that useful conclusions can be drawn. Having considered the 2nd Battalion oral interviews and memoirs, it is apparent that in some areas the accounts reinforce what is already readily available from memoirs in the public domain and edited passages in secondary literature regarding the sights, sounds and general impressions of the beach. Many recalled the terrific noise from the naval shellfire, the sinking of the *Svenner*,²³ the seasickness aboard the landing craft, the casualties in the water and the difficulty of landing among the mined beach obstacles. However, more importantly, the individual accounts vary from those currently available, in offering up details which only one particular infantryman of the battalion noticed; the out-of-the-ordinary episodes, the humorous, bizarre or tragic incidents that have remained vivid in recall because of their extraordinariness. For example, Alf Ackroyd recalled seeing a German prisoner running up the ramp of a landing craft desperately trying to board an Allied vessel to be taken to England. However 'as he got

²¹ Wilf Todd and Alf Ackroyd had particularly detailed memories of the D-Day operation.

²² For example, Clive Crauford's written account can be read in *The D-Day Landings*, Philip Warner pp.172-174, and Jack Pearse's account is in *We Remember D-Day* by Frank and Joan Shaw (London, 1994) pp.264-265.

²³ A Norwegian destroyer which was hit by a torpedo and formed a V-shape as it sank. It was this shape that remained as a clear memory, and is also noted in recollections of others landing on Sword Beach.

to the top, one of the commandos carrying his bicycle swung round, gave him an uppercut, and knocked him straight into the water'.²⁴

Post-war, Harold Isherwood suffered from health problems after witnessing a shell 'landing among some officers and there were limbs and torsos blown high into the air. A small pebble went into my arm, which I have to this day'.²⁵ Wilf Todd recalled one of the humorous episodes when he spoke of being hungry while in a shell crater, waiting for the order to move: 'Our section commander, Corporal Jim Watts was with me and when I offered him some chocolate he said "What a bloody time to be eating chocolate!"". Earlier in the interview Wilf had recalled the landing craft next to his detonating a mine and exploding. The memory that had remained was of 'a helmet going up in the air. I knew it didn't belong to one of our lads because we'd all been issued with D-Day helmets which came down the sides a bit. This particular one spinning up in the air was an ordinary flat one'.²⁶

As well as the small details, some of these individual accounts, when analysed together, provide a more cohesive view of the attacks on the battalion's objectives of 'Sole' and 'Daimler'. Moreover, the accounts give a comprehensive overview of the conditions on the beach, the orders the infantrymen had been given beforehand, and the successful conclusion to the initial assault. However, for those interviewed it became apparent that D-Day, despite being considered momentous, both at the time and in retrospect, was just one day in action and for some, it was not out of the ordinary in terms of the part they played in the clearing of defences. For those who went on to serve during the subsequent weeks and months, there were other memorable battles, near-misses and personal injuries. This explains why, on several occasions, the events of D-Day took up a small proportion of the interview's duration.

²⁴ Extract from interview with Alf Ackroyd 10th February 2002.

²⁵ From Harold Isherwood's application for a War Pension, undated. Copy supplied by Mrs Isherwood 11th September 1999.

²⁶ Both quotes are extracts from interview with Wilf Todd 20th March 1999.

In respect of the period between D-Day and V. E. Day, the interviews proved central to providing an understanding of the overall north-west Europe campaign, and the 2nd Battalion's role within it. Only by considering the harshness of the physical conditions, the escalating strain and the lack of rest, can a proper judgement be made on how the battalion performed during the period. No matter how good the leadership, the battles were fought by individuals as part of a team effort, and how the individual performed, or even if they performed at all, bearing in mind the conditions, is crucial. Sir Robin Dunn MC²⁷ wrote that Eric Cooper-Key of the Royal Norfolk Regiment revealed to him that after two months, when his battalion had been turned over with 100 per cent casualties, he was content if he, his platoon commanders and sergeants and perhaps half a dozen men of his company, reached the objective in an attack. The rest would appear over the next twenty minutes or so following the worst being over. 'Lagging behind' to this extent has not been recorded in the 2nd Battalion interviews and literature although a reluctance to leave the safety of the slit trenches on occasion, has been noted in Chapter One. However, honesty to the extent offered by Cooper-Key, albeit laudable, is rare within primary sources about infantry performance from this period, as it also implies criticism of the 'other ranks' and thereby his own battalion and regiment.

Pride in one's own regiment and its achievements are paramount, and can result in careful 'editing' of War Diary entries and an unwillingness to record less creditable events within interviews. As Passerini noted, interviews can show up the selectivity and omissions of the official documents.²⁸ Certainly some interviewees requested that names and events would not be revealed, despite the seemingly innocuous nature of the incident to the outside observer and the passage of time since the events occurred. This would usually happen after the interviewee read the completed transcript – seeing an incident written down afforded the interviewee the opportunity to reflect on what had

²⁷ Sir Robin Dunn MC, *Sword and Wig – memories of a Lord Justice* (London, 1993) p.75.

²⁸ Luisa Passerini, *Fascism in Popular Memory* (Cambridge, 1987).

been said and thereby assess its potential impact on other readers. Examples of 'self-censorship' extend not just to the interviewees but also impact on the formal battalion records, as well as the regimental and divisional histories of this, and other battalions.²⁹

The process of self-censorship began even during the war itself, as soldiers decided which incidents to discuss and which should be 'forgotten'. Interviewees remain largely protective of their officers and asked for those involved in particular incidents, such as a safe-break, to remain anonymous, for fear of upsetting the officer's family and tarnishing his military reputation.

Of course it would be extremely difficult to cover up events such as a mutiny or a mass unauthorised retreat during a battle within a Battalion War Diary. However with the use of particular vocabulary it is possible to highlight the creditable performances at the expense of the less noteworthy. Within the interview process, silences can mean either lost memories or deliberate exclusion. If all those involved subscribe to the exclusion then the silencing of the unacceptable is successful. As Gittens reminds us, 'silence and power work hand in hand'.³⁰

Part Three – Issues of Methodology; Oral History and Memory.

It has been some years since apologies needed to be made for basing academic work on the foundation of oral history. Critics focus on the unreliability of oral sources in comparison to written documents, and consider it as secondary in importance to formal records.³¹ Sceptics also point to the anecdotal nature of the evidence, the vagaries of memory and the undue influence of the interviewer in creating the material. These arguments have been countered vigorously in the wealth of literature regarding the discipline of oral history, firstly by Paul Thompson in *The Voice of the Past*, but also by

²⁹ A rare example of an admission of early problems in Normandy came from the divisional historian of the 51st Division, J. B. Salmud, quoted in Carlo d'Este, *Decision in Normandy. The Unwritten Story of Montgomery and the Allied Campaign* (London, 1983).

³⁰ Diana Gittens, 'Silences. The case of a psychiatric hospital', in *Narrative and Genre. Contexts and Types of Communication*, eds. Mary Chamberlain and Paul Thompson (New Brunswick, 2004) p.46.

³¹ Arthur Marwick, *The Nature of History* (London, 1989). For a discussion of these criticisms see Nigel de Lee, 'Oral History and British Soldiers' Experience of Battle in the Second World War', eds. Addison and Calder, in *Time to Kill. The Soldier's Experience of War in the West* (London, 1997).

leading exponents including Alessandro Portelli. It is evident that we cannot directly access the past to discover the historical 'truth' of an event. Different interviewees will also vary in their ability to recall an event in any great detail. However it is equally clear that, as Lummis argues, long-term memory does not inevitably fade.³² This study will show that some interviewees retain an extraordinary ability to recall precise factual details. More importantly, many more interviewees provide compelling accounts which, when taken together, provide 'layers' of memory that depict a group experience, which could be detected at veteran reunions. The interviews proved vital in achieving a greater understanding of the battalion during the campaign. Although they were used to corroborate or enhance existing documentary sources in the first instance, their ultimate strength lay in revealing new, and richly detailed facets of life in the battalion and its performance.

The interviews were with thirty eight veterans of the battalion, as well as six wives and widows. I also corresponded with two of the Canadian 'officers on loan' to the battalion. One further officer agreed to be interviewed but not recorded, as he considered that due to the passage of time his memory was unreliable, and that he could have told me stories which happened to others, genuinely believing that they had happened to himself. One enormously positive element of the interview process was the discovery of many associated documents, held by the veterans and their families, which were made available in order to facilitate the research. These documents included private collections of letters, memoirs, photographs, maps and a training video of the Schaddenhof farm battle. The building up of personal contacts encouraged the sense of ownership of their past by ex-battalion members and their partners, and as a result of the interview process, some of the veterans decided to write their own memoirs.

³² Trevor Lummis, *Listening to History. The authenticity of oral evidence*, p.118.

The interviewees were traced through various sources. The main source was the 2nd Battalion Veterans' Group who issued quarterly newsletters and advised members about my search for interviewees. In recording the group's approval of my research by mentioning it in the newsletter, veterans knew of me before I contacted them. As group members also knew I was contacting others on the list, this acted as a check and balance on the content of the interviews.

Additional interviewees were discovered through the Regimental Association's membership list, although these were relatively few in number. Further sources came from an appeal on the Service Pals page on Ceefax, and through the website of the Second World War Experience Centre in Leeds, which displayed details of the research. Of those who made contact through the website, the initial approach came from the veterans' families. By far the most reassuring aspect of the interview process was that some veterans passed on my details to their ex-battalion friends, thereby demonstrating it had been considered a positive experience. For this study, no sampling of respondents needed to be made, the onus was to interview every 2nd Battalion veteran who was available and could be traced. In this way, I aimed to reduce any potential bias that membership of a more formal "veterans' group" could have on an interviewee's memory of their experiences. Mainly, the interviews were conducted in the interviewees' homes, where the interviewee is most relaxed. The others took place at the annual reunions, in the lounge of the hotel, which was set aside for our use and therefore private.

Of those interviewed, the majority came from working-class families, with jobs ranging from millworkers to miners, brewery workers to butchers. Only one who was not an officer, stayed on for further education past the age of fourteen: John Scruton was fortunate to be able to finish his degree course shortly before being called up. The remainder had a basic education which represented the school system for the working

class in England at that time.³³ Scientific or technical education was practically non-existent at this level and the interviewees usually left school to provide much-needed income for their families. Very few of the veterans' families had sufficient resources to finance further education or attendance at a grammar school, even when this had been on offer.

My preferred path for the interview was to follow the 'life story' route, whereby we began by discussing the interviewee's childhood and schooling, then early jobs, before talking about time spent as a recruit, the training and active service. Following discussions about the war, we then covered what happened to the interviewee post-war, in terms of relationships and career paths. Before commencing the interview I made it clear that if the interviewee was unhappy to discuss any element, then we would move on to other issues. Some of the interviewees did exercise that right, mainly concerning details of their childhoods.³⁴ However I do consider discussing childhoods an essential first step in the interview process. Firstly, it eases the interviewee into the discussion, so that by the time we reached the war-time years, he had relaxed. It also reassured the interviewee of my interest in their life as a whole and is a recognition that the war played a small part in their lives in terms of years served, even if it played a more dominant role in their memories. For their army service I also followed a chronological route, since it made sense in terms of the interview structure. Thus as each period of service had been covered, I would ask what they remembered of, for example, Touffreville, or Venraij.

I then asked other questions about their service, concerning officer-men relationships, physical conditions such as opportunities for bathing, and what feelings they had for their opponents and allies. As the interviewees joined and left the battalion at different

³³ Only 4 per cent of 17 year olds were in full-time education in Britain in 1938-39, according to Tony Mason, in *From Blitz to Blair. A new history of Britain since 1939*, ed. Nick Tiratsoo (London, 1997).

³⁴ Wendy Rickard also gave interviewees this option which did result in difficulties in producing a comprehensive interpretation. "Oral History – 'More Dangerous than Therapy'? Interviewees' Reflections on Recording Traumatic or Taboo Issues". *Oral History Journal* Vol. 26 Autumn 1998.

times it is not feasible to draw statistical conclusions from the interviews. However it is clear from the results that the interviews have substantial 'overlaps' and similarities in experiences which allow confident analysis to be attempted.

Each interview followed the same path, although questions were tailored to the individual responses. For example, if an interviewee were more expansive about their family backgrounds, then I restricted questions about schooling, as I was conscious of time restraints. Each interviewee was interviewed once, and the length of time allotted was dependent upon whether other interviews had been scheduled for the same day. In following the path of interviewing once, the result was a 'snapshot' of the individual's memories on that particular day.³⁵ A visit on an alternative day would probably have elicited different anecdotes and responses.

Overall, the detail provided by the interviewees backs Kate Fisher's assertion that 'oral history provides the historian with dense and rich qualitative material rather than strength in numbers'.³⁶ Yet within the responses, there was also a consistency. Some elements of the interviews produced denser memories than others; the recollections of actual battle conditions were particularly intense, because they were dramatic and, as Winter and Sivan argue, 'harrowing moments are denser still'.³⁷

The interview process proved a steep learning curve, and I was extremely fortunate to discover as my first interviewee, a man with a remarkable memory. From this initial interview, the remainder varied in detail, with difficulties in people and place names common. Patently this was to be expected after sixty years. Where opportunities permit, I would argue that interviewing closer to the event produces richer detail. However, for this study it was important to record those who had taken part in historic events and had previously been overlooked. From the completion of the first few interviews, it also

³⁵ Alessandro Portelli, 'What makes oral history different?' eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, *The Oral History Reader* (London, 1998).

³⁶ Kate Fisher, *An Oral History of Birth Control Practices c. 1925-50. A Study of Oxford and South Wales.* (Oxford, 1997) Unpublished PhD thesis p.40.

³⁷ Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, eds. *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, p.12.

became apparent that they formed an overlapping narrative, dependent on when the interviewee joined and left the battalion. Certainly what the interviewees remembered was clear and appeared reliable. What had been forgotten in the intervening years was a more problematic issue. As a group, the interviewees are similar in terms of life paths chosen, and views expressed, and society appears to have influenced the memories of the veterans in the same manner. The interviews therefore reflect a 'collective' memory as well as individual memories. Although Portelli argues against the use of the term 'collective memory', citing the reason that individuals become viewed as 'interchangeable and indifferent',³⁸ for this thesis, group memory is a central theme, and the term, as I use it, denotes memories that assume an importance outside the individual account, in that they take on a life of their own, supported by similar memories of other individuals within the group.

The transcript process proved challenging and had to take into account different dialects and modes of speech.³⁹ Several were transcribed by an external agency and it was obvious the difference that a single comma could make to the understanding and meaning of the spoken word. Pauses, shuffles in the chair, coughs and laughter were all important aspects of the interview that were difficult to transfer to the transcript. Strong emotion, such as that displayed by Dennis Bowen when describing his bayoneting of a German soldier, or Clive Crauford in describing the death of a young soldier he particularly remembered, could be concealed in the transcript but was apparent by the different tones in the voice and pauses in the flow of speech.

During the course of the interviews, the understanding of the dual impact of both parties, and the importance of the individual, came to the fore. Each interviewee had different expectations of the process and approached it with their own personality. For

³⁸ Alessandro Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia. Oral History and the Art of Dialogue* (Madison, Wis, 1997) p.57.

³⁹ See Raphael Samuel, 'Perils of the Transcript', eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, *The Oral History Reader* p.389.

example, John Scruton, a meticulous man and keener on the written, rather than the spoken word, asked to read the transcript, and made amendments on several occasions, until he was satisfied with the result, because he considered he 'must have spoken carelessly or without thinking in some places'.⁴⁰ The finished transcript had had all spontaneity removed and resembled a written article. This was understandable, as John Scruton had previously prepared several pieces concerning his wartime experiences and had had the benefit of time to consider what should be included. The freedom of expression, the fluidity and unplanned nature of speech, were anathema to him.

In the case of another interview, Clive Crauford began to speak as soon as the recorder was switched on and recalled his experiences of D-Day: 'Let's start at the beginning, which is really when we were rehearsing for it'.⁴¹ This was the subject that he had assumed I was coming to interview him about, and he had clearly prepared for the interview in advance. Here, Crauford was displaying his 'historical consciousness',⁴² because he was aware of the importance assigned to D-Day both at the time of the operation, and within subsequent secondary literature. Following his lead, I listened to his experiences, then returned to the more usual 'life story' route.

Several of the interviewees asked for my reassurance before we began that they would not be asked to speak randomly about their wartime experiences, as they had doubts as to how much would be recalled.⁴³ This was often voiced as 'So, what do you want to know?' Despite any difficulties, the interview process was rewarding as any points not clearly understood, could be queried immediately. As a point of comparison, correspondence with the two Canadian officers was drawn out and written answers were short. There was little expansion on the questions posed and the questions did not lead

⁴⁰ Letter from John Scruton dated 28th June 1999.

⁴¹ Extract from interview with Clive Crauford 5th November 2000.

⁴² See Ronald J Grele, 'Movement without aim. Methodological and theoretical problems in oral history', eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*.

⁴³ Trevor Lummis argues that respondents are reassured by the knowledge that the onus will not be on them to volunteer information, in *Listening to History. The authenticity of oral evidence*.

on to other, perhaps unrelated, but equally useful, areas of enquiry. This was anticipated and certainly not the fault of the officers concerned. However to query any answers given, necessitated a long wait for the reply.

During several of the interviews, the wife remained present throughout. I did not feel in a position to request her to leave, and on some occasions the wife prompted the interviewee to reveal forgotten anecdotes. As I did not ask questions about relationships while serving in the army, and the choice of whether to discuss traumatic instances was left to the interviewee, I consider that the presence of a partner was not detrimental to the interview process in this study. On no occasion did a wife 'hi-jack' the interview, and a few clearly had not heard some of the information previously. In one instance the interviewee's sister, with whom he lived, revealed her surprise as to how her brother had received an injury. She had noticed his arm was misshapen, but he had never told her how it had come to be so.⁴⁴ Some interviewees were inspired by the interview process to prepare their own memoirs, having been made aware of the historic significance of their memories and reassured that others would find them of interest. This was often reinforced by family members.⁴⁵

Of course, the interviews cannot reconstruct the history of the 2nd Battalion as it actually occurred. Their memories are a representation of what happened, filtered by what has been forgotten or suppressed, and influenced by society in the intervening years before interview.⁴⁶ Critics of oral history have traditionally focused on the fallibility of human recall and argue that the reliability and validity of the resultant interviews are open to question.⁴⁷ Yet, when examined against the official records, and against each other, there are significant similarities between the experiences of the interviewees in this

⁴⁴ Interview with Alf Harrison 5th November 2000 during which his sister remained present.

⁴⁵ That family members paid more attention post-interview was also found by Sally Sokoloff, 'Soldiers or Civilians? The Impact of Army Service in World War Two on Birmingham Men'. *Oral History Journal* Vol. 25 Autumn 1997.

⁴⁶ John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History. Aims, methods and new directions in the study of modern history* (London and New York, 1991) p.213.

⁴⁷ Alice Hoffman, 'Reliability and Validity in Oral History', eds. David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum, *Oral History. An Interdisciplinary Anthology* (Walnut Creek, 1996).

study. At reunion events it has also been possible to conclude that the stories remain the same despite the number of times they are told. For the most part then, it has proved feasible to test for reliability and validity with some confidence. As Ritchie argues, 'oral history is as reliable or unreliable as other research sources. No single piece of data of any sort should be trusted completely, and all sources need to be tested against other evidence'.⁴⁸ The safeguards to ensure the interviews were as accurate as possible, have enabled confident assessments to be made as to, training levels of individual soldiers, where they served and the conditions discovered in each location, the difficulties of service life, and those aspects that enabled soldiers to remain in action for long periods. When tested against the existing primary and secondary sources, the interviews were revealed to be an historically important source material, which concurred with, but also added a rich new dimension to, existing records about the 2nd Battalion.

As recently as 2003, Hodgkin and Radstone asserted that memory was a minority study for historians, relegated to an adjunct of oral history. Although this situation is changing with regard to history generally, it is clear that in the area of oral history, memory has been a central issue for many years. There has been an evolution in the way memory has been regarded, in that in the second half of the twentieth century memory was initially held to be important because it acted in confirmation of particular events and allowed certain sections of the population previously overlooked to be recorded. The impetus was to collect information. However from the end of the 1970s, studies began to focus on the concept that memories could be challenged, and different versions existed with an equal claim to veracity. What was interesting therefore was the process of memory, in that we could assess how people recollect events, and what we can learn from their accounts; in essence what became important was their subjectivity.

⁴⁸ Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History* (New York, 1995) p.6.

Within this development, some theorists stressed that memories are ‘filtered’ through society, which was expounded earlier by Maurice Halbwachs and later by the Popular Memory Group. The influence of dominant social structures on individual memories is highlighted, so that the interviewee is the ‘bearer of a culture’.⁴⁹ Individual memory, therefore, has almost no meaning unless it is located within social memory.⁵⁰ This idea reinforces the role of authority and power in deciding which memories take precedence. In regard to this thesis the views of the Commando forces were accorded more weight because special forces are deemed superior, the title ‘special’ infers they are somehow extraordinary. Their views would have remained unchallenged unless the 2nd Battalion veterans were afforded their own voice. It is clear that what stories are told will not be acceptable to everybody and will often be contested, so it can be impossible to reach a consensus.

Of course, memory in its common use is viewed as essentially an individual occupation, with oral history therefore being deemed to be ‘a science and art of the individual’⁵¹ and an expression of the ‘historicity of personal experience and of the individual’s role in the history of society and in public events’.⁵² Moreover ‘having been in the war is the most immediately tangible claim for having been in history’.⁵³ Alistair Thomson argues that memories are shaped to link the past and present, and that they are altered to ‘fit’, in order for the interviewee to be more comfortable, with memories going through phases.⁵⁴ It is therefore evident that ‘life stories are not as transparent as they seem. They do not reveal objective truths, but the truths of the interviewee’.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Ronald J. Grele, ‘Movement without aim. Methodological and theoretical problems in oral history’ in *The Oral History Reader*, eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, p.48.

⁵⁰ See Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge, 1989).

⁵¹ Alessandro Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia. Oral History and the Art of Dialogue* p.57.

⁵² Alessandro Portelli, ‘Oral History as Genre’, in *Narrative and Genre. Contexts and Types of Communication*, eds. Mary Chamberlain and Paul Thompson (New Brunswick, 2004) p.26.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Alistair Thomson, ‘Anzac memories. Putting popular memory theory into practice in Australia’, in *The Oral History Reader*, eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson.

⁵⁵ Yvette J. Kopijn, ‘The Oral History Interview in a Cross-Cultural Setting’, in *Narrative and Genre. Contexts and Types of Communication*, eds. Mary Chamberlain and Paul Thompson, p.142.

A landmark in the historiography of memory studies was the seminal work of Pierre Nora in *Les Lieux de mémoire*, a collection of essays on French identity. Carrier⁵⁶ considers Nora's work to be a monument, a symbol of the political role of social memory, with a prime example being the upsurge of commemorative events and public enthusiasm for remembrance. Such commemoration, as it relates to the veterans of the 2nd Battalion, will now be discussed in more detail, with particular emphasis on the 60th anniversary of D-Day, June 2004.

Part Four – Private and Public Commemoration.

By following the 'life-story' route during the interview process, it was possible to consider the interviewees' beliefs about war and its remembrance, and it became evident that commemoration took various forms, both public and private. It has been argued that the veterans' memories shift according to what stage they are in their lives and how the war is remembered in the public arena, by the press and the state.⁵⁷ Public, or popular, memory depicts the Second World War as a time of national unity and cohesion, which is supported by the interviews.⁵⁸ However for the men of the 2nd Battalion who were involved in D-Day, their individual role was overlooked, despite D-Day as an operation receiving much attention during the fiftieth and sixtieth anniversaries, with those taking part being lauded as 'heroes'.⁵⁹ These anniversaries witnessed many public commemoration events, yet it was the individual, private acts of commemoration which were recounted during the interviews. Of course, private

⁵⁶ Peter Carrier, 'Places, Politics and the Archiving of Contemporary Memory in Pierre Nora's *Les Lieux de mémoire*', in *Memory and Methodology*, ed. Susannah Radstone (Oxford, 2000).

⁵⁷ See eds. T. G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper, *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration* (London and New York, 2000).

⁵⁸ The Popular Memory Group holds that public and private memories are interactive. Lucy Noakes argues that national unity was a partial memory, not the complete picture in *War and the British. Gender, Memory and National Identity* (London and New York, 1998).

⁵⁹ Lucy Noakes rightly argues that the male soldier is the key figure in images and war commemorations, while the women's contribution is depicted as subsidiary. Women's WWII memorials are only recently beginning to be regarded as valid.

memories become 'community remembrancing'⁶⁰ during the course of their re-telling at veteran reunions, and are affected by, and mediated by, the state in transmitting memories to future generations. Some memories are therefore encouraged, as in the case of D-Day memories, which depict the nation as a cohesive and unified force⁶¹ acting in defence of democracy, while others are discouraged.⁶²

The fiftieth anniversary of D-Day witnessed an avalanche of new books, TV programmes and press coverage, and 'such a sustained and popular expression of remembrance has no precedent within British history'.⁶³ This popularity is linked to a view of Britain as a victor in the Second World War, leading to what Shaw refers to as 'nostalgia militarism'.⁶⁴ Yet the previous anniversaries were eclipsed by the coverage of the sixtieth, which was widely held in newspapers to be the final chance to hold services while veterans were still available in enough numbers and in good enough health, to make the journey to Normandy to attend the ceremonies.

After sixty years it is clear that the Second World War remains central to the national psyche, with a concentration on the men of the armed forces as heroes. Marginalisation is apparent along gender and race lines.⁶⁵ Exclusion can also encompass some sections of the 'soldier-heroes' that are considered the prime focus. Concentration is often directed towards, for example, the airborne forces, the Commandos and the specialist armoured divisions, the 'glamorous' units, as opposed to those in the 'Poor Bloody Infantry'. This was apparent in the press and TV coverage of the sixtieth anniversary,

⁶⁰ Joep Leerssen 'Monument and Trauma : varieties of remembrance', in *History and Memory in Modern Ireland* ed. Ian McBride (Cambridge and New York, 2001).

⁶¹ See Sonya O. Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain 1939-1945* (Oxford, 2003).

⁶² D George Boyce "'No lack of ghosts': memory, commemoration, and the state in Ireland", ed. Ian McBride, *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*.

⁶³ Martin Evans and Ken Lunn, eds. *War and Memory in the Twentieth Century*, pXV (Oxford and New York, 1997). They have pointed out that 1.5 million attended the 'Victory in Europe' Day events in Hyde Park May 1995.

⁶⁴ Martin Shaw, 'Past Wars and Present Conflicts: From the Second World War to the Gulf', eds. Martin Evans and Ken Lunn, *War and Memory in the Twentieth Century* p.192.

⁶⁵ Lucy Noakes, *War and the British. Gender, Memory and National Identity*. Also Bernice Archer, 'A Low-Key Affair: Memories of Civilian Internment in the Far East, 1942-45', eds. Martin Evans and Ken Lunn, *War and Memory in the Twentieth Century*. Both write of the exclusion of women, in the view of the Second World War as a defining experience.

with programmes looking at the contribution of the ‘funnies’ of Hobart’s 79th Armoured Division and the DD ‘swimming’ tanks on D-Day, as well as the glider-borne soldiers at, particularly, Pegasus Bridge. It is generally held by the veterans of the 2nd Battalion that the contribution of the East Yorkshire Regiment has been overlooked and this again proved to be the case during the sixtieth commemorations in 2004. A reporter of *The Mail on Sunday* visited three veterans of the Regiment to interview them, with the promise that an article would appear on Sunday 6th June, yet nothing was published.

In June 2004, the commemoration of one day’s action in the north-west European campaign meant that, inevitably, many veterans who served after D-Day, and in other theatres of the war, were excluded. During this campaign, reinforcements arrived on an almost daily basis to fill gaps left by casualties, yet the services focused only on those involved in the assault. The commemorative medal issued during special services in Normandy was also limited to those taking part in D-Day. The ‘exclusive’ and historic nature of Operation Overlord gives a special status to certain veterans but excludes those with the ‘misfortune’ to arrive shortly afterwards.

For three veterans on the Regiment-organised trip, this was their first visit to Normandy since the war. They expressed their reluctance to return before, with one citing the need to come to terms with his memories, yet all felt that the sixtieth anniversary was a special event, in that it was most likely their last opportunity to visit, and future commemorations would not be on as large a scale. For the 2nd Battalion veterans, the sixtieth anniversary held a further significance, in that for the first time they would be witnessing the unveiling of a memorial plaque dedicated to their regiment alone. The purpose of such memorials is clear: ‘these historical signs and stories, inscribed on the surface of the landscape, strengthen, direct and validate both personal and collective memory’.⁶⁶ There are already Divisional monuments in existence, and in Hermanville

⁶⁶ Petri J. Raivo, ‘This is where they fought’. Finnish war landscapes as a national heritage, eds. T. G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper, *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration*, p.159.

the 3rd Division emblem is embedded in the square. However it took four years of planning before the Prince of Wales' Own Regimental Association (which is the Regiment into which the East Yorkshires and West Yorkshires were amalgamated in 1958) received the go-ahead from the French authorities for the plaque. Although a symbol of public and Regimental recognition of the contribution made by the D-Day veterans, it was not universally welcomed.⁶⁷ However, most veterans were in favour of the plaque and saw it as long overdue.

The memorial was unveiled during the afternoon service of remembrance in Hermanville on 6th June, and is dedicated 'to the everlasting memory of the officers and men of the 2nd and 5th Battalions of the East Yorkshire Regiment who landed on the beaches of Hermanville-sur-Mer and La Rivière in the first wave of the Allied assault on 6th June 1944; and in proud and grateful tribute to those whose courage that day and in the days that followed was to cost them their lives. Each risked all in freedom's cause'. This is the only memorial dedicated specifically to the 2nd Battalion's actions in north-west Europe and, of course, excludes the majority of those who served with the battalion during the campaign. The service was a sober and dignified affair, attended by many veterans from different units who were associated with Sword Beach, however there were only six veterans from the 2nd Battalion.⁶⁸ One veteran expressed a feeling of pride that five young, serving members of the Prince of Wales' Own Regiment of Yorkshire, which from June 2006 became the Yorkshire Regiment, were there to represent the Regiment at the Hermanville service. However, the remainder of the service personnel attending the ceremony were not from units familiar to the veterans and, of more concern, were placed directly in front of the veterans' marquee, obscuring their view of the ceremony, which was largely conducted in French. It became clear to

⁶⁷ Canadian veteran, Jim Fetterly, wrote: 'Regarding the suggestion of a memorial. I am not big on this kind of thing and feel that after 56 years the money could be spent in more useful ways', in letter to author dated 9th January 2000.

⁶⁸ Of the six veterans, three have since passed away and two more are now too infirm to travel. Therefore the Second World War will swiftly be passing from direct memory to cultural memory.

those attending the French-arranged religious service that it was not being held for the veterans' benefit, more that they were a 'token' presence at a ceremony dominated by references to lessons to be learned from the past and a call for European solidarity.

Despite the importance of the occasion, it was not an emotional event for the veterans present. The emotional events were the private visits to Hermanville war cemetery which contains sixty East Yorkshire Regiment graves, 38 of them casualties of the D-Day landings. It was here that the individual aspect of commemoration became apparent, with open displays of emotion and reminiscing about the dead in a way that 'brought them to life' for the listener. One example was that of a boxer in the battalion, twenty year old Cliff Milnes, whose legs were shattered on the beach and another infantryman, Cpl Wilkinson, who used Bren gun oil on his hair. Remembering the men when they were alive, serves as a reminder of the horrors of combat and of the random nature of death. The youth of many of those killed is a sharp contrast to the age of the veterans and many veterans remark on their good fortune in surviving. The youngest member of the Regiment in the cemetery is eighteen year old Pte Arthur Blackmore and the oldest is thirty-eight year old Pte Eric Elliott, with the majority in their twenties.

After the public ceremony, the Secretary of the Regimental Association asked each member of the party to place a small cross on the individual East Yorkshire Regiment graves. These crosses, and the other tokens left at the gravesides, including flowers and messages, act as the 'focus of a ritual exchange. The dead have given everything; the living, symbolically or tangibly, offer something in return'.⁶⁹ Naturally this was a more difficult situation for the veterans present, who could remember the names as people, and the emotion was evident. There was the added psychological pressure that in many cases they could remember how the men became casualties, with the attendant sights and sounds. Some had been close friends, having endured the rigours of training

⁶⁹ Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 1999) p.38.

together. Despite the individual nature of the remembered losses, the memories do not provide a coherent alternative, or oppositional, popular memory of the war to the 'finest hour' mythology already embedded in the national consciousness. Rather, these memories operate alongside this popular mythology, and the veterans use it as a justification for the losses and sacrifice.

The individual nature of the 2nd Battalion cemetery visit was in direct contrast to the formal and impersonal nature of the public events which, while focusing on loss and sacrifice, spoke of such loss in general terms. The service in Hermanville was low-key in comparison to the larger event held at Arranches, attended by world leaders, the Queen and the international press. During this service there was concentration on sacrifice and loss, yet the Queen's speech was directed towards those veterans present and reflected the feeling of national pride when she said: 'What for you is a haunting memory of danger and sacrifice one summer long ago, is for your country and for generations of your countrymen to come, one of the proudest moments in our long national history'. This speech reinforced the general view of the Second World War as being a 'righteous war' in which Britain, together with her allies, triumphed over evil. The public recognition of the veterans' contribution is valued by them, however the focus in the press on the veterans as 'heroes' sits uncomfortably with their own visions of themselves as merely doing their duty.

Press coverage during the week leading up to the events, and June 6th itself, was intense. However veterans are aware that such interest is short-lived. Doug Parker had written a short piece regarding his D-Day experiences, for inclusion in *The Sheffield Star*, but bemoaned the fact that for most of the time veterans are overlooked by the media and society. Shortly after the events, 'Chic' Watson asked his local newspaper to feature a photograph of the 2nd Battalion veterans at the commemorative event in Hermanville, yet it was deemed 'old news'.

The press coverage was uniform in its praise for the role of the veterans on D-Day, viewing them as liberators and old warriors. Those killed on D-Day are also automatically deemed to be heroes, by dint of their being involved in the operation. Of course, all those servicemen killed on D-Day died in the service of their country, but not all died heroically and very little is read about those who do not fit the hero model. During the visit to Hermanville cemetery, Jack Reid found the grave of a friend who had served with him in India during the 1930s. After the war, his friend's widow asked Reid to investigate what had happened to her husband's personal effects. Reid was warned by others in the battalion not to become involved as his friend had allegedly been killed on D-Day while 'running away'. Yet the overwhelming view of the Second World War as being a time of national unity and cohesion against Nazism, has no room for individual experiences that conflict with the dominant theme.

The sixtieth commemorations were, as on previous anniversaries, 'hi-jacked' by the world leaders for political purposes.⁷⁰ On this occasion the focus was on reconciliation and unity, particularly in President Chirac's speech welcoming the German leader, Gerhard Schroeder, to the commemoration event. Afterwards Schroeder laid a wreath in remembrance of his nation's war dead, yet refused to visit La Cambe cemetery as members of the SS Das Reich Division were buried there. Schroeder's attendance was by no means universally approved by British veterans. Eddie Hannath, general secretary of the Normandy Veterans Association spoke for many when he argued: 'The past cannot be so easily shrugged off when there are still people who bitterly remember it...It is wrong to talk simplistically of reconciliation'.⁷¹ He maintained that the time perhaps would be right in ten or twenty years' time, not yet. That time, of course, would see the majority of Second World War veterans gone. For the 2nd Battalion veterans,

⁷⁰ In *The Politics of War Memory & Commemoration*, T. G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper argue that these anniversary events are an opportunity to reinforce the mythic national narrative of 'our finest hour', extend the message to the younger generation, and consider the relationship of Britain with its 'European partners', p.4.

⁷¹ *The Daily Mail* 5th June 2004.

there was no lasting animosity towards the German people expressed during the interviews. On the contrary, there is great respect towards the fighting abilities of the ordinary Wehrmacht soldier. However, this respect does not extend to soldiers of the SS Divisions who, the veterans believe, were capable of acts of brutality towards civilians and Allied servicemen alike.⁷² This opinion is shared by Don Baker, Chairman of the Parachute Regimental Association, who said he had no hatred of the Germans, ‘but we won’t stand for the SS’.⁷³

One 2nd Battalion veteran who found it accept the idea of reconciliation was Harry Smithson, which is understandable given that due to his wife’s illness during the war, his family became separated and he was unable to intervene as he was serving in Europe. He wrote, ‘I’m very pleased I killed as many Germans as I did. I should have shot more especially towards the end of the war, when they all wanted to declare they were “good Germans”’.⁷⁴ Post-war, Smithson returned to Holland to work in the building trade, ‘helping to re-build Holland, which I had sometimes helped to destroy in 1944-45’, and during the fortieth anniversary commemorations he began to re-assess his feelings towards the German people, ‘the thoughts of real peace at heart are breaking through the barriers. The young people already have it. We older ones are feeling it’. For Smithson, as for others from the 2nd Battalion, they ‘had seen so much’ that reconciliation was a difficult issue. Commemoration, for 2nd Battalion veterans, is therefore focused on remembrance of their own lost comrades and the issues of reconciliation and unity are of less importance. particularly difficult to

The rousing Churchillian method of encouraging the nation to ‘pull together’ through adversity has sometimes been expounded by leaders in an attempt to encourage public

⁷² Wilf Todd, in his interview 4th April 1999, recalled that in Holland the bodies of two Dutch Resistance men were found. ‘They’d had their feet slashed and then they’d been killed, but they’d obviously been forced to walk in their bare feet with their feet slashed’, through a forested area. Such instances of cruelty are remembered clearly.

⁷³ *The Daily Mail* 5th June 2004.

⁷⁴ Harry Smithson’s recollections.

acceptance of war, such as Margaret Thatcher and the Falklands War.⁷⁵ That the political aspects of commemoration are closely linked to the events can be seen from the sixtieth anniversary, when the press credited the D-Day commemorations as having promoted a greater sense of international goodwill and harmony. The powerful grip of Second World War memories, passed down to younger generations, is demonstrated by Martin Shaw's survey of feelings about the first Gulf War in 1991, when Saddam Hussain was sometimes likened to Hitler.⁷⁶ Winter and Sivan argue that 'the social organization of remembrance tends to be decentralized', with an emphasis on civil society groupings rather than the central organizations of the state.⁷⁷ However, according to Ashplant, Dawson and Roper, politics will always feature in attempts to make sense of the mourning and damage of war.⁷⁸ I would argue that individual acts of commemoration are deemed to be the most valid for the 2nd Battalion veterans, despite an appreciation that national events are held to pay respect to the fallen and to acknowledge the part played by members of the Armed Forces in securing peace. For these veterans, the political elements to the events largely go unnoticed.

Other forms of private commemoration are equally important to veterans of the 2nd Battalion and their wives. Two widows of 2nd Battalion servicemen have taken great comfort in remembering their husbands through the letters they received during the war. Two interviewees remembered the deaths of soldiers that particularly affected them.

Horace Pinfold spoke of the death of his great friend Arthur Jessop:

On February 28 every year we go without fail. We go to our Hall of Memory, which is in the city centre, and take a wreath and we go on Remembrance Sunday as well. Actually this is what gets me. What I should have done when I came out of the Army was get in touch with his mother and father and go and see them, but for some unknown reason you are out of the Army and you forget

⁷⁵ Lucy Noakes, *War and the British. Gender, Memory and National Identity*, p.105.

⁷⁶ Martin Shaw, 'Past Wars and Present Conflicts: From the Second World War to the Gulf', eds. Martin Evans and Ken Lunn, *War and Memory in the Twentieth Century*, pp.194-195.

⁷⁷ Winter and Sivan, eds. *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, p.38.

⁷⁸ Ashplant, Dawson and Roper, eds. *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration*, p.9.

about it, and then we went to somewhere, oh we went to the Reichswald Forest and saw his grave.⁷⁹

For this interviewee, the memories of his friend were reawakened by the visit to the cemetery. Witnessing his friend's death just a few feet in front of him had been traumatic and the loss was felt more keenly because Arthur Jessop had taken the young reinforcement 'under his wing' since he had joined the battalion. Similarly Clive Crauford remembered one soldier's death in particular. Crauford had taken a fatherly interest in this young infantryman, helping him to cope with his fear under shellfire and gain a measure of confidence. When he was mortally wounded at Troarn the young soldier asked for Clive, before his death, in order to express his thanks for his care. The death of this soldier was particularly affecting, leading Crauford to 'think of him whenever there is an Armistice service or some wartime memories. He always comes back to me. He was just one of many, but he is one of the chaps that I can't help thinking about'.⁸⁰ In both examples the formal commemoration services remind veterans of the losses that affect them personally. For both Hugh Bone and John Scruton, commemoration of their lost friends takes the form of unpublished poetry, with Bone composing a long piece remembering 'Banger' King and Scruton writing about Frank Lockwood, who he particularly remembers 'as memory's curtains part a little slower each year'.⁸¹

Formal commemoration events offer a framework within which the veterans can conduct their own remembrance. Yet some veterans do not attend any commemorative events because they do not wish to remember. For example, Arthur Oates would not attend any services until towards the end of his life, when he allowed his daughter to

⁷⁹ Extract from interview with Horace Pinfold 2nd December 2000.

⁸⁰ Extract from interview with Clive Crauford 5th November 2000.

⁸¹ From Remembrance Day, by John Scruton. In it he describes Lockwood as 'a Brighthouse lad, big, clumsy', yet 'he did his whack' and "young Frank 'as 'ad it, Corp", was his obituary.

take him, in his wheelchair, to a Remembrance Day service in Hull.⁸² While for some, the memories can be unwelcome and painful, others made a conscious decision to put their war service behind them and build a new future with no room for reflection. Hugh Bone decided as the war finished, that he would make a fresh start and not allow his wartime memories to figure as important in his future.⁸³

For the 2nd Battalion veterans, commemoration is both an expression of pride in the regiment and a way of remembering those who were killed during their service. Commemoration is undertaken in different ways, both at formal events, which are not attended by all veterans, and also in private reflection and visits to cemeteries. The sixtieth anniversary events, including the French-organised service to dedicate their memorial, demonstrated that the veterans of the 2nd Battalion were again overlooked by society and the media, despite the best efforts of the Regiment.

Part Five - A Brief History of the Regiment.

The East Yorkshire Regiment had a long and illustrious record of service, dating back to 1685, when it was known as the 15th Regiment of Foot. Over its history, the fortunes of the regiment followed that of the British Army as a whole - perceived threats meant an increase in size and importance, periods of peace resulted in fewer soldiers and a less significant role.

The regiment's battle honours include General Wolfe's success at the Heights of Abraham in Quebec, Canada in 1759. Subsequently, ten officers of the 15th went on to become governors of provinces in North America. During the American War of Independence the troops gained their nickname of the 'Snappers' when, at the battle of Brandywine in 1777, their ammunition ran short. Lt Col Bird ordered that the remaining ammunition be handed to the best shots, while the rest of the soldiers 'snapped' (fired small blank charges of powder) to give the impression they could still fire effectively.

⁸² This is reflected in Alistair Thomson's work. See 'Anzac memories. Putting popular memory theory into practice in Australia', in *The Oral History Reader*, eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson.

⁸³ From interview with Hugh Bone 15th July 2004.

By this means, the Americans were held off until reinforcements arrived.

The First World War witnessed an initial rush of recruits to the Regimental Depot at Beverley and by the end of 1914 there were twelve battalions. The regiment saw action at the Somme, Ypres, Arras and Passchendaele in France and also at Gallipoli and by the end of the war the regiment had earned four Victoria Crosses.

At the outbreak of the Second World War, the East Yorkshires had two regular and two territorial battalions, together with a Home Defence group comprising First World War veterans, which became the 6th Home Service Battalion. On the 7th September 1939 the 2nd Battalion moved to Dorset to form part of the 3rd Infantry Division under Major General Bernard Montgomery. This regular battalion formed part of the British Expeditionary Force which headed to France, together with the 4th and 5th Territorial Battalions. By May 21st 1940 it was clear that the BEF would be forced to withdraw and all three battalions fought a rearguard action. Waiting on the beach at La Panne for their evacuation, the soldiers of the 2nd Battalion incurred around eighty casualties.

On its return from France the 2nd Battalion reformed and was sent to Frome in Somerset to be re-equipped to fight the expected German invasion. The 4th and 5th Battalions were used to strengthen coastal defences on the south coast, while the 6th Home Defence Battalion, as part of the Home Guard, guarded the docks in Hull and kept order during the air-raids.

Due to the large number of recruits passing through the 15th Infantry Training Centre at Victoria Barracks, a further two battalions were formed: the 7th and 8th East Yorkshires. As an anti-aircraft battalion, the 8th was posted to North Africa, Sicily and Italy. The 7th, having trained in invasion tactics in preparation for Normandy, was not selected for D-Day, and was disbanded in July 1944, with many being transferred to the 2nd Battalion which was, by then, already desperate for reinforcements.

In May 1942, the 4th and 5th Battalions were serving in North Africa, as part of the Eighth Army, and during the intense fighting Rommel's Afrika Korps virtually destroyed the 4th Battalion, with many of the infantrymen being captured. The 5th Battalion too, was under attack, covering the withdrawal to Matruh. By the time it reassembled at Alamein, only 170 troops remained of the original 800. Yet by March 1943 the tables had turned, and the 5th Battalion, as part of 151st Brigade, broke the Mareth line. The Germans fought a last stand at Wadi Akarit and the 5th Battalion was in the centre of a frontal assault in which Private Eric Anderson, a stretcher bearer, was awarded the VC. In July 1943 the 5th Battalion was again in action, in the invasion of Sicily, being the first British troops to enter Messina. By November of that year the battalion had returned to England to train for D-Day. Meanwhile, the 2nd Battalion had trained throughout 1943 in preparation for the Normandy landings and its troops were aware of the purpose of the combined training exercises. These exercises, and the lengthy training period they entailed, will now be examined in the following chapter, to assess the readiness of the soldiers to meet the challenges of D-Day and the subsequent battles in north-west Europe.

Chapter 1 - The Training of the 2nd Battalion East Yorkshire Regiment for D-Day

and after.

Securing adequate training was essential in ensuring the successful prosecution of the north-west Europe campaign. With this in mind, in the first part of the chapter I will examine the basic training each infantryman received, as well as the specialist training he underwent specifically for D-Day. In comparing this training with that received by the later reinforcements¹ I will assess the troops' readiness to face the actual battle conditions they encountered. Existing secondary literature is largely critical of levels of training within the infantry, both for officers (particularly junior officers) and the 'other ranks', although it is generally agreed that great strides had been made in this area since the outbreak of the war.² This criticism extends to shortcomings in battle drills and tactics, and a lack of co-operation with other arms, in particular, that between the infantry and the armoured corps. On an individual level, the infantryman is charged with displaying little personal initiative, since training was aimed at promoting obedience at all times, over an ability to adapt to changing circumstance. Since the army was allocated the less educated recruits and the infantry was, erroneously, deemed the least important branch within the army in terms of recruitment, its shortcomings were compounded by these problems. By contrast, the German Army is held up within secondary literature as the model of the finest army of the period, with training forming a central part of that reputation.³

It has been maintained that the Allied armies performed poorly in north-west Europe against this skilful opponent, with inadequate training playing a key part. In the second part of this chapter, I will look at these arguments, particularly relating to the training

¹ For the purposes of this study, the reinforcements are classed as those veterans who served with the battalion at any time after D-Day until the conclusion of the war in Europe.

² Timothy Harrison Place, *Military Training in the British Army 1940-44. From Dunkirk to D-Day*. (London, 2000) p.63. Ian Hay, *Arms and the Men* (London, 1977) p.156.

³ See, for example, Max Hastings *Overlord. D-Day and the Battle for Normandy* (London, 1984) and Richard Holmes, *Battlefields of the Second World War* (London, 2001).

experiences of new officers, to analyse whether they are valid, based on the experiences of the 2nd Battalion interviewees.

In 1939, the British Army was ill-prepared to fight the type of battles that it would face during the Second World War. General Montgomery considered the Army, at that stage, was 'admirably organised and equipped to fight the 1914 war, and with the wrong officers at the top',⁴ leaving the Army 'totally unfit to fight a first class war on the continent of Europe'.⁵ The inter-war years had seen the Army under-funded and hampered by the 'Ten Year Rule'. With no expectation of another Continental conflict, the few efforts that did occur were directed towards increasing mechanisation rather than developments in infantry tactical orthodoxy, although how this should be achieved was disputed, with important ideas being expounded by Fuller and Liddell-Hart. With no coherent military doctrine in existence to face the new German tactics, and with many soldiers poorly trained and under-equipped, the BEF succumbed to the 'Blitzkrieg' implemented by the Wehrmacht in 1940.

It would now fall to Field Marshal Sir Alan Brooke to play the major role in restructuring the British Army. This role extended to organising intensive training exercises and running frequent conferences on all facets of modern war, as well as replacing large numbers of commanders.⁶ Following its evacuation from France in June 1940, the 2nd Battalion was allocated to home defence duties in anticipation of an invasion attempt by German forces. The initial threat receded, yet the battalion was to remain in the UK until D-Day, despite undergoing amphibious landing training in preparation for the Dieppe assault in 1942 and the invasion of Sicily the following year. Those already serving in the battalion during that period had a long time available in which to undergo training in all areas.

⁴ B. Law, *The Memoirs of Field Marshal The Viscount Montgomery of Alamein K.G* (Collins, London, 1958) p.39.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.49.

⁶ David Fraser, *Alanbrooke* (London, 1982).

At this point, it is important to consider that at the time of the Normandy invasion, the 2nd Battalion was a regular battalion, comprised overwhelmingly of long-standing servicemen, some of whom had served with the battalion throughout the 1930s, with many others volunteering to join the Army following the outbreak of the war. This difference, between the regular army, and the conscripted personnel, rapidly changed when the battalion landed in France in 1944, as large numbers of conscripted reinforcements were drafted in to replace casualties. For all recruits, basic training followed a similar path, but varied thereafter, depending on whether the recruit joined the battalion prior to, or post-D-Day.

Basic training.

From the interviews, it appears that the veterans had no choice in deciding which of the services or, indeed, which branch of the army they would be joining. The experience was not unusual, although during the Second World War it was increasingly recognised that some recruits would not be suitable to withstand the rigours of active service in the front line.⁷ Despite this, the increasing need for manpower overrode the warnings of the Army psychiatrists.⁸ This pressure on manpower in the infantry meant that anyone not displaying particular work experience or qualifications would be viewed as suitable candidates. Two of the interviewees mentioned rudimentary selection tests but the majority only recalled their lack of choice.⁹

Several revealed they had volunteered for the RAF or Royal Navy in preference to waiting for their call-up papers, yet were unsuccessful. Arthur Smith was one of those

⁷ In a Report on a Visit to 21 A.G. B.L.A. by the Consulting Psychiatrist to the Army, who visited No 3 Military Prison in Bayeux on 25th October 1944, he concluded that 5 per cent of those examined were of such low intelligence they should not be in a fighting unit, 5 per cent were psychopaths and the bulk included numbers of immature type and men of low combatant temperament. (NA WO/32/11550).

⁸ Reports of Meetings. Command Specialists in Psychological Medicine, (NA WO222/1584). During the meetings it was held that 'a surprisingly large number of men suffering from constitutional mental defect escape detection by the Recruiting Medical Boards'.

⁹ John Baynes and Cliff Pettit, 'Preparing for War: the experience of the Cameronians' eds. P. Liddle, J. Bourne, I. Whitehead, *The Great World War 1914-45 Vol. 1 Lightning Strikes Twice*, (London, 2000). The experience of Thomas Laing is similar to that of my interviewees: when asked if he had any particular preference for an arm of the service he said he was a musician and was told, 'It's the infantry for you'.p.38.

who had volunteered for the Navy but ‘nothing happened until after Dunkirk. Then all they had on the books went willy nilly straight into the army’.¹⁰ Even once serving in the infantry, some interviewees volunteered for service in other regiments. Denis Cade, disillusioned with the harshness of his training, volunteered for an Airborne Division but returned to his unit after four days¹¹ and Alf Ackroyd was pleased to be transferred into the 2nd Battalion because he regarded it as a ‘fighting battalion’ and had been keen for a transfer from the 70th (Young Soldiers) West Yorkshire Regiment for some time, as his current service was not fulfilling his ‘sense of adventure’.¹² This desire to see active service should not be underestimated and Alf Ackroyd was not alone in being conscious that, until D-Day, he had not been contributing to the war effort, and his service, through no fault of his own, had been less than spectacular.

On arrival at the barracks, a recruit faced a period of basic training lasting six weeks. The purpose of this initial training was twofold: to instil in the soldier the realisation that he was no longer an individual but a member of a group and, above all, to obey commands.¹³ The aim, over time, was that the recruit should become acclimatised to putting the needs and welfare of the group before his own.¹⁴ The recruit relinquished his civilian clothes and was allocated a uniform and, during basic training, he lived to a timetable set by the Army instructors, from ‘reveille’ to ‘lights out’. Thus the period of basic training was not so much a time for learning new skills, as an acclimatisation to the Army way of life, with the instillation of a new set of values. This process was assisted by the fact that the recruits were largely young and therefore more malleable. All the interviewees recalled this short time as a period of drills, basic weapons training, PT, inoculations and kit inspections. The emphasis on drill, which is the ordering of

¹⁰ Extract from interview with Arthur Smith 27th September 1999.

¹¹ From interview with Denis Cade 4th July 1999.

¹² Extract from interview with Alf Ackroyd 10th February 2002.

¹³ Gwynne Dyer, *War* (London, 1986).

¹⁴ For Alex Bowlby, in *The Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby*, this realisation of group loyalty came during training for a river-crossing in Italy, when his Platoon started singing Lili Marlene. ‘For the first time in my life I lost all sense of self. I was inextricably part of the Platoon and they were part of me’, (London, 1999) p.13.

bodies of men to move in identical ways in response to a shouted set of commands, was a reinforcement of the group ethos. In a move towards automatic acceptance of commands, the recruits were taught to make their beds, to lay out their kit for inspection and to wear their uniforms in a specified way. Any minor infringements of the rules resulted in punishments, including additional cleaning duties, and were often imposed on the group. It was therefore in the interests of the group to ensure that all recruits conformed to the instructors' expectations of them.

This period of basic training also put great emphasis on the standard of dress required of the recruit, the 'spit and polish' or 'bull' aspect to promote discipline, pride and instil high levels of personal hygiene.¹⁵ A letter from Arthur Oates to his mother, while undergoing potential officer training, explained what this entailed:

Courses having been discontinued for about a week we are at present "dagging mad". A definition of "dagging" is: the polishing of anything and everything – so that by next Sunday we shall look like recruits with phosphorescent equipment – imagine the patience required to make a bayonet shine like glass and a buckle ½" square shine like the rising sun – still it's all part of the army.¹⁶

The interviewees often remarked that this period witnessed the start of their making long-lasting friendships with other recruits, based on shared experiences and hardships, a camaraderie which they later found difficult to replicate in civilian life. Several of the interviewees who joined the battalion as reinforcements, recalled staying with these same friends right through their service, although this was rarer for those interviewees involved in D-Day, as so many became casualties. Dennis Brown remembered, 'you were all split up to go to different regiments but Ralph Bramley and I stuck together right through'.¹⁷

¹⁵ See *Manual of Elementary Drill (All Arms)*, 1935, which includes sections on instructions for drilling recruits, words of command and rules for inspection. Copy held at Duke of Wellington's Regimental Archive, Halifax.

¹⁶ Arthur Oates' letter to Mater dated 2nd February 1941 SWWEC (2003/2075).

¹⁷ Extract from interview with Dennis Brown 4th July 1999.

Following the initial training of six weeks, the interviewees who came to the battalion as reinforcements progressed straight on to an additional training period lasting twelve weeks. However, those who joined the battalion prior to D-Day were then posted to wherever the battalion was based in the UK, and additional training was on an ad hoc basis. For Arthur Smith, serving with the battalion in the years before D-Day was a frustrating experience at times: 'They had no idea what to do with the men they were in charge of. On Monday it was RSM's parade, on a Wednesday it was Adjutant's parade and on Friday it was a CO's parade and this was while there was a war going on'.¹⁸ Many hours were spent mounting guards and the men were sometimes detailed off for labouring duties, including constructing large concrete ramps at Fort George in preparation for assault training. Indeed, it was only once the battalion was allotted a particular role in forthcoming operations, involving amphibious landings, that training intensified.

Combined Operations Training.

On 1st May 1942 the battalion moved to Inverary, and so began the first of the regular moves which continued until D-Day. Up until 1943, the Combined Operations Training Centre at Inverary, on Loch Fyne, was the main centre for amphibious training. The early attempts at amphibious landings were from twelve naval cutters, as LCAs¹⁹ were in short supply. These cutters had to be rowed and the men became very fit. Wilf Todd recalled that consequently the men were always hungry.²⁰ This initial amphibious landing training was in preparation for the Dieppe raid of August 1942. However the 2nd Battalion was replaced in this high-casualty operation by Canadian units. The craft and equipment used by the Canadians during that raid were utilised by the battalion during its combined operations training on the Isle of Wight over the following months. From

¹⁸ Extract from interview with Arthur Smith 27th September 1999.

¹⁹ Landing Craft Assault.

²⁰ From an interview with Wilf Todd 20th March 1999, in which he remembered filling his helmet with mussels and taking them back to camp for boiling.

December 1942 to February 1943, the battalion took part in Divisional exercises and practised assaults on concrete and wire obstacles, before returning to Scotland. On this occasion, the equipment was much improved and beach obstacles and fortifications had been erected for demolition and attack during training.²¹ As the Course finished, the battalion embarked on a special hardening-off exercise, during which the entire unit undertook a cross-country march of around a hundred miles to the Ardnamurchan Peninsula. This march took six days to complete and each veteran involved can remember precise details as to its hardships. Those who managed to avoid the march consider themselves fortunate.²²

Arthur Smith's oral account reflects the cold and wet conditions while bivouacking on the march, together with the infantryman's ingenuity in his attempts to remain dry:

So we had to put the groundsheets down . . . then we had gas capes and we utilised those, then of course we had the blanket. After the first day we were shattered . . . and I remember waking up and it was chucking it down, . . . and there were a little rivulet running straight down my back. It was pitch black dark. I felt around and I got my small pack and inside was my mess tin, so I put that under my head and shoulders and got my steel helmet under my bottom and spent the rest of the night that way. We weren't a bit bothered. We got up the next morning and had some breakfast and were off again.²³

The troops were permitted to put one blanket each on board the accompanying lorries, but after the first day they also wrapped their heavy greatcoats inside the blankets, to avoid having to carry them. The interviewees also recalled sleeping in the local school at Kinlochleven, so they had one night out of the rain. Some of the interviewees spoke with obvious pride that the paths they followed were also trodden by East Yorkshire troops hundreds of years earlier. The Regimental History records that men of the 15th Regiment of Foot were involved in road-making in the Highlands in 1689, 1723 and

²¹ Nightingale, *The East Yorkshire Regiment*, p.147.

²² From interview with Albert Eccles 11th September 1999.

²³ Extract from interview with Arthur Smith 27th September 1999.

1773.²⁴ The interviewees had been made aware of the historic nature of the exercise by their officers. One of these young officers, Arthur Oates, wrote to his fiancée Audrey, from the Tartan Hotel, Kinlochleven during the march:

Darling, I'm still very much alive and kicking but it's no secret that it's the roughest trip I've done yet. As a historical fact this route was last covered by the East Yorks in 1746 when they went from Inverary to Fort William and it was conceived as impossible – we're out to break the record.²⁵

The concentration on achieving supreme physical fitness is epitomised by this march and, by the end of it, Oates noted that fatigue was widespread. He wrote that the packs weighed around 60lbs 'and after four days marching one's feet start to feel bruised'. Under the censor's mark it is possible to read that he had recorded that 'the soldiers were beginning to show signs of fatigue too'. This is not the type of detail that civilian readers would be encouraged to read for fear that it would reveal any lowering of morale. None of the interviewees recorded that fatigue was an undue problem, although all who completed the march emphasised its toughness.

Oates certainly felt that the fitness training was having the desired effect. He advised Audrey in April 1943, that 'the three weeks immediately after this involves a total marching distance of 380 miles – so you see why I consider that we are getting tough'.²⁶ Interestingly, Oates' letters also include references to the climb up the 1,000ft mountain just north of Inverary which the interviewees clearly recalled, although this is unsurprising, given that it was a daily event. Oates described it as 'rather a tough climb as most of it is practically sheer but well worth the effort my hands are still rather sore from the efforts so it's rather a problem to write'.²⁷ The fitness levels are reflected in the time it took to complete the climb, 'yesterday's timing was 23 minutes up and 12 down

²⁴ Nightingale, *The East Yorkshire Regiment*, p.147.

²⁵ Letter from Arthur Oates to Audrey, undated.

²⁶ Letter to Audrey dated 3rd April 1943.

²⁷ Letter to Mater dated 24th March 1943.

and the view at the top! Super! There's an old watch tower at the very top – commonly known as the RAF canteen'.²⁸

At the end of the march, the Regimental history records that there were no casualties, 'an excellent record seeing that the march had been made intentionally tough'.²⁹ This comment on casualties was an acknowledgment of an anticipated casualty rate during exercises. Although the troops were safer during training than on active service, training at this level carried a relatively high risk. Some of these accidents were witnessed by the interviewees and are clearly remembered, for example, George Burnham recalled:

there was another incident where we were introduced to live ammunition and being fired at, and the Bren gun was on a fixed line. It couldn't move, and it was firing about three feet above the ground, and you came to this place and there was a big sign and it said "crawl or else". Of course, these three lads went straight out, straight into the machine gun fire and were cut to pieces.³⁰

Accidents in vehicles were common, particularly given the nature of the roads in the area. During one of the exercises in Scotland a carrier exploded after Polish soldiers mistakenly laid live mines. Hugh Bone remembered this incident as he had been advising one of those fatally wounded on his matrimonial problems 'and suddenly they were all solved in a moment'.³¹ Another of the incidents, remembered by Alf Harrison, demonstrated the effect that a 'friendly fire' injury had on the person inflicting it. He watched a soldier trip as he left a landing craft:

As he has tripped he has knocked the safety catch off and as he has gone down . . . his rifle has gone off and he shot, shot the bloke in front and it went right through the collar of his shirt and that killed him instantly. And the chap who had done it he is an ex-Glasgow policeman and he knew all about first aid, runs over to try to stop him, you know, bleeding, but couldn't and that man then he cried his eyes

²⁸ Letter to Audrey dated 25th March 1943. This was also referred to as the 'Airmen's Naafi' during interviews.

²⁹ Nightingale, *The East Yorkshire Regiment*, p.147.

³⁰ Extract from interview with George Burnham 26th February 2000.

³¹ From *An Ordinary Person*, unpublished memoir of Hugh Bone p.32.

out. So what they done, they transferred him to another regiment.³²

The individual training received by the 2nd Battalion was not dissimilar to that undertaken by the Commandos, who were held to be elite troops. The Commando forces were designed to be highly trained in individual battle skills, lightly equipped and exceptionally fit.³³ This emphasis on physical fitness, deemed so important by General Montgomery,³⁴ was also found within the 2nd Battalion. All the interviewees recall the assault courses to raise fitness levels, and in particular one built for the Commandos, which was regarded as ‘the “Daddy” of all assault courses – we stopped counting our bruises after thirty’.³⁵ One veteran remembers each obstacle in great clarity,³⁶ and another remembers the course for the reason that he broke his ankle tackling it.³⁷ The emphasis on fitness extended to cross-country running, boxing matches and forced marches. The interviewees attributed this concentration on fitness as coming directly from the orders of General Montgomery. Montgomery also insisted that all commanders took training seriously, with emphasis on the practising of battle drills, a concentration on realism with the use of live ammunition, and the opportunity, where practicable, to rehearse operations in advance.³⁸ He keenly advocated battle drills as a way to speed up the prosecution of operations. As French argues, Montgomery did not create the army’s operational doctrine but he ensured that a common interpretation of it was in place by 1944, which led to ‘considerable flexibility on the battlefield’.³⁹

During this period there was also intensive training at Ardnamurchan on a Company basis and ‘to each Company a Commando type Officer was attached’.⁴⁰ These officers again concentrated on fitness levels, and assault landings, under battle conditions, took

³² Extract from interview with Alf Harrison 5th May 2000.

³³ James Dunning, *The Fighting Fourth. No. 4 Commando at War 1940-45* (Stroud, 2003).

³⁴ See *The Memoirs of Field Marshal The Viscount Montgomery of Alamein* (London, 1958) pp.71-73.

³⁵ Extract from interview with Jack Reid 4th July 1999.

³⁶ Wilf Todd interview 20th March 1999.

³⁷ Albert Eccles interview 11th September 1999.

³⁸ David French, *Raising Churchill’s Army*, p.249.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.261.

⁴⁰ Nightingale, *The East Yorkshire Regiment*, p.147.

place at *HMS Dorlan*. However the battalion's anticipated role in the Sicily operations did not transpire. The Regimental History records that 'this last-minute cancellation was a severe blow to the Division, trained to full fighting pitch – an anti-climax bringing in its train a heavy drop in morale'.⁴¹ This view is not borne out by the interviewees.

George Burnham's extract is indicative of the general feeling:

You said that you should have gone on the Sicily landings?

Yes, we should have done.

And that was postponed?

Yes. The old man said "we are not going. They are saving you for better things". We thought "Oh my God".

Did you not feel that it was an enormously long time doing all that training?⁴²

Well, I mean you never thought anything about it. I mean you did as you were told, and, you know, that was it.⁴³

It was certainly not unusual for troops of all specialties to remain on home soil for this long,⁴⁴ and for the interviewees it brought a bonus, in that each operation which failed to materialise was preceded by embarkation leave.

As it became clear that the Division had been selected to take part in Operation Overlord, the exercises became increasingly intensive. They took place both by day and night, at all levels, and on a combined basis with armour and artillery. After a very wet period in Tighnabrugich, during which time the battalion practised assaults against defended positions, the Division then moved to Nairn in the Moray Firth area. In late 1943, an area at Burghead Bay was selected as suitable for amphibious landing training

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.148.

⁴² This is clearly a leading question, although it was within the confines of a conversational, rather than formal interview. The interviewee's response indicates he felt at ease and could disagree with the supposition.

⁴³ Extract from interview with George Burnham 26th February 2000.

⁴⁴ Capt Alistair Bannerman of the 2nd Bn Royal Warwickshire Regt said of D-Day that 'I had been training for this very day for about three years in England' (SWWEC 2001-819). Also P. E. G. Balfour of Guards Armoured Brigade (SWWEC 99.90) and Sir Anthony Dewey, an Anti-Tank Regt officer SWWEC (2001-1233).

as it resembled Sword Beach, the battalion's assigned landing area for D-Day. 'They set it up with a little narrow gauge railway and put fortified bungalows up, which were concrete emplacements. We landed at daytime, night time, again and again, so it became second nature'.⁴⁵ Exercises took place involving armoured vehicles, the Beach Groups, signals, engineers and artillery.

Exercises 'Wetshod', 'Leapyear', 'Burgher 1' and 'Burgher 2' epitomised the idea of a 'combined operation' as being 'one in which two or more of the Fighting Services co-operate in order to strike the enemy with the maximum of effect at a chosen place and a chosen moment', since 'troops, even veterans, are useless unless the Navy can put them ashore at the chosen place and at the right time, and both may fail if there is no air cover above them'.⁴⁶ Successfully prosecuted in the Torch landings in North Africa in 1942, and the landings in Pantelleria and Sicily in 1943, combined operations had not, before that time, been an unqualified success. Yet the massive growth during the war in the numbers and types of craft available made a landing in strength on the coast of France feasible, assuming that the training and preparations were of a sufficient standard. The autumn and winter exercises were extremely tough on the men due to the regularly rough seas and cold weather. The interviewees remember the physical conditions very clearly, particularly Peter Brown who feels he almost contracted hypothermia on one exercise in November 1943. Having jumped out of the landing craft, Peter Brown received a thorough soaking after being dragged under the water. He then set off for the shore:

Our objective in this exercise was a wood about fifteen miles inland across rough countryside. By the time we got there and had dug a slit trench I was in a pretty poor state. My clothes had partially dried but as darkness fell and it got colder I could not stop shivering and began to think I would not last the night. However about three in the morning the exercise was called off and we were able to

⁴⁵ Extract from interview with Wilf Todd 20th March 1999.

⁴⁶ Both quotes from *Combined Operations 1940-1942* (London, 1943).

light a huge bonfire and this, together with a generous rum ration, probably saved my life.⁴⁷

Two interviewees also remembered being aboard a landing craft which began to sink: 'we threw all our rifles and everything over the side. It started going down but they reckoned they were unsinkable. Fortunately another boat that was going back to the LSI saw us and picked us up, otherwise I wouldn't have been here. It was that cold in the water'.⁴⁸

The 2nd Battalion War Diary is only available from January 1944, as the records prior to this date have been lost, which means that the Regimental history, the memoirs, and the oral interviews, are the only sources for the years 1942 and 1943. However, from January to June, the Diary reveals the intensive nature of the exercises, if not the details. In January, three days were spent at Burghead Bay during Exercise 'Grab', with the intention 'to practice assaults on beaches and the capture of initial objectives by assault battalions'. There was also emphasis on night operations, including breaching minefields, compass work and direction finding, as well as time spent on the range.

In January and February, Companies also attended Street Fighting Courses, signifying that while overall concentration was placed on the landings, it was not to the exclusion of all else. In February, during Exercise Anchor, the assault troops built on the previous month's exercise by focusing on rapid consolidation of the positions they aimed to capture on D-Day. For this exercise, full details were laid out, including numbers of men per assault craft and the equipment each craft was to carry, for example four 10ft Bangalore, 3 scaling ladders and 3 rolls of rabbit netting were on board the second landing craft. This was now a full-scale rehearsal for the landings, albeit without live ammunition. While other exercises used live ammunition for purposes of battle inoculation, this exercise allowed all involved to practise their D-Day drills without too great a risk of being injured in the process, although provision had been made for the

⁴⁷ Peter Brown – privately held memoir.

⁴⁸ Extract from interview with Doug Parker 17th July 1999.

inevitable casualties to be evacuated to nearby hospitals. Unfortunately, there was no information on how successful the exercise proved, but such exercises were conducted to familiarise the men with their allotted roles, so that by D-Day they would act instinctively and the training would override any uncertainty amidst the confusion of battle. This element of training was crucial, and remains so today.

The following month saw the re-introduction of platoon marches for fitness purposes as well as two major exercises, one at Brigade level, and the other a higher formation exercise set at Divisional level. Exercise 'Deputy' on 15th and 16th March focused on co-operation between infantry and tanks during an assault landing, and Exercise 'Leapyear' proceeded under 'as realistic conditions as possible'.⁴⁹ 'Leapyear' was another full-scale rehearsal for D-Day, before the battalion moved to Cowplain in preparation for the invasion. From April the concentration reverted to individual fitness, with four day, platoon level, route marches including a one night compass march. On alternate days there were also battalion level marches, dressed as for the assault. The emphasis on personal fitness continued in the sealed camps in the run-up to D-Day. Jack Pearse wrote of two marches in two days, as well as playing sports in the camp: 'This is the weather when the men appreciate a decent sports field to play basket-ball, deck quoits, open-air darts, even football, of their own arranging rather than the regimentation of P.T. parades. Morale is consequently high'.⁵⁰ The importance of strong religious beliefs for some servicemen, as a source of comfort during difficult times, was also apparent during this period and is illustrated in film taken of 8th Brigade troops, including members of the 2nd Battalion, at a packed open-air service just before D-Day.⁵¹

⁴⁹ 2nd Battalion War Diary 15-16th March 1944.

⁵⁰ Letter from Jack Pearse to his wife Dorothy, dated Thursday 1st June 1944. Copies supplied by the family.

⁵¹ Film A70 15-1 and 15-2, The 3rd Division rehearses its D-Day invasion role during Operation Fabius, IWM.

At the beginning of May 1944, Force S (Sword Beach) took part in exercise Fabius 4, landing to the west of Littlehampton. In the same optimistic note adopted throughout the Regimental History, its author argued that ‘the last great try-out exercises such as “Fabius” had resulted in but very minor deficiencies in the arrangements coming to light’.⁵² Others who witnessed the exercise, have focused on the confusion associated with this exercise. Under stormy conditions, some troops lost their lives, landing craft became disordered and the exercises were called off. It was thought that many more weeks of training would be needed, yet time had run out.⁵³ Whatever the official reports, the Divisional Commander, in a letter to the 2nd Battalion wrote ‘the exercise went very well’ and ‘all were particularly impressed with the enthusiasm and cheerfulness of the troops’⁵⁴ in an effort to sustain morale in the run-up to D-Day. In another attempt to foster confidence in the task ahead, the battalion attended a demonstration on beach clearance by 79 Sqn RE, using AVRE, at Littlehampton.

For the D-Day troops, training was focused intensively on preparations for the assault as its importance was so great. However the long build-up for the 2nd Battalion ensured that there was also ample opportunity for house-to-house fighting to be practised including the technique of ‘mouseholing’ whereby soldiers learnt ‘tunnelling from one house to the next when we couldn’t go out. You knocked a hole through the wall’.⁵⁵ These house-clearing skills would prove especially useful for those serving later, in Holland and Germany. The longer-serving interviewees had specialist street fighting skills which were practised in Glasgow: ‘You are running through the houses and. . .they had taken the window frames out and you have got to run through these houses

⁵² Nightingale, *The East Yorkshire Regiment*, p.164.

⁵³ Paul Lund and Harry Ludlam, *The War of the Landing Craft* (London, 1976).

⁵⁴ Quoted in the Bn War Diary. A visit by General D. W. Eisenhower was also recorded on 13th May 1944, with his subsequent letter stating ‘It was good to see your Division looking so fit and in such good spirits’. The King inspected the battalion on 19th May.

⁵⁵ Extract from interview with Alf Ackroyd 10th February 2002.

with your rifle and that, and you have got to run straight through the window, and you have got an eight or ten foot drop there to the basement'.⁵⁶

Clearly, both the length of time available to the battalion between Dunkirk and D-Day, and its specific task for the invasion, ensured that the level of training received by the longer-serving infantrymen was comprehensive, detailed and designed to achieve success in taking the initial objectives. Despite fears of heavy casualties during D-Day, the training also ensured that those coming through the assault on the beach physically unscathed, would possess the necessary skills and knowledge to fight during the subsequent months. The long preparation also meant that those serving on D-Day had had the opportunity to undergo full section, platoon, and company training. Despite the high casualties inflicted on D-Day, this training would prove beneficial during the Normandy campaign.⁵⁷

Training of the Reinforcements.

As has already been noted, the level of training received by reinforcements post D-Day, was the same during basic training but differed thereafter. Reinforcements underwent a short, but intensive twelve weeks of additional training, focusing on fitness, weapons handling and 'hardening off'. There had certainly been substantial improvements in training of reinforcements since earlier in the war. Major General J. S. Nichols wrote that of 860 men posted to 50th Division, Eighth Army, in 1942, only about 25 per cent had done any field firing and 131 had never thrown a live grenade.⁵⁸ The 2nd Battalion reinforcements interviewed, were without doubt trained to a higher standard for overseas service. The conditions experienced in the bocage of Normandy, with its high, impenetrable hedges and deep ditches providing ideal cover for the defending forces, reinforced the need for troops to be able to withstand long periods without sleep or

⁵⁶ Extract from interview with Alf Harrison 5th May 2000.

⁵⁷ Where such opportunities were lacking, it was considered a great handicap, ie Lt Col P. H. Richardson of 7th Bn The Green Howards. Papers at the Green Howards Regimental Museum, Richmond.

⁵⁸ Report by Major General J. S. Nichols. NA (WO201/2590).

personal comforts, to be able to 'dig-in' quickly after putting in an attack and to be as aware as possible of proper battle conditions in the short time available. It was in this area of battle readiness that training faltered. Of course, as the interviewees argued, it is impossible to simulate real battle conditions.⁵⁹ 'Battle inoculation' came to be regarded as increasingly important as the war progressed. Live firing exercises, village and town fighting courses, coping with loud explosions and firing at moving targets all featured in the training of the longer-serving members of the 2nd Battalion.⁶⁰ However, none of the reinforcement interviewees mentioned such exercises, in contrast to the D-Day veterans, who had a much longer training period. That is not to argue that such exercises did not take place, more that within the realm of additional training, other aspects, particularly the 'hardening off' exercises were those which produced more vivid recall. Denis Cade remembered these exercises clearly:

Then I moved to Longhorsely in Northumberland. Believe me it was tough. It was winter. They'd take you out for a couple of days and you had to dig trenches and sleep in them at night. You'd put your gas cape over you and your overcoat. But it was only the same as being at the front. It was the toughening up period.⁶¹

The most important transition between training and proper battle conditions, for all infantrymen, is the realisation that serious attempts are being made to inflict harm. A comment from one interviewee that 'there were people actually trying to kill you!'⁶² carried a serious message; it was the one aspect that training really could not instil in the recruits, it had to be a mental adjustment once on the battlefield.

⁵⁹ Diana M. Henderson argues in 'The Scottish Soldier – Reality and the Armchair Experience', that there is very little you can do to prepare yourself for the shock of battle completely, eds. Paul Addison and Angus Calder, *Time to Kill. The Soldier's Experience of War in the West 1939-1945*.

⁶⁰ In 1944, over 80 per cent of 344 infantrymen questioned in Italy, considered that realistic battle training had been important in preparing for combat. From Samuel A. Stouffer *The American Soldier: Combat and its Aftermath* Vol. II 1949, quoted in Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing. Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare* (London, 1999).

⁶¹ Denis Cade judged that his training was a good preparation for his life in the front line in Holland and Germany. Extract from interview 9th May 1999.

⁶² Extract from interview with Wilf Todd 20th March 1999.

Certainly two of the interviewees expressed the opinion that their training was momentarily forgotten on arrival in the front line. 'Funnily enough, you learnt all these things about keeping your head down but when you go into your first assault, you seem to forget it all'.⁶³ Two interviewees also remembered digging slit trenches and then sitting, or sleeping, above ground: 'Harry and I dug a slit trench and we were sat having a smoke. All of a sudden we heard an 88, well by the time you heard it, it was too late, it went that fast. I don't know if it went between us or not but we got down!'⁶⁴ Keeping under cover was a valuable lesson that was soon learnt, to ensure personal survival.

The longer-serving soldiers had strong regimental ties, instilled during the years of training before D-Day. However reinforcements had no such loyalty initially. Interviewees who were 2nd Battalion reinforcements came from various regiments, including the Lancashire Fusiliers and the Sherwood Foresters.⁶⁵ Horace Pinfold recalled, 'actually without being nasty, we had never heard of the East Yorkshire Regiment. Our regiment was the Royal Warwicks and that is what we were aiming for'.⁶⁶ Other reinforcements came from different regiments and one interviewee⁶⁷ remarked that after D-Day, reinforcements could arrive at the battalion, be wounded, and leave, before anyone knew their names.⁶⁸ Robin Neillands wrote that as a general rule British reinforcements went to battalions of their own regiment or to a battalion in the same brigade. Yet my interviewees went neither to their own battalion nor their own

⁶³ Extract from interview with Ray Robinson 19th September 1999.

⁶⁴ Extract from interview with Ray Robinson 19th September 1999. A similar situation was recalled by Peter Brown, interviewed on the same date.

⁶⁵ Robin Neillands, *The Battle of Normandy 1944* (London, 2002) p.413.

⁶⁶ Extract from interview with Horace Pinfold 2nd December 2000. As with all the reinforcement veterans, Horace's allegiance soon transferred to the East Yorkshire Regt.

⁶⁷ Extract from interview with Alf Ackroyd 10th February 2002.

⁶⁸ This experience was replicated in other units and also US Divisions. Robin Neillands, *The Battle of Normandy*, p.250.

division. Since regimental loyalty is an important factor in ensuring men continue to serve effectively, the reinforcements were at an immediate disadvantage.⁶⁹

Well-directed training can instil confidence in soldiers in their own abilities and the quality of their equipment. However the element of personal risk that a soldier deems acceptable and the level of responsibility that he is willing to accept, still varies according to the personality of the infantryman concerned. Wilf Todd, for example, was keen to seek promotion, as it brought extra pay, and carried a Bren gun single-handedly around a testing assault course to draw attention to his strength and ability. This attempt did not work, yet during active service in north-west Europe, he had a chance of promotion when his Sergeant reported sick in preference to leading an attack:

We set off to clear a small wood. Chris Lochran said “Do I have to lead you buggers everywhere?” and I took umbrage and said “No bugger has to lead me, I can lead myself. But he’s getting paid for doing the job”. So Chris Lochran said “If you get paid will you bloody well do it?” and I said yes. So I was section commander just like that.⁷⁰

My point here is that regardless of rank, some will be more prepared than others to display leadership qualities, because it is in their nature to do so. The argument put forward in secondary literature, that individual soldiers failed to show initiative because their training directed them towards complete obedience, may be true of a proportion of infantrymen, but these men would not possess leadership skills in any event and would not choose to exercise initiative. What they preferred, was to be led by others, of any rank, who possessed these skills. Arthur Smith remembered one such example:

When we were in Venraj I remember this section. . .and there is this lad leading. He weren’t a Lance Corporal, he was just a private, but he took charge, which I could well understand. He was one of them sort. And he were in charge of that section marching up the street with rifles over their shoulders, you know. Just marching up street one day. I don’t know where they were going or anything,

⁶⁹ The mutiny at Salerno was as a result of men being drafted to divisions other than their own. The men refused to be transferred, see Robert H Ahrenfeldt, *Psychiatry in the British Army in the Second World War* (London, 1958) p.215.

⁷⁰ Extracts from interview with Wilf Todd 20th March 1999.

but it were just the sight of him being the leader of the section.⁷¹

That initiative was recognised and rewarded by High Command is evident in the awards made to Private J. Roberts of the 2nd Battalion, who received a certificate for initiative and gallantry while under fire at the Chateau de la Londe on 28th June 1944, and another for gallantry and leadership in taking command of his section during an action on the Udem road on 27th February 1945.⁷² However it is clear that displays of initiative and leadership from the ranks were not commonplace. The argument that certain men will display leadership abilities, regardless of rank, reflects John Keegan's idea of the 'big man', the person who can wield power over the others and who is a 'key figure in the way battles work'. Such 'big men' are the ones who bring battles alive and who encourage others to follow them, yet may not hold any rank at all, indeed 'authority may disapprove of him and his comrades may even dislike him'.⁷³

The doctrine of the British army was to stress obedience before all other attributes, otherwise it was believed that once in battle morale would falter and serious problems would ensue.⁷⁴ This prevailing attitude is evident in a chapter of John Scruton's memoir entitled 'On not being paid to think', whereby he wrote that in reality, he was being paid not to think. However it was also increasingly recognised that due to the nature of modern warfare, soldiers would inevitably be split into small groups on the battlefield, rather than be under the direct control of officers, and may therefore need to make their own decisions on occasion, thus confronting 'the army with a serious conundrum that it never really solved'.⁷⁵ The major attempt to reconcile the two positions was by implementing educational training, however, in practice the hours devoted to formal

⁷¹ Extract from interview with Arthur Smith 27th September 1999.

⁷² Records of the Regimental Museum of the Prince of Wales' Own Regiment of Yorkshire, York.

⁷³ John Keegan, Part 1. *Towards a Theory of Combat Motivation*, pp.8-9, eds. Paul Addison and Angus Calder, *Time to Kill. The Soldier's Experience of War in the West 1939-1945*.

⁷⁴ David French. *Raising Churchill's Army. The British Army and the War against Germany 1919-1945* (Oxford and New York, 2000).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.56.

drill were far in excess to those on education.⁷⁶ I would argue that those men who were predisposed to showing leadership and intelligent initiative would do so, regardless of the different focuses during training.

It is also apparent that writers equate the less educated recruits, who were more likely to enter the infantry, with having a lesser ability to display initiative.⁷⁷ It must be acknowledged that these recruits had few educational opportunities during this period, often due to family circumstances. Many of those interviewed were obliged to leave school at the earliest permitted age, in order to contribute towards family finances. However this does not mean that they were unintelligent, far from it, and many displayed both initiative and a strong desire to capitalise on opportunities within the army and in civilian life post-war.

Certainly, infantrymen were willing to be exposed to differing levels of personal risk, depending on their personalities and the length of time they had already served in the front line. One NCO, Alf Ackroyd, was sympathetic towards the reluctance of his men to take risks in action. He maintained that perhaps he too, may have been more reluctant to expose himself to dangerous situations without his 'stripe', although he was angry with those who did not come to the rescue of their mates, buried in collapsing slit trenches under shellfire, who were calling for assistance.⁷⁸ Wilf Todd, once section commander, remembered calling to his section to follow him into a wood. Having advanced quite some way, he discovered that no-one had followed him and he was making the advance single-handed.⁷⁹ This situation was by no means an isolated incident and was certainly found within other battalions.⁸⁰ Some refused the opportunity of promotion because it not only conferred responsibility, but could cause problems

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.56.

⁷⁷ David French, *Raising Churchill's Army* p.65 and Timothy Harrison Place, *Military Training in the British Army 1940-44. From Dunkirk to D-Day* p.54.

⁷⁸ Interview with Alf Ackroyd 10th February 2002.

⁷⁹ Information relayed to author by Wilf Todd at the 2nd Battalion Veterans' Group reunion April 2005.

⁸⁰ See Sean Longden, *To the Victor the Spoils. D-Day to V E Day, the Reality behind the Heroism* (Gloucs, 2004).

with those who were formerly friends. This reluctance by some infantrymen, generally, to accept promotion, also concealed another important fact: 'My six weeks as a lance-corporal – I kept the stripe until Egypt – had convinced me that I was better off as a rifleman. Three weeks' fighting had confirmed this. Riflemen lived longer than NCOs'.⁸¹

Tommy Hall was an accomplished NCO who was commended for his initiative at Udem: 'we had to crawl up to this house and we could hear them (the Germans) talking. If we'd have done what the officer told us, we'd have all been killed. They said it was empty. We chucked a grenade in and got out of it'.⁸² Tommy found it frustrating that he was not given any information other than his objective, and felt more knowledge would have helped him, although he acknowledged that often the officers were not furnished with more details either. Tommy is an example of an infantryman, albeit an NCO, prepared to use his initiative. He is remembered by the reinforcements as not differentiating between the ranks, despite his own higher position. Horace Pinfold joined Hall's section in Holland and was told he would be carrying the PIAT⁸³: 'so I stood to attention and said "yes, Corporal". He said "none of that. . . You are not in training any more. This is the real thing and I haven't got time for all that bull", and those are the words he said I remember'.⁸⁴ Tommy Hall claimed during his interview that he did not enjoy assuming responsibility. However he was certainly very good at it, and the reinforcement interviewees remember Hall as a tough and skilful Corporal.

Having demonstrated that the reinforcements were not given training for as long, or in as much depth as those trained for the Normandy landings, I will now consider how the longer-serving infantrymen viewed the readiness of the reinforcements for action and how the reinforcements themselves measured their preparation. One of the interviewees,

⁸¹ Alex Bowlby, *The Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby* (London, 1999) p.88.

⁸² Extract from interview with Tommy Hall 17th July 1999.

⁸³ Projectile Infantry Anti-Tank.

⁸⁴ Extract from interview with Horace Pinfold 2nd December 2000.

when asked whether he thought that the reinforcements were well enough trained for their role defended them by replying, 'Oh they was alright. They was just the same. If you put a rifle in his hands he was alright. He was able to pull the trigger, and that is all he had got to do'.⁸⁵ However others felt there to be a definite lack in battle readiness:

You used to get these young lads come out and they wouldn't last 3 or 4 days before they were killed. In comparison, they didn't have as much training. We'd been there since the landings and we'd trained under the conditions. You've got to learn in the army, you've got to be wise, otherwise you don't survive. You learnt the hard way.⁸⁶

As a Corporal, in command of a section of eight men, John Scruton was ideally placed to judge the performance of the reinforcements: 'you had to tell them just what to do whereas the others knew by training and experience how to react in a variety of circumstances'.⁸⁷ It should be stressed that there would be different standards of training received by the reinforcements, as they were trained at Infantry Training Centres in various regions in the UK, and the quality of training depended on the abilities of the individual instructors. Certainly Lt Col Renison considered the training of the reinforcements to be lacking. During training for river crossings under Lt Dick Laming, an officer of the Royal Navy, in January 1945, Laming voiced his concern that, 'with the exception of B Coy's Chindits, the general standard of fieldcraft was low'. Renison agreed, but argued, 'I could understand this however as most of our old original men were gone and the standard of reinforcements could never be the standard of a battalion trained together'.⁸⁸

The reinforcement interviewees themselves however, certainly felt that they were prepared for their role: 'When we were in training it was exactly what you met over

⁸⁵ Extract from interview with Les Turner 2nd January 2003.

⁸⁶ Extract from interview with Doug Parker 17th July 1999. Major 'Banger' King also wrote to his batman Blenkhorn, on 29th August 1944, saying he was pleased to see the return of several wounded men to the battalion as 'the stuff we had been getting lately was pretty bad as you know', (IWM 93/39/1).

⁸⁷ Extract from interview with John Scruton 31st May 1999.

⁸⁸ Lt Col J. D. W. Renison's memoir p.212.

there so you knew what to expect. You had live ammunition fired at you and nights sleeping out. We were very well trained with all kinds of weapons. When we got in action the lads there said they'd keep an eye on us'.⁸⁹ Indeed, newly arriving reinforcements to the battalion were encouraged to 'keep their heads down'. Alf Harrison, a D-Day veteran remembered:

some of them think - oh they are jack the lads, they do this and do that, but they are the first ones who cops it. And what we do, we try to ease them up and tell them. "Don't be silly, don't do nothing silly and just wait, do what you are told and don't take chances", and that is all you can tell them otherwise they start going off and then they go out looking for all souvenirs to take home...⁹⁰

When asked whether they considered themselves properly trained in order to operate effectively as infantrymen, the reinforcement interviewees invariably concurred, however it should be remembered that they had no point of comparison, as they had no direct knowledge of the in-depth training of the D-Day veterans. They assumed that the 'old hands' learned their skills through actual battle experience and admire those who landed on D-Day, feeling that they were somehow 'better' soldiers. Horace Pinfold summed this up:

They were veterans - half the Platoon, and they looked after us youngsters. Like Harold Isherwood, he was a big friend, he looked after us and what is his name, Dougie Parker, and Ginger Baxendale. They were all veterans although they weren't much older than myself I suppose, but they were veterans and we looked up to them. There is no doubt about that. Always admired the chaps who landed D-Day.⁹¹

It should also be noted that the interviewees are the survivors of the battles they took part in and perhaps they learned the additional skills they needed quickly, in order to do so. Of course, luck also played a large part in deciding the fate of those in the front line.

⁸⁹ Extract from interview with Denis Cade 9th May 1999.

⁹⁰ Extract from interview with Alf Harrison 5th November 2000.

⁹¹ Extract from interview with Horace Pinfold 2nd December 2000.

Having considered the training and battle readiness of the individual soldier, I will now consider the arguments put forward concerning the effects of training deficiencies on the campaign in north-west Europe. One of the criticisms of the training in secondary literature highlights a supposed undue concentration on the initial landings on the Normandy coast at the expense of skills required for the long period of fighting thereafter.⁹² It is true that the 2nd Battalion underwent a concentrated period of training specifically for D-Day, including repeated landings from LCAs, weapons training and assaults on defended strongpoints. However, as I have already demonstrated, the long period of training available for the D-Day infantrymen ensured that other aspects were also amply covered, including street-fighting and house-clearing. Certainly all the contemporary training manuals were made available within the 2nd Battalion. Wilf Todd remembered the manuals were held in the Company Office and were freely available for training sessions, although they had to be signed for and returned.⁹³

Regardless of any training deficiencies, there is general agreement that Allied armies were fighting what was regarded as the best fighting force in the world at that time, and were therefore at an immediate disadvantage. Robin Neillands wrote, 'in terms of kit, training, tactical ability, tenacity and sheer guts, fighting without air cover or naval gunfire support and hampered by interference from Adolf Hitler, the German Army was undoubtedly the best army in the field'.⁹⁴ This excellence was remarked upon in contemporary literature which described German infantrymen as 'good fighters. They will act quickly and shoot with all their weapons'. Naturally this literature did not portray the Germans as invincible but instead attempted to reassure British infantrymen

⁹² Julian Thompson, *The Imperial War Museum Book of Victory in Europe. The North-West European Campaign 1944-45* (London, 1994) pp.9-10.

⁹³ Wilf Todd was shown 'The Instructors' Handbook on Fieldcraft and Battle Drill' (10/42) during a visit to his home 9th May 2005, which he clearly remembered and described as 'basic' information.

⁹⁴ Robin Neillands, *The Battle of Normandy*, p.407.

that 'if you watch for your opportunity you should kill quite a lot of them'.⁹⁵ The interviewees largely agree on the excellence of the opposition they faced. Doug Parker commented, 'the German soldiers were very good. But we came across the Hitler Youth just over the Rhine at Goch. They wouldn't surrender so you had to kill them and that was it'.⁹⁶

Yet even amongst members of the battalion there are those who held different opinions as to the capabilities of the German soldier. Harry Smithson considered that 'luckily the British were trained to think and act alone. Whereas the German had to have someone to shout at him and kick him around. Alone he was nobody'.⁹⁷ John Folley, while according 'great respect' to the German soldiers as fighters, cast an interesting insight into why their resistance might have been so stubborn: 'The SS troopers held strategic positions to observe their brothers at arms, the Wehrmacht troops, making sure they did not desert their post in the front line. I have witnessed the Wehrmacht soldiers retreating before us, deliberately mortared and killed by their own side, the SS soldiers'.⁹⁸

Of course, not all units in the German army were well-trained and prepared to fight to support the idea of Aryan superiority; many units were of lesser quality, including some of those on coastal duties on D-Day, often from countries under occupation. Lt Col Renison came upon such troops after a leave in Paris when he stopped to view a Canadian prisoner-of-war cage, 'full of a most dispirited crowd drawn practically from every race under the sun – certainly a fair proportion of them appeared to be of Mongolian origin. They were a very poor type compared with the Boche we had been meeting in Normandy'.⁹⁹ Alf Ackroyd echoed these sentiments during his interview:

⁹⁵ Both quotes from *Popular Guide to the German Army. No 2. The Infantry Division. War Office 1941* p.2. See also *German Infantry in Action (Minor Tactics) War Office Feb 1941.*

⁹⁶ Extract from interview with Doug Parker 17th July 1999.

⁹⁷ Harry Smithson recollections sent to author by Smithson's family.

⁹⁸ 'A Brief Description of the Enemy we Fought' by John Folley, Special Collections, Leeds University (ARMY 069).

⁹⁹ Lt Col Renison's memoir, p.73.

when you came across the German troops themselves it was very stubborn and very hard fighting. But prior to, shall I say, Troarn and Touffreville, it had mostly been foreign troops I think what we had and sort of second rate troops. Most of the Germans though, they fought to the finish . . and they were very Bolshie prisoners.¹⁰⁰

It should also be remembered that from D-Day onwards the German forces were primarily defending, from well-prepared and dug-in positions, which is an easier task, in military terms, than attacking. The Germans' defensive strength was remarked upon in Lt Col Renison's memoir when he cited the example of Overloon where they were extremely well dug-in, and camouflaged, and thereby almost impossible to locate. Renison also noted the ability of German troops to implement delaying tactics, thereby allowing others to pull back and re-group in preparation for a counter-attack. The German army, according to Richard Holmes,¹⁰¹ consistently outfought the Allies when faced with similar sized units, and was capable of inflicting a higher casualty rate.¹⁰² The German army was also held as being of equal priority to the other arms, in terms of men and equipment, unlike the British Army, which considered itself the 'Cinderella' of the services. Recruits to the German army had been systematically attracted since the 1920s, by means of increased pay, a dramatic improvement in living standards and a relaxation of the strict disciplinary system.¹⁰³ Holmes argued that since the German system sent the best men to the front, they had confidence in their abilities and training and were consequently granted authority and freedom to promote displays of personal initiative. Indeed one example of this initiative can be seen in the following German account,

During this action I learnt the worth of these young Grenadiers...There was no firing as ammunition was short....From my tank, Turmluk, I observed that from time

¹⁰⁰ Extract from interview with Alf Ackroyd 25th February 2002.

¹⁰¹ Richard Holmes, *Battlefields of the Second World War*.

¹⁰² In '*A Genius for War*' by Trevor Dupuy, he argued that man for man, the German ground soldiers inflicted casualties at about a 50 per cent higher rate than the British or US under all circumstances. Quoted in Holmes above, p.33.

¹⁰³ French, *Raising Churchill's Army* p.52.

to time one of our Grenadiers would dash to the next trench, to help the wounded or occupy the position – on their own initiative and without orders.¹⁰⁴

Despite the best efforts of the Allied armies, the German army was capable of resisting to the last and could seemingly rise again, despite a series of crushing defeats, particularly at the ‘Falaise pocket’. Indeed Hastings wrote of the German army that its ethos was that of ‘a society fighting to the last to escape *götterdämmerung*’¹⁰⁵ and aware that the Allies were intent upon their unconditional surrender. In Hastings’ reasoning, German tactics were ‘masterly’, with strong defence, concentrated use of mortars and machine guns and quick counter-attacks when ground had been lost. They realised the need for infiltration, and standards of junior leadership were superior to that of the Allies.

Neillands¹⁰⁶ maintains that the Allies’ tactical failures in Normandy would not have occurred if training had been more efficient and also cites a failure to push on to achieve more ground after battle successes. He argues that more night attacks and infiltration should have taken place, changes should have been made in infantry tactics and some means found of countering German weaponry. Certainly, German weapons were generally excellent, including the Schmeisser sub-machine gun, the MG42 (Spandau) machine gun, effective anti-tank guns, particularly the 88mm PAK43, and accurate mortars.¹⁰⁷ However, interviewees viewed most of their personal weapons as adequate for the task facing them, except for the notoriously unreliable Sten gun, and spoke highly of the Bren gun, as well as the 25-pounder support provided by the Artillery.

Holmes concluded that in the Allied armies everyone believed themselves to be individuals with rights and ‘compounded by deficiencies in doctrine, training and

¹⁰⁴ Account of 12th SS Panzer Div. Fontenay le Pesnil 25th June 1944 by Captain Hans Siegel, the commander of 8th Panzer Co, writing of the Grenadiers of 3rd Battalion, 26th Regt. Translated by Scott Flaving, of The Duke of Wellington’s Regimental HQ.

¹⁰⁵ Max Hastings, *Overlord. D-Day and the Battle for Normandy*, p.317.

¹⁰⁶ Neillands, *Battle for Normandy* p.409.

¹⁰⁷ Of the MG34 and MG42, Sydney Jary wrote in *18 Platoon* (Carshalton Beeches, Surrey, 1987), ‘the crushing fire power of these very rapid-firing guns’ amazed him, p.53. Capt Michael Bendix described the 88mm gun as ‘simply terrifying’ SWWEC (2000-356).

equipment though they were, the relative military shortcomings of the British and American armies also faithfully reflected the better values of their societies, and we cannot wish for it to have been otherwise'.¹⁰⁸ It should be remembered that the Allied and German armies cannot be compared on an equal footing, since the Allies pursued a democratic ideal, whereas the German army was imbued with the beliefs of an authoritarian regime, particularly the Waffen SS. Indeed, as Nofi wrote of the German army: 'One of the tragedies of the twentieth century remains the fact that the finest mass army in history was an instrument of evil'.¹⁰⁹ It must also be noted that the German army retained, and used, the death penalty, whereas the Army Act of 1930 removed this ultimate penalty for most offences while on active service in the British Army.

In respect of the criticisms of infantry tactics, lack of night attacks and failure to push on to take more ground,¹¹⁰ it is impossible to assess the validity of these arguments based on the experiences of one battalion alone. When questioned, individual officers have appeared genuinely bewildered by these accusations.¹¹¹ However it is evident from Lt Col Renison's recollections, that the emphasis during the campaign in north-west Europe so far as the 2nd Battalion was concerned, was on attack, followed by consolidation of the ground taken, in order to be certain that it would not be lost during German counter-attacks. Attacks also took place at Brigade level, with the South Lancashire and Suffolk Regiments, therefore any advance necessitated success by all three battalions, otherwise the leading battalion would be forced to wait for the others to catch up. The progress may not have matched the lightning advances made elsewhere, for example by Patton, yet the battalion members were proud that they had never retreated from an area captured; once taken it remained that way, as will be demonstrated in Chapter 3.

¹⁰⁸ Holmes, *Battlefields of the Second World War* p.37.

¹⁰⁹ Albert A. Nofi, ed. *The War against Hitler. Military Strategy in the West* (New York, 1995) p.107.

¹¹⁰ See, for example, Timothy Harrison Place's *Military Training in the British Army 1940-44*, Chapter Five, The Failure of Infantry.

¹¹¹ Interviews with Hugh Bone in July 2004 and Dennis Hallam in October 2005.

Also, it is important to recognise the great strides made in the area of training since the outbreak of the war. The men of the 2nd Battalion had benefited from the experiences of those serving in North Africa, Italy and elsewhere, and it is clear from existing training documents that the lessons learned were passed on to those training in the UK.¹¹²

The Allied forces, by 1944, were fighting to finish the war and return home, therefore many soldiers would understandably be unwilling to accept great personal risk. There was an understanding too that General Montgomery would not unduly risk their lives. Having witnessed the scale of losses during the First World War, while a platoon commander,¹¹³ and mindful of the lack of reserves available, major pushes in Normandy were attempted by Montgomery using concentrated armoured forces, to conserve manpower. It is inevitable that the vast majority of British soldiers fought with an eye on the future and wished to return home at the end of the war unharmed. One interviewee admitted that he had always harboured that thought, until the battle at Schaddenhof Farm, when he expected to be killed:

At Schaddenhof Farm that night we all knew it was the end. The surprising thing was that we all accepted it and because of that we fought better. Prior to that you fought but tried to save your life as well. But that night we thought it was our last night on earth, so we gave the best that we could.¹¹⁴

As well as understanding the viewpoint of average infantrymen, that they were engaged in a necessary job which needed to be completed in order that they could go home, they followed the same belief which permeated the whole British army, namely that superior firepower could be brought to bear on the enemy to ensure that much of the killing

¹¹² Discussion on lessons learned during the year of fighting from El Alamein to Messina by 152 Inf Brigade. This report was disseminated widely, to HQ 21 Army Gp (G Trg), Staff College, the School of Infantry and Senior Officers School on 6th November 1943. NA (WO231/16).

¹¹³ Carlo d'Este, 'The Army and the Challenge of War 1939-45', in *The Oxford History of the British Army*. ed. David Chandler (Oxford, 1994). In *The Memoirs of Field Marshal The Viscount Montgomery of Alamein*, (London, 1958) Montgomery said of the First World War, 'the frightful casualties appalled me'. p.35.

¹¹⁴ Extract from interview with Wilf Todd 20th March 1999.

would be accomplished before they would have to cross the battlefield.¹¹⁵ In fact, while artillery support could prove life-saving, as in the case of the Corps artillery shoot on Schaddenhof Farm, which protected the beleaguered 2nd Battalion, it could also prove a 'straitjacket', hindering exploitation of opportunities and restricting battalion movement to a pre-ordained timetable.¹¹⁶

More forcibly, Holmes argues, 'Allied training not only of conscripts but also of junior infantry officers, most notoriously in the US Army, was deficient to the point of negligence'.¹¹⁷ Certainly the training experiences of the D-Day veterans of the 2nd Battalion do not bear this out. It is a fairer argument when applied blanket-fashion to the level of training received by the reinforcements and it is true that the standard of training was variable generally, as it relied on the individual abilities of instructors and officers to impart knowledge to the recruits.

Officer Training.

To assess how efficient was the training received by officers it is necessary to consider the experiences of 'hostilities-only' officers of the 2nd Battalion, as their training took place during the war itself and differed to that of pre-war regulars. During the Second World War, the number of regular officers totalled 14,000, whereas nearly a quarter of a million men were commissioned for the duration of hostilities, so that 'the wartime officer corps was composed overwhelmingly of amateur soldiers'.¹¹⁸ In early 1942, when Hugh Bone joined the 2nd Battalion at Watford as a junior officer, most of the senior officers were regulars and he realised that opportunities for promotion at that stage would be limited. However the battalion needed more commanders, particularly as the training for D-Day intensified and especially at a more junior level, and these were principally 'hostilities-only' officers. Once the campaign in north-west Europe started,

¹¹⁵ Hastings, *Overlord*.

¹¹⁶ Sydney Jary in *Eighteen Platoon*, p.19. Also Peter Balfour, of the 3rd Bn Scots Guards - letter to his parents dated 14th August 1944. SWWEC (99.90).

¹¹⁷ Holmes, *Battlefields of the Second World War*, p.34.

¹¹⁸ David French, *Raising Churchill's Army*, p.73.

the opportunities for more rapid promotion swiftly became apparent as a result of the high casualty figures among officers.

As French maintains, 'until 1942, there seemed to be ample evidence to support the charge that class bias was undermining the efficiency of the officer corps',¹¹⁹ with new recruits largely from the middle and upper classes. Early in the war an entrant was selected for an OCTU¹²⁰ based on a recommendation from a Commanding Officer followed by an interview. From April 1942 the selection procedure changed to the WOSB (War Office Selection Board) system, processing over 100,000 potential officers by the end of the war and recognising that leadership skills were not dependent upon social class. Within this study, the officers referred to were principally from middle class families and followed similar educational paths before the war. They were often grammar school boys and post-war, took white-collar jobs in the financial and administrative sectors, with one, Hugh Bone, joining the Ministry. In this area of social background of officers, as in so many others, the 2nd Battalion fitted the norm of other standard county regiments in the campaign.

Major Clive Crauford, who volunteered for the Army as an undergraduate at Cambridge, recalled his path to the infantry reflected that experienced by the rank and file. Having tried for the Royal Engineers and then the Artillery:

they got me transferred to an Infantry OCTU, which was dealing with ignorant people who didn't know anything. So I got, well, I was just right for cannon fodder. You were told if you were fit and enthusiastic you were good enough for the Infantry, and I found it was really much more up my street than any of these other ones.¹²¹

All potential officers firstly attended an OCTU course. According to French, the OCTUs placed 'too little emphasis on producing leaders'¹²² and instead concentrated on producing perfectly turned-out private soldiers who then required additional intensive

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ Officer Cadet Training Unit.

¹²¹ Extract from interview with Clive Crauford 5th November 2000.

¹²² French, *Raising Churchill's Army*, p.75.

training upon reaching their units. Of course, this additional training would again be dependent on the quality of instruction they received at their regiment. Certainly Arthur Oates' experiences at his OCTU reflect this criticism. In a letter to Mater from 164th OCTU at Barmouth he wrote:

It's all red tape – rolls of it. Cadets must wash their hands before entering the dining room – you have to lay on the road in a gym vest yet get checked when it looks grimy – all idiotic nonsense like that – it's 20 times worse than being in gaol. And all this time we're having a war – people are dying getting blown to Hell with Air Raids – and we've got to be meticulous about swaying our arms and wearing a spotless cap band. For God's sake write and tell me what to do about it before I turn "conchie".¹²³

Yet within a week he felt 'rather ashamed' of his letter and reassured his mother that 'I'm not really so badly off as I made out'. The physical intensity of the course, together with the emphasis on 'spit and polish', was 'almost guaranteed to wreck one completely', however 'with a bit of luck I shall survive'.¹²⁴ The letters of Arthur Oates are particularly interesting as a reflection on the standard of training at his OCTU, because he had already served in the ranks with the York and Lancaster Regiment in Iceland and would not have expected to repeat what was, in effect, his basic training as an infantry recruit. Despite Oates' successful completion of the course, the concentration on high standards of turn-out remained a source of irritation throughout:

By the way – one's hair must only be 1½" long- and one is a "cad" if one nips a cigarette and sticks it in one's pocket. Cadets are not allowed to smoke at all in the streets. They sacrifice everything like knowledge of weapons – tactics and real war for this fetish of spit and polish and smartness on the square; a system which annoys everyone intensely – after all are we here to learn about the King's Review procedure or to learn how to win the war.¹²⁵

His frustration is clearly aimed at how the time at OCTU was allocated, and was shared by John Scruton, who objected to being assembled every day for 15 minutes before the

¹²³ Arthur Oates letter dated 24.9.41 SWWEC (2003/2075). Oates' letters bear no trace of censorship during his course at OCTU.

¹²⁴ Letter to Mater dated 28th September 1941.

¹²⁵ Letter to Mater dated 26th November 1941 from the Cadet Club, Beach Hotel, Dunbar.

evening meal to learn the art of 'small talk'.¹²⁶ Oates considered that the course should be used to learn tactics and the role of an officer.¹²⁷ However, correct turn-out is considered important for the maintenance of discipline and an important lesson for potential officers to learn, in order to impart these standards to the 'other ranks'. Lt Col Renison's memoir supported his CO, Lt Col Dickson's keenness on smartness both in, and out of the line, when on 31st August 1944 the CO held a full battalion parade to inspect the state of battledress and uniformity of appearance, confirming 'it certainly paid handsome dividends, in spite of mutterings by all and sundry'.¹²⁸

After OCTU Arthur Oates then attended a Battle School course and was shocked at the report he received on his performance:

Then the bomb fell – my report arrived from the Battle School – and gosh! it stunk – it took the OM about 5 minutes to tell me just what he thought about me. One of the nicest things he said was that I had too big an idea of myself altogether – and lots more. Result was that my beautiful job vanishes (in the carrier platoon) and I'm once again in a Rifle Coy playing stooge to all and sundry.¹²⁹

Oates did not reveal what his report stated about his performance. However he had sufficient time before he went into action on D-Day to put right his deficiencies and prove his mettle as a platoon commander, as Oates' award of the Military Cross demonstrated. All bar one of his platoon were either killed or injured and, despite his own injury, it fell to Oates and the remaining man to blow a gap in the wire using a Bangalore torpedo. He followed the basic principle, understood by all successful officers, in leading by example. However by leading from the front, casualties among the officers were disproportionately high, and I would argue it was the high turnover, particularly of junior officers, that affected performance and morale in north-west

¹²⁶ John Scruton, privately held typescript notes.

¹²⁷ Oates had likened his previous service to that of a concentration camp, with reveille at 7am, 9am PT, 10am Drill, 11am Bren Gun, through to 5pm.

¹²⁸ Lt Col Renison's memoir, p.63.

¹²⁹ Letter to 'My Dear Audrey', Oates' fiancée, dated 4th October 1942.

Europe, even more than the lack of officer training cited in existing secondary literature.¹³⁰

At the Battle Schools, officers received ‘hate training’, whereby attempts were made to ‘whip up among students an extreme hatred of the enemy’.¹³¹ The ensuing public outcry caused this training to cease in May 1942. Oates had clearly received this training as a letter to his mother from Inverary included:

Weather recently has been lousy but the first half of the week was grand – the scenery round here is really terrific if you have time to look at it – primroses and bluebells all over the place – I should have liked to send you some but somehow I don’t fancy picking flowers is in accordance with my position – particularly as I’m supposed to be an exponent of the much discussed “Hate” training.¹³²

The words ‘supposed to be’ reveal the divergence between his training, and the views he actually held. This was true for most of those receiving hate training, which was not a success in this country, although among US troops there was generally a greater chance of instilling enmity against Japanese soldiers, as the attack on Pearl Harbor had resulted in shock and outrage across the USA.

Junior officers were under pressure to perform from the outset of the Normandy campaign and found themselves leading platoons at the age of nineteen or twenty, hopefully with the experienced support of their Platoon Sergeant and Corporals, yet retaining the ultimate authority. Their role therefore could be difficult, but was made easier by fostering an understanding of the men under their command. Oates wrote to his fiancée, setting out his thoughts on the ‘other ranks’:

I have great faith in this same lower class - they’re simple – gullible and full of a desire to get something for nothing – but they’re hard as well – they don’t whine – they can be punished for their own mistakes and they don’t get caught twice – and they never forget.¹³³

¹³⁰ See Sydney Jary, *Eighteen Platoon*, pp.1 and 14.

¹³¹ Timothy Harrison Place, *Military Training in the British Army*, p.57.

¹³² Letter to Mater from Oates, Dukes Camp, Inverary, dated 24th May 1942.

¹³³ Letter to Audrey dated 29th October 1942.

Oates led a platoon in a series of exercises at the Divisional Battle School in November 1942. Clearly his poor performance during his own Battle School course still rankled¹³⁴ and Oates regarded this as an opportunity to try out his own ideas regarding treatment of his men and demonstrate his success to the Commanding Officer:

My chaps here are doing marvellously and I'm making a shot at a report to show the CO he doesn't know what he's talking about – it's the first time I've been left alone sufficiently to try out lots of my theories – I've had this mob here for a fortnight without a single charge against any of them – I believe that they take more notice of me telling them what utter idiots they are at times than just giving them CB. I'm in a rather unfortunate position as I work harder than any of them but I've always got the argument that if I can do it – they can and they're just starting to believe it. They're a terrible mixture – Yorks – Irish – Scotch and Cockney – but they all understand Billingsgate.¹³⁵

During the first half of 1943, Oates led a platoon through the fitness training which occupied much of the battalion's time in Scotland. He was also involved in the educational courses proposed by the Army to assist the 'other ranks', who had often left school poorly equipped academically. According to Oates, they were also used to 'fill in' time until the troops were sent overseas.¹³⁶ In a letter to his mother, Oates commented on his one-day training in giving lectures to his troops, an idea put forward by the Army Bureau of Current Affairs (ABCA)¹³⁷ whereby:

I spend a day about 30 miles away listening to various professors and Army education officers and then have to give a 15 minute lecture on some obscure subject to a syndicate of very intelligent people who doubtless, know far more about it than I do – I don't fancy the job at all but it's all part of the day's work. So as usual I shall just have a crack at it.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Oates was not alone in receiving an adverse assessment. See Sydney Jary, *Eighteen Platoon* p.12.

¹³⁵ Letter to Mater dated 17th November 1942.

¹³⁶ Letter to Audrey 18th October 1942: 'we can't possibly carry on our "bash on" system of training right through the winter so various educational courses have been thought of'.

¹³⁷ For a thorough examination of ABCA and its development, see S. P. MacKenzie, *Politics and Military Morale. Current-Affairs and Citizenship Education in the British Army, 1914-1950* (Oxford, 1992).

¹³⁸ Letter to Mater dated 28th June 1942.

These lectures were not regarded as important by those interviewees questioned on the subject and were seen as ‘time off’ from their proper training schedule.¹³⁹

Oates’ officer training focused on physical fitness and smart turn-out, yet from his letters it is impossible to assess the amount of time he spent learning tactics for battle and leading his men on exercises designed to replicate actual battle conditions. His letters from the first six months of 1944, which would perhaps reveal more, no longer exist. However the memoir of Hugh Bone, the Battalion Signals Officer, is clearer regarding the imparting of tactics knowledge to his platoon. While the battalion was based on the Isle of Wight, he daily led his platoon:

in field tactics and battle drill among the blackberries and trees and bushes around Osborne House, “Left or Right Flanking” attacks, or both, but never Frontal attacks. “Down, crawl, observe, fire” when fired on by an enemy. DRINK, mnemonic for targeting: designation, range, indication, number of rounds, kind of fire.¹⁴⁰

Bone remembered the period before D-Day as comprising exercises and hard work, and recalled a platoon-leading competition whereby he had to identify an enemy position through binoculars and lead his platoon in an attack. Bone was fortunate in that the umpire was a battalion officer, who made up for Bone’s poor eyesight by whispering the location of the position. Bone became known as ‘Basher’ because he bashed on ahead of the other competitors and won the competition for the battalion. According to Bone, his own Battle School course aimed to prepare officers for actual battle conditions by exhausting them. He attended a course at Leighton Buzzard where ‘the officers were divided into groups of twelve and ordered to move everywhere outside the building at the double’.¹⁴¹ The concentration on physical toughness meant that ‘by the end of the course half of the twelve officers in Hugh’s section were either in hospital or

¹³⁹ Interviewees asked were Wilf Todd and Alf Ackroyd during the 2nd Battalion Veterans’ Group annual reunion April 2003.

¹⁴⁰ Hugh Bone *An Ordinary Person*, unpublished typescript, p.28.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.35.

laid up'.¹⁴² By keeping up pressure on the young officers, the Battle School courses were designed to induce a level of stress to replicate the pressures they would be under on active service. By far the most stress would be engendered by the confusion and chaos of the battlefield, when plans needed to be changed on the spot and with incomplete knowledge of the current situation.

The Battle School courses, although not wholly favourably regarded,¹⁴³ appear to be successful in terms of battle inoculation. One Canloan¹⁴⁴ officer described his course at Barnard Castle as 'the most efficient, imaginative and thorough educational experience of my lifetime'.¹⁴⁵ The Canloan officers had received officer training in Canada before volunteering for service in the British Army but, as in the British system, the quality of this training varied. Lt Len Robertson arrived at the 2nd Battalion in the run-up to D-Day, having experienced no training on Landing Craft Assault, 'however with the co-operation of the Navy we Canloans had a crash course, one day, plus the big exercise shortly before D-Day. On this exercise we led the platoons that we would be leading on D-Day'.¹⁴⁶

Dennis Hallam attended the Divisional Battle School course at Moffat. At the end of the course Hallam took part in a live firing exercise on St Mary's Loch with assault craft crossing the loch under fire from Bren guns. On landing, he had to cross barbed wire and obstacles, while ground charges went off to simulate explosions, a procedure which was 'scary, yet exciting'. This demonstrates that officers did participate in exercises designed for battle inoculation, although Hallam maintains that whatever training he received, it could not prepare him for the real sights of battle, particularly seeing his first casualty.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p.35.

¹⁴³ Sydney Jary, in *Eighteen Platoon* was highly critical of the battle schools.

¹⁴⁴ Scheme whereby Canadian officers volunteered to be loaned to the British Army.

¹⁴⁵ Prof Frederick Burd SWWEC (2001-1346). He described the course as a 'life-saver'.

¹⁴⁶ In a letter to author from Len Robertson dated 27th March 2000.

¹⁴⁷ Extracts from interview with Dennis Hallam 1st October 2005.

Jack Pearse, who served as Signals and Intelligence Officer in north-west Europe, attended his course at 54th Division Battle School on 13th February 1943, and his detailed notebook outlines the aspects covered on the course, including Fieldcraft (Principles, Battle Discipline), Platoon Weapons, Movement, Use of Fire and Smoke, Lines of Advance, Defence, Section and Platoon Attacks, Attacking a Pillbox, Clearing Woods, Villages and Water Obstacles and Orders. Pearse's officer training did not proceed smoothly and his letters reveal a difference of opinion with his CO.¹⁴⁸ Personality and procedural difficulties were by no means rare, particularly for the 'hostilities only' officers who of necessity had to learn the 'correct' rules for procedure which the regular officers, with their longer service, already followed. Dennis Hallam was unaware that he should have advised his CO of his forthcoming marriage. Clive Crauford inadvertently failed to show a superior officer sufficient 'respect', which led to difficulties on arrival at the battalion when Crauford discovered this man was to be his Commanding Officer. Jack Pearse appealed against an adverse report submitted by his CO, which cited a lack of confidence in his personality and drive in the field in July 1943.¹⁴⁹ However Pearse not only led a platoon during the initial assault on D-Day, he went on to forge a good relationship with his new CO, Lt Col Renison, which continued post-war. Such difficulties could hamper the promotional prospects of the officers concerned, and thereby their opportunities for higher level training.

On-going training during active service.

Once on active service in north-west Europe the opportunities for on-going training were obviously more limited, but training both at individual and unit level by no means ceased. It is evident from an analysis of Lt Col Renison's memoir that training

¹⁴⁸ Letter from Jack Pearse to his wife Dorothy dated 31st May 1944 in which he writes 'By the way, darling, you must forgive my reticence about that awkward difference of opinion with the old C.O. last year: but it wouldn't have been very helpful to you at that time, would it dear; and it's the only little bit I have never confided in you – forgive dear?' Copy to author from Pearse's family.

¹⁴⁹ Jack Pearse's 'Appeal in Accordance with Section 42 of the Army Act', dated 25th July 1943 from The Barony in Scotland. Copy to author from Pearse's family.

continued to be considered vital, post D-Day, and every opportunity was taken to improve skills, particularly during spells in so-called rest areas. For example, towards the end of August, when the battalion was based at Fresnes, he wrote 'the accent in this area was very definitely on training and after the first two days companies submitted training programmes every morning. A whole day and night were spent on training with craft for assault river crossing'.¹⁵⁰ The river crossing training proved to be unnecessary, for the battalion was not used either for the crossing of the Seine or, later, the Rhine. Then in early September, whilst at Les Andelys Renison recorded: 'we immediately started off on serious training with a 17 mile route march. The country was lovely, though much more open than Normandy and unfortunately for marching, much more hilly. The last pull up left quite a few on their knees'.¹⁵¹

In December, the training emphasis was on the use of infantry weapons as 'it was always noticeable how reluctant a man was to use his rifle in action, we eventually made it a rule that every man, immediately on being forced to cover by enemy fire, fired his rifle in the general direction of the enemy and we found this had quite a considerable effect on morale even if it did no damage to the enemy. It is the old question of being able to hit back'.¹⁵² This situation was by no means restricted to the 2nd Battalion. A survey of more than 400 infantry companies concluded that between 1943 and 1945, on average, only 15 per cent of trained combat riflemen fired their weapons at all in battle.¹⁵³ Although none of the interviewees considered there had been a reluctance to fire, two, Wilf Todd and Alf Ackroyd,¹⁵⁴ did stress the pressure to conserve ammunition which ruled out indiscriminate firing. After an arduous battle, Alf Ackroyd was

¹⁵⁰ Lt Col Renison's memoir, p.66.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.74.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p.179.

¹⁵³ Survey under the direction of US Army Col S.L.A. Marshall. Training was adapted so that by the Korean War at least 50 per cent were firing, even 100 per cent at some points. Quoted in Dyer, *War*, p.118.

¹⁵⁴ Both interviewees were asked during the 2nd Battalion Veterans' Group annual reunion April 2003. Alf Ackroyd supplied the information during the reunion.

annoyed to be castigated for not returning with the empty magazines for the Bren gun, such was the pressure on ammunition and equipment.

The rest areas were also used for training those promoted in the field. An NCOs' cadre was set up in Les Andelys with Major 'Banger' King in supervision. Clearly the term 'rest area' is something of a misnomer. In Gemert in early December 'our time was spent largely in cleaning up with a certain amount of drill and ABCA thrown in',¹⁵⁵ yet the men appreciated the need to stay busy and focused:

We had a few short rests but even when you came out you had to keep up discipline. You couldn't just lay about or do what you wanted to. You had to clean yourself up and sort your kit out. The Sergeant Major got hold of you. It was probably a good thing. It was part of the system.¹⁵⁶

In Renison's opinion, the emphasis on Combined Operations training in the run-up to D-Day had deprived the battalion of higher formation training in other areas and he, and the Commanding Officer, started to put this in place just a month after the landings. On 15th July the CO was told to study 'the action of the battalion moving as a flank guard through wooded country protecting the flank of an attack across moderately open country'.¹⁵⁷ Initially Dickson and the Second-in-Command, Renison, studied the flank-guard as a cloth-model TEWT (tactical exercise without troops), illustrating that even senior officers continued to polish the skills learnt during OCTU, Battle School, and regimental training thereafter. Dickson and Renison had also spent an afternoon 'refighting the battle of the Chateau de la Londe'.¹⁵⁸ By walking the battlefield¹⁵⁹ it became easier for Renison to appreciate the difficulties faced by the battalion during the period before he joined and he wrote 'it had looked so simple on the map at Army HQ –

¹⁵⁵ Lt Col Renison's memoir, p.171.

¹⁵⁶ Extract from interview with Doug Parker 17th July 1999.

¹⁵⁷ Lt Col Renison's memoir, p.21.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.21.

¹⁵⁹ This is an on-going feature of service in the British Army and officer cadets continue to visit previous battlefields to study the decisions made at the time and lessons to be learned.

but so difficult on the ground'.¹⁶⁰ The outlay of the ground and high corn had made it easier for the defenders, who inflicted high casualties on 8th Brigade.

The skills were also reinforced during NCO training. A flank attack towards Epron in July was later used as a cloth model exercise for NCOs as it was 'strongly reminiscent of the "one leg on the ground" and covered approach of Battle School days'.¹⁶¹ In February 1945, Renison implemented a series of 'Officers' Days' for discussions and TEWTs, including the use of Wasps, the flame-producing carriers, demonstrating that training was considered an on-going theme during active service.

A lack of co-operation between armour and infantry has been cited in secondary literature as a problem during the north-west Europe campaign, hampering the progress of the Allied effort.¹⁶² Certainly the interviewees mention tank support only rarely during battle situations. However Lt Col Renison did cite an instance of co-operation early on in the campaign, when tanks of the 13th/18th East Riding Yeomanry rooted out snipers in the village of Touffreville. Towards the end of August, every company had the opportunity of a days training with a squadron of the Grenadier Guards. Renison recorded that Tollemarche, the Squadron Commander 'was most co-operative and he and his troop attended an Officers' discussion one evening on Infantry and Tank co-operation. We all learnt a lot from this form of training. . .but above all we got to know them personally on all levels and that was worth a great deal'.¹⁶³ Clearly the building of personal relationships led to a greater understanding of one another's roles. Eliciting the assistance of tanks not in support of the battalion could be more difficult.¹⁶⁴ Renison cited an example at Venraij in October during heavy fighting when tanks refused to provide armoured support to assist the 2nd Battalion enter the town. Finally an 'officer in

¹⁶⁰ Lt Col Renison's memoir, p.20.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.17.

¹⁶² Timothy Harrison Place, *Military Training in the British Army*. Place refers to Montgomery's 'horribly misguided tank-infantry tactics', p.174.

¹⁶³ Lt Col Renison's memoir, p.66.

¹⁶⁴ P. E. G. Balfour of 3rd Tank Bn, Scots Guards, served in an independent tank brigade in support of the infantry. He argued that 'tanks must support the infantry and not vice versa. This is where everybody else went wrong'. Letter to 'Daddy' dated 9th September 1944. SWWEC (99.90).

a flail tank offered to shoot "A" Coy down the street with the remark "if I start off down the street, the others will have to follow me for fear of mines".¹⁶⁵ Successful tank and infantry co-operation appears to rest on sufficient opportunities to train and go into battle together. Where joint training did not take place, setbacks in operations would result in a drop in morale, recriminations by both parties and a loss of confidence and mutual respect.¹⁶⁶

By February 1945, in preparation for the Schaddenhof battle, Renison remarked on 'the complete ease of co-operation' with the supporting armour, and he 'arranged with the Squadron Commander to meet at Tac HQ as soon as possible to recce the ground and to have his troop commanders forward later on to tie up with the Coy Commanders'.¹⁶⁷

One of the training aspects discussed was that of signalling between the infantry and tanks. Renison considered signalling to the tanks, particularly regarding ceasefires, was most successful using the phosphorus smoke from the 77 Grenade.

This need for close support also extended to the artillery. On 11th August the battalion worked temporarily with a Corps Regiment and Renison was of the opinion 'we didn't know each others methods or each other and I must say that I never really felt happy until Burton Pirie and 302 Battery came back to us'.¹⁶⁸ This confidence in Pirie extended to leaving the Command Post in his hands at one point during the Schaddenhof battle as 'we had worked together long enough to know each others minds and Burton was always an invaluable source of advice and encouragement to me. I never had to make up a fire plan, it was always there ready for me to vet'.¹⁶⁹ As in the case of tank and infantry co-operation, it was only when the different arms had the

¹⁶⁵ Lt Col Renison's memoir, p.122.

¹⁶⁶ Armour – Co-operation with other Arms – a report summing up communication difficulties between tanks and infantry. Findings of Colonel R. J. Colwell. NA (WO232/38).

¹⁶⁷ Lt Col Renison's memoir, p.237.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.156.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.249.

opportunity to work closely together over time, that they operated efficiently as a team, rather than as separate entities with differing aims.

In conclusion, infantry training has been widely criticised in academic studies and has been held up as a major reason for what is deemed to be the poor performance of the British Army, particularly in Normandy. The British infantryman and Allied soldiers more generally, have not been regarded as equal in ability to the Wehrmacht soldier and this, combined with faults in strategy, has been argued to be a prime reason why German forces were able to frustrate the Allied advance.

Within secondary literature, the 2nd Battalion is not singled out for particular criticism, except that put forward by the Commandos concerning D-Day, which will be covered in the next chapter. However, as a Line Infantry Regiment, these criticisms do encompass the 2nd Battalion. In relation to the interviewees, neither the D-Day veterans nor the reinforcements felt that they had received inadequate training. Some of the longer-serving soldiers considered there to be a difference, in that the reinforcements, naturally, were inexperienced. However the pressure on manpower was such that training was, out of necessity, confined to eighteen weeks and this was a very short time to learn the skills required for front-line service. In terms of training, the 2nd Battalion infantrymen received the same levels of training as all regiments based in the UK during the period between Dunkirk and D-Day and underwent stringent additional training in preparation for leading the assault on Queen Red beach on 6th June. This particular training was of a very high standard. The interviewees praise the training they received and consider it adequate for the reception they faced in north-west Europe. None of them were of the opinion that additional preparation was necessary and reinforcements often remarked, unasked, about the efficacy of the informal 'buddy system' which operated on their arrival at their new section. It is only when considering the length of time available to the pre-D-Day infantrymen, and the specialist courses they attended, that the differences

become clear and the evidence suggests that those within the battalion who were trained for D-Day were better prepared to face the different challenges within the north-west Europe campaign. Certainly, for the longer-serving interviewees, their prolonged period of training formed an important part of their wartime experiences.

For those joining the battalion prior to D-Day, there was sufficient time to build a sense of regimental loyalty and pride;¹⁷⁰ for reinforcements, this pride and knowledge of the Regiment's history had to be learned during active service. Yet the real loyalty for all infantrymen was to their immediate comrades, those within their own section, who would remain watchful while they slept and cover them while in action and this will be considered in more detail in Chapter Four. It is true that not all members of the battalion would exercise initiative, or even take an active part unless forced. However they were outnumbered by the larger numbers of men willing to do their duty under good leadership. This good leadership was exercised by officers obliged to learn new military skills during short but intensive OCTU and Battle School courses. The quality of leadership would vary, but was largely commended by those who witnessed it at first hand, the 'other ranks'. Of those officers named in this chapter, several were awarded the Military Cross for skills in patrolling, bravery during the D-Day landings, and successful leadership during particular actions.¹⁷¹ The junior officers were, on average, from social backgrounds not unrecognisable to the men they commanded, and the young officers in the 2nd Battalion appear largely to have been afforded both respect and affection from the men they commanded.

Despite arguments pointing to the inadequacy of training I would reiterate that overall, the infantry, including those in the 2nd Battalion, carried out their role well under difficult circumstances. They made the necessary progress in the north-west Europe

¹⁷⁰ For a discussion on the importance of regimental pride, see James Lucas, *The British Soldier* (London, 1989) pp.23-24.

¹⁷¹ Dennis Hallam, Arthur Oates, Reg Rutherford and Clive Crauford. The Canloan officers were similarly successful – Len Robertson and Jim Fetterly were also awarded the Military Cross.

campaign across difficult terrain, against a skilful and determined defender and achieved the desired outcome, if not according to the initial timetable, as will be shown in Chapter Three. The evidence suggests that under such testing conditions the infantry should be accorded much credit for fighting well and continuing to fight while physically and mentally pushed to the brink. The 2nd Battalion's major initial task, towards which all the training had been directed, was the invasion of the Normandy coast, and this fell to the longer-serving servicemen. An examination of how well the operation was tackled by the battalion will demonstrate the strengths of combined operations training, which enabled the infantry of the battalion to successfully take its objectives on D-Day.

Chapter 2 - D-Day.

Once it became clear that the 2nd Battalion would be part of the initial assault on the Normandy coastline, training intensified, until the infantrymen were at peak readiness. Having already assessed in the previous chapter that the training was sufficient, at least for the initial operation, this chapter assesses the role of the battalion during the landings and how successfully its tasks were carried out. This is important in light of the criticisms levelled at the battalion in secondary literature, particularly during the assault, but also as part of the 3rd Division's 'failure' to take its prime objective of Caen on D-Day. The criticism of the battalion's performance on the beach comes wholly from the Commandos, who crossed the beach after the initial companies of the 2nd Battalion had landed. Patently, as special forces are considered to receive first-class training and are widely held to be superior troops, any arguments put forward by the Commandos will be given credence. Their comments are therefore assessed for validity, before I go on to consider the criticisms of the 3rd Division more generally, in its failure to take Caen.

Before assessing the role of the 2nd Battalion specifically, it is important to consider how D-Day is, and has been, historicized within secondary literature since the war's end. Not only was the Normandy invasion the most ambitious and dangerous operation for the 2nd Battalion during the Second World War, it was also the riskiest operation for the Allies, due to the scale of the undertaking, the risk of its being discovered before D-Day and the knowledge that its failure would preclude any repeat of the landings on a similar scale for some considerable time. The avalanche of secondary literature has reflected this appreciation of the vital nature of D-Day, and its successful outcome. The major change in how the operation has been depicted came in the 1980s, with a move away from the views of great commanders, strategy and technology, towards the personal experience of the individual. Holmes recognised this change of direction when he wrote: 'for the last twenty years, the historiographic pendulum has swung away from

a top-down view of warfare, towards the worm's-eye view of the squaddy, the *poilu*, the dog-face, the *landser* – the man at the point of the battering ram'.¹ This significant change, together with an analysis of the longer-term trends will now be considered in more detail.

The Historicization of D-Day.

D-Day, as in the case of other momentous events in history, has become elevated within British national consciousness to transcend its original importance, and it is perhaps now seen, in this country, as not only the most important event within the Second World War, but perhaps the best known military operation of the twentieth century. This is due, in no small measure, to its coverage in films, documentaries and books issued post-war, particularly the films 'The Longest Day' (1962) and 'Saving Private Ryan' (1998) and the continuing avalanche of documentaries covering every aspect of the operation on terrestrial and digital television channels, particularly the History and UK History channels. Its depiction, and the coverage attaching to it, now reaches viewers who may have no surviving relations from the wartime years and whose only knowledge is that provided by the mass media. In Britain D-Day is generally regarded as a hugely successful operation in which the Allies held the moral high ground and which signified that the military reverses were at an end. It was a day in which the Allied nations could celebrate a great step forward in winning the war. Yet D-Day has not always been regarded so triumphantly and those looking at the facts closely would discover that nowhere were the objectives met on the first day.

The first part of the chapter sets out to examine the secondary literature pertaining to D-Day, firstly during the immediate post-war years and then the subsequent changes in perception and emphasis, as more information entered the public domain. This analysis seeks to explore how D-Day has been elevated beyond its original significance and

¹ Richard Holmes, *Battlefields of the Second World War*, p.38.

reveals what it is about this operation that has merited such a reaction. Certainly, many D-Day books include a well-rehearsed list of facts and figures, in order to emphasise what a vast undertaking it was, and thereby how vital it was that the operation should be a success:

D-Day was the greatest amphibious operation the world has ever seen, a truly staggering feat of logistics which involved putting ashore in Normandy a total of 176,475 men, 3,000 guns, 1,500 tanks and 15,000 other assorted vehicles. Some 11,000 ships were committed to the invasion force; 10,500 air sorties were flown.²

The statistics are impressive and are often cited to justify the coverage of the event, yet for those living through the Second World War and experiencing it first-hand, the idea that D-Day was perhaps the most momentous day of the war may have fewer advocates, and it may be argued that there are other, equally important phases, that should be commemorated, both in Britain and, differently, elsewhere. The list might include, for Britain, Dunkirk, the Battle of Britain, the fall of Singapore, El Alamein, the Italian campaign and VE Day. Alternatively, we may consider that Pearl Harbor, the battle of Stalingrad, the Holocaust, the war in the Pacific, or Hiroshima and Nagasaki merit more consideration than the invasion of north-west Europe. This is all true when considering vital campaigns for national defence or indeed events of tragic significance, but D-Day was different; it was a turning-point. Not only was it the first day in an eleven-month struggle, it also signified a return to the coast of France and a fatal blow to the dominance of Germany on the continent. It was vitally important that the Allies made a successful landing and gained a foothold that could not be dislodged.

For months in the lead-up to the invasion, newspapers had speculated as to the timing of the opening of the 'Second Front'. This operation was to prove a huge boost to national morale, as the years of 1941 and 1942 had witnessed a series of military setbacks for Britain and the first hope of turning the tide had not appeared until October 1942, with

² Russell Miller, *Nothing Less Than Victory. An Oral History of D-Day* (London, 1993) p.xiii.

significant progress at El Alamein. The British Government hoped that success on D-Day would provide a clear signal that the end of the war was in sight and that this morale-boost would sustain the population during its continuing hardships and shortages on the Home Front. The then Queen Elizabeth wrote 'I can recall the immense relief and pride felt by all those at home'³ when D-Day was announced. This view did not take into account recent military advances in North Africa, the Far East and Italy, as well as naval progress in the north Atlantic, but reinforced the importance of Operation Overlord as a symbol that the tide had turned.

Certainly, those taking part in the invasion were aware that the operation was an historic event. Bill Millin recalled hearing Lord Lovat's address to the Commandos at the final briefing on 5th June 1944:

I wish you all the very best of luck in what lies ahead: this will be the greatest military venture of all time, and the Commando brigade has an important role to play . . . A hundred years from now your children's children will say "They must have been giants in those days."⁴

This knowledge of being involved in 'history being made' was not confined to those serving in the special forces. Major 'Banger' King's reading from Shakespeare's *Henry V*, to his troops of 'A' Company, the 2nd Battalion, on the run-in to the beach, has been included in secondary literature⁵ as an example of 'one of the dramatic stories of D-Day',⁶ and emphasises his own awareness of how important the operation was, both at the time and how it would be seen afterwards if there was a successful outcome. King's speech to his troops is one of the few references to actions of the 2nd Battalion in the wealth of secondary literature. It is oft-quoted because it was unusual and contributed to the 'glamorous' aura of the operation, from the readers' point of view. During the

³ Colonel Michael Dewar and Major General Julian Thompson, eds. Foreword to *D-Day Fifty Years On*, (Tri-Service Publications, 1994).

⁴ Piper Bill Millin, *Invasion* (Dawlish, 1991).

⁵ See Cornelius Ryan, *The Longest Day* (London, 1960) pp.148-149 and R. McNish, *Iron Division* p.98.

⁶ Patrick Delaforce, *Monty's Ironsides. From the Normandy Beaches to Bremen with the 3rd Division*, p.27.

course of the day, Jack Pearse, also of the 2nd Battalion, kept reminding himself that he was 'seeing history in the making', while being in the midst of the action.⁷

Not only was D-Day important for morale, it was also vital politically, as Stalin called for the invasion in order to tie up German units and relieve pressure on Russia's resources. It is only in the last ten to twenty years that the true breadth of Russian involvement and sacrifice has received proper credit within secondary literature, since proper examination of the archives has been achievable only since the fall of Communism.⁸ However, authors in the early post-war years did recognise that D-Day's success was only achievable because of Russia's efforts.⁹

Operation Overlord became known as D-Day straight away, yet in military terms D-Day is the launch date of any operation, not just 6 June 1944.¹⁰ Thus there were many D-Days prior to the invasion of France, yet secondary literature usually uses this title to refer to the Normandy landings, in preference to its operational title.

There have been several distinct phases in the development of secondary literature relating to the invasion, each presenting D-Day in a different way and, in time, creating a public demand for new perspectives and new material, particularly after the two major films were screened. In brief, the trends have been firstly to portray the operation as just one phase in a longer-term campaign. Secondly, the first Regimental and Divisional accounts were published, which incorporated service on D-Day into a wider interpretation of actions in which the various units fought. Thirdly, the main commanders involved, issued memoirs setting out their own versions of events. General

⁷ Jack Pearse of B Company, 2nd Battalion East Yorkshires, quoted in Frank and Joan Shaw, *We Remember D-Day*, p.265.

⁸ Many recent books have benefited from this access. For example, Antony Beevor, *Stalingrad* (London, 1998) and Rodric Braithwaite, *Moscow 1941, A City and its People*, (London, 2006). Also pictorially, Will Fowler, *Eastern Front, The Unpublished Photographs 1941-1945* (London, 2001) which used the Kiev archive, previously inaccessible.

⁹ Chester Wilmot, *The Struggle for Europe* (London, 1953).

¹⁰ The invasion of Sicily the previous year had also been referred to as D-Day. John Gunther, *D-day*. (London and New York, 1944).

Eisenhower's account was entitled *Crusade in Europe*,¹¹ an indication of how he regarded the war, and specifically the north-west Europe campaign, as being morally just. During this early phase it also became popular to produce documentary-type books of the invasion, which told the story of D-Day from the viewpoint of individuals from both sides, woven together to give an overview of the progression of the invasion. Cornelius Ryan's *The Longest Day* is the best known of these works. The 1980s witnessed the beginning of the next trend, that of displaying personal testimonies instead of a more detailed explanation of the logistical build-up, political manoeuvres and general background to the operation. Much greater emphasis was placed instead on the actual seaborne and airborne landings, and the personal accounts added the human element, and dominated the content, to a greater extent than in earlier works. In recent years, particularly during the 50th and 60th commemorations of D-Day, authors have attempted to supply fresh approaches to the invasion, some more successful than others. Each of these trends will now be examined in more detail.

In the early post-war years, some publications focused on an unquestioning and nationalistic pride in Britain's achievements on D-Day. One example is that of *Invasion! The D-Day Story June 6 1944* by John St. John Cooper, which provided a largely pictorial representation of events, backed by 'bullish' language and failing to mention determined enemy opposition; instead captioning an image of wrecked German tanks as a 'Wizard Prang' and describing the British assault as going in 'with cold fury and determination'. It presented a patriotic, unquestioning tribute to Allied efforts and its purpose was to portray 'the valour and sacrifice of free men who took part in this great invasion for the liberation of Europe'.¹²

At that time little was known in the public arena of the elements of logistics, or the deception work, although these were vital ingredients in determining the success of the

¹¹ General Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (New York, 1948).

¹² John St. John Cooper, *Invasion! The D-Day Story June 6 1944* (Beaverbrook Newspapers, 1954). (Introduction section, no page numbers).

operation. Other works, whilst acknowledging its importance, set D-Day within the context of the progress of the war as a whole. One influential work was that of *The Struggle for Europe* by Chester Wilmot, published in 1953. Whilst placing D-Day in its rightful place as the first day in a longer term battle, which came under the heading 'The Battle of Normandy', Wilmot did agree that preparations for D-Day had occupied strategic thinking, in that 'during the four years between the evacuation of Dunkirk and the invasion of Normandy the problem of crossing the Channel, in one direction or the other, exerted a decisive influence on the conduct and development of the war'.¹³ Wilmot produced his detailed work during the early period of the Cold War, amidst an atmosphere of distrust and fear of the Russian 'menace'. He attempted to show how the events of the Second World War led inexorably to the post-war divide, and how the Allied failure to fully exploit gains on the battlefield enabled Russia to make significant advances into Germany. By his limited coverage of the actual landings,¹⁴ Wilmot demonstrated that the planning and deception stages of the operation were the most crucial aspects to ensure its success. Close Allied co-operation during this phase was also vital and the Battle of Normandy 'provided its single greatest victory'.¹⁵ This victory was by no means assured at the time. As B. Liddell-Hart argued, 'The ultimate triumph has obscured the fact that the Allies were in great danger at the outset, and had a very narrow shave'.¹⁶

When the first official history of the period was published the same year as Wilmot's work, it reflected the same dominant trend that continued through the 1960s and 1970s, that of placing D-Day within a longer-term context.¹⁷ Tasked with producing a clear picture of the contribution of 21st Army Group to the progress of the Allied campaign,

¹³ Chester Wilmot, *The Struggle for Europe* (London, 1953) p.12.

¹⁴ Wilmot dedicated only 47 pages out of 717 to the landings, whereas 62 pages were set aside to describe the planning phase alone. See also B. H. Liddell-Hart's *History of the Second World War* (London, 1970).

¹⁵ Wilmot, p.12.

¹⁶ B. H. Liddell-Hart, *History of the Second World War*, p.543.

¹⁷ See ed. Ronald Lewin, *Freedom's Battle Vol III The War on Land 1939-45* (London, 1969), a year by year account. For 1944, only one account, by Douglas Grant, recalled the action on D-Day.

North covered the operations engaged in by this army group, and assessed their overall significance. Within this framework, North reasoned that with regard to D-Day ‘the achievement was considerable; but, unhappily, it was not enough’¹⁸ and that ‘the D-Day operational plan as a whole had collapsed’.¹⁹ Therefore the greater proportion of the book, of necessity, related to the wider campaign and the subsequent eleven months.²⁰ It is interesting that the official sources did not claim overriding success for the operation. The aforementioned criticism is indeed more damning than in subsequent texts, which usually concentrate on the failure to take Caen, but look more sympathetically at the difficulties faced on the beaches.²¹

Post-war, in the first ten years, a number of Regimental and Divisional works appeared, each commissioned by the separate regiments, to provide a record of their activities during the hostilities. Each regimental account provided a different picture of D-Day, depending on the number of battalions within the regiment, and their areas of active service. For example, both the Green Howards and the East Yorkshire Regiment had battalions serving in the BEF in France, in North Africa and Sicily and in India and Burma, as well as on D-Day and the north-west Europe campaign. Consequently, this campaign was placed in its proper context as just one area of service among many. Referring to the East Yorkshire Regiment’s service on D-Day, the author²² did make reference to the fact that it was the only regiment to field two battalions for the initial assault and he concluded that, for the 2nd Battalion, the invasion had proved ‘just like a training show – only easier’,²³ which is an opinion not likely to find backing amongst those taking part, in view of the high casualty figures. The author of the Green

¹⁸ John North, *North-West Europe 1944-5. The achievement of 21st Army Group* (London, 1977) p.46.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.50.

²⁰ North dedicates just 16 pages to D-Day out of a total 249.

²¹ Another example of the official literature is that of Major L. F. Ellis CVO CBE DSO MC, *History of the Second World War – Victory in the West. Volume 1. The Battle of Normandy* (London, 1962).

Essentially a reference book, it has become an important source for subsequent writers of the invasion.

²² Nightingale, *The East Yorkshire Regiment*.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.179.

Howards' history²⁴ made it clear that his role was to concentrate purely on recounting the actions of the 6th and 7th Battalions, and produced a more detailed chapter, assisted by his having contacted the Company Commanders and the Commanding Officers to request help in reconstructing an accurate version of events.²⁵ Naturally, Synge also included details of CSM Hollis' actions during the assault, which led to his award of the VC, the only VC awarded on D-Day. Both Regimental accounts used stirring language to record the events on D-Day and portray the battalions as having achieved their main objectives without undue effort. Synge wrote of the 6th Battalion Green Howards 'the day had been one of many heroic deeds',²⁶ and Nightingale recorded of the 5th Battalion East Yorkshire Regiment: 'like its sister Battalion, the 2nd, a few miles to the East, the veteran 5th had played a glorious part in this momentous operation'.²⁷

Divisional records usually follow the same format as the regimental accounts and incorporate D-Day into a wider framework. The importance that is placed on service on D-Day is dependent on the different overseas campaigns in which the Division took part. For example, within the Divisional history of the 3rd Division,²⁸ D-Day is accorded a greater emphasis, because during the Second World War, this Division served only in the BEF in France, before returning to the Continent as part of Operation Overlord. Accordingly, Scarfe gave details of the combined operations training for the assault and wrote of the progress of the advance on D-Day by each unit of the Division, acknowledging that the experiences of the Division during D-Day could easily have made a book in themselves. Again, he did not focus on problems, other than the congestion on the beach, and offered no criticism of the delays in advancing towards Caen, other than the masterly understatement 'it was not 9 Brigade's day'.²⁹

²⁴ Capt W. A. T. Synge, *The Story of the Green Howards 1939-1945* (Richmond, 1952).

²⁵ Both authors complained about the brevity of their main source, the Regimental War Diaries.

²⁶ Synge, *The Story of the Green Howards*, p.296.

²⁷ Nightingale, *The East Yorkshire Regiment*, p.182.

²⁸ Scarfe, *Assault Division*.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.88.

Naturally the commanders involved in the operation, including Generals Eisenhower and Bradley, and Field Marshal Montgomery, also produced books shortly after the end of the war,³⁰ putting their version of events into the public domain and justifying decisions that had been made. These books attempted to set out the views of the commanders, to persuade the reader that theirs had been the right way to proceed, based on what they knew of the situation at the time.

In his capacity as Supreme Commander Allied Expeditionary Force, Eisenhower also wrote an official report on the progression of the campaign from D-Day to V. E. Day which was published in 1946. Within the report, the rivalries and disagreements are glossed over, yet glimpses remain. For example, in Montgomery's memoir he states that it was his recommendation that the number of divisions involved in the landings be increased from three to five. In Eisenhower's report he is at pains to stress that he asked Montgomery to check the plans in December 1943 since he considered that the initial assaulting forces were insufficient and the front would prove too narrow. It may appear a small point, but this is an early indication of the instances of claiming of credit and criticisms of each other's performance that characterised the memoirs of Montgomery and Bradley in particular. In respect of the operations in Normandy, there was much subsequent criticism of the seemingly 'lacklustre' performance of British and Canadian forces in the early stages³¹ and in the different memoirs the writers are swift to justify their actions. Montgomery attracted much adverse comment for the failure to take Caen and the inability to stage a rapid break-out on the eastern flank. In his memoir,³² Montgomery explained his plan had always been to tie up German forces in this area,

³⁰ General Omar Bradley produced *A Soldier's Story* (New York, 1951), General Dwight D Eisenhower wrote *Crusade in Europe* and Field Marshal Viscount Montgomery published *Normandy to the Baltic* (Germany, 1946).

³¹ Some writers have included an analysis of D-Day, as part of their argument that the Allies defeated German forces only when they were able to bring a material superiority to bear, for example Carlo d'Este, *Decision in Normandy* and Max Hastings, *Overlord, D-Day and the Battle for Normandy* For a full account of the development of the historiography of the British Army during the Second World War, see David French, *Raising Churchill's Army. The British Army and the War against Germany 1919-1945*.

³² *The Memoirs of Field-Marshal the Viscount Montgomery of Alamein, KG*.

thereby allowing American forces to break-out on the western flank, arguing ‘all our work was linked to this basic plot, which I explained at many conferences from February onwards’.³³ Such tensions reflect Holmes’ viewpoint that ‘the friction was more the product of individuals wrapping swollen egos in their national colours. High responsibility can bring out the worst as well as the best in people . . .’³⁴ Certainly, in the planning stages of D-Day, the Allied co-operation was generally good and problems tended to occur because of the differing priorities of the three Services and the competition between them.

Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay’s diary of 1944 was not made generally available to a mass audience until the 50th anniversary commemorations.³⁵ The diary is an interesting document in that Ramsay did not have time to alter his entries for a wide readership, as he died in January 1945, although of course he exercised choice in what he recorded at the time. It has influenced how D-Day is regarded because it reveals the scale of the job facing Ramsay, the difficulties he faced, the different personalities and the strain of his position, which frequently left him exhausted. His role was all-encompassing:

Ramsay faced the most formidable challenge of his career. He had to transport across the Channel the largest armada the world had yet seen, put it ashore on the beaches of Normandy, and keep it supplied from the sea as it began to penetrate inland. The stakes could not have been higher, both military and political.³⁶

This edited diary clearly demonstrates the level of planning undertaken and the attendant problems, for example, his entry for 8th April 1944 read, ‘the US were tiresome, demanding flotillas of M/S (minesweepers) which they knew I cannot provide’.³⁷

³³ *Ibid.*, p.223.

³⁴ Richard Holmes, *Battlefields of the Second World War*, p.24.

³⁵ There was a biography of Ramsay issued earlier; W. S. Chalmers, *Full Cycle: The Biography of Admiral Sir Bertram Home Ramsay KCB, KBE, MVO* (London, 1959).

³⁶ Robert W. Love Jr. and John Major, eds. *The Year of D-Day. The 1944 Diary of Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay* (Hull, 1994) pXXXV. Of course the editors exercised their own choices in terms of extracts for inclusion.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.53.

From the 1950s onwards, as writers continued to portray D-Day as one facet of the north-west Europe campaign, a small series of documentary-drama works were published which produced a very different picture of D-Day as heroic, tragic and ultimately successful, by weaving together personal stories and historical fact. The most well-known example is that of Cornelius Ryan's *The Longest Day*.³⁸ Ryan attempted to recount the invasion from the viewpoint of those who served in it, from both sides, and regardless of rank. In so doing, he incorporated conversations which may have taken place and devoted more attention to the 'glamorous' units taking part, including the Commandos, the British and American airborne, those in the midget submarines, and the Rangers. The result was enthusiastically greeted by Lt General James Gavin, who wrote 'you will be spellbound, as I was, by this magnificent telling of a glorious and tragic story'.³⁹

This was the first work about the operation which secured a mass-market and was instrumental in determining how D-Day was perceived nationally. Inevitably, given the style in which the book had been written, it was turned into a film of the same name, which reached a wide audience.⁴⁰ Well-known film stars of the day, including Henry Fonda, John Wayne, and Richard Todd, participated in establishing the Ryan book as the 'definitive' version of the invasion in public consciousness. Thus, the invasion was now considered to be more important than, and separate from, the remaining eleven months of battle. In achieving this level of renown internationally, those who served on

³⁸ Although not a novel, this work is written in a similar style. There are novels using D-Day as a backdrop, including *The Sixth of June* by Lionel Shapiro (Companion Book Club, 1957), where the finale is the invasion itself. Written at the same time as *The Longest Day*, in a similar format, was David Howarth's *Dawn of D-Day* (London, 1959).

³⁹ Ryan, *The Longest Day*, front cover.

⁴⁰ The film was released in 1962 and had more than 40 well-known actors starring in it. Promotional 'taglines' included 'this is the day that changed the world' and 'when history held its breath'.

D-Day became elevated to the status of heroes in the eyes of the public. More specifically, those who were depicted in the film, became instantly well-known.⁴¹

Despite the notable exception of Ryan's work, the general trend towards setting D-Day in a longer term context continued until the 1980s, when new publications which dealt with the operation in isolation first appeared in large numbers.⁴² These works were not the first, yet it was during this period that the trend became apparent and was linked with a move towards catering for a mass-market, rather than considering the operation in academic terms. Not only did new books feature purely the initial landings, a new emphasis was placed upon individual reminiscences as the main source. The trend also shifted from the importance of the commanders and the 'greats' towards an acknowledgment of the historical value of the 'led' who had until then been largely voiceless. This move heralded a new wave of literature dedicated to the experience of the individual and many books have since been published on D-Day in this format, of variable quality.⁴³

This new tide of literature has also singled out D-Day as being an important event by use of increasingly elaborate language. References are made to its being 'a pivotal day in human history'⁴⁴ and 'the single most crucial military mobilization of the last century',⁴⁵ as if justifying the place this operation has in public consciousness.

Authors writing about the invasion, have made full use of the available oral and written testimony of veterans of all units. However not all veterans have been offered the opportunity, or have wished to record their experiences, and what is available in the

⁴¹ Bill Millin, Lord Lovat's piper, was shown crossing Pegasus Bridge. His own memoir, *Invasion*, makes mention of the film's effect. The introduction reads 'Most people will remember him from Cornelius Ryan's book *The Longest Day*, and the film of that name'.

⁴² One of the first books to consider D-Day in its entirety was the excellent *Invasion '44. The full story of D-Day*, by John Frayn Turner (London) published in 1959. In 1972, *Spearhead of Invasion D-Day* by R. W. Thompson, (London), covered just the operation itself, and made no mention of personal experience.

⁴³ See Russell Miller's *Nothing Less than Victory. The Oral History of D-Day*, which provides a comprehensive overview but, in my opinion is not above criticism. Also *We Remember D-Day*, by Frank and Joan Shaw, published for the 50th anniversary, which includes 130 accounts, predominantly British.

⁴⁴ Jonathan Bastable, *Voices from D-Day* (Newton Abbot, 2004) p.9.

⁴⁵ Martin W. Bowman, *Remembering D-Day. Personal Histories of Everyday Heroes* (London, 2004) Flyleaf.

public domain is a scattering of testimonies across units and the different services involved on D-Day. This material is regularly used in different books and some veterans have achieved public recognition due to the regular publication of their memoirs and oral recordings.⁴⁶

This new emphasis began with Philip Warner's book *The D-Day Landings* in 1980, in which he argued for a change of emphasis towards the recollections of the ordinary soldier:

On 6th June 1944 there took place the greatest seaborne invasion in the history of mankind . . . In a war which saw one massive military action after another . . . D Day stands supreme. It has been celebrated as a triumph of planning, of international co-operation, of combined operations, of political foresight. In this maelstrom of analysis, self-congratulation and euphoria one fact seems to have been glossed over. It was made possible by the ordinary man.⁴⁷

One interesting fact that emerged through individual accounts is that for some of the servicemen D-Day was not the most momentous operation in their service, nor the most arduous. For one, D-Day 'did not produce the fear and frustration that we were later to experience at Arnhem' which entailed 'back-to-the-wall fighting',⁴⁸ and another described Operation Overlord as 'one of the most pleasant operations' of his service, for which he received a Mention in Despatches, yet 'I got nothing for months of grilling convoy work with plenty of danger'.⁴⁹

There remains an appeal for many, in reading personal accounts of the landings. They offer an immediacy not found in studies of strategy and planning, a glimpse of the horror, the tragic and the comedic. When reading books in this style, it becomes clear that there are common threads running through the individual recollections, which

⁴⁶ Memoirs quoted regularly include those by Bill Millin, Lord Lovat's piper who landed on Sword Beach, Capt Ian Hammerton, who landed in a flail tank as part of 22nd Dragoons, 79th Armoured Division and Lance Corporal Pat Hennessy of 13th/18th Royal Hussars, who landed in a duplex drive tank. Hennessy's account, for example, is included in Russell Miller's *Nothing Less than Victory. The Oral History of D-Day*, Robert J. Kershaw's *D-Day. Piercing the Atlantic Wall* and Tim Kilvert-Jones' *Sword Beach. 3rd British Infantry Division's Battle for the Normandy Beachhead* (Barnsley, 2001) among others.

⁴⁷ Philip Warner, *The D Day Landings* (London, 1980) p.11.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, Quote by Mr B. A. Tomblin, Glider Pilot Regt p.57.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, Quote by Mr P. S. Evetts, former Lt. RNVR pp.70-71.

reflect the feelings of pride, fear and comradeship among those taking part. It is usual to read of the awe inspired by the numbers of ships involved or the sight of the glider-borne troops landing on the evening of D-Day, or to find memories of the terrific noise of the ships' bombardments, the shock of seeing the first casualties, and feelings about the first contact with enemy forces, who often formed small groups of prisoners.⁵⁰ Moreover, the same conclusions can be drawn, irrespective of how many books in this format are referred to: namely, that the landings on Omaha Beach came close to disaster, that those on Sword Beach were hazardous, while troops on Gold, Juno and Utah Beaches, despite opposition, were able to make good progress inland. Some books emphasise the role of the special forces, the paratroopers and the Commandos, during the invasion,⁵¹ while authors often edit the extracts to emphasise the dangers or how the casualties were incurred.

The quest for battlefield realism was epitomised by Steven Spielberg's film 'Saving Private Ryan' (1998)⁵² which, although a fictionalised storyline, opened with a graphic thirty minute depiction of the horrendous conditions on Omaha Beach. This was followed three years later by the mini-series 'The Band of Brothers'⁵³ based on Stephen Ambrose's book of that name, again with realistic battle sequences. This focus on realism is very much a present day trend, sparing the viewer nothing of the graphic nature of the injuries, and the fear, as well as depicting what it was, and is, like to operate under battle conditions.

Increasingly, since the 1980s, secondary literature has included due emphasis on the role of deception work, undertaken to mislead the Germans as to the Allies' true intentions. As more documents were released into the public domain, it became

⁵⁰ See, for example, Jonathan Bastable, *Voices from D-Day* and Russell Miller, *Nothing Less than Victory. The Oral History of D-Day*.

⁵¹ Warner has chapters on 'Invasion from the Air' and 'Marines and Commandos', while Bowman includes a section on 'The Jocks and the Green Berets Forge Inland'.

⁵² The film was released in 1998 and the story was written by Robert Rodat. It featured a fictional search for a paratrooper of the US 101st Airborne Division. www.imdb.com

⁵³ The *Band of Brothers* book was written in 1992 and the mini-series premiered in 2001.

apparent what an essential role deception played in ensuring the landings were successful. Christina Goulter wrote: 'because of the sensitivity of the subject, especially the work undertaken by double agents and other operatives, the full story of the Allied deception and intelligence work has not been told until recently'.⁵⁴

Operation Bodyguard was the overall plan to convince the Germans that any invasion would not happen until late summer 1944, and that the likely landing areas would also encompass Norway and Greece. To this end, fake concentrations of armour, and bogus wireless telegraphy were created, and the work was given vital support by fifteen double agents, including 'Garbo' and 'Tricycle'. Up until July 1944, the German High Command still anticipated a large-scale landing would take place in the Pas-de-Calais area and withheld possible reinforcements in anticipation of a further invasion. This more recent understanding of the scale of the deception work by the Allies has therefore changed the prevailing view and coverage of D-Day. From focusing on the operation as predominantly a success for military hardware and soldiering, secondary literature now gives due credit to the extraordinary measures carried out in secret, to allow the armed forces sufficient time to become established in Normandy.

As more anniversaries take place, it has become clear that the available personal testimony has reached a natural plateau with the advanced ages of the participants. With this in mind, secondary literature published for the 60th commemorations, tended to portray D-Day in its entirety, with fewer, and shorter, extracts from individuals,⁵⁵ while a number still followed the personal experience route.⁵⁶ What most of these latter books share, are references to commemorative aspects, either in the Foreword or as a concluding section, and are often accompanied by images from the Normandy

⁵⁴ Christina J M Goulter, 'The great shadow-boxing match', p.65 in *The D-Day Companion*, ed. Jane Penrose (Oxford, 2004). See also Mary Kathryn Barbier, 'Planning, High Command, and Deception', in *Everyone's War*, the Journal of the Second World War Experience Centre, issue no 9, D-Day.

⁵⁵ For example, Dan Parry, *D-Day: 6.6.44 The Dramatic Story of the World's Greatest Invasion* (London, 2004).

⁵⁶ Examples of the latter include Peter Liddle's *D-Day, by those who were there* (Barnsley, 2004), Jonathan Bastable, *Voices from D-Day* and Martin W. Bowman, *Remembering D-Day. Personal Histories of Everyday Heroes*.

cemeteries.⁵⁷ Whereas books written during the Cold War period often pointed out the lessons to be learnt from D-Day,⁵⁸ in the last twenty years the message is that of remembering the sacrifices made and urge: 'Do not forget what happened. Do not forget why it happened'.⁵⁹

As new opportunities to record personal testimonies are now increasingly limited, future literature will, of necessity, involve a revisiting of existing testimonies or republishing existing texts, a trend which commenced with the most recent commemorative literature. Naturally new volumes will be issued on each major commemorative anniversary, and some of the older publications were re-issued for the 60th anniversary, with new covers.⁶⁰ These re-issued volumes are designed to capture fresh, younger audiences, yet the need to re-issue existing literature reflects the dearth of new information available. There are simply not enough new ways to portray D-Day to satisfy the unending interest. Publishers look for new approaches, yet there are few novel ways remaining to present the landings. Two recent works that presented a fresh view of the invasion are David Stafford's *Ten Days to D-Day*,⁶¹ and *The D-Day Companion*,⁶² edited by Jane Penrose. Stafford considered all the facets of the build-up to the invasion, but not the amply-covered invasion itself, while Osprey Publishing commissioned Penrose's volume specifically for the 60th anniversary commemorations, featuring articles on all major aspects of D-Day by well-known academics. Other works published for the 50th and 60th commemorations have focused either on the individual beaches, regions in Britain,⁶³ or occasionally individual units,⁶⁴ although these latter

⁵⁷ See Martin Bowman, *Remembering D-Day. Personal Histories of Everyday Heroes*, and Derek Blizard, *The Normandy Landings, D-Day, The Invasion of Europe 6 June 1944* (London, 1993).

⁵⁸ For example, in the Foreword to John St. John Cooper's book, *Invasion! The D-Day Story June 6 1944*, Viscount Montgomery took the opportunity to write that the war had been won, but not the peace, and that 'the key to collective strength is unselfish solidarity'.

⁵⁹ From Frank and Joan Shaw's *We Remember D-Day*, p.ii.

⁶⁰ One of those books republished was Philip Warner's *The D-Day Landings*.

⁶¹ David Stafford, *Ten Days to D-Day. Countdown to the Liberation of Europe* (London, 2004).

⁶² *The D-Day Companion* ed. Jane Penrose (Oxford, 2004).

⁶³ For example, eds. Ian Greig, Kim Leslie and Alan Readman *D-Day West Sussex* (West Sussex, 1994).

⁶⁴ One example is *Eagles and Bulldogs in Normandy, 1944* by Michael Reynolds (Staplehurst, 2003).

works are rarer as there are few units which have detailed personal testimonies from many of the participants. This dearth of British and Canadian personal testimonies, particularly on film, is reflected in the TV coverage for the 60th commemorations, by the documentary channels in particular, who produced programmes concentrating on machines and craft used in the landings, the Mulberries, or those performing specialist roles, backed by a predominance of American personal experiences, as often the programmes are made in the US.

Increasingly, there is also a new focus on travel guides to the Normandy beaches, to cater for the large numbers of visitors to the area, combining a look at the seaborne and airborne landings in the region, with a series of maps and suggested routes.⁶⁵ These guides provide the same material as other books, albeit in a different format. However they present the invasion to a new audience, those who perhaps would not learn about the operation except as part of a holiday, and those who wish to know the basic facts without looking at the build-up, logistics, or strategy.

Considering the level of interest in the invasion, it can be frustrating for writers trying to generate a similar knowledge of later phases of the campaign. James Jay Carafino expresses this view in *After D-Day – Operation Cobra and the Normandy Breakout*:

Operation Cobra proved to be one of the most climactic operations of World War II; yet, ironically, it is also one of the least remembered. The Normandy D-Day invasion has assumed almost mythic proportions in U.S. military history, generating volume after volume of research and study, but Cobra has never been the dedicated subject of a major work.⁶⁶

Carafino included 'D-Day' in the title of his work to capture the attention of potential readers, however the book covers the subsequent campaign, not the landings. Clearly in

⁶⁵ Examples include, Major and Mrs Holt's *Battlefield Guide to the Normandy Landing Beaches* (Barnsley, 2000), Tim Kilvert Jones *Sword Beach. 3rd British Infantry Division's Battle for the Normandy Beachhead*, part of a series covering each of the landing areas, and Ken Ford's *Sword Beach* (Stroud, 2004), again part of a series.

⁶⁶ James Jay Carafino, *After D-Day – Operation Cobra and the Normandy Breakout* (Boulder, Colo, 2000) p.1.

the US there is a similar situation regarding interest in D-Day surmounting the later battles.

The plethora of modern volumes, produced for a mass readership, provide a different emphasis on D-Day depending on whether they are aimed at an American or British audience, with, of course, an American audience being potentially so much larger. In US-published volumes, greater emphasis is placed on the American beaches, particularly the dramatic landings on Omaha. By adopting this skewed version of events, the British and Canadian beaches thereby appear ‘unchallenging’ in comparison to the American sector, which is clearly false.⁶⁷ Many of the recent works are dominated by illustrations and here too, there is a pressure to discover hitherto unpublished images.⁶⁸ As is the case for oral and written sources, most works rely on the same photographic images, which become familiar due to their over-use, in particular, the short series of images by Robert Capa of the troops sheltering on Omaha Beach, Lord Lovat and the Commandos landing on Sword Beach, and the Commandos coming ashore at Juno. The images that are well-known tend to be held by the IWM, Bundesarchiv and US National Archives.

Since the Normandy landings there has been a gradual evolution in the way Operation Overlord has been presented within secondary literature. In the early post-war years, D-Day was not covered in isolation, but as part of a longer-term campaign and also as part of the progression of the entire war. The dramatic work ‘The Longest Day’ signalled the change to a focus on D-Day as having an importance in its own right. For the books that now had D-Day as their entire focus, differences began to appear in how predominant the seaborne and airborne landings were, in terms of numbers of pages allotted to each. These differences tended to occur depending on which markets the books were aimed

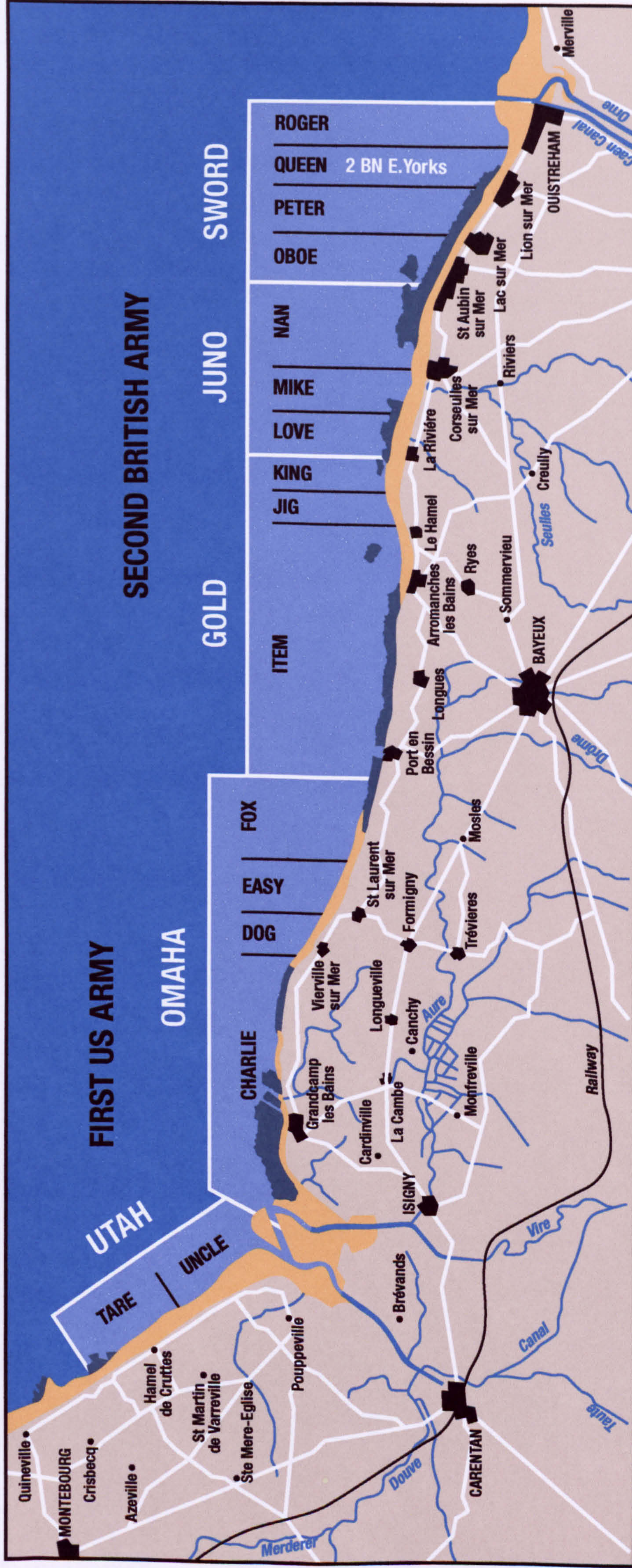
⁶⁷ Stephen Ambrose, *D-Day June 6, 1944. The Climactic Battle of World War II* (London, 2002) is one example.

⁶⁸ Examples of the heavily illustrated works include Derek Blizard, *The Normandy Landings. D-Day. The invasion of Europe 6 June 1944*, and Stephen Badsey, *D-Day. From the Normandy Beaches to the Liberation of France* (Surrey, 1994).

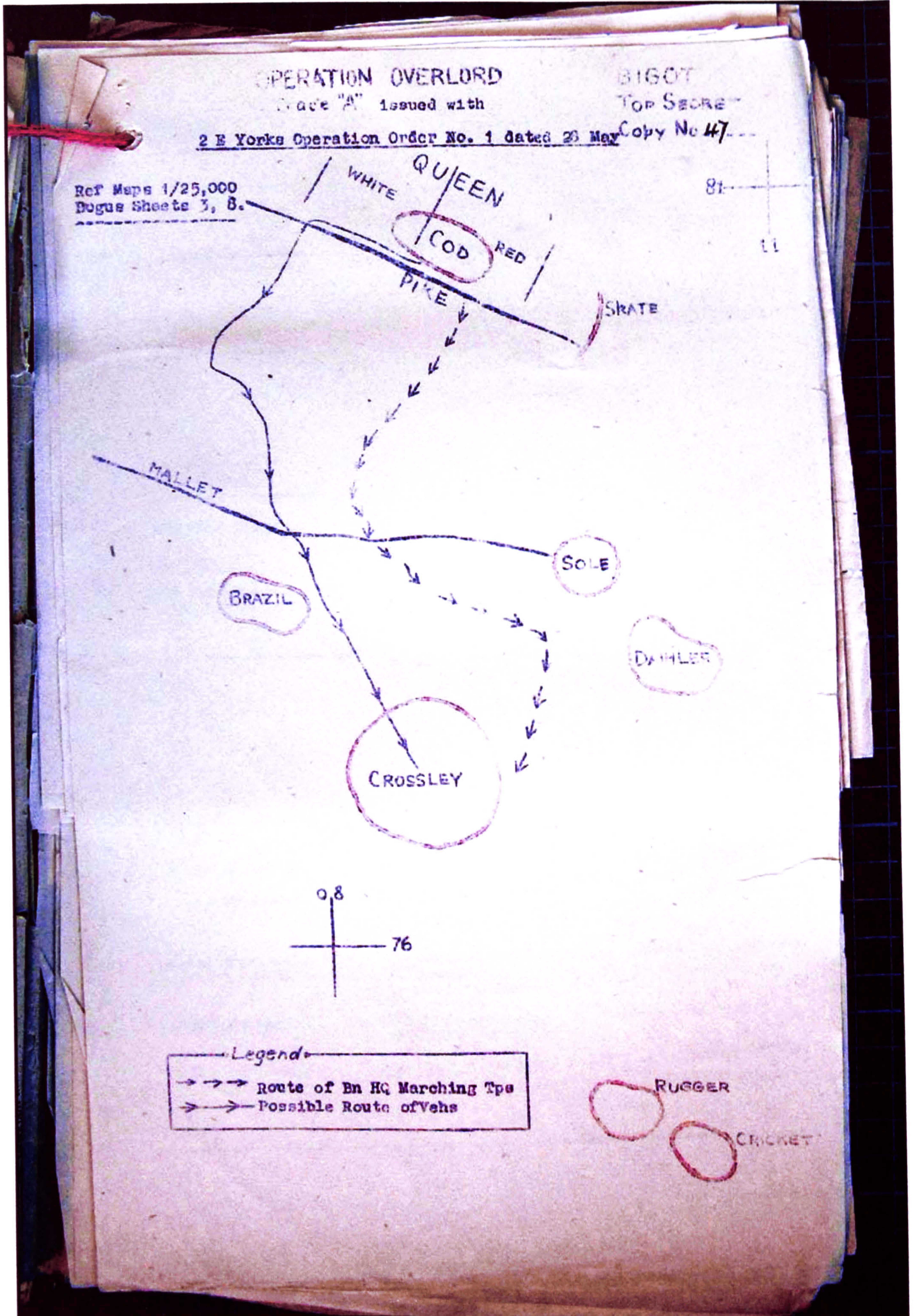
at, for example, mass audiences demanded a greater concentration on the landings as opposed to the build-up and planning stages. The demands of a mass-market resulted in an avalanche of works, and the 1980s witnessed a change in emphasis towards the recording of D-Day in terms of personal accounts. This trend has remained dominant, however each commemorative anniversary also results in a search for new angles, with varying degrees of success. It is clear that the number of works available is both a trigger for greater public interest, and has been generated in response to the demand. This public interest shows no sign of abating, particularly during commemorative anniversaries and in response to films such as 'Saving Private Ryan'. D-Day retains a firm grip on the public imagination.

Normandy Landing Beaches

6th June 1944



MAP PREPARED BY A. CRAGGS



The role and effectiveness of the 2nd Battalion East Yorkshire Regiment on D-Day.

For the 2nd Battalion infantrymen, D-Day was the spectacular moment that their training had been directed towards. For the interviewees who had served during the landings, it was apparent that D-Day was the most important operation of their army service, and took up a greater proportion of the interview's duration than any other single day of the north-west Europe campaign. These interviewees clearly wanted to bear witness to their involvement in this historic event, particularly in light of their being overlooked in existing literature, and being criticised by the Commandos for alleged shortcomings during the landings.

In order to assess the validity of the criticisms, it is important to establish firstly what D-Day entailed for the battalion. The level and quality of manpower right through the ranks had to be at its peak for the landings. The Commanding Officer, Lt Col Hardy Spicer, was replaced by Lt Col Hutchinson for the D-Day operation. His was not the only replacement. Other officers too were changed for reasons such as age, as the overwhelming need was for officers who were fit and suited to battle conditions. Additional officers and men were brought in for D-Day, with the battalion swelling from around 800 to 1000. During the last six months the impetus was towards maximising numbers. In January, five new Lieutenants were taken on strength from 165 OCTU and in February two Majors and a Captain were received.⁶⁹ Four Canloan⁷⁰ officers arrived at the battalion on 24th April, which allowed them very little time to become familiar with the men they would be commanding. This situation was not ideal, but demonstrates the lack of available officers, in particular junior officers, within the infantry.

⁶⁹ From 2nd Battalion War Diary NA, 23rd January, 2nd February and 7th February 1944.

⁷⁰ The four Canadian officers who arrived first at the 2nd Battalion were Capt James McGregor and Lts. 'Robbie' Robertson, Hugh Neily and Stirling Reid. Capt McGregor was killed on D-Day.

Secondary literature often focuses on the logistics of the landings and the detailed planning which took place.⁷¹ The plans of the battalion were a microcosm of those formulated at higher levels and the Operation Order No. 1 is a precise document outlining the tasks for each company. Security regarding the orders was extremely tight with the copies being kept under lock and key and guarded. No marks were to be made on the maps and portions of the Order not required ashore were to be burned before embarkation. The War Diary includes a breakdown of the objectives as well as the 'intention' which was that the '2nd East Yorkshires Battalion Group will land on Queen Red Beach at H plus 5 minutes, destroy the beach defences, capture CROSSLEY 3816 and secure RUGGER 399148 and CRICKET 404146'. 'A' and 'B' Companies would land in the initial assault, with 'C' and 'D' Companies landing twenty minutes behind them. It was the task of 'A' Company to land about the middle of Red Beach, swing west and destroy the beach defence codenamed 'Cod', together with 'C' Company the South Lancashire Regiment. Cod was a formidable strongpoint, comprising twenty separate positions, including a 75mm gun, two 50mm anti-tank guns, and five different machine gun posts.⁷² On D-Day, this strongpoint was not fully subdued until 10am and casualties were heavy. 'B' Company would land on the left of Red Beach and swing east to destroy all beach defences except 'Cod'. It would hold the defensive position codenamed 'Skate' until No. 4 Commando passed through. The role of the follow-up companies, 'C' and 'D', was to assist the forward companies on the beach if needed, or to assemble at point 'Pike' to move inland straightaway. Once inland, the companies would attack the strongpoints 'Sole' and 'Daimler'. The planners considered these objectives sufficient progress for the battalion to achieve on the first day. It was the role of the other, follow-up battalions within the Division to progress towards Caen.

⁷¹ Robert W. Love Jr. and John Major, eds. *The Year of D-Day. The 1944 Diary of Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay* provides a good insight into the work involved.

⁷² From *D-Day Then and Now*, Vol. 2 (London, 1995).

Landing with the four companies were teams of engineers to assist with mine clearance and demolition of beach obstacles, a demolition team from the Pioneers and duplex drive tanks of the 13th/18th Royal Hussars. Specialist AVREs, among the series of vehicles nicknamed 'Hobart's Funnies',⁷³ would also land in the early minutes to assist in destroying the defences and clearing mines, although these AVREs were not under the command of, or in direct support of, the battalion. The section of Sword Beach, Queen Red, to be targeted by the battalion stretched from Riva-Bella and La Brèche on the left, to Lion-sur-Mer on the right. The 1st South Lancashire Regiment would land alongside at Queen White. The 2nd Battalion had a difficult role in that they faced attack from two flanks, from the left and the front, as in the initial phase they were the far-left troops of the entire invasion force.

The War Diary provides a formal, yet sparse account of the progress of the battalion on D-Day and the difficulties facing it but cannot demonstrate the confusion about the ever-changing situation and balancing of conflicting priorities, the role of the individual infantryman, or the sights and sounds of battle. It also shows the importance of traditions within the Regimental system; an importance not just for the officers but a feeling which permeated all the ranks; that of Regimental pride and loyalty. A prime example is detailed on the entry for 5th June, when 'Lt Col C. F. Hutchinson presented (the *Glenearn*'s) Capt Hutcheson with a silver bugle inscribed with the Regimental crest and in return the ships company presented the battalion with a pike which bore the Regimental badge of the Royal Marines. The Battalion HQ flag made by the ladies of Waterlooville was then attached to the pike and an anchor signifying the part played by the H M Navy sewn to the flag'. To the members of the battalion, this combining of emblems showing the respect and comradeship between the different participants, was very significant. Having trained together for many months prior to the operation, the

⁷³ The 'Funnies' of the 79th Armoured Division on Sword Beach, included flail tanks from the 22nd Dragoon Guards, Crocodile flamethrower tanks and the AVREs (Armoured Vehicle Royal Engineers) which were armed with Petard mortars.

sailors on board the *Glennearn* and the soldiers of the 2nd Battalion in particular, had had the opportunity to gain an understanding of each other's roles, epitomised by Rear Admiral Talbot's pre-invasion message to all in 'S' Force:

The 3rd British Infantry Division has been entrusted to our care. They are old friends of ours; we have grown up together; we have come to look on them as our own. Let every officer and man in the Force feel a personal responsibility for the comfort, safety and maintenance of his "opposite number" in the 3rd Division. And, above all FIGHT; FIGHT to help the Army, FIGHT to help yourselves; FIGHT to help your ship; FIGHT to the very end.⁷⁴

Many of the interviewees spoke particularly of the battalion flag made by the ladies of the WRVS in Waterlooville during their stay in the area in the run-up to D-Day. They wanted me to understand their gratitude and feelings of pride.⁷⁵ It is also significant that within a limited War Diary D-Day entry, this act was recorded in detail.⁷⁶

There is no doubt that the interviewees recognised how important their role was on D-Day and knew that it was a momentous operation, for speculation had been rife in newspapers and there had been a general air of expectation throughout the country for some months. They were also aware that casualties were expected to be heavy for the assault troops as they had been warned in briefings. Despite this awareness, some were disappointed to be designated 'left out of battle', having trained for the landings for so long. Jack Reid recalled seeing men in tears,⁷⁷ while Arthur Smith, who could have been left out on medical grounds, successfully appealed to his officer to be included.⁷⁸

Clive Crauford, at that time a Captain, was not happy to be part of the follow-up wave:

I am not in the least bit proud of what I personally did on D-Day...being out at sea while your friends are off storming the beach...you can't help feeling a bit of a rat. It's hell, all your friends are there, and facing the music...so I wasn't the least bit happy at what I was

⁷⁴ Message from Rear Admiral A. G. Talbot in Stephen Badsey, *D-Day. From the Normandy Beaches to the Liberation of France* (Godalming, 1993).

⁷⁵ The flag is now on display at the Prince of Wales' Own Regiment of Yorkshire Museum in York.

⁷⁶ 2nd Battalion War Diary 3rd June 1944.

⁷⁷ From interview with Jack Reid 4th July 1999.

⁷⁸ From interview with Arthur Smith 27th September 1999.

doing...and if I got ashore, I'd never been in action before...was I going to be up to the job anyway? I think most people felt like that...We just hadn't proved ourselves.⁷⁹

Not all the infantrymen were keen to be part of this historic day. Arthur Lumb remembered one man faking illness,⁸⁰ 'he said he had bad stomach pains so they put him in a padded cell in an asylum. They had to do because he'd been briefed about where we were going and what time and everything. About a fortnight after we'd landed he was brought back to the battalion'. Arthur Smith saw another being put under special guard, feeling that 'his nerves must have got the better of him'.⁸¹

The War Diary recorded that maps were distributed to all commanders of craft on the 5th, followed by a visit by the Commanding Officer to all companies and a short blessing by Reverend Victor Price, who was a popular padre with the troops, and who took over the medical attention of the casualties when the Medical Officer was killed during the landings, despite being injured himself. The War Diary does not provide details of what the padre said in his address but one interviewee remembered that the service 'was very well attended'.⁸² Wilf Todd remembered that the service was preceded by another speaker: 'Before it got dark they mustered everyone on the welldeck. The captain of the *Glenearn*, Capt Hutcheson, gave us all a talk. He told us about PLUTO⁸³ and the Mulberry harbours. He said that he'd like to lay another pipeline to pump beer across to us!'⁸⁴

The War Diary recorded that the convoy set sail at 9pm on the 5th, after a day's postponement due to the poor weather conditions and the next entry is for the 6th June at 4.30am when the landing craft were loaded and the assault companies were cheered by the remainder of the battalion who were waiting their turn to be loaded. By 6am the

⁷⁹ Extract from interview with Clive Crauford 5th November 2000. This is a typically modest response – Crauford took an active role on D-Day in subduing the gun emplacement 'Daimler'.

⁸⁰ Extract from interview with Arthur Lumb 1st May 1999.

⁸¹ From interview with Arthur Smith 7th November 1999.

⁸² Extract from interview with Peter Brown 19th September 1999.

⁸³ Pipeline under the Ocean.

⁸⁴ Extract from interview with Wilf Todd 20th March 1999.

assault companies were ready for the run-in to the beach. Nothing is outlined of what happened on board *HMS Empire Battleaxe* or *HMS Glenearn*, during the night of 5-6th June, for it does not immediately concern the military performance of the battalion. However that night is remembered vividly by several of the interviewees for differing reasons. For Dennis Hallam it was the rough sailing conditions,⁸⁵ whereas three of the respondents recalled an accident on board the *Glenearn* which resulted in the death of Sgt Eric Ibbetson:

One of the section commanders in 'D' Company, a corporal, had put a magazine in his Sten gun and put it on the table. As the ship changed direction the gun fell on the floor. The gun went off and several rounds ricocheted round the steel bulkheads where we were. A lad got hit in the heel. It was his 21st birthday that day. Another lad, a sergeant, bled to death when a bullet cut his femoral artery in his thigh.⁸⁶

Some whiled away the long wait by sleeping, preparing their weapons or reading; others made their own entertainment. George Burnham recalled playing pontoon and winning around a thousand francs.⁸⁷

One significant facet of the interviews was the expression of fear, or lack of it, during the crossing and preparations for the landing. Clearly some of the interviewees had been asked this previously, by family members or friends, or, in one case, by a newspaper reporter. George Burnham pre-empted the question by saying:

you are probably going to ask me "were you frightened"? I don't know. I think well, I think probably a lot of us were too young to be frightened to any great extent. You see twenty year old, you are probably full of it. You didn't know what you were going into. . .⁸⁸

Burnham was not alone in his lack of fear; Peter Brown wrote 'looking back it is difficult to imagine how nearly one thousand young men, mainly between the ages

⁸⁵ Dennis Hallam wrote 'I still remember with absolute horror the night of 5-6th June 1944 when the Channel was so beastly to me! It was a positive pleasure and relief to hit the terra firma of the beach. A bit of an exaggeration but you will know what I mean!' in a letter to the author dated 9th June 2005.

⁸⁶ Extract from interview with Wilf Todd 20th March 1999.

⁸⁷ Each man had received specially printed invasion money.

⁸⁸ Extract from interview with George Burnham 26th February 2000.

eighteen to twenty five, could face what awaited them with so little emotion. No-one was under any illusions that their chance of coming through unscathed was rather slight'.⁸⁹ The lack of visible emotion is likely to be connected with the difference between an operation and an exercise – up to this point none of the interviewees had seen active service and had yet to assimilate the knowledge that fire would be aimed at them with the intention to kill. However it may also be a result of a difficulty in recapturing emotions after a sixty-year interval. Certainly Wilf Todd's letter to his wife, written shortly after his wounding on D-Day, sounds a very different note: 'I prayed that night as I have never prayed in my life' and as he climbed aboard his LCA 'my heart was beating like a trip hammer'.⁹⁰

For the inexperienced infantrymen, this was their first action and two of them mentioned that the landings induced a brief feeling of 'dislocation' from their surroundings. Alf Harrison remembered 'your mind goes blank for a few seconds. Then you come to and you say "I have got to get off here" and away you go'.⁹¹ It is clear from the interviews that none of the interviewees recall being immobilised by fear or unable to carry out their duties. That may not apply to all the 2nd Battalion soldiers on Sword Beach, but certainly the veterans interviewed felt confident in their allotted roles and equipped by their training to carry them out. The Regimental Diary gives an overview of the performance of the battalion on the beach, however it is the interviewees who afford the opportunity to assess the readiness and confidence of the men involved.

By 6am on the morning of the 6th June the two assault companies were lined up in their craft ready for the run-in, yet there is no recorded time of arrival on the beach. H-Hour was due to be 7.25am and this must have been fairly accurate as the first signal from 'A'

⁸⁹ Peter Brown's privately held memoir.

⁹⁰ Extract from letter written by Wilf Todd to his wife, addressed to 'Sweetheart' dated June 1944, copy supplied by family.

⁹¹ Extract from interview with Alf Harrison 5th November 2000. Wilf Todd attributed his feeling of dislocation to the terrific noise during the landings, during an interview 1st May 1999.

and 'B' Companies, was received at 7.35am reporting 'heavy opposition but operation proceeding to plan'. When the two reserve companies and Battalion HQ landed at 7.55am they reported difficulties with underwater obstacles and that 'crossfire and sniping was fairly considerable and accurate enemy mortar and shellfire was causing some casualties'. By this time, the high tide was covering many of the obstacles which had been designed either to cause damage to the incoming landing craft below the water line, or explode the craft when they triggered mines attached to the top of the defences. On landing, 'C' Company was dispatched to position 'Sole' and 'D' Company lost its Company Commander when a mortar bomb landed amongst Company HQ. The move to 'Sole' was undertaken across marshy ground and was slowed by the terrain and the fact that it was under mortar fire throughout. Several interviewees recalled the progress across this flooded area, with the water absorbing some of the blast from the mortar fire. The position 'Sole' turned out to be more heavily defended than previously thought, but was secured by 'C' Company assisted by 'A' Company, who had by now cleared the beach, according to the War Diary. An officer serving with 13th/18th Hussars, who witnessed the attack, confirmed that in attacking 'Sole' the 2nd Battalion 'showed great dash'.⁹² Once 'B' Company rejoined the battalion, the attack on position 'Daimler' was prepared, led by 'A' and 'C' Companies supported by 76 Field Regt and B Sqn 13th/18th Hussars. Clive Crauford, of 'C' Company, described Daimler:

They were called "hedgehog positions" in the jargon, and hedgehog was a damn good name for them because it fairly bristled with everything unpleasant. . .it was protected by three pillboxes each presumably with an automatic weapon in and a few men, the equivalent of a section I suppose, and you had to overcome the three pillboxes before you could get the central emplacement. Beyond that there was a minefield. On the outside perimeter of the whole outfit was barbed wire.⁹³

⁹² Capt J Neave SWWEC (2003-2309).

⁹³ Extract from interview with Clive Crauford 5th November 2000.

With the help of the artillery, the pillboxes were taken, leaving the central emplacement vulnerable. Clive Crauford climbed through the gun aperture at the same time as his batman dropped a grenade in through the top. Fortunately Crauford was protected from the subsequent blast by the gun shield and called on the gun crew, who were sheltering in an inner compartment, to surrender. There were few casualties within the 2nd Battalion from this action and 70 prisoners were taken, as well as enemy weapons.

After this action, the battalion moved to St Aubin d'Arquenay and eventually dug in to the west of Hermanville. The following day, 'D' Company rejoined from the canal and river bridges codenamed 'Rugger' and 'Cricket', having been relieved by 6th Airborne Division. Thus, at the close of D-Day, the 2nd Battalion had taken all its objectives, with artillery and armoured support.

In the Regimental War Diary there are no mentions of the attacks on position 'Cod', nor that on 'Skate'. This is surprising, given that 'Cod' was such a large, well-defended objective and specific mention was made of it in the Operation Order. I can trace from other, secondary literature,⁹⁴ that the attack on 'Cod' was successful, but it is difficult to discover what part the 2nd Battalion played in this, as well as establishing whether the battalion made an attack on 'Skate' at all, and if so, what part the battalion played. However, one of 'Banger' King's letters to his batman's mother,⁹⁵ reported that his Company had cleared a 200 yard wide gap in the defences 'through which poured the reserve companies – Commandos – and it seemed to be about half the British Army' before clearing machine-gun nests and a 50cm gun, probably referring to part of the 'Cod' strongpoint.

The Diary provides an overview of the day's events, yet does not focus on the overcoming of the beach defences. None of the interviewees mentioned 'Skate' by name, although Alf Ackroyd described overcoming a defensive position at the top of the

⁹⁴ Tim Kilvert-Jones, *Sword Beach. 3rd British Infantry Division's Battle for the Normandy Beachhead*. Also Michael Reynolds, *Eagles and Bulldogs in Normandy, 1944*.

⁹⁵ Letter from Major 'Banger' King to Blenkorn's mother dated 6th July 1944 (IWM 93/39/1).

beach, without knowing its codename. There is only one account from an 'A' Company officer in the public domain, however this does not refer to the attack on 'Cod', which was 'A' Company's objective.⁹⁶ This account concentrated on gapping the copious barbed wire which proved problematic for many troops involved in the initial wave. Some were equipped with 'Bangalore torpedoes', sections of piping which were screwed together and pushed under the wire, which was then destroyed by an explosive charge. However, individual sections of piping became lost as men became casualties and it was a hazardous operation to perform while under fire, as noted in the example set by Lt Arthur Oates, outlined in Chapter One.

According to the evidence supplied by the War Diary, the interviewees and personal written accounts, the battalion was successful in carrying out the tasks it was set for D-Day. After the operation, *The Snapper* carried an article by 'A Military Observer', quoting RSM William Palmer as saying 'they were wonderful, every man of them. I've done twenty one years' service in the Army, and I was never so proud of my lads than I was that morning – a morning I'll never forget'.⁹⁷ As Company Commander of 'A' Company, Major 'Banger' King wrote to his batman's mother 'I cannot express too deeply my admiration for the men I have been commanding. When we landed at H-Hour on D-Day they went straight in over the beaches in spite of a murderous fire'.⁹⁸ Of course, all these sources have an element of self-interest, but so too do the aforementioned critical accounts of the Commandos. To justify their existence they had to be seen as superior troops – their formation was due to the direct support of Winston Churchill in 1940 and the Army Commandos were not destined for longevity, being disbanded at the end of the war. Hastings argues that by 1944 the special forces were not as highly regarded by High Command, and to an extent were not seen as relevant to

⁹⁶ I was unable to trace any interviewees from 'A' Company and there are no accounts in the public domain except that of Arthur Oates (SWWEC).

⁹⁷ From *The Snapper* Vol XXXIX No 7, dated July 1944. The Military Observer was Hugh Gunning.

⁹⁸ Letter from Major 'Banger' King to Blenkhorn's mother dated 6th July 1944.

the landings since many of the raids they had taken part in up to that point, had proved unsuccessful.⁹⁹ They had a great deal to prove during D-Day. There are numerous personal accounts by former Commandos in secondary literature, which 2nd Battalion members have not had the opportunity to counter, as there have been few opportunities to air their opinions in the public domain.

The main criticism is that the 2nd Battalion remained on the foreshore, instead of pushing through and off the beach straightaway. Secondly, that riflemen of the battalion proceeded to 'dig in' as protection against small-arms and shellfire in preference to clearing the area and thirdly, that poor training contributed to the high casualty rates, since by 'bunching' together they presented an easier target. Brigadier the Lord Lovat went further and accused the battalion of failing to take objectives. In describing the scene on landing he wrote:

Barely clear of the creeping tide, soldiers lay with heads down, pinned to the sand. Half-way up the beach, others dug themselves into what amounted to a certain death-trap. . . My O group did well through the soft sand and flung themselves down behind the nearest pillbox taken single-handed by Knyvet Carr. The job had been the responsibility of the East Yorks. . . During the saturation bombing, Monsieur Lefèvre, a Resistance leader . . . cut cables connected with flame-throwers in the beach defences. He did more than the 8th Brigade, who landed to our immediate front. A poor showing in the last rehearsal was faithfully repeated on the battlefield. We passed through them, leaving platoons scrabbling in sand where the shelling hit hardest.¹⁰⁰

The same accusations, that the East Yorkshire troops were digging-in on the beach and failed to display 'dash' have been reinforced by Commandos from the ranks in various books about the landings,¹⁰¹ so that inevitably it becomes the accepted version of

⁹⁹ Max Hastings, *Overlord. D-Day and the Battle for Normandy*, p.37.

¹⁰⁰ *D-Day Then and Now* Vol. 2, p.540. Brigadier the Lord Lovat was in command of 1st Special Service Brigade.

¹⁰¹ See Martin Bowman's *Remembering D-Day. Personal Histories of Everyday Heroes*, the criticism by Private Bill Bidmead of A Troop, No. 4 Commando p.113. Also Nigel Cawthorne, *6 June, 1944. D-Day: Dawn of Heroes* (Devizes, 2004) p.76 and Ian Dear, *Ten Commando 1942-1945* (London, 1987) p.116.

events. In particular, this charge has been repeated in Cornelius Ryan's *The Longest Day*, which is, as has been noted, one of the most influential works in establishing how D-Day has been historicized in the public arena. Extracts from the work were reproduced in newspapers, including *The Hull Daily Mail*, which featured a piece from Ryan's section on Sword Beach:

In the Ouistreham half of Sword, men of the 22nd East Yorkshire Regiment lay dead and dying from the water's edge all the way up the beach. . .it seems likely that the East Yorks suffered most of their two hundred D-Day casualties in these first few minutes. . .Some saw "bodies stacked like cordwood" and counted "more than 150 dead". . .Corporal Fred Mears of Lord Lovat's commandos was "aghast to see the East Yorks lying in bunches . . .It would probably never have happened had they spread out". As he charged up the beach . . .he remembers cynically thinking that "they would know better the next time".¹⁰²

It is true that the casualty figures sustained by the 2nd Battalion during D-Day were high, and higher than those sustained by many of the individual units on other beaches, except for Omaha: 5 officers and 60 'other ranks' were killed, and 4 officers and 137 'other ranks' were wounded, around one-quarter of the battalion's strength. However the troops had been briefed that their role would inevitably result in such figures. The difficult circumstances on the beach explain why the numbers were high, as opposed to the accusations of 'bunching' levelled by the Commandos. As Ron Major wrote, 'the Commandos who followed us were surprised at the mortality rate and put it down to inexperience. This wasn't the case. We had been well trained. But heavy artillery and machine gun fire was pouring down on us. There just wasn't anywhere to go'.¹⁰³ The interviewees and memoirs of the 2nd Battalion veterans confirm that many of the casualties were incurred as the troops left the landing craft, before they had had the opportunity to cross the beach.¹⁰⁴ The casualty figures in the first assault craft were

¹⁰² Cornelius Ryan, *The Longest Day*, p.184.

¹⁰³ Ron Major, IWM (95/23/1).

¹⁰⁴ Interviews with Alf Ackroyd 10th February 2002, Wilf Todd 4th April 1999 and memoir of John Folley (Special Collections, University of Leeds ARMY 069).

particularly high. Reg Rutherford, a Platoon Commander from 'B' Company, recalled that two-thirds of his platoon became casualties in the initial landing, leaving just eleven men available to advance inland.¹⁰⁵

One must also not overlook the fact that the 2nd Battalion were not the only soldiers landing on Sword Beach in the early stages. The role of some of the troops on landing, such as the engineers and beach party, was to remain on the beach to ensure the swift and safe passage of those following. Arthur Oates' account recorded 'Beach Group bunching badly and taking casualties' and it is possible that in their charge across the beach, the Commandos may not have been able to differentiate between the units already there. Certainly the casualty rate among the engineers was high, as they had the dangerous task of dismantling the sea defences, including the mines endangering the safe passage of the landing craft.¹⁰⁶ Among 629 Field Squadron, 20 per cent of the men were lost, including many who drowned attempting to remove the aforesaid mines.¹⁰⁷

The emotive text by Ryan sparked a restrained response from Capt Arthur Oates of the 2nd Battalion to *The Hull Daily Mail*:

The general impression is one of a 'blood bath' and a suggestion that casualties were caused by careless fieldcraft.

1. Mr Ryan refers to the 22nd Battalion, East Yorkshire Regt and to the best of my knowledge such a unit never existed.
2. Casualties were less than had been anticipated and I cannot imagine that anyone who landed at any proximity to H-Hour could have spared the time to count '150 dead' which were 'stacked like cordwood'.¹⁰⁸

Captain Oates' daughter remembers how angry her father was after reading Ryan's presentation of the battalion's performance on D Day, despite his rather measured letter.

However, the impression given in the Ryan book has become widely accepted as

¹⁰⁵ Alf Ackroyd retains a full list of all those in Rutherford's platoon on D-Day and what happened to each of them, confirming the casualty figures. See Appendix C.

¹⁰⁶ In Patrick Delaforce's, *Monty's Ironsides*, he quotes casualty figures of 117 for the assault engineers of 5ARE and 22nd Dragoons had 42 casualties.

¹⁰⁷ Brigadier John Brown SWWEC (2002-1766).

¹⁰⁸ Letter from Arthur Oates to The Editor, *The Hull Daily Mail* dated 10th May 1960.

historically accurate and contributes to the marginalisation of the role of the 2nd Battalion on D-Day. Ryan rightly acknowledged ‘there will always be differences of opinion about the nature of the fighting on Sword’.¹⁰⁹ He wrote that Brigadier E. E. Cass, in command of 8th Brigade had defended the 2nd Battalion, arguing that they had already left the beach by the time the Commandos landed. It is probable that most had indeed left the beach before the arrival of Lord Lovat’s 1st Special Service Brigade, as his Brigade came in to the beach at H+75 minutes. However, No. 4 Commando landed at H+30 minutes and at this point many East Yorkshire infantrymen were still on Sword, including Cpl Alf Ackroyd of ‘B’ Company, who considered the Commandos heroes as they stormed across the beach. His account demonstrates the difficulty of advancing while under aimed small arms fire:

When the Commandos landed behind us we were still pinned down on the beach. They come out in a rugby scrum and stormed over the wire and got through. . . Where these Commandos went was about fifteen yards at the most to the right of where I was. . . In fact when the Commandos went Jack said “well, I am going to try it”. I said “well, keep your behind down”, and he jumped up, got about two paces, and he was shot through his behind. The other lad did the same thing, and he got shot in the behind, as far as I can remember. . . Anyhow we got through the barbed wire to the back of the trench, partly because of these Commandos had made way.¹¹⁰

Jack Pearse, a Platoon Commander in ‘B’ Company was among the first to land, and wrote of his anxiety when he discovered the landing craft beside his had failed to reach the beach and his platoon was now covering the exposed left flank of the invasion. He recorded: ‘my fears are eased: a boat-load of Commandos lands to strike off left along the beach without obvious trouble’¹¹¹ before he was ordered to lead his platoon through a cleared beach exit on to the coastal road. Both accounts therefore confirm the presence

¹⁰⁹ Ryan, *The Longest Day*, p.184.

¹¹⁰ Extract from interview with Alf Ackroyd 10th February 2002.

¹¹¹ Extract from Jack Pearse’s recollections of D-Day, given to author by family. Also re-printed in Frank and Joan Shaw, *We Remember D-Day*, pp. 264-265.

of some 2nd Battalion troops on the beach at the time of the arrival of the Commandos, as they were still involved in clearing the beach defences when the Commandos landed. The Commandos' spirited dash across the beach was a great achievement, although it was also to result in significant casualties of their own. Dunning recorded that of the 177 French Commandos landing with No. 4 Commando, only 114 arrived at the assembly point, the remainder became casualties of the small arms, mortars and shellfire taking a similarly heavy toll on the 2nd Battalion infantrymen. It surely cannot be argued therefore that the high casualty figures were due to incompetence on the part of the 2nd Battalion infantrymen. High casualty figures were also experienced by the 5th Battalion of the East Yorkshire Regiment, as 85 'other ranks' were lost on the beach at Gold alone, when 'D' and 'C' Companies crossed the beach under fire from an anti-tank gun at La Rivière and heavy small arms fire. Unlike the adverse comments regarding the 2nd Battalion's performance, there is no criticism attached to this battalion in secondary literature as it was recognised that the casualties were a direct result of the enemy firepower on the beach.

One account by a Commando recalled that the 2nd Battalion infantrymen were 'committing suicide by trying to dig in where they were', yet his own efforts to rouse them revealed that two were dead and the third was injured.¹¹² This is a similar outcome to that recalled by Hugh Bone. Bone could not make a quick exit from the beach because of the heavy wireless sets. It only took a few minutes for him to get off the beach, but he had to return to try and gather a wireless team. He found several casualties sheltering near a tank, 'I felt a little callous when I found out that nearly all of them had been hit and some were dead', but 'by persuading a couple of blokes with shrapnel in their legs and feet that they were good for a few hours yet, I got my wireless lifted'.¹¹³

¹¹² James Dunning, *The Fighting Fourth. No. 4 Commando at War 1940-45* (Stroud, 2003). Extract by Capt Murdoch McDougal.

¹¹³ Extracts from Lt H. T. Bone's letter to his mother dated 4th July 1944, IWM (87/31/1).

Interestingly, Piper Bill Millin recorded that he witnessed several Commandos sheltering behind a wall, while ‘other Commandos were attempting to dig in’.¹¹⁴

I would argue that these attacks on the 2nd Battalion are over-critical and self-serving as they fail to take into account the work already undertaken by the two leading assault companies before the arrival of the Commandos, together with armoured support.¹¹⁵

The objective of No. 4 Commando was to destroy a battery and the garrison in Ouistreham while the remainder of the Brigade, landing forty-five minutes afterwards, was to reach the 6th Airborne Division and help hold the bridges spanning the River Orne and Caen Canal. Thus their own tasks on D-Day were very different from those of the two leading companies of the 2nd Battalion, whose objectives entailed destroying beach defences.

The adverse comments about the performance of the 2nd Battalion are unusual in that infantrymen are usually more supportive of each other’s efforts in personal accounts, given that the difficult nature of their roles is mutually understood and forms a bond of shared experience. One infantryman who considered the criticism of the battalion’s performance to be incorrect was Lt P. Webber of the 2nd Middlesex Regiment, who wrote ‘perhaps I should say that it is quite inaccurate to state, as I have read, that the East Yorks on the left were pinned down on the beach for some time. They were certainly not there when we landed, only dead and wounded’.¹¹⁶

However Dunning’s book offers a clue to the expectations that No. 4 Commando held regarding the conditions they would find on the beach on arrival and thereby their dissatisfaction that these expectations were not met. After returning from an ‘O’ group prior to the operation, Captain Alastair Thorburn appraised his troops of their own role, before explaining ‘that companies of infantry would land before the Commando to clear

¹¹⁴ Bill Millin, (Piper to Lord Lovat) *Invasion* (privately published memoir, 1991) p.69.

¹¹⁵ Arthur Oates’ account included ‘Could not move for machine gun on revolving tower – firing on beach. Banger got a tank to fire and silenced machine gun’.

¹¹⁶ From Philip Warner, *The D Day Landings*, p.190.

the beach of obstacles, knock out four strongpoints and lay white tapes for No. 4 to go through on their way to the objectives in the town',¹¹⁷ intimating that opposition would virtually have ceased on the beach by the time of their landing and cleared exits would be available for the Commandos. This timetable allowed just thirty minutes for approximately two hundred men of 'A' and 'B' Companies of the 2nd Battalion to accomplish the clearing of four strongpoints and swathes of barbed wire entanglements, while the engineers had to clear a multitude of beach defences of their mines and clear safe paths off the beach, all of course with armoured support. Considering the amount of fire on the beach and the rapidly rising tide, this was unrealistic in the time allotted. In the initial phase, some of the armoured support had been timetabled to arrive before the infantry to account for some of the defences firing directly on the beach. However due to the heavy seas, the duplex drive tanks of the 13th/18th Hussars landed at the same time as the assault infantry. Also, the second wave of 'C' and 'D' Companies were due to land just ten minutes before No. 4 Commando, leaving a critically small number of men to undertake the tasks allotted in the first twenty five minutes.

Much credit is due to the two initial assault companies of the 2nd Battalion on Sword Beach as their efforts ensured that many from the two follow-up companies were able to make a similar dash across the beach to that achieved by the Commandos. Arthur Smith of 'C' Company, remembered the speed of those leaving his landing craft in crossing the beach. Carrying a wireless set slowed him down, but the others 'were off like the clappers and we'd a job to keep up with them y'know'.¹¹⁸ This aspect was always stressed in briefings – the wounded were to be left to the care of medical personnel, while the men were ordered to get across the beach as quickly as possible. Indeed several of the interviewees have emphasised the strong warnings against stopping for

¹¹⁷ James Dunning, *The Fighting Fourth*, p.123.

¹¹⁸ Extract from interview with Arthur Smith 27th September 1999.

any purpose.¹¹⁹ For the small proportion of the battalion who may have remained trapped or trying to find shelter on the beach this condemnation by the Commandos appears harsh when taking into consideration the confused circumstances and level of fire to be found there. The infantry on Omaha Beach also attempted to take shelter among the obstacles, yet their situation is generally viewed with sympathy because of the horrendous conditions under which they landed.

The criticisms by the Commandos have become the accepted version of events due largely to the lack of opportunity for 2nd Battalion members to put forward their own views, as well as the dearth of coverage of the battalion's performance during D-Day in secondary literature. Peter Brown is one who feels this strongly: 'Whenever the landings on Sword Beach is mentioned in post-war literature it is always implied that the assault was made by the Commandos. Little mention is made of the fact that the beach had already been cleared by the East Yorks and the South Lancs'.¹²⁰ More typically, no opinion was expressed during the interviews, as I did not pose a specific question about the criticisms. Many veterans had undertaken little or no post-war reading and were perhaps unaware of the comments made, or were philosophical about them.¹²¹ It should be noted that although the criticisms of the 2nd Battalion's performance have come wholly from the Commandos, not all the Commandos felt similarly. R. Pidgley, who landed with Lord Lovat, paid tribute to the 2nd Battalion, describing the infantrymen as 'brave' and that 'our lot owe these lads a great deal'.¹²² Having considered the criticisms of the performance of the 2nd Battalion by the Commandos, it is also necessary to assess the more widely held, and generally accepted view that the 3rd Division failed in its objective to take Caen on the first day and thereby

¹¹⁹ Interviews with, amongst others, Arthur Smith 27th September 1999 and Alf Harrison 5th November 2000.

¹²⁰ Peter Brown privately held memoir.

¹²¹ I spoke to Wilf Todd about the criticisms made by the Commandos, during the annual veteran reunion in April 2005 and he replied, 'well they would say that, wouldn't they!'

¹²² R. Pidgley, *One man in his time plays many parts* (West Sussex, 2003) SWWEC (2004-2578).

strike a significant blow to the opportunities of German forces to counter-attack rapidly and in strength.¹²³ As the 2nd Battalion formed part of the 3rd Division, together with two other Regiments in 8th Brigade and two further Brigades (9th Brigade and 185th Brigade) its performance is also judged to be lacking. The role of the 2nd Battalion did not entail making any further move beyond St Aubin d'Arquenay on D-Day as the gaining of the objectives it had been set was considered sufficiently demanding for the initial period. It was also anticipated that casualties would be heavy and that the battalion would not be in a position to proceed further without reinforcements.

The objective of taking Caen on the first day fell to 185th Brigade (comprising 2nd Warwickshire Regiment, 1st Norfolk Regiment and 2nd KSLI) supported by the Staffordshire Yeomanry, yet the planners had set an ambitious target which depended on all elements of the landings working in concert to ensure success, a pattern repeated later during Operation Market Garden. The first problem arose with the congestion on Sword Beach caused by the rising tide, which resulted in a landing strip of 30 feet instead of 30 yards and which thereby held up the progress of 185th Brigade's armoured support. By the time the tanks were free of the beach the initial impetus had been lost. By late afternoon 21st Panzer Division effected a counter-attack near Periers ridge which was beaten back by the KSLI and Staffordshire Yeomanry, although this delayed their advance further.

9th Brigade (comprising 2nd Lincolnshire Regiment, 1st KOSB and 2nd RUR) had been tasked to reach Carpiquet and possibly assist in the taking of Caen in order to close the gap between the British and Canadian forces landing on Sword and Juno Beaches. However, after coming ashore at 1pm, the Brigade was re-directed to assist 6th Airborne in holding the vital bridges, an order which was not delivered due to the injury of

¹²³ In Major General David Belchem's *Victory in Normandy* (London, 1981) p.109, he wrote 'The record of 3 British Division is the most disappointing of all the assault sectors', describing the progress of the division as overcautious. See also Hasting, *Overlord. D-Day and the Battle for Normandy*.

Brigadier Cunningham. There elapsed some considerable time before his Second-in-Command, Colonel Dennis Orr took over and the Brigade made a move.

From a study of the evidence it is clear that the objective of taking Caen was doomed as soon as the usual confusions and rapid changes of war presented themselves. An advance of ten miles by one Brigade to take a defended city, after an arduous Channel crossing was ambitious, if not over-ambitious, and was not helped by the difficulties in effecting infantry - tank - artillery co-operation during the hectic early hours of the landings. Criticism has been levelled at the cautiousness of the 185th Brigade Commander, Brigadier K P Smith OBE, and the Divisional Commander Major General T G Rennie DSO, MBE.¹²⁴ While unqualified to judge the capabilities of these two Commanders, it is difficult to justify Smith's delay of one hour in calling an 'O' Group on landing, or appreciate Rennie's reluctance to take a firmer role in the handling of 185th Brigade once the delays became apparent. The operational order had highlighted the need to act with speed and boldness and certainly the speed was lacking.

Despite the accusations, it must also be stressed that at the end of D-Day the overall picture in the Sword Beach vicinity was heartening, especially when taking into account that 3rd Division was the only Division to meet a major armoured counter-attack that day.¹²⁵ All the beach defences had been cleared, the 2nd East Yorkshire Regiment had taken the strongpoints 'Sole' and 'Daimler', the 1st South Lancashire Regiment had a firm base in Hermanville and the 1st Suffolk Regiment had secured Colleville and cleared the strongpoints 'Morris' and 'Hillman'. The Division had effected a bridgehead that was four miles wide and five miles deep, which was an admirable achievement considering the opposition which existed in this sector. It should also not be overlooked that a successful outcome to Operation Overlord had never been a certainty and senior

¹²⁴ Sir Robin Dunn MC, *Sword and Wig – memories of a Lord Justice*. Dunn witnessed chaotic battalion movements during Exercise Leapyear and considered Brig Smith should have been replaced prior to D-Day.

¹²⁵ Eversley Belfield and H. Essame, *The Battle for Normandy* (London, 1965) p.61.

commanders expressed fears up until the eve of D-Day.¹²⁶ Furthermore, on none of the landing beaches were all the D-Day objectives met within the initial 24 hours.¹²⁷

In this chapter I set out to assess the role of the 2nd Battalion on D-Day, taking into account the criticisms levelled at it by the Commandos, which have been so often repeated in secondary literature that they have become accepted as fact. More widely, the criticisms of the 3rd British Infantry Division's performance have encompassed the 2nd Battalion, since it formed one-third of 8th Brigade. It is apparent that the objectives of the battalion, to secure the defensive positions of 'Sole' and 'Daimler', were taken, together with the support of others, including artillery and tanks. So too was the beach strongpoint of 'Cod', in conjunction with the 1st South Lancashire Regiment. 'D' Company also reached the canal bridges 'Rugger' and 'Cricket'. Other beach defences were cleared, yet it is impossible to assess the extent of the battalion's involvement in each case. This is not unexpected, as the different Regiments and Arms had been trained to act in support of each other for Operation Overlord, even if the reality was of competition and garnering of credit between some units. Such competition is an inevitable product of the Regimental system. The available evidence shows that the 2nd Battalion performed well on D-Day in capturing its objectives, especially taking into account the conditions on the beach. Although most of the assault troops led a spirited dash across the foreshore, some were forced to take cover from the shellfire due to the nature of their roles in destroying barbed wire, attacking beach strongpoints and carrying heavy equipment, and due also to the high numbers becoming casualties on the beach.

D-Day was by far the most trained-for, and risky, operation for the infantrymen of the 2nd Battalion and forms the key central memory for the interviewees who took part in it.

¹²⁶ Max Hastings outlined the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir Alan Brooke's, misgivings in *Overlord. D-Day and the Battle for Normandy*, p.19.

¹²⁷ See Tim Kilvert-Jones, *Sword Beach 3rd British Infantry Division's Battle for the Normandy Beachhead 6 June – 10 June 1944* and William Buckingham, *D-Day. The First 72 Hours* (Stroud, 2004).

They are aware of its historic nature, and wanted to bear witness to the part they played in the invasion. They also know of society's continued interest in D-Day, which is catered for, and encouraged by, the wealth of secondary literature dedicated to it. This chapter has considered the criticisms of the battalion's performance by the Commandos. In the next chapter the role of the 2nd Battalion during the remainder of the north-west Europe campaign is examined in light of accusations of an 'unspectacular' performance by the 3rd Division and, more generally, by the British Army.

Chapter 3 - From D-Day to Bremen with the 'Unspectaculars' – the roles of the infantrymen of the 2nd East Yorkshire Regiment, 8th Brigade, 3rd Division.

Although the D-Day operation was hugely significant within the history of the 2nd Battalion, it was only the first day of a long period of active service before Germany's surrender in May 1945, with the battalion seeing action in France, Belgium, Holland and Germany itself. During this period the 3rd Division took part in some of the major 'pushes' although it did not have a central role in the 'high-profile' operations such as Operation Market Garden, nor did it take part in the Battle of the Ardennes. During the Normandy campaign, the main operations were led by armour in the British sector, with the infantry in support to consolidate any gains, due to the shortage of infantry reinforcements. There was little public knowledge of the Division's movements during this period, and this led to the men of the Division being deemed the 'Unspectaculars' by the press, according to Lt Col Renison. This chapter looks at the role of the 2nd Battalion within the Division, and assesses whether the battalion merits this soubriquet. Its performance will be considered in relation to the argument put forward in secondary literature¹ that the British Army failed to achieve the anticipated progress, despite the Allies' overwhelming material advantage.

For this chapter, the interviews were a useful corroborative source, confirming the sequence of events portrayed in the War Diary. Yet their main importance lay in providing a clear impression of the conditions in each region and how they impacted on the course of the battles, and on the interviewees personally. Moreover, each interview added something of historical value to the sparse primary records. For example, Alf Ackroyd's detailed recollections of the attack on Touffreville plainly showed the difficulties experienced during the advance, which culminated in Major 'Banger' King's 'rugby scrum' approach on the village. Alf Ackroyd's interview highlighted the high

¹ For example, Carlo d'Este, *Decision in Normandy*, and Max Hastings, *Overlord*.

casualties caused by snipers and mines, which were noted in the War Diary, and which could lead to an advance stalling. Having lost all but two men of his section in the initial stages of the advance to these dangers, he caught up with Major King in time to take part in the attack on the heavily defended farmhouse by around fifteen men, who were prompted by King to charge across the farmyard. This charge, and its successful outcome, became well-known in the battalion, as one of the stories recounted about King and his determination to win the battle. However it was not recorded in the War Diary. Alf Ackroyd's account, as one of the few men taking part in the 'rugby scrum', is therefore important in order to reconstruct what is known of the battalion's performance. The interviews did not contradict any of the facts outlined in the War Diary which, in line with its remit,² concentrated on the actions of the battalion, rather than the individual. Instead, they added many layers of rich detail that enhanced the Diary and provided the viewpoints of the infantrymen.

As one example, the interviewees had strong views on the civilians they encountered in the different countries they experienced as 'liberators', and, in many cases, destroyers. As a group, their views are remarkably homogenous, in that they were ambivalent about the French, hugely positive about the Dutch and suspicious of the German civilian population. The cultural differences became apparent shortly after the initial landings:

Alf Ackroyd remembered:

we were proper embarrassed because at one side of the road there was a couple of ladies talking, and as they crouched against the wall all of a sudden a Frenchman comes riding down the street on his bike. Jumps off. Throws his bike against the wall. Turns his back on the ladies and urinates straight in front of them.³

Some of those interviewed considered that their views were formed by the amount of contact they had with the different nationalities, in that they were sometimes billeted with Dutch families and were made to feel very welcome. Under some circumstances

² *Instructions for the Preparation and Disposal of War Diaries*, 1944, pp.2-3.

³ Extract from interview with Alf Ackroyd 25th February 2002.

Dutch civilians put themselves at personal risk to help the 2nd Battalion infantrymen, even though they were advised to remain in their cellars. As the 2nd Battalion fought through Germany, strict non-fraternisation rules came into force. The interviewees found it relatively easy to abide by the rules in relation to German adults, but more difficult with the children, who asked for the soldiers' sweets and chocolate.

France.

For the infantrymen of the 2nd Battalion, their pride in the events of D-Day was quickly matched by a realisation that the invasion marked the beginning of their involvement in a longer-term campaign, necessitating a psychological re-adjustment.⁴ On Lt Col Renison's arrival at the battalion on the 2nd July, he noted: 'I soon realised that the fact that the Battalion had landed on the extreme left beach at H-Hour on D-Day was the ruling thought and source of pride in everyone's mind and coloured their whole consideration of the campaign. As a newcomer it had to be recognised and allowed for in every action'.⁵ For many months the focus in training had been on the initial landing and clearing of the beach defences; now the normal infantry skills of advancing behind a barrage, patrolling and digging-in would once again come to the fore.

The Regimental historian, Lt Col Nightingale, concluded that for the East Yorkshire Regiment, the Normandy campaign formed a 'story of hard-slogging and constant moves into and out of more or less static and inconclusive battles'.⁶ This situation was the same for other British units and was due to Montgomery's intention to hold the bulk of German armour against the British and Canadian front, allowing the Americans to break out to the south and eventually encircle the German forces. In tying down the German armour, the British were doomed to battles which 'lacked spectacular or

⁴ Sir Robin Dunn MC of 7th Field Regiment noted: we had 'to brace ourselves for what we all knew was to be hard fighting ahead', *Sword and Wig – memories of a Lord Justice*, p.63. Also Norman Scarfe, *Assault Division* and Eversley Belfield and H. Essame, *The Battle for Normandy* (London, 1965) p.56.

⁵ Lt Col Renison's memoir, p.9.

⁶ Nightingale, *The East Yorkshire Regiment*, p.183.

decisive results'.⁷ Divisions were often involved in holding the line and remaining static for periods, to enable other divisions to take the lead, depending on what operations were being planned. This was standard practice and does not imply that a particular division did not take full part in the campaign.⁸

The original D-Day objective of taking Caen was another month away from success. In the early days after D-Day the 2nd Battalion regrouped after its substantial losses during the landing and took no part in the initial battles for Caen, as these early battles were primarily fought by follow-up units. On D+1 the battalion received 3 officers and 60 other rank reinforcements. This did not bring the battalion back up to strength but it was usual for infantry Regiments to operate below strength during the campaign.⁹

Following D-Day, the 2nd Battalion's first action was the attack on the Chateau de la Londe at first light on 28th June, so the battalion had had some time out of the front line. This action formed the battalion's subordinate role in Operation Epsom, the wider attempt to secure the encirclement of Caen, which resulted in high casualty figures for those at the forefront, primarily 43rd, 15th Scottish and 11th Armoured Divisions,¹⁰ but matched by greater losses among German forces. The offensive fought by the three assaulting divisions, was a 'grim rather than a spectacular battle'¹¹ and was halted after casualties mounted, particularly at Hill 112.

At the strongly defended Chateau de la Londe, the 2nd Battalion was to attack on the right, with the Suffolk Regiment attacking on the left, going through the South Lancashire Regiment. The South Lancashire Regiment had taken La Londe originally on 22nd June but a strong counter-attack forced a withdrawal. Now two battalions were

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ For example, Nightingale revealed that 50th Division was fulfilling a holding role for a month from 18th June, p.191.

⁹ Lt Col Martin Lindsay DSO, *So Few Got Through* (London, 1946) p.67. Between the 8th and 23rd August 1944 Lindsay's battalion lost 15 officers and 150 other ranks and had just one subaltern left – the 4 rifle companies were amalgamated into one. In Sydney Jary's *18 Platoon*, between 14th and 18th July, 12 officers and 479 reinforcements were received and the battalion was still under-strength.

¹⁰ In Max Hastings *Overlord* p.143, he argues that Montgomery's plan to capture and encircle Caen was admirable, but it went wrong in its execution.

¹¹ Belfield and Essame, *The Battle for Normandy*, p.107.

ordered to put in a new attack. The East Yorkshire and Suffolk battalions faced 5th Company 192nd Panzer Grenadier Regiment, over 30 tanks, a platoon of engineers and Headquarters company of 22nd Panzer Regiment.¹² During the advance, 'B' Company of the 2nd Battalion would be on the right, with 'A' Company on the left and 'C' Company as follow-up. The start line, a track parallel to Le Landel wood, was under fire and casualties were taken immediately. As both companies reached their objectives, 'A' Company was counter-attacked by tanks and infantry and some were taken prisoner, although most escaped in the confusion. The chaotic nature of events at this time is reflected in the different versions given by the interviewees.¹³ It is impossible to gain a coherent idea of the movement of the battle, yet the different accounts give a good insight into the reality of coming up against German tanks with no anti-tank guns immediately available to deploy against them, and of the scale of the casualties incurred. For example, Lt Jim Fetterly, who was awarded the Military Cross in this action, wrote of his platoon's role:

I counted five enemy tanks in our front. We were aware that if they broke through there was little to stop them from going right to the beach. I sent a Sergeant back to report our position at the Chateau and to have artillery do a shoot on our front. They did. When the guns opened up, the ground shook and sod flew. None of us expected to survive. I lost my revolver and broke the glass on my watch. I counted twelve fighting men and all others nearby were either wounded or dead.¹⁴

Although the War Diary states that Fetterly 'personally accounted for a German tank commander who was unwise enough to call upon his platoon to surrender', Fetterly himself made no mention of this in his letters; instead he referred to the capture of the tank, equipped with the new 88mm gun, which, he was told, later went on display in Trafalgar Square.¹⁵

¹² McNish, *Iron Division*, p.108.

¹³ For example, the interviews with Clive Crauford, and Alf Ackroyd, and letters from Jim Fetterly.

¹⁴ Letter from Jim Fetterly to author 10th March 2000.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Both companies, with the assistance of 'C' and 'D' Companies, took their objectives and the Chateau, which was considered the key to the road to Caen, now remained in British hands. For the 2nd Battalion, having faced a number of German tanks, with no armour support, the successful attack was certainly a significant achievement, albeit at the expense of heavy casualties. The War Diary recorded: 'Later, this strongpoint was reputed to be the "bloodiest square mile in the whole of Normandy"'.¹⁶ The 2nd Battalion suffered losses of 98 killed or wounded in this action, bringing the total for June to 368, which equalled almost a complete turnover of the four rifle companies. In the Regimental History, Lt Col Dickson paid particular tribute to the bravery of the signallers and the stretcher-bearers,¹⁷ whose role necessitated their spending long periods out in the open, and who were therefore at additional risk of injury. Dickson also wrote a personal note of recognition to Pte Hart, a stretcher-bearer, thanking him for his efforts¹⁸ which read 'Well done boy! You have done your best and helped us, saved many mens (sic) lives. Thank you for all you have done to help us. Good luck'.

The Chateau de la Londe action was arduous and had taken its toll on those involved, both mentally and physically. Indeed, McNish describes it as 'some of the Division's costliest fighting'.¹⁹ As a result of the strength of opposition and the casualties incurred during the fighting, the Corps Commander called off the planned Operation Aberlour against a series of defended villages including la Bijude and Authie which was to involve 9th Brigade and 9th Canadian Brigade.

The experience of the 2nd Battalion at the Chateau was similar to that of the other two battalions of the Brigade, the 1st South Lancashire Regiment and 1st Suffolk Regiment, and the latter now has a memorial to its infantrymen at the site, having 'lost 161 killed,

¹⁶ War Diary 28th June 1944.

¹⁷ Nightingale, *The East Yorkshire Regiment*, pp.187-188. Major General G. C. A. Gilbert also paid tribute to the stretcher bearers, deeming them 'heroes' in his interview. SWWEC (2002-1696).

¹⁸ The Prince of Wales' Own Regimental Museum. Written on a Field Medical card and dated 21st July 1944.

¹⁹ McNish, *Iron Division*, p.108.

wounded and missing'. One Suffolk soldier wrote, 'of my platoon, which numbered 33 on D-Day, only five were left'.²⁰ The importance of this battle was also demonstrated later when Lt Col Dickson and his Second-in-Command, Renison, spent an afternoon going over the ground at the Chateau and looking at the difficulties of advancing through high corn. For both men, the Chateau's vital strategic importance for the Germans in holding up any advance towards Lebiesey or Caen could easily be seen. Although ultimately a successful action for the 2nd Battalion and the 1st Suffolk Regiment, existing Divisional histories concentrate only on the role carried out by the Suffolks, who captured the Chateau itself.²¹ This is due to a reliance within this literature, on the lengthy Regimental history published by the Suffolk Regiment,²² which inevitably leads readers to assume that the 2nd Battalion played a minor role in the action. This demonstrates how regiments who issued detailed histories portraying their battalions in an uncritical and successful light, could perpetuate this same image through subsequent Divisional histories, while those who produced brief histories are overlooked. Scarfe concluded that the battalion history of the South Lancashire Regiment was 'a regrettably naked narrative'²³ and there is a similar lack of information regarding the 2nd Battalion, leading to its being relegated to a subordinate position within existing Divisional literature.

At this stage in the Normandy campaign, it was already clear that the German forces had recovered from the shock of the initial assault and were, as Lt Col Hastings described, 'fighting to the death'²⁴ amongst ideal country for the defenders, with its thick leafy cover, high hedgerows and deep ditches. In such close country, 'tanks were

²⁰ Private R. Harris, B Company, 1st Suffolk Regiment, from Philip Warner, *The D-Day Landings*, p.187.

²¹ Scarfe, *Assault Division*, McNish, *Iron Division*.

²² Colonel W. N. Nicholson CMG DSO, *The History of the Suffolk Regiment 1928-1946* (Ipswich, undated.) Naturally more emphasis is placed on the battalion which captured the chateau, rather than on the battalion which took part in the fighting in the lead-up to its capture.

²³ Scarfe, *Assault Division*, p.182.

²⁴ Lt Col R. H. W. S. Hastings p.5. Short Account of 6th Bn Ops. June 1944. Green Howards Regtal Museum. Ref M58(a).

useless except to hold off enemy counter-attacks'.²⁵ Although the initial weeks following the invasion were spent strengthening and extending the beachhead, there was still insufficient space for the necessary construction of a number of airfields, and General Montgomery's lack of progress territorially, attracted criticism from senior airmen. He faced increasing pressure to take Caen and hence head south to the open country known as the Caen-Falaise Plain.²⁶

Straight after the Chateau battle, the battalion moved back to Mathieu (code-named Gazelle) to rest and receive reinforcements. Here, the men were able to take their first showers and change their clothing. On the 7th July the battalion moved back to a wood to the west of the Chateau, in support of the 9th Brigade and 59th Division who were to advance towards Caen. This position had been under shellfire since D-Day and the area was littered with dead cattle. Memories of the dead animals are a feature of both the oral interviews, and secondary literature²⁷ on the period. The following day, 'A' and 'D' Companies entered Epron, where close-quarter fighting took place, and 73 POWs were taken, enabling 59th Division to proceed. The operation was used later as a cloth exercise for NCOs as it demonstrated the benefits of approaching from a flank rather than incurring the casualties suffered by the 59th Division as they attacked frontally over a crest. Some authors have argued that a lack of infiltration on the part of the Allied armies, a skill much-employed by the Germans, was one of the problems hampering the progress of the Allies.²⁸ Yet here is an example of a silent attack which involved taking six or eight German posts from the rear in what appears from the primary sources to be a routine operation. The battalion did not take part in the last push to Caen, Operation Charnwood, which was led by other units of the 3rd British Division as well as the 3rd

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.6. Sydney Jary in *18 Platoon*, described Normandy as 'a defender's paradise', p.6.

²⁶ Belfield and Essame, *The Battle for Normandy*, p.98.

²⁷ For example, interviews with Wilf Todd, Arthur Smith and Dennis Hallam. Other sources include the letters of Hugh Bone IWM, Frank and Joan Shaw, *We Remember D-Day*, and Robin Neillands, *The Battle of Normandy 1944*.

²⁸ Hastings, *Overlord*, p.316.

Canadian Division, although at this point other divisions, including the 59th, were only just becoming involved in their first action in Normandy. The losses incurred by the 2nd Battalion to this point were by no means unusual in terms of the Normandy campaign and were due to the campaign having entered its second phase, that of a ‘full-blooded war of attrition’²⁹ to wear down the German forces.

Following the fall of Caen, the 2nd Battalion moved to the east side of the River Orne in support of 6th Airborne Division. Renison wrote of Field Marshal Montgomery’s plan, that Montgomery intended to move ‘all his armour over to the left where the country was open and rolling in an attempt to break the Caen hinge by an attack between Caen and Troarn directed on Bourguébus’.³⁰ At just outside Escoville, at Le Mesnil, the battalion had a good view of the landing sites of the gliders that had landed on D-Day. Their arrival is a feature both of the oral interviews and secondary literature on D-Day, as the sight acted as a boost to morale.

On 18th July the battalion attacked the village of Touffreville, known to the battalion as ‘Toffeeville’, supported by a squadron of tanks from the 13th/18th Hussars. This village was on a direct road to Paris and the action formed part of a larger Divisional attack with 8th Brigade on the right, and 9th Brigade on the left of the battalion, the latter heading towards Troarn. The attack was preceded by an aerial bombardment, an artillery concentration, and was followed by a tank attack by 7th, 11th and Guards Armoured Division. ‘It was hoped that the armour would effect a complete breakthrough’.³¹

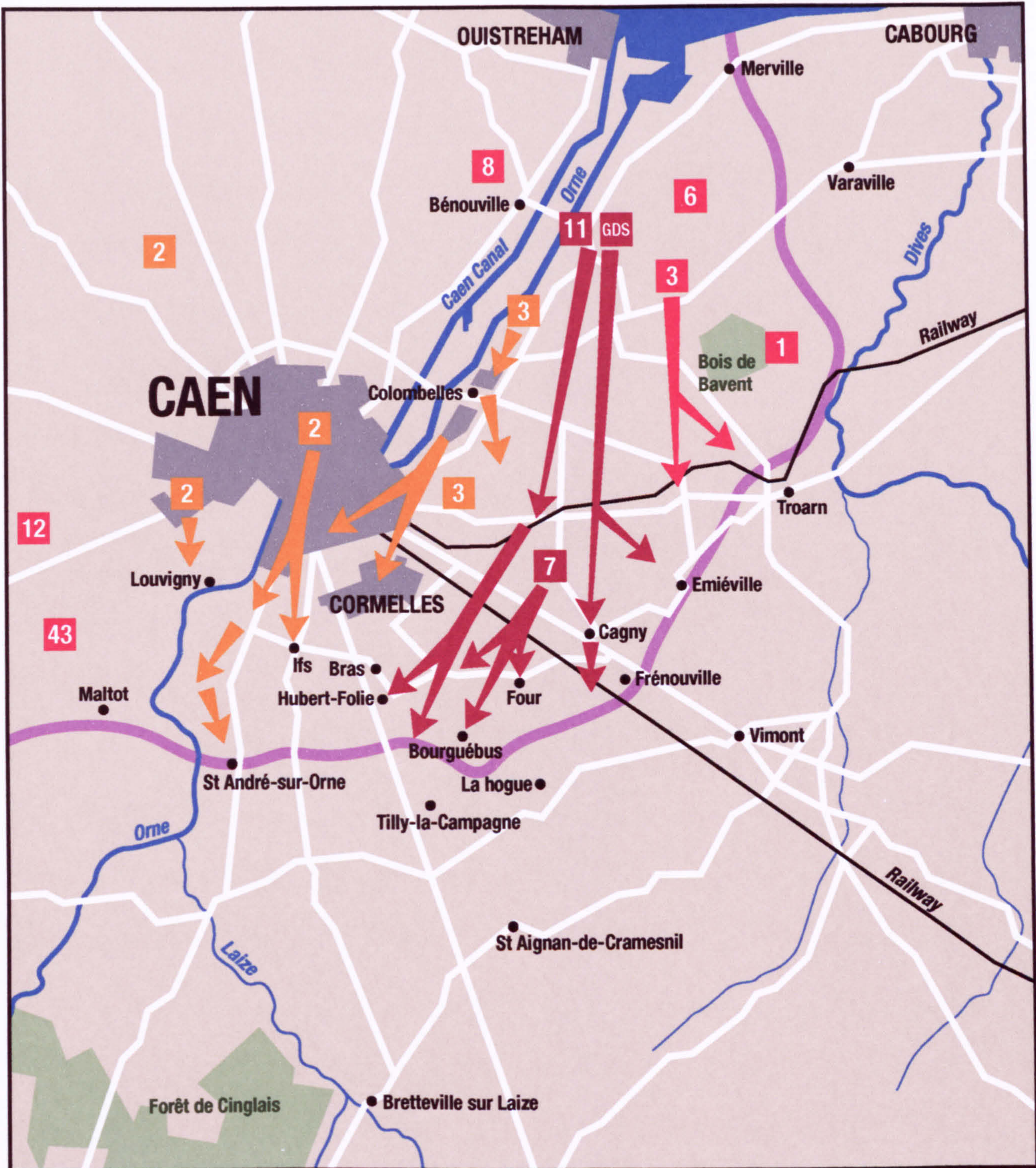
²⁹ Belfield and Essame, *The Battle for Normandy*, p.131.

³⁰ Lt Col Renison’s memoir, p.21.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp.22-23.

Operation Goodwood

18th-28th July 1944



■ British Armoured Division ■ British Infantry Division ■ Canadian Infantry Division
— Limit of Allied Advance

MAP PREPARED BY A. CRAGGS

The battalion's attack formed part of Operation Goodwood whereby the three armoured divisions would head south, astride the Caen-Falaise road, tying up all the available German armour.³² This was the largest operation launched by the British during the Normandy campaign and involved about half the 2nd Army.³³ The aerial bombardment created massive craters south-east of the villages of Banneville, Sanneville and Touffreville, which caused a lot of difficulty for the infantry. The Suffolk and South Lancashire Regiments made swifter progress due to the success of the aerial bombing. However the bombs had missed Touffreville and the German forces there were unscathed and ready to mount a strong defence.³⁴ 'B' and 'C' Companies of the 2nd Battalion came under fire from the start and began taking casualties, and the opposition was dug-in to a number of well-camouflaged weapon pits. When 'B' Company was held up, after Major Modin, the Company Commander had been killed, 'C' Company went round the right of the enemy to approach from the flank and 'this they accomplished with considerable dash, bombing their way from slit to slit'.³⁵ During his interview, Major Crauford was more honest about the quality of the opposition 'C' Company faced in these trenches: 'it was another one of these rotten battalions consisting of a few pressed men from all the occupied places in Europe' and once captured 'they all came out saying "me Austrian, me no German, me Czech, me no German". One of them actually had the effrontery to say to me "me no German, me American". That takes a bit of beating'.³⁶ Here then, is an example of an interview which qualifies the unusually effusive vocabulary of Lt Col Renison.

Although Touffreville was taken by 6pm, the strong German resistance resulted in 104 casualties, which totalled the complement of one rifle company. As well as 90 POWs, a

³² David Fraser, *And We Shall Shock Them. The British Army in the Second World War* (London, 1983) p.333.

³³ Belfield and Essame, *The Battle for Normandy*, p.134.

³⁴ McNish, *Iron Division*, p.112.

³⁵ Lt Col Renison's memoir, p.24.

³⁶ Extract from interview with Clive Crauford 5th November 2000.

large quantity of German equipment was captured, including an enemy headquarters, complete with telephones and typewriters, which led Lt Col Renison to conclude that the opposition was at battalion strength, which probably accounted for the high battalion casualty figures. Lt Col Dickson argued that 'this battle was one of our hardest in every way'³⁷ and certainly it is clear this action was a successful one for the battalion, in that the objective was taken, and the battalion duly played the role asked of it within the wider operation.

Following the action in Touffreville, the battalion moved to the nearby brickworks, and came under constant shell and Nebelwerfer fire, which caused heavy casualties. The shellfire and wet weather affected morale, with the War Diary recording these 'made life dismal'.³⁸ This move was due to the dispositions of the other forces in the area and how they had fared in the last major push. The armour had been held up and 9th Brigade had not reached Troarn. The engagements of the battalion to date typified the small but steady gains of the British Army in Normandy as a whole. Nowhere were huge gains being made in terms of territory; rather there was a series of close-quarter battles across the region.³⁹ Operation Goodwood had ground to a halt, with the armoured divisions facing strong anti-tank defences, supported by Tiger tanks, and lacking air support due to the low cloud. The ensuing losses, including around 200 tanks and 1,500 casualties on the first day alone,⁴⁰ caused congestion to build and the advance halted after six miles. Despite the Allies' best efforts, at this point 'the Germans appeared intact, even aggressive'.⁴¹ Although the 2nd Battalion's small part had been successful and the Division had protected the eastern flank of the armoured advance, overall the operation in terms of significant progress, was a failure, succeeding only in holding German

³⁷ Nightingale, *The East Yorkshire Regiment*, p.199.

³⁸ War Diary 20-25th July 1944. Sydney Jary wrote in *18 Platoon* 'Morale was always higher during an attack. Sitting around being shelled is not an occupation to be recommended', p.49.

³⁹ Fraser, *And We Shall Shock Them*, p.331.

⁴⁰ Belfield and Essame, *The Battle for Normandy*, p.141.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.335.

armour east of the Orne but not striking either a decisive blow or enabling the armour to make significant gains. At this point, major operations were led by armour, deemed replaceable, as the shortage of infantry reinforcements became increasingly apparent.⁴²

The holding of the bulk of the German armour east of the Orne, facilitated the successful American break-out during Operation Cobra, which aimed to capture St Lo, Coutances, then head south towards Vire and Mortain, as well as Avranches, and from there to take Cherbourg.⁴³ By 25th July 645 German tanks faced the British and Canadians, while 190 faced the US troops.⁴⁴

At the end of July, Operation Bluecoat was launched south of Caumont, involving XXX Corps and VIII Corps in a slow yet constant progress through central Normandy, which did not involve the 3rd Division in the initial stages. Six divisions were involved at the start of the offensive, yet the men of the infantry divisions were already tired, and once again the battles were to prove 'a tedious and costly business'.⁴⁵ On 31st July the 2nd Battalion returned across the Orne, to Beuville, where a large draft of reinforcements arrived from the 7th Battalion East Yorkshire Regiment and 'magnificent stuff they afterwards proved themselves to be'.⁴⁶ The 7th Battalion was not the only battalion to be disbanded during the campaign, as manpower deficiencies necessitated frequent re-organisations. Divisions too, met the same fate. Several, including the 8th, 12th, 23rd and 66th were disbanded in 1940, and others, including the 38th, 45th, 76th and 80th, existed until 1944.

The 2nd Battalion then came under orders to move to Mauger, on the extreme right of the British 2nd Army, to take up its role in Operation Bluecoat in the breakout of the British lines towards Beny Bocage. Lt Col Renison recorded that he was aware of Patton's left hook advance, although 'as yet we certainly didn't realise the implications

⁴² Hastings, *Overlord*, p.238.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp.249-50.

⁴⁴ McNish, *Iron Division*, p.113.

⁴⁵ Belfield and Essame, *The Battle for Normandy*, p.186.

⁴⁶ Lt Col Renison's memoir, p.39.

of what was happening, nor how the grouping of the German forces was playing the game that Monty had planned for'.⁴⁷ It seems that ideas about the grand strategy never reached the battalion level, although later on in the campaign, in Germany, the Divisional Commander, Major General Whistler, addressed all the officers in the battalion about the forthcoming battle for Bremen.

On the 11th August, the battalion took part in a Brigade attack along the Vire-Tinchebray road, with US troops on the right and 185th Brigade on the left. In this instance 8th Brigade was the third of the three brigades to be committed to battle. During the previous three days the initial advances had been made by 185th and 9th Brigades. In this instance, the 2nd Battalion War Diary records that the enemy, although not strong in numbers, put up a determined defence. Lt Col Renison's memoir provides a valuable insight into the difficulties of advancing in this area. The German troops were paratroopers 'and were adept at the hide and seek game amongst the high hedges'.⁴⁸ As darkness fell, the two sides were so close that they were 'literally lobbing grenades over the hedge at each other'.⁴⁹ The move towards the encirclement of the Germans, which would culminate in the eventual closure of the Falaise Gap on 21st August, had commenced, and the Germans were putting up strong resistance. Having reached la Salière Grande, the troops discovered the area to be heavily mined and booby trapped. These areas tended to lead to high casualties depending on the type of mines used – the 'schu-mine' was particularly difficult to avoid as it was wooden and tended to cause injuries to the feet and lower limbs.⁵⁰ Two Lieutenants from the battalion were killed here and 'B' Company lost all its stretcher bearers to injury, making it difficult to recover casualties. A counter-attack on the two leading companies, 'A' and 'B', came to nothing, which led the recorder of the War Diary to conclude 'it was no doubt part of

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.41.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.48.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.48.

⁵⁰ Interview with Wilf Todd 4th April 1999 and recollections of Brian Guy, 246 Field Company RE.

the enemy's delaying action, rather than an attempt to regain and hold lost ground'.⁵¹

This was a well-known German tactic, used to good effect in this campaign, allowing the main part of the German forces to withdraw.

At this stage, Renison argued 'no-one quite knew the reason for our being there until later on when we found out that the German armoured counter-attack toward Montain and Arromanches was at its height and there was a considerable danger of Patton's slender life line being cut'.⁵² The 3rd Division was ordered to attack southwards to draw off the German forces and enable the Americans to continue their advance unhindered by additional German units. The two major British and Canadian offensives of this period, Operation Totalize on 7th August and Tractable on 14th August, both towards Falaise, did not involve the 3rd British Division and thereby the 2nd Battalion. Both operations progressed slowly, permitting German forces to escape encirclement and the Canadian 1st Army has attracted criticism for the slowness of the advance.⁵³ Secondary literature on the battle for Normandy, for reasons of clarity and length, focuses on these two main operations and does not refer to the smaller-scale actions of the British infantry during this period.

On the 13th August, still proceeding along the Vire-Tinchebray road, 'C' Company patrols discovered an 88mm gun which was fired on and damaged, preventing its removal. Lt Col Renison specifically mentioned the action of Clive Crauford as 'against all orders for Company Commanders',⁵⁴ he crawled forward to the edge of the wood to discover the exact location of the gun. This is an example of officer bravery and leading by example, although it was not mentioned during Crauford's interview. That evening, the battalion received orders that a push was to be made to keep contact with the withdrawing Germans, which involved the battalion in an attack on a ridge, with a

⁵¹ War Diary 11th August 1944.

⁵² Lt Col Renison's memoir, p.44.

⁵³ Hastings, *Overlord*, p.305.

⁵⁴ Lt Col Renison's memoir, p.52.

squadron of tanks in support. 'A' and 'D' Companies took the ridge, although there was only one officer left with 'D' Company and 'A' Company had no officers at all, the leadership having devolved upon CSM Webb who 'did a fine job of work'.⁵⁵ Clearing up remnants of the enemy continued all night. The Adjutant, Captain Ron Brown, captured one German, and the War Diary makes specific mention of Major 'Banger' King who 'came up on the ridge with the rations in carriers almost as soon as the leading troops, and throughout the night toured the area, ensuring that all were fed'.⁵⁶ 'C' Company captured a German officer whose nominal company roll displayed fifty names, nearly all of whom had been killed or captured.

This action showed how the advantage lay with the defenders in Normandy. A small group of well-sited Germans could hold-up the advance of a battalion quite easily,⁵⁷ indeed in this area the 1st Suffolk Regiment had suffered around one hundred casualties as the Germans were holding a high ridge with a clear view of all the approaches and were able to accurately direct their shellfire. The Regimental History of the Suffolk Regiment for this period, recorded that the attack of the 2nd Battalion had stalled early on, while the Suffolks 'undeterred', had 'gone on, constantly opposed by enemy fire; but coolly and efficiently dealing with the firers'.⁵⁸ However the War Diary of the 2nd Battalion made no mention of the attack 'stalling', merely confirming that the ridge objective of the battalion had been successfully taken by nightfall. The Suffolks' natural Regimental pride and competitiveness is further reflected in the Commanding Officer, Lt Col Gough's letter, in the Suffolks' History declaring that he had been told the 3rd Division was the best in France and the 1st Suffolk Regiment the best in the Division.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.54.

⁵⁶ War Diary 13th August 1944.

⁵⁷ Lt Col R. H. W. S. Hastings wrote, 'the individual German behind a hedge with a spandau was a difficult man to dislodge', p.7. Also Belfield and Essame, *The Battle for Normandy*, p.186 provided a description of the various German delaying tactics.

⁵⁸ Nicholson, *The History of the Suffolk Regiment*, p.121.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.123.

The collapse of the German defence in this area and their rapid withdrawal came as a surprise to Brigade HQ, who now ordered the 2nd Battalion to advance by carrier to occupy Montsecret and Fresnes by first light on 16th August. There was no defence of the area and the few remaining Germans surrendered. The area was littered both with a large amount of German transport and equipment. It was here that the war temporarily left the 2nd Battalion out of the general advance. Lt Col Renison wrote: 'the war was already leaving us far behind as the battle of Normandy raced on to the climax of Falaise'.⁶⁰

At the close of the battle for Normandy, the casualty figures totalled 300,000 losses for the Germans and almost 210,000 for the Allies, and to the British during this period had fallen 'some of the hardest and least obviously rewarding parts of the fighting'.⁶¹

The troops remained based at La Miniere from the 20th August, where they trained in river assault crossings, close co-operation with tanks, and exercises on a platoon and company basis. Fifty new reinforcements arrived, followed by a further 144 men on 26th August. These reinforcements came as a result of the break-up of 59th Division and one of the Brigades of 50th Division. Lt Col Renison discovered later that these troops successfully occupied 'a surprising number of the higher ranks in the battalion'.⁶² At this point in the campaign the 2nd Battalion was over-strength, an unusual position and one that would not last through the forthcoming actions. A Reinforcement Company was therefore temporarily established, commanded by two officers of the former 7th Battalion East Yorkshire Regiment. Of course, the fact that so many reinforcements were needed shows that for long periods the battalion fought understrength.

Based at Barou-Norrey-en-Auge, the battalion carried out further searches for German vehicles and equipment, and Lt Col Renison wrote: 'the battle of Normandy was over –

⁶⁰ Lt Col Renison's memoir, p.61.

⁶¹ Belfield and Essame, *The Battle for Normandy*, p.219.

⁶² Lt Col Renison's memoir, p.68.

we expected the battle for the Seine to be ahead'.⁶³ An opposed crossing of the Seine proved unnecessary as the Germans had been routed at Falaise and had not yet reorganised. By now, Renison concluded, 'we were already over 100 miles from the battle'⁶⁴ and the Divisional Commander, 'Bolo' Whistler lamented, 'it is almost unbelievable to be out of the battle to this extent. It feels hundreds of miles away'.⁶⁵

It was at this point that Major King wrote to his recuperating batman in hospital:⁶⁶ 'we are having a so called rest. At any rate it's a change not to be hearing guns all day and night. Dunno how long it will last, but I can't believe they would allow an attack to go anywhere without us taking a prominent part in it'. King considered the battalion had seen its fair share of action up till that point and was generally at the forefront of the advances.

At the beginning of September, the battalion had a long move by transport to east of Les Andelys on the Seine, 25 miles south-east of Rouen, to St Jean de Frenelle. By this point the battalion was so far back, that on the move up they passed RHUs⁶⁷ and a General Hospital, which are usually found well to the rear of the front line. However, the 2nd Battalion was not the only unit to be left behind.⁶⁸ The logistical difficulties meant that not all units could advance at the same time and there was an overwhelming need for more port and road capacity,⁶⁹ primarily for the delivery of fuel. This period was used for serious training, including a 17 mile route march, drill, patrolling and practice on a newly built range.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.62.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.66.

⁶⁵ Sir John Smyth VC, *Bolo Whistler. The Life of General Sir Lashmer Whistler* (London, 1967) pp.124-125. Diary entry for 30th August 1944.

⁶⁶ Letter from Major King to Blenkhorn dated 29th August 1944.

⁶⁷ RHU – Reinforcement Holding Unit.

⁶⁸ In *So Few Got Through*, Martin Lindsay complained, 'I greatly fear that the war in Germany may be over while we are back here and out of it' in a diary entry 20th September 1944 p.87.

⁶⁹ Fraser, *And We Shall Shock Them*, p.340.

Belgium.

After a brief stop at Soignies in Belgium, the battalion received orders to cross the Escaut canal after 9th Brigade, to help establish a bridgehead and widen the salient currently held by the Allies. This canal crossing was the Division's only concerted battle between mid-August and the taking of Overloon in mid-October.⁷⁰ The role of the 3rd Division was to cover the right flank of XXX Corps, who were in turn responsible for the relief of the airborne divisions. This action formed part of the larger Market Garden operation, which was an attempt to cross the Rhine and go on to threaten the Ruhr. 'A' Company of the 2nd Battalion crossed the canal by assault boat as the bridge was damaged, while 'B' Company crossed by bridge once it was repaired, fired on by machine guns. Around five machine guns on the canal bank were then silenced by 'A' and 'B' Companies. Much of the resistance had come from an SS Officer Cadet Unit who were, 'determined to die for their Fuhrer' according to the Commanding Officer, Lt Col N. J. Dickson, who added 'see that you assist them in their determination'.⁷¹ On the morning of 20th September, 32 of the officer cadets surrendered. Despite successfully crossing the canal, the battalion effectively played only a minor role in the ill-fated but newsworthy Market Garden operation, which was dominated by US and British airborne divisions, with XXX, VIII and XII Corps, and not I Corps, forming the ground troops.

Holland.

On the 26th September, with the Germans withdrawing the previous afternoon, the battalion arrived in Gemert in Holland, and the troops received a tremendous welcome. The Regimental History recorded this entry into Holland as 'unspectacular from a military point of view',⁷² since the Germans would patently fight a series of delaying

⁷⁰ Scarfe, *Assault Division*, pp.140-141.

⁷¹ From the *Regimental History of 2nd Battalion The East Yorkshire Regiment 6th June 1944 to 8th May 1945* p.16.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.17.

actions, using the canal system as a barrier, until a new line could be established using reinforcements and the remaining troops available after the closure of the Falaise Gap. Therefore there would be no swift advances or capitalising on quick gains, it was to be a return to the stubborn defence by the Germans witnessed earlier in the campaign. Wilf Todd remembered seeing an American Division passing through, heading towards Overloon,⁷³ 'While we were at Gemert an American armoured division came up through our lines with sirens going and headlights on the tanks, in usual American fashion. Three days later they were back, with the Germans chasing them!'⁷⁴ The withdrawal of the 7th US Armoured Division, which had severely under-estimated the numbers of German troops they would be facing,⁷⁵ left the ensuing battles to be fought predominantly by the infantry, an 'unenviable task'.⁷⁶

October saw the 2nd Battalion involved in some of the heaviest fighting since the end of June, amid continual rain and mud. On the 9th October the battalion was ordered to prepare for an attack on the town of Overloon, which was 'the beginning of an operation by 8 Corps to clear the enemy salient west of the R. Maas'⁷⁷ and was codenamed Operation Aintree. While the 3rd Division was to tie up all possible German forces, three other divisions would then attempt to cut off any enemy retreat to Roermond and Venlo.⁷⁸ Heavy rain⁷⁹ put back the attack until noon on the 12th and the plan was that the 2nd Battalion would proceed on the left, while the 1st Suffolk Regiment would attack on the right. The East Yorkshiremen had to advance through woods to cross the

⁷³ The American 7th Armoured Division suffered 450 casualties trying to clear this area west of the Maas before it was withdrawn. After taking over the area, 3rd Division lost 3 times as many men in clearing Venraij and Overloon. McNish, *Iron Division*, p.119, Scarfe, *Assault Division*, p.157.

⁷⁴ Extract from interview with Wilf Todd 4th April 1999.

⁷⁵ A. Korthals Altes and N. K. C. A. In't Veld, *The Forgotten Battle. Overloon and the Maas Salient 1944-45* (Staplehurst, 1995). The US troops thought they would be facing 2-3,000 Germans, in actuality there were 15,000.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.72.

⁷⁷ 2nd Battalion War Diary 9th October.

⁷⁸ Scarfe, *Assault Division*, p.157.

⁷⁹ In *A Canloan Officer*, R. F. Fendick described the weather while at Overloon as 'raw and cold and wet and one could never get properly dried out. The woods were sodden and dripping and the ground was little more than a bog'. Unpublished memoir SWWEC (2001-1255) p.123.

Vierlingsbeek road, north and east of Overloon.⁸⁰ The night before the attack, Lt Col Renison wrote of a typical incidence of 'chickenshit'⁸¹ whereby an unattended candle set fire to a barn. Despite it being nearly midnight, Brigade HQ insisted on a Court of Enquiry straightaway, and Major King had to listen to the evidence. The outcome was forwarded to Brigade that same night, but nothing came of it. The unfortunate culprit, a platoon sergeant, was killed in the next day's action.

The following morning, the 2nd Battalion's leading companies, 'C' and 'D', were held up by the enemy in the 'dog-shaped' woods, while suffering shelling and mortar fire. Although each of these forward companies had a troop of tanks in support, the armour, which also included flame-throwing Crocodiles, faltered due to the high number of mines, which in turn created difficulties for the infantry, as the attack had been planned around tank back-up. Despite discovering a large number of mines on the left, the forward companies started sending back German POWs. 'D' Company reached the south-west corner of the woods by 2pm but could not advance further, as they had lost their officers and CSM, and were being commanded by a corporal.⁸² 'B' Company was sent to push through the remaining men of 'D' Company and advance further, while 'C' Company was fighting on the edge of another large wood south of the town. The difficulty experienced by 'D' Company is one example of an attack stalling when the leaders became casualties, but there are many such examples involving other British units during this campaign, leading Timothy Harrison Place to conclude correctly 'most men did not command sufficient initiative and military knowledge to make useful battlefield decisions when beyond immediate contact with a commander'.⁸³ However the lack of military knowledge was as a result of men generally being unaware of objectives unless they were officers or NCOs.

⁸⁰ Scarfe, *Assault Division*, p.160.

⁸¹ Paul Fussell, *Wartime - Understanding and Behaviour in the Second World War* (New York, 1989).

⁸² It was common for an advance to stall when a platoon became leaderless. Martin Lindsay, in *So Few Got Through* wrote 'our experience is that once the leaders get hit, the attack pegs out', p.215.

⁸³ Timothy Harrison Place, *Military Training in the British Army 1940-44. From Dunkirk to D-Day*, p.54.

The 2nd Battalion appears to defy another of Place's arguments that too much reliance was placed on advancing under a barrage, as there are examples in the War Diary both of this type of advance, and also other occasions where the companies relied on their own firepower, particularly in flanking attacks. In 'set-piece attacks' there would be a fireplan drawn up before the action. However during the attacks themselves, companies would often be in situations where artillery support was not feasible, due to the location, or perhaps being too close to the enemy. This ability to assess a changing situation and act accordingly, particularly by Lt Col Renison, perhaps accounts for the battalion's success in gaining its objectives, and holding them, throughout the campaign. Certainly I would take issue with Place's argument that 'firepower made tactical skill unnecessary'.⁸⁴ Although firepower was immensely important to the successful prosecution of the campaign, tactical skill was an essential component in finishing a battle in the Allies' favour.⁸⁵ At some point the infantry will always have to advance to take and hold the ground and this was often accomplished without using 'the artillery as a crutch'.⁸⁶ In contrast to Place's view of the infantry, Harry Smithson wrote:

once on the move I only went to ground when under extreme small arms fire, hit the ground, roll over, or crawl to a good position and begin to fire, then move by ones, and groups, always covered by withering fire of the others. It was the only way, otherwise one could have stayed there all day, or weeks, like the 1914-18 war.⁸⁷

By 6pm the 1st Suffolk Regiment had two companies within Overloon and the fighting shortly ceased. The Germans continued to shell and mortar the 2nd Battalion positions all night. During the subsequent two days, both 185th and 9th Brigades continued 'mopping up' activities around the town and nearby woods, demonstrating that it was

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.174.

⁸⁵ However, due to casualties in experienced platoon commanders and NCOs, skill in tactics would be affected, with more reliance on firepower, according to Martin Lindsay, *So Few Got Through*, p.224.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Harry Smithson's recollections. His rank during the campaign is not known, although he served in the Army for 7 years, reaching the rank of CSM.

the overall quality of the troops within a division that counted, rather than a single battalion. The casualties to the 2nd Battalion in this action totalled 49.

On the 16th October, the battalion received fresh orders to attack Venraij, with themselves on the left and the 1st Suffolk Regiment on the right. Three supporting tanks of the Coldstream Guards became bogged down in the mud and the 1st Suffolk Regiment was held up by heavy mortar and machine gun fire. The 2nd Battalion came under Nebelwerfer fire and did not set off until 5pm, waiting for the Suffolks to advance. From Venraij, the battalion area was under observation and 'it was one of those cases of hanging about waiting with nothing to do under fire, when nerves get very strained'.⁸⁸ 'B' Company then crossed the stream and headed left, followed by the rest of the battalion which reached Brabander. Progress was slow as the tracks were difficult to follow and sniping in the vicinity 'made people rather jumpy in the dark'.⁸⁹

The following day the attack on Venraij continued, with 'C' Company on the left, heading for a road junction towards the north-east of the town, and 'A' Company on the right, making for the church and market square. 'D' Company would follow 'C', to cover the gap between the two forward companies. This is the classic set-piece battle with two companies forward, a procedure that Hastings argued too much reliance was placed upon.⁹⁰ Certainly the 2nd Battalion War Diary confirms this system formed the central practice followed by senior Regimental officers. However it was a system that appears to have worked for the battalion. During the advance, Brigade was informed of the good progress being made, but the battalion was told to wait because the 1st Suffolk Regiment and 185th Brigade needed to overcome opposition in their areas. Renison considered this hold-up an 'annoyance', but it demonstrates how swift advances could be checked by the British Army belief that all gains must be consolidated to prevent a successful counter-attack. If the battalion had carried on, then the possible gains could

⁸⁸ Lt Col Renison's memoir, p.118.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p.119.

⁹⁰ Hastings, *Overlord*, p.146.

have been considered 'spectacular', yet the military doctrine followed by the British Army at this time necessitated waiting for other units to catch up. The risk in terms of possible casualties outweighed any strategic gains at this point.

During the afternoon of the 17th, 'C' Company became held up but reached the objective, and 'A' Company entered the town and began the dangerous task of fighting from house-to-house. As it started to become dark, 'D' Company, under Capt Reg Rutherford, had also reached the town and decided to push on past their objective, reaching the town centre before any other troops of the battalion, in the knowledge that 'A' Company had become held up before the market square. During the night German patrols continued to enter the town and 'D' Company troops found themselves engaged in continued fighting until 4am. By first light the remaining Germans had withdrawn and the battle was over, at the cost of nine 'other ranks' killed, forty-one, including one officer, wounded, and eleven men missing.⁹¹ The interviewees recall the action in Venraij was particularly intense, with all their training coming into play.⁹²

This Operation, named Aintree, provided a good example of the methods of attack adopted by the British infantry during the campaign. It was usual procedure for Divisional level attacks to involve two Brigades while the other was held in reserve, allowing the men of one Brigade to have some measure of rest,⁹³ while all the battalions involved in the two attacking Brigades, worked in concert to achieve the overall objective. To capture Venraij, 185th Brigade had been ordered to attack the north side of the town, at Brabander, while 8th Brigade had advanced from the west to attack the southern side of Venraij. Although the 2nd Battalion was the first to have platoons entering Venraij, this achievement was only possible because three other battalions were engaged around the town at the same time. During the battles for Overloon and Venraij

⁹¹ High casualty rates can be found in most infantry battalions serving in this campaign. P. E. G. Balfour of the Scots Guards wrote 'every time I see an infantry battalion I know well, I am appalled at the number of new faces' in a letter to 'Ma' 6th November 1944 (SWWEC 99.90).

⁹² For example, interviews with Wilf Todd and Peter Brown.

⁹³ Scarfe, *Assault Division*, p.181.

every battalion of the Division had been involved at some point and the casualties overall proved heavy.⁹⁴ The Commander of VIII Corps, Lieutenant General O'Connor, wrote congratulating the 3rd Division troops at the cessation of these actions on their 'very fine performance',⁹⁵ singling out 185th Brigade for particular praise. Scarfe argued that 8th Brigade deserved similar praise for making their own advance without the anticipated armoured support.⁹⁶ The Divisional Commander described the troops of 3rd Division during this period of fighting as 'desperately gallant soldiers with a wonderful spirit', having concluded that the conditions under which they had fought were 'quite bloody'.⁹⁷ The Overloon and Venraij battles were a prime example of battalions and at a higher level, brigades, working together to successfully take their objectives. The 2nd Battalion took a full part in the taking of both towns and it was a considerable achievement, as it was for all those serving in the 3rd Division during this period.

On the 19th October, Lt Col Dickson left the battalion due to continuing ill-health and Lt Col Renison took command. The same day the battalion moved to the St Servatius area of the town, relieving the 2nd Warwickshire Regiment. The area was under enemy shellfire and the mental institution of St Servatius needed to be evacuated as the water tanks had been destroyed. This planning was entrusted to Major 'Banger' King. There were sixteen large buildings connected by glass verandahs. On the 21st seven hundred patients were evacuated to St Anna's, a mile and a half away, then during the next four days two thousand two hundred refugees, stretcher cases and attendants were moved without casualty. This was an achievement considering that 'during the whole evacuation the battalion were in contact with the enemy, whose forward posts were only

⁹⁴ McNish, *Iron Division*, p.122.

⁹⁵ Quoted in Scarfe, *Assault Division*, p.172.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Sir John Smyth, *Bolo Whistler*, pp.135-136.

200 yards distant, and who had the main road approach to the asylum under fixed line fire from machine guns'.⁹⁸

During the following few days the battalion was put under the command of 11th Armoured Brigade, of 159th Division, and moved to the area Deurne / Griendtsveen to fill the gap between units of 11th Armoured Division during the German threat at Meijel. It fell to the 15th Scottish Division to put in a counter-attack against the Germans, supported by mortars of the 2nd Battalion. Although not outstanding work, being by its nature static and unglamorous, a letter from Major General G P B Roberts DSO MC to Major General L G Whistler DSO, Commander of 3rd British Infantry Division, spelled out his gratitude to the 2nd Battalion: 'They occupied an unpleasant area for rather a long time with never a grumble. They did some excellent patrols under most unpleasant conditions'.⁹⁹

On the 1st November, the battalion moved to relieve the 1st Hereford Regiment at Griendtsveen and remained there for a week, enduring bad weather and enforcing a system of standing patrols by day and roving patrols by night in an area of peat-bogs, marshes and flooded fields.¹⁰⁰ On the 10th, the battalion went into reserve at Overloon and rejoined the 3rd Division,¹⁰¹ however an incident on the 19th illustrates that there are no 'safe' areas within shelling distance of the front lines. A shell landed on 'A' Company's cook-house, causing three casualties, and then a sniper hit two soldiers in the same company, killing one.

On the 22nd November, the battalion moved into Smakt, which proved to be a heavily mined area, and discovered the bridge was rigged with a 500 kilogramme bomb. 'D' Company sent out a patrol to see if the village of Maashees had been evacuated and when it was found to be free of Germans, the rest of the Company followed, with 'C'

⁹⁸ Appendix A, Evacuation of Refugees from St Servatius, 2nd Bn War Diary 1st to 31st October 1944.

⁹⁹ Regimental History pp.18-19.

¹⁰⁰ Nightingale, *The East Yorkshire Regiment*, p.233.

¹⁰¹ It was not unusual for infantry battalions to be seconded to different Divisions, both for the 2nd Battalion and within the British Army as a whole.

Company moving up closer to the village and 'A' and 'B' Companies defending Smakt. 'We were rather amused a few nights later to hear the BBC announce that British forces had entered Maashees',¹⁰² remembered Lt Col Renison. The 2nd Battalion was fortunate to have reached the Maas without having to take part in further battles.

The months of December and January proved considerably quieter for the 2nd Battalion. This enforced rest was due to the need for the Allies to make the port of Antwerp serviceable and build up supplies ready for the push into the Ruhr, the industrial heartland of Germany. At the beginning of December the battalion went into reserve in Gemert and the War Diary records that each company held a dance before taking part in a march past on the 10th, with the salute being taken by the Divisional Commander, General Whistler. The following day, Field Marshal Montgomery visited the battalion to award decorations to five men of the battalion, including Military Crosses to Major Crauford and Lt Oates. In Gemert the battalion also received two large drafts of reinforcements which brought it back up to the War Establishment; some had served in the Chindit Expedition but there were also 'a lot of very young boys'.¹⁰³

Lt Col Renison also attended a Divisional meeting of Infantry Battalion Commanders to discuss the issue of leave to the UK. It was decided that the vacancies for leave would operate via ballot, with everyone who had served in the theatre for six months being eligible. Lt Col Renison was pleased that the allocation of vacancies allowed around one hundred for the battalion for the month of January, although 'what did cause a good deal of dissatisfaction later was the fact that many of the Lines of Communication units who didn't land until July or even August were getting leave before some of our D-Day survivors'.¹⁰⁴ The difficulty was due to the overall shortage of infantry available. Within the battalion Lt Col Renison decided that all who landed on D-Day would have leave first, with the remainder of the allocation decided chronologically, ensuring that those

¹⁰² Lt Col Renison's memoir, p.165.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.171.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.183.

who had served longest would go on leave first. The issue of leave was a very sensitive one, and Renison's option was considered the fairest.¹⁰⁵

On the 12th, the battalion moved to Haps, where the Brigade Commander issued more awards, and on the 21st of the month, the battalion returned to Smakt, with 'C' Company in Vierlingsbeek and 'D' Company in Maashees. At this time the Germans were attacking through the Ardennes in what later became known as 'the Battle of the Bulge'. Twenty German divisions, including twelve Panzer divisions, advanced westwards against a thinly held American front of four divisions on the 16th December. Lt Col Renison was on leave in Brussels and recorded that the local population felt that the Germans were returning, and the Allied forces would be unable to halt the advance. Although some British units were moved, in case they were needed to reinforce the American defence, the 3rd Division had no part to play in this battle, just as it had had no involvement in the clearing of the Scheldt to open the port of Antwerp.¹⁰⁶ In the event, the German advance petered out by Christmas and a successful counter-attack by American and British forces started at the end of December, which also did not involve the 2nd Battalion. On Christmas Day 'the enemy sent Xmas greetings in the form of 25 shells in Smakt area, no casualties'.¹⁰⁷ Some of 'A' Company's buildings caught fire and were ablaze all night and three enemy patrols crossed the Maas. The battalion had printed its own Christmas card¹⁰⁸ which was designed by the Intelligence section following a battalion competition and many troops sent them home to their families. Some of the interviewees had kept their cards, which showed a map of Europe and some of the main actions the battalion had been involved in. Arthur Oates disapproved of one of the actions being listed: 'The Xmas card was just a few of our spots . . . We

¹⁰⁵ Martin Lindsay, in *So Few Got Through*, wrote that leave vacancies for January and February, in his Division, were cut, as allocations for the Lines of Communication troops had been under-estimated. He called this explanation 'tactless' when the infantry considered themselves to be more in need of a leave at home, due to the arduous nature of their role, p.161.

¹⁰⁶ Scarfe, *Assault Division*, p.180.

¹⁰⁷ 2nd Battalion War Diary 25th December 1944.

¹⁰⁸ A copy of the card is at Appendix D.

thought they could have left off the beach landing scene though as it was hardly a pleasant topic and not fit for holiday times'.¹⁰⁹

The War Diary recorded that the forward companies sent a platoon at a time to the rear to enjoy a Christmas dinner. What the Diary did not relate, for it was outside its remit, was that Christmas on the Maas was a low time for many. This was contrary to Lt Col Renison's memoir, which recorded 'the spirit was grand everywhere'.¹¹⁰ Lt Jim Fetterly remembered being in charge of the festivities;

Christmas Day on the Maas was a sad time. Every man got a bottle of beer. Some did not drink. Each received a can of plum duff. My responsibility was to get as many men together as possible for an hour and a meal. After conversations a lad asked if I would sing a song. I'm no singer but I did the first verse of O Canada. Everyone cried including myself as we felt a bit lonely.¹¹¹

The Commander of the 3rd British Infantry Division sent out a Christmas message to the troops, particularly to the men of the Rifle Companies, of whom he wrote: 'In spite of heavy casualties, they have never failed to take their objective and retain it. Their determination and steadiness under fire has been beyond praise'.¹¹²

On the 28th December, six civilians crossed the Maas and gave information about German forces and how they were concentrated east of the river. Then, on the 1st January the Germans fired tracers and coloured lights 'presumably celebrating the New Year'.¹¹³ The Germans kept the battalion on alert by keeping up extensive patrolling across the Maas, although the battalion had been ordered not to reciprocate. Lt Col Renison considered the enemy here to be 'full of guts'¹¹⁴ despite being generally considered second-grade troops and in relatively low numbers. German units had launched a successful bid to occupy some woods close to the 1st South Lancashire

¹⁰⁹ From a letter to Mater dated 6th January 1945. Arthur Oates' papers SWWEC.

¹¹⁰ Lt Col Renison's memoir, p.191.

¹¹¹ Extract from letter to author from Jim Fetterly 9th January 2000.

¹¹² Regimental History p.20.

¹¹³ 2nd Battalion War Diary 1st January 1945.

¹¹⁴ Lt Col Renison's memoir, p.196.

Regiment position in Wanssum on the Allied side of the river and although the Germans subsequently withdrew across the Maas, it had been intended to re-establish a bridgehead on the west bank to prevent any further Allied troops being released to defend the Ardennes. The 2nd Battalion therefore had to ensure that no large-scale crossing took place in their area. Lt Col Renison wrote that it was during their stay in Maashees, that the troops of 'D' Company were once again forged into a team 'after their period of disappointment and partial disbandment at Overloon'.¹¹⁵ The casualties had been very heavy in this Company, but it had taken only two months to re-build the men's 'team spirit', thus showing that even with the addition of substantial numbers of reinforcements, a sense of loyalty can develop.

The New Year brought welcome news for some, the chance of a week's leave at home.

Doug Parker was one of the fortunate ones:

Somebody said to me "You lucky so and so", and I was one of the first out. I came home in January. It was for seven days. If you come out and then you have to go back in the line you're that bit more frightened. You get used to the shelling and mortaring when you're in the line. I was fortunate going back on the Maas.¹¹⁶

The first fourteen 'other ranks' and Major Rutherford left for England on the 2nd January, followed by fifteen on the 7th, fifteen on the 10th, and finally fifteen on the 14th. The fact that this was new, and a welcome, if overdue change, was indicated by Lt Little's addition of an exclamation mark after his entry in the War Diary for the 7th – 'Capt R T Brown (Adjutant) and 14 ORs proceeded on leave to England!' On his arrival at the battalion that same day, Lt Little took over as Intelligence Officer and prepared the War Diary, although it is interesting that he also signed the Diary's entries for the previous week, before his arrival, and seems, in addition, to have typed those entries. The War Diary therefore, is not only a sparse document, it cannot be confirmed who

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.200.

¹¹⁶ Extract from interview with Doug Parker 17th July 1999.

compiled the entries or how the decision was made as to what information would be included.

On the 6th January, 'D' Company carried out a deception plan on the river bank by using smoke and a motorcycle to deceive the Germans into thinking a crossing was being implemented. This was intended to protect an attack by the 1st South Lancashire Regiment on the Wanssum bridgehead. The Germans had already been spotted wiring the river bank and this activity continued during the battalion's stay in the area. Later in the month 'A' Company tried a similar exercise by using a tannoy to amplify supposed noises of a wiring party. Two of the interviewees recall tannoys being used during this period. However, both referred to them as being utilised by the Germans rather than the British.¹¹⁷

Being in a static position, it was ideal for sniper work and sniping was specifically mentioned in the War Diary between the 13th and 17th of January with some measure of success. The War Diary for the 13th January displayed Lt Little's sense of humour: 'enemy who used to saunter around Aaien sniped at by battalion snipers throughout the day. By evening they were reported to be moving at the double'. Sniper work was intended to affect morale by putting the enemy into a state of constant alert, as well as to kill or wound officers and thereby affect efficiency. However, within the German army it was a feature of training that all troops should be capable of displaying initiative and therefore the sniping of officers would theoretically have less impact militarily.¹¹⁸

On the 18th January the battalion began further river crossing training, with the assistance of Lt Laming DSC RNVR, in order to take patrols across the River Maas. Unimpressed with the battalion's assault boats, he acquired three naval dories, 'naval types complete with white ensigns'.¹¹⁹ Just over a week later, a patrol of Lt T Russell

¹¹⁷ During interviews with Wilf Todd and John Gardner.

¹¹⁸ For example, Popular Guide to the German Army No 2. The Infantry Division. War Office May 1941. In papers of T. Hare SWWEC (2002-1821).

¹¹⁹ 2nd Battalion War Diary 18th January 1945.

and eleven 'other ranks' took a dorie across the Maas, with a reserve dorie and two assault boats as back-up. As the reserve crew saw men in snowsuits approaching, they thought it was the patrol returning and went to meet them, but L/Cpl Higton was killed when the men were discovered to be German.

Towards the end of January the battalion pulled back to Venraij to go into reserve. During the beginning and middle of February more officers and 'other ranks' enjoyed a week on leave in England, while short day-passes were issued to Belgium. The battalion moved back to the Louvain area on the 7th, and the War Diary characterises this period as quiet, 'general routine'. Whilst Lt Col Renison was in the UK on leave, he noted that Operation Veritable had commenced on the 8th February, but the only mention in the press was of the Canadian Army.¹²⁰ He discovered that the 15th, 43rd, 51st and 53rd Divisions were fighting with the Canadians, but he considered that the 2nd Battalion must be being held for an assault crossing of the Rhine, due to the river crossing training the troops had been given.

Into Germany.

Operation Veritable was intended to advance 21st Army Group up to the Rhine through the Reichswald Forest, which was four miles deep.¹²¹ Initial moves went well, but the weather conditions, mud, and a build-up of traffic hampered the troops. The 3rd Division had not been called on to participate in the first phase of clearing the Reichswald Forest or taking Cleve and Goch. During these intense battles, involving the SS, Panzers and German paratroopers, the 2nd Battalion had, according to the Regimental historian 'spent a quiet time in the back areas'.¹²²

¹²⁰ Lt Col Renison's memoir, pp.222-223. In *So Few Got Through*, Martin Lindsay wrote that he found it frustrating that British units were not mentioned, due to the Army Public Relations Dept. 'How much morale in the Army would go up if they would release unit names and how bucked our Jocks would be to see "1st Gordons" in print once a month or so', p.220.

¹²¹ Fraser, *And We Shall Shock Them*, p.385.

¹²² Nightingale, *The East Yorkshire Regiment*, p.246.

The way the battalion was now ordered to move, illustrates the rapidly changing nature of the front line after the static period on the Maas. During the morning of the 23rd February, the Brigadier informed Lt Col Renison that it was likely he could expect the battalion to be based in its current area for around two weeks, yet that same day Lt Col Renison was advised the battalion would be moving the next morning to relieve the 15th Division, and 'we were going into the battle before the Rhine was reached after all'.¹²³ The battalion moved firstly to Tilburg on the 24th then on to Goch the following day, going into the trenches held by 46th Brigade, who had been in action since the beginning of Operation Veritable and whose casualties had mounted.

From Goch, the 3rd Division's overall objective was to cut the line of the Udem-Weeze road and capture Kervenheim, using all three Brigades. Within this plan, known as Operation Heather, the main action of the 2nd Battalion was to capture intact the bridge over the Mühlen-Fleuth, on the road to Weeze. This operation formed part of the British and Canadian efforts to clear the final positions of the Germans west of the Rhine. David Fraser argued that Operation Veritable 'was a killing match; slow, deadly and predictable',¹²⁴ as the Germans defended tenaciously and inflicted high casualties on the Allies throughout this operation, having committed three Infantry, four Parachute Regiments, one Panzer Grenadier and two Panzer Divisions against the British and Canadians.¹²⁵ In light of how much depended on good defence by the Germans and how hard they fought, it is clear that for the 2nd Battalion, other than the D-Day landings, this is the one battle of the battalion that can be described as spectacular. There were other battles in which the battalion performed very well overall, including the Chateau de la Londe in June and at Overloon and Venraij in October. However this is the action in which infantry of the battalion worked alone in their area, supported by the artillery, achieving initial success in the advance and then holding on through determined

¹²³ Lt Col Renison's memoir, p.229.

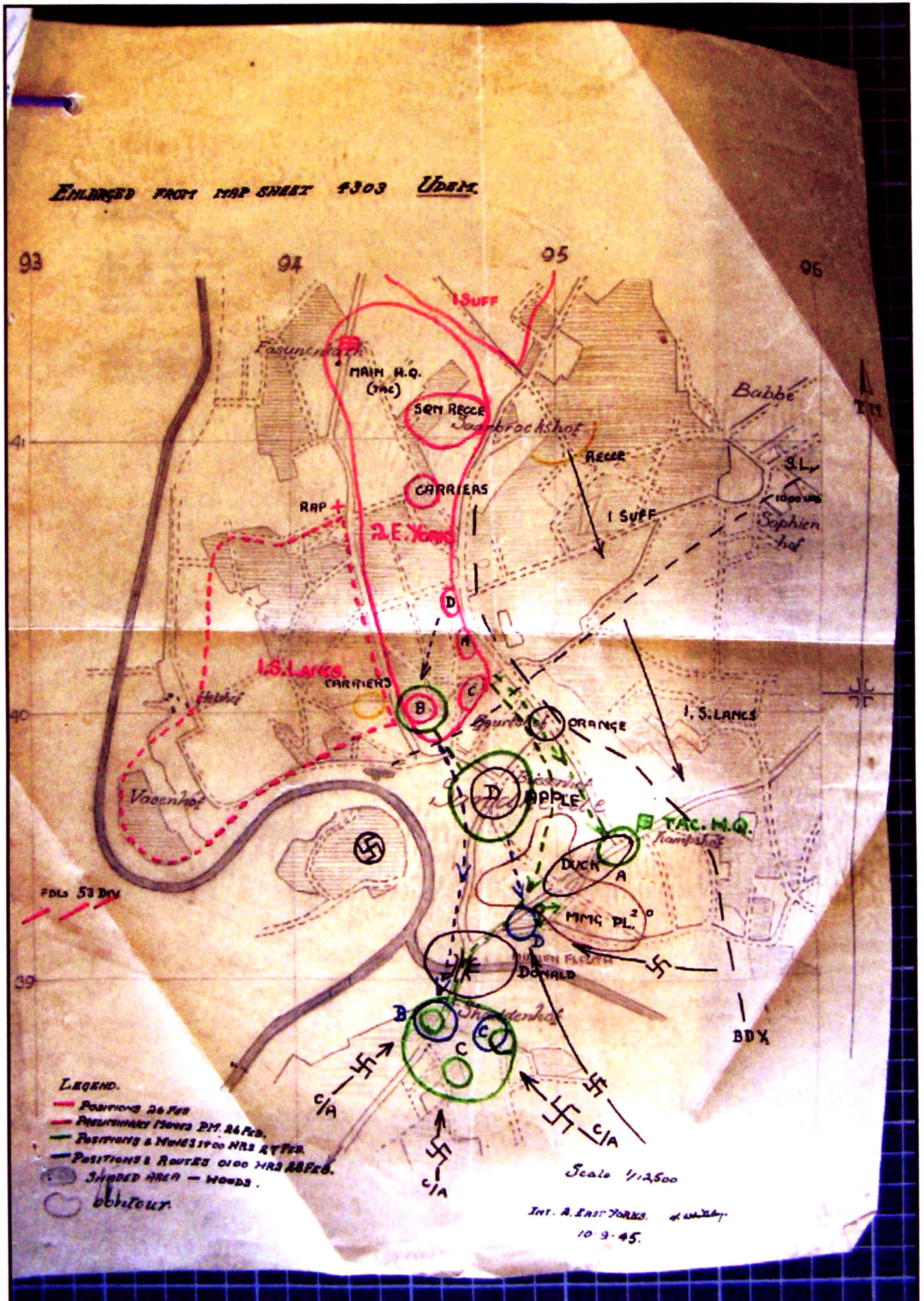
¹²⁴ Fraser, *And We Shall Shock Them*, p.390.

¹²⁵ Scarfe, *Assault Division*, p.205.

Schaddenhof Farm

The Battle of the Bridge

27th-28th Feb 1945



PHOTOGRAPHED FROM 2ND BATTALION WAR DIARY - NATIONAL ARCHIVES

'A' Company captured a further fifteen enemy soldiers and had reached objective Geurtzhof, codenamed 'Duck', by midday, although the company was reduced to around thirty men for the onward assault on Kampshof. Due to the mounting casualties, 'C' Company, commanded by Major Reg Rutherford, was ordered to secure the bridge, and moved at such speed that it was taken by 2pm with the loss of just three men. The swift advance, 'faster than anything I have ever seen in battle before or since',¹²⁷ ensured that the bridge was not blown and one platoon waded through the Mühlen-Fleuth to capture the garrison at Schaddenhof. The Germans counter-attacked, with tanks and infantry, repeatedly during the course of the rest of the day and night; reaching and even entering, the Schaddenhof farm buildings, desperately defended by the battalion but with ammunition running out. The only armoured support was provided by the tank of the artillery forward observation officer.¹²⁸ The Germans attempted to cut off 'C' and 'B' Companies by infiltrating the woods between the farm buildings and the bridge and the dwindling ammunition made the situation desperate for the forward companies. The forward platoon of Lt Glew had to withdraw to the farmhouse after being attacked by paratroopers. According to Peter Brown, the paratroopers 'all looked to be about 7 feet tall. Whether they were drunk or drugged I don't know but they appeared to just keep coming forward without trying to take cover'.¹²⁹

The isolation of the two forward companies was compounded when the Germans attacked the Middlesex heavy machine-gunners in the copse near the bridge and drove them out. The efforts of the entire Corps artillery was called for, and by shelling right up to the farmhouse walls, they managed to hold off the German attacks. The role of the artillery proved pivotal in the Schaddenhof defence, permitting the infantry to defend the farmhouse while the Germans surrounding the perimeter suffered high casualties.

¹²⁷ Lt Col Renison's memoir, p.244.

¹²⁸ John Ford, FOO of B Troop, 76th Field Regiment, Scarfe, *Assault Division*, p.211.

¹²⁹ Peter Brown privately held memoir.

The German counter-attacks finally subsided at 4 o'clock in the morning, leading Lt Col Renison to conclude that the battle had been 'a close-run thing'.¹³⁰ Subsequently, 83 German dead were recorded in the area in front of 'B' and 'C' Company positions and around 150 POWs were taken. By the following morning nine officers of the battalion and 147 soldiers had been killed or wounded.

This battle, described by Scarfe as 'epic',¹³¹ deserves to be considered spectacular because the two forward companies held out for nine hours against superior numbers of German paratroopers, despite low ammunition and heavy casualties. There was no armoured support of any significance on their side of the bridge, yet the men faced tanks and panzerfausts which fired directly at the farmhouse walls. The Germans entered the outbuildings and called on the battalion to surrender, and at times the situation inside the farmhouse appeared, to the defenders, to be untenable. There were also concerns for the large numbers of casualties sheltering in the cellar, who were unable to be evacuated for treatment, some of whom were German. However the companies continued to put up opposition and the strong counter-attacks ultimately failed. The Divisional Commander named the bridge 'Yorkshire Bridge' in honour of this battle. This was an important accolade and the interviewees taking part in this action remain proud that it was awarded.¹³²

Not only was the bridge renamed, General Whistler also sent a message to the 2nd Battalion Commander saying: 'how very proud I am of the magnificent fight you made last night. Will you let all ranks know that I shall come and tell them, as soon as I possibly can, how moved I have been by their very gallant actions'.¹³³ At the close of Operation Veritable, General Whistler judged that 9th Brigade, followed by 185th

¹³⁰ Quoted in McNish, *Iron Division*, p.126.

¹³¹ Scarfe, *Assault Division*, p.210.

¹³² The maps in the memoirs of Robin Dunn and R. F. Fendick show few details other than place names, yet both have marked the location of the 'Yorkshire Bridge'. Fendick included a tribute to the actions of Major 'Banger' King during the battle, p.171.

¹³³ Copy letter in War Diary dated 28th February 1945.

Brigade had performed best during recent weeks, with 8th Brigade not proving as successful, although 'E Yorks had a terrific night holding a bridgehead against repeated counter-attacks', and he also wrote that the Lincolnshire and Suffolk battalions were the best in the Division.¹³⁴ The ferocity of the battle and the ability of the battalion infantrymen to hold off the counter-attacks despite the lack of ammunition, has resulted in a concentration on this action within Divisional secondary literature. The only option available to the infantrymen at Schaddenhof was to continue to resist and in so doing, face a very real risk of death, or they could surrender, as their only route of withdrawal had been cut-off. It is to their credit that they continued to resist when outnumbered and out-gunned. This was a valiant action by the 2nd Battalion and although it formed just a minor part of the overall operation, together, the jigsaw of small advances by all the Allied units ensured ultimate success, albeit a costly one. During the subsequent days, it fell to the other Brigades of the Division to capture Kervenheim, Winnekendonk and Kapellen, while 8th Brigade rested.

On the 2nd and 3rd March, a draft of 172 reinforcements and two new officers arrived at the battalion. Many came from other regiments and, until their arrival, were unaware of their final destination, or to which regiment they would be attached.

The 2nd Battalion then moved on towards the Rhine, in preparation for the final push. For a short time, while the Allies built up supplies ready for the crossing, the battalion experienced a lull in the action and saw for themselves that the civilians had enjoyed better living conditions than those in France and Holland. From Calcar, the battalion moved to Honnepel on the 14th March, where the War Diary recorded 'we are told that our chief role while sitting on the banks of the Rhine is to obtain all possible information of the enemy on the East bank'. The Rhine crossing commenced on the 23rd March yet the battalion was not directly involved. The initial assault was made by 1st

¹³⁴ McNish, *Iron Division*, p128, Sir John Smyth, *Bolo Whistler*, pp.145-146.

Commando Brigade at Wesel, 15th Division north of Xanten and 51st Division at Rees; the same divisions as were involved in the opening days of Operation Veritable. The crossing was accompanied by a large airborne drop and by 27th March the bridgehead was ten miles deep. The Regimental historian recorded that the 3rd Division wished it could have taken part in the initial crossing.¹³⁵ Yet none of the interviewees expressed this opinion. Instead their memories of this period invariably focused on the better living conditions and ample provision of food, which included some of the livestock left by the German farmers. There again appears to be a divergence between what views the battalion espoused in public and the reality as experienced by the infantryman.

During this period, Nightingale assessed the role of the battalion to be one of acting in support of the initial assault divisions,¹³⁶ however this support extended only to observation of German activity across the river.¹³⁷ Scarfe termed this 'an unspectacular, fundamental part', whereby the Division formed a 'springboard off which two Divisions dived into mid-Germany'.¹³⁸

The crossing of the Rhine was a vast undertaking, with 30,000 engineers and pioneers to do the bridging work, 1300 artillery guns in support and the involvement of a complete Airborne Army Corps, both parachutist and glider-borne.¹³⁹ This was therefore an important operation and to be follow-up troops meant that there would be little opportunity to perform outstandingly if the initial crossings were a success. In the event the 2nd Battalion guarded the gaps blown in the dykes and waited for the first prisoners of war to arrive. Although the Rifle Companies were not involved in the assault, 8th Brigade provided medical services for those of other units who were wounded in it.

¹³⁵ Nightingale, *The East Yorkshire Regiment*, p.258. Also Scarfe, *Assault Division*, p.220.

¹³⁶ Nightingale, *The East Yorkshire Regiment*, p.258.

¹³⁷ This was also the Divisional role. McNish, *Iron Division*, p.129.

¹³⁸ Scarfe, *Assault Division*, p.220.

¹³⁹ McNish, *Iron Division*, p.260.

The War Diary included a detailed breakdown of the different units involved, with the thought that '3 Div will probably follow up with the Guards Armoured Div sometime after the 26th March'. This did not happen and the War Diary noted 'movement in the Bn area decreases' before the 2nd Battalion made their own crossing over a bridge at Rees on the 29th. Other units of the 3rd Division had become involved the day before. The beginning of April saw the battalion just over the border in Holland at Enschede, after an attack on the town was called off when the Germans were found to have withdrawn. Having hoped that their stay in 'this large friendly town with its comfortable billets' would be a long one, the War Diary reflected the battalion's 'regret' that the troops were ordered to leave for Nordhorn in Germany on the 3rd April, where a large camp for displaced people, principally Russians and Poles, was discovered. This phase was the start of the civilian affairs problems that plagued the battalion until some months after the cessation of the war. The following day the Carrier Platoon liberated the Dutch village of Ootmarsum, where 'they were greeted with great warmth. This little village had been asking for our aid when underground troops of the hamlet clashed with the enemy'.¹⁴⁰ The battalion was presented with a scroll of thanks by the village, commemorating the liberation, which was not recorded in the War Diary, but is clearly a unique document and is held at the Regimental Museum in York.

On the 10th April, the battalion moved to Harpstedt, and as they travelled, large groups of displaced people lined the route 'some saluting, some waving. They seemed happy despite the long march, the dust and probable shortage of food'.¹⁴¹ The Suffolks held Bassum and the South Lancashires Wildeshausen, with these two towns and that of Harpstedt each controlling a road leading north-west into Bremen.¹⁴² On the 13th, 8th Brigade was directed to the Brinkum area, with the 2nd Battalion based at Fahrenhorst. On the 16th, the 2nd Battalion was ordered to take Heiligenrode and Great Mackenstedt.

¹⁴⁰ 2nd Battalion War Diary 4th April 1945.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 10th April 1945.

¹⁴² Scarfe, *Assault Division*, p.244.

The fighting here is recorded in great detail in the War Diary, yet it differed in intensity from the battles of the previous year. As an illustration, UK leave continued throughout and was not curtailed, which would have happened had the progress of the war been in jeopardy.

It was during this period that the Reverend George Fox, of the 3rd Reconnaissance Regiment, 3rd Division, recorded in his diary, '3rd Division seems to have lost some of its old drive, it is certainly not considered the first class division as when in the Normandy bridgehead. There are many reasons, but I am not fully in the picture. I am not in a position to judge'.¹⁴³ Reverend Fox was not the only one to consider the 3rd Division had faltered. Lt Col Martin Lindsay DSO rated the infantry divisions at 1st August 1944 and on 1st April 1945. The 3rd Division was rated top for efficiency and effectiveness in August but was 3rd on the list by the following April.¹⁴⁴ This may perhaps be explained by David Fraser's summing up of the final battles in Germany as 'seldom easy, but to fight them was to engage in a race where the result was already known. The necessity was clear but the stimulus flagged'.¹⁴⁵ Thus, small and costly battles continued to be fought, while the units concerned proceeded cautiously. As Wilf Todd explained: 'For an infantryman every little battle was serious, because it didn't matter whether it was a major battle or a skirmish, a bullet could kill you'.¹⁴⁶ It is this knowledge that colours the War Diary through the remaining days of the war. There is clearly frustration towards the German forces who inflicted casualties when continued resistance seemed futile. The advance of the 2nd Battalion in this area, and to Great Mackenstedt, formed part of a larger attack involving 9th Brigade and the 51st Highland Division. The rapid progress saw the 2nd Battalion capturing two 88mm guns with their

¹⁴³ The Reverend Colin Fox ed. *Diary of the Reverend George Fox MC June 16th 1944-June 6th 1945* (York, 1998) Diary entry for 17th April 1945.

¹⁴⁴ Martin Lindsay, *So Few Got Through*, p.254. Of course it might not be purely accidental that Lindsay's own division, the 51st, topped the second list.

¹⁴⁵ Fraser, *And We Shall Shock Them*, p.393.

¹⁴⁶ Extract from interview with Wilf Todd 4th April 1999.

crews and numerous prisoners. However, both villages were defended and house-to-house fighting took place. By the 20th April, the road and rail links had been cut between Delmenhorst and Bremen, and the 2nd Battalion had cut the road link by taking two vital crossroads.

The last major battle that involved the 2nd Battalion, the taking of Bremen, saw the 3rd Division making an attack from the south of the city, with 52nd Lowland Division and 43rd (Wessex) Division entering the city from the east. Thus, for the 24th April the Diary recorded 'the Battalion has little to do but watch preparations for the attack upon Bremen' and the next day 'in the morning we hear that the attack went well'. Nightingale reasoned: 'as at Honnopol, the East Yorkshires were just spectators of the first phase'.¹⁴⁷ The two other Brigades, 9th and 185th, began their attack on the night of the 24th/25th, and much of the opposition in Bremen had been cleared before 8th Brigade became involved on the 26th April, with the 2nd Battalion entering the housing estate of Rablingshauser, supported by tanks of the 4/7th Dragoon Guards.¹⁴⁸ 8th Brigade's objective was to clear the area of Bremen south of the Weser.¹⁴⁹ There was a constant danger from SS troops and 'B' Company 'chased eight of these contemptible tykes along the road killing two, taking four PW, (while) two escaped'.¹⁵⁰ 'C' Company took almost two hundred prisoners and discovered an enemy AA control post, then captured another hundred soldiers near the village of Strom. Lt Col Renison went to investigate for himself the reports of so many prisoners and met 'a long column of Boche marching down the road towards us shepherded by a few jubilant members of "C" Company'.¹⁵¹ The AA control post had been expecting the advance to come from the Delmenhorst area, by 51st Division, and not from behind them. The following day, 'A' Company troops were fired on from houses, which killed one and injured another, then 'seventeen

¹⁴⁷ Nightingale, *The East Yorkshire Regiment*, p.272.

¹⁴⁸ Scarfe, *Assault Division*, pp.266-7.

¹⁴⁹ McNish, *Iron Division*, p.132.

¹⁵⁰ 2nd Battalion War Diary 26th April 1945.

¹⁵¹ Lt Col Renison's memoir, p.361.

despicable SS youths gave themselves up'.¹⁵² More trouble was experienced further on, and 'it was with mixed feelings of regret and rage that we learned that Major Pemberton, "A" Coy Comdr had been wounded'.¹⁵³

On May 5th official hostilities ceased, however for some of the interviewees, interestingly the longer-serving ones, the news was an anti-climax.¹⁵⁴ Jim Fetterly recalled 'there was no celebration except a few handshakes. We were dirty and tired and grateful'.¹⁵⁵ The Regimental History recorded: 'It was difficult for us to appreciate that hostilities were virtually at an end'.¹⁵⁶ The Colonel of the 2nd Battalion addressed all the troops and told them of messages of appreciation from Field Marshal Montgomery and a message from the Commander of 30 Corps, Lt General B. G. Horrocks CB DSO MC, received on 1st May 1945, stating 'it seems to me that the Division has gone from strength to strength in the recent fighting and I am certain that there is no better Division than the 3rd British in the British Liberation Army today'.¹⁵⁷ On the 8th May, V. E. Day, the War Diary recorded 'today is V. E. Day but there is nothing in the nature of boisterous flag waving hilarity'.¹⁵⁸

From Normandy to Bremen the 2nd Battalion suffered 1072 dead, wounded or missing, a complete turnover of the rifle companies by two and a half times. This is clearly a high rate of loss, although not an exceptional figure for an infantry battalion of this period.¹⁵⁹ It is significant that the total number of missing was comparatively small, just two officers and fifty 'other ranks', which was an indication of how well the men of the

¹⁵² 2nd Battalion War Diary 27th April 1945.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ This sense of anti-climax was not restricted to the long-serving 2nd Bn soldiers. Major General P. Martin remembered 'weeping quietly to myself. . .it was a grand anti-climax as far as I was concerned' SWWEC Tape 2106.

¹⁵⁵ In a letter from Jim Fetterly to the author dated 9th January 2000.

¹⁵⁶ Regimental History p.24.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.24-5.

¹⁵⁸ This feeling was replicated elsewhere. In *A Canloan Officer*, R. F. Fendick related how 'there were few signs of emotion among the group I was with there, just quiet acceptance' p.222. In *18 Platoon*, Sydney Jary wrote 'we had learned too much to indulge in shallow demonstrations', p.122.

¹⁵⁹ The 4th Bn The Somerset Light Infantry lost more – 1313 killed or wounded since July 1944. Sydney Jary *18 Platoon* p.122.

battalion fought.¹⁶⁰ Some of those missing had been captured – Capt G. W. Smith met a Sergeant and four privates of the 2nd Battalion in his prison camp.¹⁶¹

An examination of the secondary literature reveals a concentration on the role of armour, particularly during the Normandy Campaign, due to the nature of the planned operations. The pressure on manpower dictated a reliance on armoured brigades and divisions, to make territorial gains and tie up the armour of the enemy. The role of the infantry was thereby relegated to a concentration on protection of the flanks and consolidation of the territory secured by Allied armoured formations. In the event, some of these operations, for example Goodwood, were not successful due to the difficult terrain and the strength of the opposition. The infantry divisions thereby, were limited in their own achievements and generally, few divisions merit more than a brief reference. The performance of the 2nd Battalion during this period could quite legitimately be dubbed ‘unspectacular’ overall. Its story is the story of many of the battalions of the north-west Europe campaign. It formed part of a solid, county regiment and did no more than many other similar regiments of the line. However this is not to denigrate its achievements, in particular the battalion, unlike other units,¹⁶² was never forced to give up territory or objectives it had taken.¹⁶³ A careful study of the War Diary has revealed that at no point were the troops forced to retreat; the story is overwhelmingly one of advance followed by consolidation. The men, in some encounters, notably at the Chateau de la Londe and the Schaddenhof farm, fought extremely well, despite taking heavy casualties. Of course, other battalions in other Divisions, could be argued to have

¹⁶⁰ Lt Col R. H. W. S. Hastings used this argument in support of his own battalion, the 6th Battalion Green Howards, p.7.

¹⁶¹ *In the Bag!* by Capt G. W. Smith - memoir IWM (95/30/1).

¹⁶² There are innumerable instances of retreats during this period. The 6th Battalion Green Howards had been forced to retreat following heavy casualties at a farm called Les Hauts Vents, the 8th Battalion DLI was driven out of Tilly.

¹⁶³ In *The Snapper* Vol XL June, 1945, Lt Col Renison wrote in ‘Banger’ King’s Obituary ‘it was his proud boast that this Battalion had never failed to take its objective and to hold it’.

performed equally well at various stages and in different locations,¹⁶⁴ although McNish concluded that the role of the 3rd Division as a whole was unique, in that its infantrymen had fought in all three campaigns noted as decisive by General Eisenhower; the battle of the Normandy beaches, the battle of the Falaise pocket and the battles west of the Rhine.¹⁶⁵ It should be noted however, that the 3rd Division was not at the forefront of the culminating battle to close the Falaise Gap, but rather was involved in the lead-up. The 2nd Battalion was not alone in enduring hard battles; other units of the Division had their own actions in which prolonged and arduous fighting took place, resulting in a high turnover of men.

The interviews have been used in this chapter both to confirm the areas in which the battalion served and describe more fully the conditions the infantry discovered therein. The historic value of the interviews, in this assessment of the battalion's performance, lies in their providing the personal aspects missing from the War Diary. The individual infantryman, unable to influence strategy, was most concerned with survival, whether involved in a small or large battle, or sitting under shellfire. It was not of immediate concern whether the battle was newsworthy or how history would judge the battalion. This would be a matter for post-war reflection. For the infantryman, his wish was to live long enough to see the end of the war and return home. It was not of relevance that post-war, secondary literature would depict his contribution as less 'glamorous' than that of the special forces.

The individual infantryman of the battalion would never describe himself as spectacular. Neither would the infantry of other similar regiments. Yet the majority did enough to secure eventual victory, despite the lack of rest, the horrendous physical conditions, the fear and the instinct for self-preservation. An understanding of the extent of the difficulties facing the infantryman, examined in the following chapter, leads to the

¹⁶⁴ Martin Lindsay, *So Few Got Through*, p.244. His troops had to endure street-fighting for 48 hours at one stretch when clearing Rees and were 'overloaded with congratulations'.

¹⁶⁵ McNish, *Iron Division*, p.133.

conclusion that this was a remarkable feat. Hastings rightly argued that it was the overall quality of the British Army that decided the outcome of the north-west Europe campaign, rather than the superior fighting qualities of single units.¹⁶⁶ The fighting quality of the 2nd Battalion, as for so many other battalions, was sufficient to assist in securing the unconditional surrender of the German Army, which was the ultimate goal of the campaign.

¹⁶⁶ Hastings, *Overlord*, p.150.

**Chapter 4 - Leadership, Comradeship and Endurance - conditions of service for
the 2nd Battalion infantrymen**

This chapter concentrates on the conditions endured by the infantrymen of the 2nd Battalion during the north-west Europe campaign. During the course of the campaign, the infantry battled through mud, snow and rain, using whatever was around them to alleviate the conditions, while under constant threat from bombardments and small-arms fire, all without any idea of how long the war would last. The physical and mental difficulties are measured against an examination of those aspects which went some way to alleviating the hardships, such as small-unit loyalty, comradeship, good leadership and comforts, in order to understand why the infantry continued to fight, despite the ever-present risk of injury or death.¹

The Battalion War Diary does not provide a detailed insight into the conditions under which the infantry operated as this was not within its remit. It is primarily a military document outlining the progress of the actions in which the battalion took part. The interviews are therefore valuable historically in that they reveal the life of the individual infantryman during the campaign. In many cases, the interviews reinforced the available secondary literature on life in the infantry.² However they additionally, and again, more importantly, provide an insight into the memories that remain particularly vivid for the individual 2nd Battalion infantrymen, such as experiences of near-misses and injuries. They also reflect the strong link between physical conditions and the places in which the interviewees served, and reveal how the sixty years since the conflict ended have shaped the memories of those involved. The length of time that has elapsed, has often eroded memories of place names and dates, which is to be expected. However the memories of the physical hardships and their specifics, are richly detailed and evocative.

¹ For an examination of the issues of discipline and morale, see David French, *Raising Churchill's Army*, Chapter 4.

² For example John Ellis, *The Sharp End of War. The Fighting Man in World War II* (London, 1980), Richard Holmes, *Acts of War. The Behaviour of Men in Battle* (London, 2004) and Sean Longden, *To the Victor the Spoils. D-Day to V. E. Day, the Reality behind the Heroism* (Gloucs, 2004).

Each interviewee remembered experiences which were intensely personal, for example, Arthur Lumb witnessed a doctor cut off what remained of a man's leg using a pair of scissors³ and Peter Brown threw a potato at a German soldier, fooling him into thinking it was a grenade, at the height of the battle for Schaddenhof farm.⁴ These are small, individual details that remain vivid for the interviewees and taken altogether, the personal evolves into the group record of the battalion. These overlapping 'layers' of memory reveal a great deal of the group experience, and allow useful generalisations to be made. Within secondary literature, representations of life in the infantry are based on memoirs and interviews from regiments across the Army. Here, memories have been solicited from one battalion, so the degree of overlap is greater and the reliability of the evidence is consequently higher.

Physical Conditions and Comforts.

During the north-west Europe campaign, the soldiers faced severe physical conditions, including extremes of weather, long periods in action, and a lack of basic facilities including food, shelter and warmth. They spent long periods in trenches, trying to make them as safe and comfortable as possible. Events such as the arrival of the Mobile Bath Unit or finding additional food were therefore seen as a notable exception to their normal existence and interviewees often recalled specific instances. As one Regimental History concludes, 'there is no greater mistake than to believe the more spartan a life the soldier lives, the better soldier he must be'.⁵

During the interview process, examples of the physical conditions were given in response to questions about specific regions in which they served. Hence the town of Troarn is associated with problems of mosquitoes, Venraij and Overloon are defined by

³ From interview with Arthur Lumb 1st May 1999.

⁴ From interview with Peter Brown 19th September 1999.

⁵ Nicholson, *The History of the Suffolk Regiment 1928-1946*, p.138.

rain and mud,⁶ while the Maas area is linked to snow and intense cold over a prolonged period. For the infantryman, the physical conditions are of paramount importance, because for long periods he is fully exposed to the natural environment. Hence his sensory memories remain vivid. It is apparent that much time was expended in attempts to maximise personal comfort by whatever means were available. Often this was as basic as putting doors or branches across the top of a trench, or securing shelter in a cellar.⁷

There was often a shortage of food, or a lack of opportunity to eat the food the troops did have access to: at breakfast men could make porridge from blocks in their ration packs or have soya-link sausages but ‘sometimes you just had tea and the whistle would be blowing to get going. Then you’d probably just have a piece of chocolate from your emergency rations or some hard tack biscuits’.⁸ Many of the interviewees recalled the ration packs, the monotony of the food available, and the shortages, hence packages from home proved a highlight.⁹ Equally, if a parcel did not include food, the disappointment could be extreme.¹⁰ To supplement the rations, soldiers bartered cigarettes and tins from their own supplies, for eggs and fresh foodstuff. Determined efforts were made to deliver hot food to those in the front line, however the War Diary makes several references to the difficulties this entailed. On one occasion, Wilf Todd volunteered to drive a Bren carrier through the shelling to deliver food to his company, even recalling that the sweet was Yorkshire Pudding fritters with syrup.

⁶ Capt P. E. G. Balfour wrote about Holland to Anne, ‘This is a bloody country. It rains all day, it is extremely cold and is rapidly becoming one large bog’, 13th November 1944 (SWWEC 99.90).

⁷ This was a widespread practice. R. F. Fendick wrote of providing overhead cover for the slit trenches, of logs, building wood or sheet metal, covered with spoil, in *A Canloan Officer*, p.61.

⁸ Extract from interview with Wilf Todd 1st May 1999.

⁹ Alf Ackroyd recalled receiving a bacon and egg pie from his mother, which arrived with mildew on, yet was still eaten, during an interview 25th February 2002.

¹⁰ In his recollections, John Scruton wrote of the fury of a new reinforcement in his section who received Brylcreem instead of the expected honey or jam.

As well as the lack of food, the constant tiredness was a feature both of the interviews and in personal accounts from other units involved in this campaign.¹¹ As an officer, Clive Crauford emphasised how important it was for the maintenance of morale for him to visit the slit trenches of those on guard duty at night, but ‘when you’re dog-tired, you haven’t had a decent night’s sleep since God knows when, . . .the willpower required to make yourself wake up and get moving and go and see the outposts (laughing) is incredibly difficult’.¹² This lack of proper rest took its toll on strained nerves. One interviewee remembered, ‘you didn’t get any proper sleep. You were in a slit trench with another chap and you’d grab an hour or two and then he would. There was nowhere to sit. You just got your head down as best you could’.¹³ The ability to dig a slit trench quickly was essential. Often the interviewees would dig more than one trench a day – as soon as the soldiers stopped, it was the first duty that was performed. This was a normal feature of life for the infantry.¹⁴

The other problem was a lack of opportunity to wash. Daily shaving, even if it was using tea, was deemed essential, yet bathing was infrequent and relied on the ‘mobile bath units’ or the soldiers’ ingenuity. The lack of privacy was patently difficult for some of those serving in the campaign. Doug Parker remembered an experience at the mobile bath unit, when ‘no sooner had we got naked than they started mortaring it. I had to dive in a trench. I was really embarrassed about that’.¹⁵ John Scruton recalled French women laughing at their nakedness and one man of his section confided ‘not even my wife has seen me like this’.¹⁶

To supplement the rare visits of the mobile bath unit, some interviewees remembered unorthodox methods of washing in the field, such as a rudimentary shower made from a

¹¹ Lt Col R. H. W. S. Hastings of 6th Battalion Green Howards wrote, ‘the predominant feeling was of fatigue. Officers and men were very tired indeed’, p.6 of *A Short Account of the Operations of 6th Bn Green Howards*, held at the archive of the Green Howards Regimental Museum.

¹² Extract from interview with Clive Crauford 5th November 2000.

¹³ Extract from interview with Doug Parker 17th July 1999.

¹⁴ Capt Michael Bendix recalled ‘digging four, in a four hour period’ SWWEC (2000-356).

¹⁵ Extract from interview with Doug Parker 17th July 1999.

¹⁶ John Scruton privately held recollections.

tin with holes punched in it'¹⁷ and a bath with water heated in 40 gallon oil drums. 'We all took turns to go in. It was alright if you were first in but not so good for the last'.¹⁸

When the battalion was in trenches near Troarn, shellfire¹⁹ and wet weather affected morale. The interviewees recalled a further factor which added to the discomfort, a high concentration of mosquitoes. Of course, for the infantry, living in trenches deep in water made life far from comfortable and for some, the mosquitoes were the last straw.²⁰ 'The net result of this was a very serious outbreak of so called "battle exhaustion" which took the very harshest treatment and a good deal of plain speaking by the Doctor to quell'.²¹ None of the interviewees remembered the conditions causing anyone to report sick, but some did recall the ointment supplied for mosquito bites, including Bill Turner: 'Oh honestly they bit me to death the sods did. All over my face. They used to call me "the man with the blue beard"',²² as the ointment was coloured.

During the freezing winter of 1944-45, the troops had to become acclimatised to the sub-zero temperatures and resorted to improvisation to keep themselves warm. They put sacking over their boots and packed them with straw,²³ and when they went to the top of the orchard for a standing patrol there was a hen run, in which they would take turns to lay, to shelter from the wind and snow.²⁴ The intense cold affected the performance of the troops and their weapons, and was a feature of life for many units in Holland during this period.²⁵

¹⁷ From interview with Clive Crauford 5th November 2000.

¹⁸ Extract from interview with Wilf Todd 25th March 1999.

¹⁹ Sydney Jary wrote in *18 Platoon*, 'Morale was always higher during an attack. Sitting around being shelled is not an occupation to be recommended', p.49. On p.110, one of Jary's Lance-Corporals 'went to pieces' due to the intense noise of the accurate shelling.

²⁰ In *A Canloan Officer*, R. F. Fendick reinforced how great a problem the mosquitoes in this area were: 'my platoon had more casualties, sent back for treatment of infected mosquito bites in a two or three week period, than we had from enemy action' p.87.

²¹ Lt Col Renison's memoir, p.30.

²² Extract from interview with Bill Turner 2nd January 2003.

²³ From interview with Horace Pinfold 2nd December 2000.

²⁴ From interview with Wilf Todd 1st May 1999. Also recalled by Harry Smithson in his recollections.

²⁵ Sydney Jary, *18 Platoon*, p.93 'the oil in our automatic weapons froze and, until anti-freeze lubricants were issued, our Brens were useless'.

Although the months of December and January were quiet militarily, the harsh physical conditions took their toll, and unusually, the War Diary makes specific reference to this in a section at the end of January, prepared by Lt Little, entitled 'General Notes on the Month': 'The biggest enemy during the month was the cold. It was overcome by the issue of a weird collection of clothing, including locally made fur coats, ear muffs, gum boot stockings, and sand-bags for the feet. Rum was issued on a generous scale throughout the month'.²⁶ Although none of the interviewees mentioned unusual clothing, many did recall the sand-bags, the snowsuits and the unrelenting cold. Horace Pinfold also recalled the rum issue, considered essential by many soldiers:

Being the youngest, I was told to carry the rum up to this trench up by the Maas, a big bottle of rum, and of course. . . they kept looking at me, I thought 'they are looking after me'. . .and anyway I disappeared down a hole, and I remember this very plainly, and this one chap said "is he alright?", and somebody said "never mind if so and so over there is alright. Is the rum alright"? That is a further thing that stands out in my mind.²⁷

This is a typical anecdote illustrating Army humour,²⁸ but it also reflects just how important the rum became at times, for morale purposes as well as to combat the cold. Although 'this rum was so strong a lot of the boys could not drink it',²⁹ it proved a method of making the harsh physical conditions bearable.³⁰ Rum was not distributed daily, but depended on the prevailing circumstances. In Smithson's account of fetching the rum for his depleted section, the qualification was that it had been raining for more than ten minutes.

The harsh physical conditions were alleviated during periods in reserve or while on leave, when efforts were made to supply the soldiers with beer and recreation, while

²⁶ 2nd Battalion War Diary 31st January 1945.

²⁷ Extract from interview with Horace Pinfold 2nd December 2000.

²⁸ The importance of humour as a stress diffuser should not be overlooked. Many of the interviewees quoted examples of laughter despite the grimmest of situations, including Peter Brown and Wilf Todd.

²⁹ Harry Smithson's recollections.

³⁰ For the function of alcohol on the frontline see Richard Holmes, *Acts of War. The Behaviour of Men in Battle*, pp.247-250.

continuing to adhere to army rules and standards. Lt Col Renison's memoir makes reference to football matches, ENSA shows, dances and film showings, yet rest periods were, of necessity, short and infrequent. More regularly, the battalion was removed from the front line in order to re-equip and receive reinforcements. However these periods were not wholly restful as the areas were usually close enough to the front line to be within German artillery range.³¹

Endurance and Exhaustion.

For many infantrymen, after a long spell in action, watching comrades becoming casualties and perhaps their replacements also being killed or wounded, they would begin to feel 'an increasing weariness of the spirit, a slowly dawning and dreadful realisation that there was no way out, that the odds were stacked against the front-line soldier'.³² For officers, the risks were even greater.

To many involved in this campaign, it appeared that more concerted action could be expected from the inexperienced soldier, with the longer-serving troops becoming increasingly cautious.³³ Lt Col Richardson considered that 'the old war horse needs far more careful handling and bandaging up in cotton wool than the youngster, who is prepared to rush his fences because he has never had a bad fall'.³⁴ One battalion in 3rd Division was quoted as having failed to advance during an attack because the experienced soldiers, hearing a Spandau machine gun, had gone to ground, encouraging the reinforcements to follow suit, 'such is the state to which too much hard fighting and mental exhaustion can reduce a fine formation'.³⁵ In fact, no matter how good the training in helping the infantryman acclimatise to the battlefield, he would still have a

³¹ This was usual practice for the infantry and also for armoured regiments. Brig M. J. P. O'Cock recalled incurring casualties out of the front line 'in spite of all our precautions' SWWEC (2003-2287) p.5.

³² John Ellis, *The Sharp End of War. The fighting man in World War II*, p.239.

³³ Major General P. Martin – after a period in action 'we certainly didn't take the sort of wild risks which one would have expected the newly arrived troops from England to take' SWWEC Tape 2106. Also Belfield and Essame, *The Battle for Normandy*, p.116.

³⁴ Lt Col P. H. Richardson DSO OBE, Commanding Officer of 7th Battalion The Green Howards, p.3 from his account held at The Green Howards Regimental Museum, Richmond.

³⁵ Belfield and Essame, *The Battle for Normandy*, p.169. The battalion was not named.

'breaking point'.³⁶ John Folley wrote honestly of the mental pressure, which resulted in thoughts of suicide,³⁷ and which impacted on the rest of his life. As has already been outlined, cases of men refusing to advance on the enemy are well-documented, both on occasion within the 2nd Battalion and in many instances elsewhere within infantry regiments serving in north-west Europe.³⁸ An infantryman's 'breaking point' was considered to be after four hundred days of exposure to action, even with proper rest out of the line.³⁹

During the north-west Europe campaign, Major-General Gilbert of the 2nd Battalion Lincolnshire Regiment found that as a Company Commander he was initially unprepared for cases of battle exhaustion. He quickly had to learn to spot a man under strain and send him back down the line for a short rest.⁴⁰ Gilbert highlighted the most stressful situations as being periods of intensive shelling and also accurate aimed rifle fire.⁴¹ Sir Robin Dunn reiterated that it was difficult to persuade soldiers to do their duty when they were 'frightened, tired, cold, wet and hungry',⁴² yet in his experience at least 90 per cent of his men continued to perform effectively. Some men remained effective in action longer than others, yet all would succumb to exhaustion eventually.⁴³ Symptoms of exhaustion included 'shaking hands, stammering, tears and untypical behaviour' and it could prove unsettling for the other men in the unit.⁴⁴

³⁶ Discipline and the Death Penalty in the British Army in the War against Germany during the Second World War, David French. *Journal of Contemporary History* 33. 4.

³⁷ Article by John Folley, 'Every Man has a Breaking Point', Special Collections, University of Leeds, ARMY 069.

³⁸ A Diary entry on 10th August 1944, by Reverend George Fox MC of the 3rd Reconnaissance Regt stated: 'encouraged one man to get out of his trench and join the rest, I told him that I would stand by him at his post, but of no avail. Impossible to reason with such a case in such surroundings, they must be got away from the line', ed. The Reverend Colin Fox.

³⁹ Gwynne Dyer, in *War*, wrote that during the Second World War, the US Army said men would break down after 200-240 days and both US and British Armies agreed that breakdown was inevitable. See also Richard Holmes, *Acts of War*, p. 215.

⁴⁰ John P. Waterfield remembered the Padre alerting him if an individual was displaying signs of battle fatigue, whereupon he would be sent for a short rest. Interview SWWEC (2002-1672).

⁴¹ Major General G. C. A. Gilbert MC. Interview by SWWEC Tape 1424.

⁴² Sir Robin Dunn of the Royal Artillery. Interview by SWWEC Tape 1500.

⁴³ Major General P. Martin recalled one of his Corporals in the DLI breaking down in Normandy, after serving gallantly in the desert. Interview SWWEC Tape 2106.

⁴⁴ Lt Eric Chamberlain SWWEC (2003-2067), Brig M. J. P. O'Cock SWWEC (2003-2287).

Inevitably there was a conflict of interest between the military, who needed the maximum number of men available for active service, and those operating in the field of psychiatry who wanted to treat those displaying symptoms of strain. By initially treating cases close to the front line, as many men as possible could be returned to their unit instead of evacuating them to the rear.

For the 2nd Battalion, the strain that resulted from being in action became apparent by the end of June. Straight after the Chateau de la Londe battle, the battalion moved back to Mathieu. The rest was certainly needed. On Lt Col Renison's arrival at the battalion he noted that 'I was horrified to find how pale and tired, almost listless everyone seemed'.⁴⁵ This situation was replicated within other battalions serving in Normandy during the period.⁴⁶ The Chateau de la Londe action was arduous and had taken its toll mentally. Capt Ogden recorded in his memoir that he felt it would be a useful exercise for 'B' Company to go back over the battle for training purposes, yet 'before we started, normally cheerful red faced soldiers were going grey and ashen in colour. I felt it a little in the pit of my stomach. We were slipping back in time to the battle itself. We were in an actual time warp or a psychological one'.⁴⁷ He swiftly cancelled the exercise and returned the men to their usual duties. Capt Ogden remembered the large number of unburied dead from both sides, as the action had taken three weeks in all, and the interviewees too, recalled these sights and the attendant smell. For Peter Brown, the battle 'was certainly the worst experience we'd had to date', particularly as he had had to share his dug-out with a dead German for some hours and 'although by this time we were used to the smell of death, it was a long time before we recovered from this experience'.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Lt Col Renison's memoir, p.11.

⁴⁶ Lt Col Martin Lindsay, *So Few Got Through*, p.13. Lindsay's CO said as early as July 15th 1944 that his battalion was tired as a result of too much use being made of the Division, accounting for a number of men becoming 'bomb-happy'.

⁴⁷ Captain J. H. Ogden, *Ogden's Force IWM (67/267/1)*.

⁴⁸ Peter Brown privately held memoir.

Neither the War Diary nor Lt Col Renison wrote of deserters, yet desertion was a common problem among infantry divisions in north-west Europe. During the First World War, the ultimate punishment for desertion had been the death penalty, but this ultimate deterrent was no longer in force during the 1939-45 conflict. The usual sentence for desertion in the north-west European campaign, was three years' penal servitude.⁴⁹ As a result of a survey of 2,000 deserters, a close link was established between desertion and low morale, so that if unit morale faltered, a soldier could resort to desertion or become a casualty of battle exhaustion.⁵⁰ The survey also linked desertion to men who had served in previous campaigns and a higher rate among the infantry, who comprised 89 per cent of the total. In one of Major King's letters to his batman he referred to the problem of desertion, when the German troops counter-attacked and 'some of our bomb happy crowd beat it'.⁵¹ He is obviously not writing of just one or two men who could not, or would not, face battle, yet the north-west Europe campaign, at this point, was only three months old.

The interviewees spoke of men who had become 'bomb-happy' but did not mention many incidences of desertion, as it was considered a source of shame for the battalion.⁵²

Cpl John Scruton remembered men leaving the front line when they had had enough, and once or twice he helped them with a little money, in the knowledge that if they stayed, their behaviour could endanger others. He also revealed, 'I had one bloke who shot his finger off not long after D-Day' to effect a return to the UK. Scruton argued that this behaviour was in the minority, as 'most stuck it out, often month after month, with a dogged, stubborn (sometimes sullen) spirit of determination'.⁵³ Other than this one mention of a self-inflicted wound, none of the other interviewees spoke of such

⁴⁹ Robert H. Ahrenfeldt, *Psychiatry in the British Army in the Second World War* (London, 1958) p.118.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* pp.122-123.

⁵¹ Letter from Major King to Blenkhorn dated 29th August 1944.

⁵² Lt Col Martin Lindsay wrote that six deserters from 3rd Division had surrendered to his battalion, although no unit name was given, in *So Few Got Through* p.24. Lindsay also recorded deserters from his own battalion p.64.

⁵³ Interview with John Scruton 31st May 1999.

incidences, although John Folley wrote of limbs held above the trenches during shell-fire 'sprouting up like weeds' in the hope of achieving a 'Blighty' wound.⁵⁴

The 3rd Infantry Division's monthly medical bulletins analysed the numbers of casualties and their causes. The bulletin for October 1944 showed that battle exhaustion cases were high in proportion to wounded during the battle for Venraij⁵⁵ and pointed out the reason for the preponderance of such cases was due to the battle conditions of 'cold and wet weather, inability to dig proper slit trenches due to the waterlogged ground; a prolonged battle with not very much progress and the continual fear of mines'. The ratio for the 2nd Battalion was 1:2, meaning that for every two men injured in battle, one became a casualty of exhaustion. Fortunately around three-quarters of the exhaustion cases were 'returned to unit' following proper care,⁵⁶ although it is not clear how many men may have later suffered a relapse. This is a higher percentage than that achieved by the 53rd Welsh Division, which managed to return only 52.4 per cent of soldiers suffering from exhaustion to their units during Operation Veritable in the period February to March 1945.⁵⁷

The report concluded that in respect of the Venraij battle, the majority of cases were of physical exhaustion rather than mental. It also linked the higher incidence of exhaustion to the days when more than ten men had to be evacuated with wounds, inferring that the resulting blow to morale predisposed the troops to becoming exhaustion cases. To speed up the treatment of exhaustion cases, a system was implemented for November whereby an officer assessed all new cases at the Advanced Dressing Station and divided them into physical exhaustion cases exhibiting slight nervous symptoms who could be treated on site, and those who were 'nervous wrecks' who were evacuated direct to the Field

⁵⁴ 'A Blighty', from the papers of John Folley, University of Leeds.

⁵⁵ In *A Canloan Officer*, R. F. Fendick ascribed this figure as being due to 'the very severe nature of the fighting and the appalling conditions', p.135.

⁵⁶ 3rd British Infantry Division monthly medical bulletins, prepared by the ADMS of 3rd Div, Colonel R D Cameron. From the papers of Lt Col D. Paton of the RAMC, 223 Field Ambulance. SWWEC (2001-1354).

⁵⁷ A. D. Bolland, *Team Spirit. The Administration of the 53rd Welsh Division during Operation Overlord June 1944-May 1945*. SWWEC (2003-2140).

Dressing Station. The November report considered the issue of 'the Exhaustion Casualty' in greater depth, being defined as 'the soldier who, not being wounded or suffering from a particular disease, finds himself incapable of carrying on during the battle'. The causes included poor physical conditions, a long period at the front under shellfire, the loss of Company Commanders with no real leaders to take their place, and a lack of 'esprit de corps' within the troops, particularly relating to the arrival of new reinforcements who may feel inferior due to their dearth of battle experience. The report stressed the vital role played by officers in keeping the cases of exhaustion to a minimum, including regular visits around the platoon by its officer, putting new reinforcements with an experienced soldier acting as a 'battle father' and keeping troops active during rest periods, with parades, training and marches. In the case of the 2nd Battalion, it is apparent from the War Diary and interviews that these recommendations were rigorously followed. The only recommendation which does not feature in the interviews is that of giving lectures to the troops on the progress of the war between battles; rather it was noted by two interviewees that more information would have been useful.

In assessing the incidence of battle exhaustion it is clear that particular elements of active service produced increased strain for the infantrymen. These elements include continual bombardments, the period immediately before going into action, the battle itself, and patrolling. Maintaining a constant high level of patrolling is a feature of Lt Col Renison's memoir and was regularly referred to in interviews. Patrols varied according to their purpose, whether for reconnaissance, or to protect the position (a 'standing' patrol) or to demoralise the enemy by engaging them, and in doing so, perhaps capture a prisoner for intelligence (a 'fighting' patrol). Their different purpose would determine how many men went, and what weapons would be carried. Infantry

battalions carried out all three types depending on their location, for example proximity to the enemy, and whether 'friendly forces' covered the flanks.⁵⁸

Patrolling could be a dangerous activity,⁵⁹ although one interviewee, Alf Ackroyd, opted to take out patrols as 'it meant that next day you could get your head down without being disturbed for five or six hours'.⁶⁰ As a lack of sleep was an ever-present problem, for Alf Ackroyd, the benefits of being able to sleep for a longer stretch outweighed the risks of being out on patrol. However, Doug Parker recalled his first patrol as an unnerving experience: 'The first patrol I went on there was a Spandau firing down on us from a tree when we were walking across a field. All these tracer bullets were coming. I heard this lad shout, "mother, mother". Well we all did a runner, we were that frightened'. He added: 'It was no wonder your nerves were terrible. Every time you went out you'd wonder if you were coming back'.⁶¹ Coping with such fear, and continuing to serve in the front line in spite of it, is considered by some to be a true measure of bravery.⁶²

For some of those who became casualties, depending on the nature of their injury, it could be seen as a positive experience, in that it gave them time away from the front line. Of course, some of the injuries were life-changing in that their effects have continued to the present day. All those who became casualties remembered the details of the incident, their route back for treatment and the care they received, in great detail and with clarity, even in cases where the remainder of the interview was devoid of hard facts. For all those wounded, the names of hospitals, the number of weeks hospitalised and what they did during the subsequent leave, are all brought easily to mind.⁶³

⁵⁸ In *18 Platoon*, Sydney Jary argued that reconnaissance and standing patrols were useful for information purposes, but fighting patrols were a 'contentious proposition', p.72.

⁵⁹ Capt Michael Bendix described fighting patrols as 'hateful' and standing patrols as 'physically exhausting' SWWEC (2000-356).

⁶⁰ Extract from interview with Alf Ackroyd 25th February 2002.

⁶¹ Extract from interview with Doug Parker 17th July 1999.

⁶² R. F. Fendick, *A Canloan Officer*, p.83. In *18 Platoon*, Sydney Jary cited the example of Pte Charles Raven.

⁶³ For example, interviews with Jack Reid, George Burnham and Peter Brown.

Similarly, incidences of 'near misses' were recalled in detail.⁶⁴ Harry Smithson and two comrades ran for the same trench when shellfire started. Smithson was second into the trench and the last man, who landed on the top of the others, was killed.⁶⁵ On D-Day, Arthur Lumb was leaving the beach when the men in front of and behind him were killed, while Lumb was unscathed.⁶⁶ Such incidences reminded the interviewees of their mortality, and their good fortune in escaping unhurt when others around them were becoming casualties. Yet, for the longer-serving interviewees, it became increasingly clear that the only acceptable way to escape active service was to be injured or killed. Wilf Todd summed up this awareness:

I always thought I would come through the Normandy landings. Later on in the war, and especially at night when you've been through a big attack and you're laying in your trench, you used to think about all your mates who had died. You knew that most of the faces you saw now hadn't come with you on the landings. You'd think surely my time must be coming now and you didn't give much for your chances of coming through the war.⁶⁷

During the north-west Europe campaign, the infantry came under enormous strain and cases of battle fatigue were widespread.⁶⁸ There was a fine line between endurance and breakdown and it was only a matter of time before any infantryman would fall victim to collapse. It was the high turnover of soldiers that ensured large numbers did not suffer from breakdown simultaneously.

Killing and the Treatment of Prisoners.

The issues of killing, and prisoner mistreatment, remain sensitive ones, which is reflected in the fact that few interviewees volunteered details of particular instances. Of those that did, it appears that being close enough to the enemy to see his face as you

⁶⁴ Martin Lindsay, in *So Few Got Through*, wrote that initially, near misses were 'slightly exhilarating', but after a while the law of averages became apparent and they wore you down, p.216.

⁶⁵ Harry Smithson's recollections.

⁶⁶ From interview with Arthur Lumb 1st May 1999.

⁶⁷ Extract from interview with Wilf Todd 4th April 1999.

⁶⁸ See Ben Shephard, *A War of Nerves. Soldiers and Psychiatrists 1914-1994* (London, 2002) pp.250-255.

killed him had a significant impact on the survivor.⁶⁹ It is also quite rare to find particular instances of killing among infantry memoirs of the period. I did not pose a particular question relating to either prisoner abuse or killing generally, as I decided it was too intrusive to raise this subject in the short interview time available. However, a small number of interviewees did speak of these issues voluntarily, and from listening to the testimony and watching the reaction of the interviewee as he recalled the event, it is clear how affecting these issues were, both at the time and during the subsequent years.

Despite Joanna Bourke's argument that some men during this period gained pleasure from killing, there were no feelings of pleasure associated with these instances of prisoner abuse or killing of Germans generally. Bourke wrote, 'fear, anxiety, pain; these are only too familiar in combat. But excitement, joy and satisfaction were equally fundamental emotions, inspired by imagining that they had scored a good, clean "kill"'.⁷⁰ None of my interviewees viewed the killing of German troops as in any way pleasurable, and instead gave examples of killing to protect their comrades or for self-preservation.

It was in the battle for the bridge near Schaddenhof farm, that Dennis Bowen used his bayonet in action to kill a German soldier, which was not a regular occurrence during this campaign. Dennis Bowen shuddered, and his voice faltered, while describing his bayonet attack.⁷¹ In another interview Wilf Todd calmly described one of the incidents which deeply affected him both at the time and post-war. After crossing the Escaut canal, he killed one of a small party of Germans while they were surrendering, as he mistakenly thought the German, who had a revolver in his hand, had just shot his friend.

⁶⁹ This extends beyond the 2nd Bn. Norman Ford wrote of shooting a young 17 year old German who 'suddenly became a fellow human being'. It is 'still painful to recall', SWWEC (99.40).

⁷⁰ Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing. Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare*, p.43.

⁷¹ From interview with Dennis Bowen 23rd January 2000.

This soldier closely resembled his father, with whom he had a troubled relationship, and this had a profound effect on Wilf Todd.⁷²

Killing close-up was a very different proposition to the long-range killing of the aerial bombing campaign, or the shelling from a distance undertaken by the artillery. Only a small proportion of the armed forces killed at close range; the infantry of the rifle companies, and machine-gunners in the tanks, on the occasions when they had enemy infantry in range. It was common not to see enemy soldiers on the battlefield, as German forces usually remained hidden from view.

In terms of treatment of prisoners, it appears that instances of mistreatment often occurred shortly after a battle, in retaliation for the loss of comrades and while the captor was angry and distressed. Certainly the most dangerous period for any new captives was in the first few moments of surrender.⁷³ Having lost almost all of the men from his section during the battle for Touffreville, Alf Ackroyd remembered: 'two Germans surrendered, and I was so full of emotion that for the first time I turned the rifle and pulled the trigger. Fortunately it didn't fire, a typical misfire, for which afterwards I was very thankful'.⁷⁴ This was the only personal involvement recalled during the interviews. The other incidents recorded during the interviews and battalion memoirs, entail acting as witnesses to prisoner abuse by other battalion members.⁷⁵ This reflects the findings of Stephen Ambrose, who interviewed over one thousand combat veterans. While only one admitted killing a prisoner himself, nearly a third recalled

⁷² From interview with Wilf Todd 4th April 1999.

⁷³ From Peter H. Liddle and S. P. MacKenzie, 'The experience of captivity: British and Commonwealth prisoners in Germany', eds. P. Liddle, J. Bourne, I. Whitehead, *The Great World War 1914-45 Vol. 1 Lightning Strikes Twice*.

⁷⁴ Extract from interview with Alf Ackroyd 25th February 2002.

⁷⁵ For example Melville Hardiment, a sergeant in the 2nd Battalion, recalled a private called Willy killing three Germans trying to surrender on D-Day: 'I felt so bloody angry. All around us there were men, my friends, dying bravely'. Hardiment considered that the private 'had obviously felt the same way as I had. Only more so'. From *The Daily Star*, 6th June 1984. Other incidents were recalled by Alf Harrison and John Folley.

other GIs shooting unarmed POWs.⁷⁶ Certainly Alf Ackroyd was unable to recall any specific guidance from officers as to how prisoners were to be taken, and treated thereafter,⁷⁷ although this would have been their responsibility.

Jim Fetterly, at the time a junior officer, wrote that before the battle for the Chateau de la Londe, he was specifically ordered by a superior officer not to take any prisoners during the forthcoming action. This shows that the killing of prisoners, while officially against the Geneva Convention, was, on occasion, unofficially sanctioned during the campaign. Fetterly queried the orders as he refused to countenance the shooting of Germans who wished to surrender, and was saved from a charge of insubordination by his superior being wounded during the battle.⁷⁸ Fetterly's example is corroborated in Stephen Ambrose's work, when he related the experience of Pvt Phillip Stark, who was ordered not to take prisoners as there were too few soldiers available to take care of them.⁷⁹

It is unsurprising that the interviewees did not discuss many examples of prisoner mistreatment, as pride in membership of the 2nd Battalion remains strong. There is also, naturally, the concept of morality, with most infantrymen believing in fair treatment for prisoners, aware that they too could be captured. As a Regimental Policeman, Arthur Lumb handled many of the prisoners. During his interview he remained angry about one particular incidence of prisoner mistreatment: 'This German had tried to escape near the Escaut canal. If he'd have got over, he'd have had a decent run into Germany. He was captured and this sergeant kicked him really hard. I didn't like it at all'.⁸⁰

Some prisoners did not expect to be treated fairly. Tommy Hall considered that snipers generally recognised that surrender would be futile, since their methods of operating

⁷⁶ Stephen E. Ambrose, *Citizen Soldiers. The US Army from the Normandy Beaches to the Surrender of Germany* (London, 2002) pp. 352-353. See also Ambrose's *Band of Brothers* (London, 2001) p.206.

⁷⁷ During visit to Alf Ackroyd 4th June 2007.

⁷⁸ Letter from Jim Fetterly to author dated 10th March 2000.

⁷⁹ Stephen E. Ambrose, *The Victors. The Men of World War II* (London, 2004) p.288.

⁸⁰ Extract from interview with Arthur Lumb 1st May 1999.

were not 'honourable' and they were therefore not often taken prisoner: 'The laws of fighting say that a sniper has to be shot because he shoots people who don't stand a chance. As a sniper you know what's going to happen to you'.⁸¹

It is clear that in most instances, prisoners were treated fairly and cases of mistreatment are in the minority. There are also examples where killing of soldiers on both sides could have taken place but were avoided. John Folley wrote of being observed by a German soldier while he carried an injured infantryman to safety, yet was not fired at, and John Scruton's patrol watched a lone German soldier fishing but did not take the opportunity to shoot him. British infantrymen differentiated between soldiers of the Wehrmacht and the SS Divisions. However the concept of pleasure in killing is certainly not generally recognised by the infantry of the 2nd Battalion.

Loyalty and Comradeship.

The strongest ties among infantrymen have historically been with their immediate friends within a small unit, usually their section, or more widely, the platoon. It is this loyalty that binds soldiers together and keeps them fighting together despite the conditions under which they operate, so that 'the group, family, is the psychological protection for individuals. The power of the group cannot be overstressed'.⁸² Lt Col Renison commented on small unit loyalty at the end of January 1945 when the freezing conditions in the Maas area had necessitated calling a temporary halt to offensive action. The men had time to live together in their sections without the relentless turnover from casualties and had therefore formed closer bonds, so that 'each section had got its team spirit'.⁸³

⁸¹ Extract from interview with Tommy Hall 17th July 1999. Sydney Jary in *18 Platoon*, considered sniping to be 'sordid' and 'more often than not, it was a cold and calculated way of killing which achieved no military advantage', pp. 60-61.

⁸² Lt Col Ian Palmer, senior lecturer in military psychology, quoted in Wendy Holden's *Shell Shock* (London, 2001) p.168.

⁸³ Lt Col Renison's memoir, p.216.

These friendships could prove life-saving while in action. Tom Penrice saved the life of Wilf Todd, Arthur Jessop provided similar protection for Horace Pinfold, and Bill Yoxall defied an officer's orders to drag his injured friend, John Scruton, to safety, while all were serving in north-west Europe. In attaching familial roles to their friends it was clear that for many, the section, rather than the company or battalion, was considered in the same light as a family. Each man had at least one 'mucker' that he would dig-in with and with whom he would share a trench.

Mindful that the reinforcements had had less time for training, and were being assimilated into a regiment usually not their own, it was usual for longer-serving soldiers to help acclimatise them to front line duties. This practice was not confined to the 2nd Battalion and is referred to in memoirs and interviews.⁸⁴ Denis Bowen recalled, 'I could see how one of the D-Day veterans would literally take one or two of the new reinforcements under his wing and would coax them along and reassure them when the going was tough'⁸⁵ and John Gardner remembered two ex-Chindits in his section reassuring him with the words, 'if there is any trouble you stop there and we will see to it'.⁸⁶ By easing the path of the reinforcements, the veterans allowed them time to become used to active service, which was gratefully acknowledged by the reinforcement interviewees.

The strong tie of comradeship was evident in the case of minor injuries, whereby the man injured would refuse to report sick, for fear of being permanently separated from his section. Going on guard duty while in Maashees, Norman Lucas fell while going upstairs from the basement and set fire to his hand, when the lit paraffin in his lamp spilled, yet treated the burn himself in preference to seeking medical assistance.⁸⁷ This reaction was not confined to the 'other ranks'. Lt Jim Fetterly suffered a head wound earlier in the

⁸⁴ Ray Fort –interview SWWEC Tape 1257.

⁸⁵ Extract from interview with Dennis Bowen 23rd January 2000.

⁸⁶ Extract from interview with John Gardner 2nd December 2000.

⁸⁷ From interview with Norman Lucas 9th October 1999.

campaign, and despite being unable to wear a helmet, was allowed to set up a sniper school rather than be evacuated to the UK, until after three weeks, 'I asked to be returned to my battalion'.⁸⁸ This shows how quickly the bonds of loyalty and comradeship developed. Fetterly, a Canadian officer on loan to the British Army, had only joined the battalion just before D-Day.⁸⁹

Some of the interviewees refused the opportunity for promotion in order to stay with their friends, and in so doing, forewent the extra pay. This desire to be with friends proved difficult when an infantryman was deemed 'LOB', Left out of Battle. Both Wilf Todd and Alf Ackroyd, although safe while LOB, hated the experience and would not repeat it. Alf Ackroyd returned to discover the last of his original section had been wounded and was demoralised as a result, recalling 'I was real down in the dumps that night'.⁹⁰

The death of friends and the circumstances surrounding the loss were vivid memories for the interviewees. Such recollections were often accompanied by strong emotion. Horace Pinfold recalled the death of Arthur Jessop, the friend who had saved his life, 'a shell landed and I was thrown into the air. I may have knocked myself out, came round and looked at Arthur and half his head had gone, and that really got me and it does now doesn't it?' (addressing his wife). Horace had not told his wife about this event, which affected him greatly, for many years, and she asked him to share his experience, in order to assist my understanding of how traumatic wartime service could be for these young infantrymen.

Officers and Men.

During the interview process a question was posed about general officer and men relationships and in so doing, it became apparent that all relationships with officers

⁸⁸ Both quotes from Jim Fetterly's letter to author 31st October 1999.

⁸⁹ In *An Ordinary Person*, Hugh Bone did not want to leave the 2nd Battalion when he injured his knee, and arranged to stay at 'B' echelon with the stores until fit, unpublished memoir, p.37.

⁹⁰ Extract from interview with Alf Ackroyd 11th March 2002.

were eclipsed by the general regard for one officer. This officer, Major 'Banger' King, will be considered in depth as a hero figure to the men of the battalion in the next section. Other officers mentioned, include Majors Rutherford and Crauford and also the Canadian officers on loan, such as Lieutenants Fetterly and Robertson, who were particularly remembered for their informal relationship with the 'other ranks'. Individual interviewees remember instances of bravery demonstrated by these officers, including Lt Fetterly's actions at the Chateau de la Londe, resulting in the award of his Military Cross, and Major Rutherford's similar award following action in Holland.

Majors Rutherford and Crauford were both also noted for their leadership qualities, and stories have been recounted of Major Crauford walking up and down a railway embankment near Venraij, while under fire, in full view of the enemy and shouting at the men to advance 'because they hadn't even started firing at us yet'. The interviewee remembered 'Albert Bean saying "If they weren't firing, what the bloody hell was that stuff trying to take the top off his steel helmet?" The Germans could have chopped Major Crauford in two with their machine gun bullets'.⁹¹

None of the interviewees had anecdotes regarding the Commanding Officer of the battalion, Lt Col Renison. Although held in high regard for his abilities as CO, the only reference to him was in relation to King, when he was complimented for giving "'Banger" his head' and allowing 'him to do whatever he wanted'.⁹² Similarly, the interviewees made few references to Company Commanders other than Majors Crauford and Rutherford, although this is probably due to the high turnover of officers at this level within the battalion.

The junior leaders in the 2nd Battalion, the young Lieutenants, or subalterns, mentioned by the interviewees, were all held in high regard, particularly the Canloan officers. The casualty rate among the young Canloan officers was very high. Leonard Robertson

⁹¹ Extract from interview with Wilf Todd 20th March 1999.

⁹² Ibid.

provided figures illustrating that of the original 673 Canadians involved in the scheme, 20 per cent were killed and a further 50 per cent wounded, principally in Normandy; junior officers in particular, faced the attendant risks of 'leading from the front'.⁹³

Certainly not all the officers were valued by the interviewees, but very little criticism was openly offered, perhaps to protect their reputations and that of the regiment. John Folley and Jim Fetterly both wrote of officers who succumbed to battle fatigue and who either 'disappeared' from the battlefield or threatened suicide.⁹⁴ Yet such cases usually met with some degree of understanding, especially if the sufferer had served for a lengthy period in the front line.⁹⁵

Early in the north-west Europe campaign, the problems of leadership under extreme conditions became apparent. Whether a man should be ordered to play his full role in an action, or whether he should report for treatment if his panic was in danger of infecting the rest of the soldiers around him, was a split-second decision which often devolved on to the junior officers in the first instance. In the battle of the Chateau de la Londe, Lt Fetterly sent back a former wrestler who 'kept at me to turn back before we all got killed. As he was useless, I told him to take back the two wounded. He took one under each arm and actually ran carrying the two'.⁹⁶ Just days previously, Clive Crauford had acted differently, when stragglers from another battalion which was taking heavy casualties, attempted to retreat through 2nd Battalion lines. After Crauford ordered the men to return to their unit, a nearby soldier remarked to Crauford: "they didn't get away with it with you Sir", and it occurred to me then I had been dead right. The good soldier doesn't want to see the scroungers get away with it'.⁹⁷ Yet, examples of

⁹³ Letter from Len Robertson 27th March 2000. Martin Lindsay, in *So Few Got Through* wrote the average life expectancy of a platoon commander was one month, p.126.

⁹⁴ 'They Gave Their All', John Folley, University of Leeds, and letter to author from Jim Fetterly 10th March 2000.

⁹⁵ This understanding was not extended to those who succumbed without having 'proved' themselves. For example Sir Robin Dunn MC in *Sword and Wig – memories of a Lord Justice*, was angry that a new Captain, in refusing to go into the line, had got away with a 'soft option' p.74.

⁹⁶ Extract from letter from Jim Fetterly to author 10th March 2000.

⁹⁷ Extracts from interview with Clive Crauford 5th November 2000.

'scroungers' were differentiated by Crauford from those of young men experiencing real and natural fear, as demonstrated in the Introduction. Here, a young, nervous soldier was encouraged to deal with his fear and remain in the front line. Young officers were faced with such situations increasingly, as the campaign continued, and were in the difficult position of having to decide for themselves how to react and how to impose discipline, particularly in light of the number of reinforcements joining the battalion. Officers became aware that there was often a fine line between carrying on the fight or reporting sick, perhaps even deserting.⁹⁸

During front line duties, the barriers between officers and their men became 'blurred' due to the intense experiences they shared. One interviewee recalled 'when we were in action we were all the same, the officers and us, but it was in peacetime that they were more selective'.⁹⁹ This peacetime division became apparent post-war: 'in Egypt we started getting these young officers out of OCTU who'd never seen action and they started trying to lay the law down',¹⁰⁰ which proved unpopular with those who had served in the front line. While in action of course, the other ranks looked to their officers to provide strong leadership and in this it appears that the officers mentioned with such respect by the interviewees, did not disappoint. In return, Clive Crauford considered that a bond developed between his men and himself. The men under his command were:

typical of the wartime army as a whole, very ordinary sort of fellows, they played the game according to the rules. They knew that the officer had to give instructions, they recognised that sometimes you would say something awkward, difficult, and tell them things they didn't want to do, but they recognised also that he was doing his job and they knew they wanted to do their job, most of them did, there was always the odd one who was a perfect damned nuisance, but that's not typical. The majority of

⁹⁸ Martin Lindsay, *So Few Got Through*, p.132.

⁹⁹ Extract from interview with Jack Reid 4th July 1999.

¹⁰⁰ Extract from interview with Denis Cade 4th July 1999.

them were willing to do their job if they could, willing to help.¹⁰¹

If the officers looked after their men then the relationship could prove mutually beneficial. Major Crauford recalled the care his men displayed towards him when he was very tired and starting to dig a slit trench. His batman told him to go to sleep, but Crauford demurred, feeling that if his men had to dig he should follow suit, at which point 'they all turned round to me at once and they said "you go to sleep Sir, you could do with it, we'll do the digging". So I gratefully recognised I was among friends'.¹⁰² In this reminiscence, Crauford's men still referred to him as 'Sir', in deference to his rank, yet the relationship clearly tends towards the informal. A key factor in this process was the recognition by the other ranks that their officers shared the same physical conditions and dangers they did while in action. Certainly the respect of the interviewees appears to be reserved for those officers that fought alongside them, rather than those, at any level, who were less visible.

During the war, there was also less emphasis on the 'spit and polish' aspects of service. Some standards of cleanliness, for example with regard to foot care and maintenance of weapons, were essential, yet the 'other ranks' had a particular antipathy for officers they saw as making unrealistic demands, given the prevailing physical conditions.

During an interview, Alf Ackroyd remembered an officer of one of the Guards regiments being attached to the battalion for a short period. Having called an 'O' group, he sent the attendees back to their trenches because 'we wasn't smart enough. We hadn't shaved and we hadn't got our boots clean, and how he expected us to clean us boots I don't know. . .and he is there with his flat cap and shiny badge and, you know, nice and comfortable in his trench. No sense'. Some officers became known by the 'other ranks' for their 'chickenshit' which refers 'to behaviour that makes military life

¹⁰¹ Extract from interview with Clive Crauford 5th November 2000.

¹⁰² Ibid.

worse than it need be'.¹⁰³ An officer therefore quickly became unpopular if he was not perceived to share the same conditions as his men, nor to hold their needs as important. From the interviews conducted it was apparent that officer and men relationships within the 2nd Battalion were generally very good, and an affection and respect for their officers has continued to the present day. The experiences of the interviewees with regard to their officers reflect the argument put forward by French that 'effective leadership was the key to success and regimental officers did not fail to provide it. They shared the hardships of their men, led from the front, and suffered correspondingly higher casualties'.¹⁰⁴

A Study in Leadership.

The north-west European campaign would not have been successfully prosecuted by the Allies without strong and effective leadership by many officers of all ranks, both commissioned and non-commissioned. Such leadership is essential for the welfare of the men being led, and to ensure they operate at their peak, particularly 'during moments of great danger' when 'the grip of the leader on the led is paramount'.¹⁰⁵ Of course, leadership was not restricted to the officers, but in the case of the 2nd Battalion, there was one man, above all others, who demonstrated the difference that effective leadership could directly make to morale and unit cohesion.

Major Charles King, known throughout the battalion as 'Banger', inspired men within the battalion, and also the 3rd Division, with his bravery, energy and inspirational leadership. All the interviewees remembered King and related examples of his heroism, his lack of fear, his sense of humour despite the hardships, and his care in ensuring their needs were met. This study in leadership focuses on three aspects of King, to demonstrate his leadership style and why it proved so successful. Firstly it considers what King was like as a man and as an officer, secondly, what exactly he provided for

¹⁰³ Paul Fussell, *Wartime – Understanding and Behaviour in the Second World War*.

¹⁰⁴ French, *Raising Churchill's Army*, p.76.

¹⁰⁵ Sydney Jary, *Eighteen Platoon*, p.7.

his men to elicit such loyalty and feelings of respect and affection, and finally, what it was about him that made him 'different' from other leaders.

For this study the interviews 'fleshed out' the one-dimensional heroic version of King, presented within the Divisional secondary literature.¹⁰⁶ Different anecdotes are remembered, particularly by those who served with him the longest, and stress his humour, generosity and care towards them, as well as the feats he carried out while in action.

To the young recruits Major King seemed different from other officers from the moment of his arrival in the battalion. A regular officer, as opposed to the 'civilian officers' brought in for the duration of hostilities only, King had the additional aura that familiarity with the army brought. This, together with the relative gap in their ages, fostered the element of hero-worship in the young soldiers from the first, so that:

When he came to our battalion some of the longer serving soldiers were really excited. We couldn't understand why, until we first glimpsed Banger on the parade ground. His hair was down onto his collar and he had a proper round service hat on with a peak, a cheese cutter, pushed slightly towards the back.¹⁰⁷

Here then was an officer who was clearly less concerned with the 'spit and polish' element of service life, who wore his hair overlong and his hat off the regulation line. For the strictly regimented recruits it is easy to understand why initial impressions of Major King remain strong in the memories of veterans so many years on. As an able and witty raconteur, King also told stories about himself and his previous army career, particularly while serving in India and Africa. Such stories would have produced an aura of glamour and mystery around King, and the younger element particularly, would have been impressed with these tales of romantic adventure. They also reinforced King's status as a regular officer of many years standing.

¹⁰⁶ These sources are the divisional histories of Scarfe and Delaforce, and Ryan's book *The Longest Day*.

¹⁰⁷ Extract from interview with Wilf Todd 20th March 1999.

Although the stories portray King's bravery and sincerity, none mark him out as especially remarkable in his appearance, stature or voice. He was of average height, wore standard British army uniform and was seldom seen without his pipe. In comparison, it is easy to see why T. E. Lawrence's wearing of white robes with a gold curved sword caught the public imagination, transforming him into 'an imperial adventure hero'.¹⁰⁸ Growing up during a period of imperial adventure stories and heroic lives biographies it would be remarkable if King had not been infected with ideas of proper behaviour along heroic lines and was attracted by the opportunity for adventures of his own in India and Africa.¹⁰⁹

King's leadership style on active service became apparent to the men of the 2nd Battalion during the D-Day landings. As previously noted, having 'gone to the trouble of writing down the lines he wanted',¹¹⁰ King read extracts from Shakespeare's *Henry V*, to his men on board the landing craft, in recognition of the historic day and to stir his men into action. News of the reading spread round the battalion, so that one interviewee, recalling the incident, maintained, 'When you get somebody like him, reading stuff like that, you'd follow him to hell. Especially when you knew that once the ramp went down he'd be right out at the front and you'd have a hell of a job to keep up with him'.¹¹¹

Together with the stories related by the interviewees, an idea of King's character is most evident today in the small collection of letters to his batman and batman's mother. Prior to D-Day, King had written to his batman's mother to reassure her as to her son's chances:

¹⁰⁸ Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes. British adventure, empire and the imagining of masculinities* (London and New York, 1994) p.169.

¹⁰⁹ Hugh Bone's poem 'A Man is Gone', written shortly after King's death, referred to his experiences of 'strange adventures, witchcraft, native wars. Of wandering in the East in Lashiv, Tibet, Penang, a soldier's outpost life. In Rasmack and Peshewar, the vast Sudan; a Lord of life in Bongo Bongo land'.

¹¹⁰ Cornelius Ryan, *The Longest Day*, p.148.

¹¹¹ Extract from interview with Wilf Todd 20th March 1999.

I hope you are not worrying too much about him. As a bachelor I haven't any (family) worries, but I feel that it's up to me to get as many of my company through this business as I can. The men take the place of a family in my estimation. . . and you can be sure that I won't lead your son or any of my company into any damn suicide act.¹¹²

After his batman had been injured and on discovering his whereabouts, King wrote to return the money he had removed from his batman's wallet for safekeeping, 'plus something to have a drink with me when you get out of hospital'.¹¹³

These letters are not perfunctory messages of goodwill but detailed and familiar. King clearly likes his batman. This is not King displaying 'kindly and humane paternalism'¹¹⁴ or behaving towards Blenkhorn as though he were a 'cherished pet'. There is no apparent social gulf between the two men. King is happy to refer to his own character faults, in revealing that his new batman is 'almost (but not quite, as that would be impossible) as forgetful' as him. This correspondence is all the more remarkable as Major King's daily responsibilities, even during 'rest periods' were extremely onerous and illustrates the depth of the care King felt towards his men, even when they had returned to the UK.

Major King was always keen to be where the action was, and frequently went so far forward that he was way in advance of front lines. One incident which was mentioned in a letter to his batman, was reiterated by one of the interviewees. After crossing the Escaut canal, 'King had gone across and taken the battalion objective. He'd gone miles ahead and was holed up in a farmhouse'.¹¹⁵ The 'other ranks' favoured his boldness, appreciating that he would not order them to go where he was unwilling to go himself, and thereby validating the argument that 'a man who is prepared to take risks makes a more popular leader than one not so inclined'.¹¹⁶ As well as being a regular officer and

¹¹² Letter from Major King to Blenkhorn's mother 24th April 1944.

¹¹³ Letter from Major King to Blenkhorn 29th August 1944.

¹¹⁴ Norman Dixon, *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence* (London, 1994) p.217.

¹¹⁵ Extract from interview with Wilf Todd 20th March 1999.

¹¹⁶ Norman Dixon, *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence*, p.217.

highly recognisable to all in the battalion, King did indeed treat his men as members of his family, leading one interviewee to comment that “‘Banger’ was a father, mother, big brother, you name it, all rolled into one’.¹¹⁷ This aptitude of effective leaders, to demonstrate fatherly qualities, was also reinforced by Lionel Roebuck who told his platoon commander Dennis Hallam, ‘you were like a father to us’, despite Hallam’s age being almost the same as the young soldiers he was commanding.¹¹⁸

Major King was also willing to stand up against instances he perceived as unjust to his men, or that might cause unnecessary casualties. Hugh Bone, the 2nd Battalion Signals Officer knew ‘Banger’ well and stressed this aspect of his character: ‘The troops loved him because he always thought of them and stood up for them, even on an occasion in Normandy risking court martial for them by telling the Brigadier what he thought of him in a particular action’.¹¹⁹

An additional facet of King’s character was seen as important by a further three interviewees, who stressed that for King, rank didn’t appear to matter, that ‘it was the guts that counted’¹²⁰ and that ‘he used to mix with us a lot. He was an officer you could talk to and he’d have a laugh and a joke with you’.¹²¹ It was the junior officers who lived alongside their men on a daily basis during wartime. The further up the promotional ladder the officers rose, the further removed they became, particularly in peacetime conditions. However the ranks did not detect this ‘divide’ with Major King; he was relaxed and familiar with them. King also ordered his young Lieutenants to go on guard duty, to subject them to the same conditions under which their men operated and thereby promote their understanding.¹²²

¹¹⁷ Extract from interview with Wilf Todd 20th March 1999.

¹¹⁸ Recounted in conversation with author.

¹¹⁹ Hugh Bone’s memoir, *An Ordinary Person*. Jack Reid singled out this attribute specifically, as he had personally benefited from it, in his interview 4th July 1999

¹²⁰ Extract from interview with Tommy Hall 17th July 1999.

¹²¹ Extract from interview with Jack Reid 4th July 1999.

¹²² Letter from John Folley to the author dated 26th March 2004, dictated to his wife due to illness.

As an officer, King could also show understanding towards those who were badly in need of rest. Lt Fetterly complained to 'Banger' that he had taken patrols out four nights in a row in Holland. The Major asked Fetterly to take that night's patrol as 'you Canadians have that Indian blood in you'¹²³ and then gave him time off. King was complimentary as he knew Fetterly was reliable and there was no doubting Fetterly's bravery, which had been proven, yet King also appreciated that rest was essential to maintain morale.

Major King proved an invaluable Second-in-Command to Lt Col Renison, when Renison took over command of the battalion in October 1944, and he wrote of King that he was 'a tower of strength and a source of encouragement. To say that at times he almost nursed me might sound sentimental, but so it seemed to me'.¹²⁴ By introducing the word 'nursing', Renison credits King with a more gentle, even feminine, quality than is usually considered when hearing stories of King's exploits. The interviewees, in contrast, have focused on King as 'a man's man', happiest in action, while the newspaper articles about him stress his masculine qualities. This explains the general amusement at the sight of King driving away a group of nuns in his jeep in Holland.¹²⁵ Of course, Renison's memories of King will be tinged with an element of gratitude that his Second-in-Command bore him no professional jealousy and instead devoted his energies towards assisting Renison in a successful prosecution of the battalion's war efforts. Renison was shrewd in taking full advantage of King's eighteen years' experience. Interestingly, King revealed that he had not been keen to accept the role of Second-in-Command, preferring instead to remain as company commander. Yet, as King confided to his batman: 'I would like to command the battalion one day, and although that is not very probable it is a step on the road'.¹²⁶

¹²³ Letter from Jim Fetterly to author 9th January 2000.

¹²⁴ Letter from Lt Col Renison published in *The Snapper* 1945.

¹²⁵ Nightingale, *The East Yorkshire Regiment*, p.231.

¹²⁶ Letter from Major King to Blenkhorn 21st November 1944.

King was also well regarded by Major Crauford, who understood, and agreed with, King's views on waging war. During his interview, Crauford said 'I knew "Banger" very well, and I liked and respected "Banger"'.¹²⁷ He chose the word respected, rather than admired, because he saw King as a fellow officer, an equal. Crauford recalled King 'making an example' of one soldier returning from a patrol, who had let down the others and endangered their lives. King threatened the soldier that he would shoot him if he behaved in the same way again. He then told him that he would receive the backing of the other men in the patrol to do so: 'if you let them down they won't object to you being shot'. Crauford added: 'He wouldn't have shot him of course, but it taught him a lesson anyway'. Like Crauford, Major King fully appreciated the situation faced by the battalion, which required that everyone play their allotted role to avoid additional or unnecessary casualties. Crauford was concerned about telling me this story of King's actions, in that it might not reflect well on King, yet his reason for telling this story was to illustrate proper fighting conditions; 'people don't realise the urgency of the situation. You have got to win. There is no other thing. If you are in a battle there are only two things. You may be massacred or you may win. It's better not to be massacred'.¹²⁸ He also credited King for being 'a hands-on type of Infantry officer', and again this is the same attribute with which interviewees have credited Crauford.

Having considered King's qualities as a man, and as an officer, it is important to examine what he provided for the men, in order to maintain their morale and mould them into an effective fighting force. Chiefly, Major King provided care for his men, he championed and inspired them. The stories related by the interviewees, invariably involve humour, either in how King reacted to the situation at the time or as a personal response to recounting the story to an audience. Occasionally the interviewees appear surprised at how they were inspired to acts of bravery by King in extreme situations, for

¹²⁷ Extract from interview with Clive Crauford 5th November 2000.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

example one recalled the officer ordering him to drive his Bren carrier through unexploded shells, in order to deliver rations to the front lines, where the men were resting having completed a full day's fighting. The driver did as he was ordered, and was rewarded by being given some whisky by King after the rations had been delivered. Recalling these events sixty years on, the interviewee still seemed surprised on reflecting that he had actually accomplished the drive unharmed.¹²⁹

Of course, demonstrating care for his men made military sense. Ensuring the men had their rations, particularly hot food after a day in action, and had sufficient ammunition to meet any counter-attacks, would assist in maintaining morale within the battalion. What came as second nature to King, due to his military training and care for his men, did not come naturally to all officers. At the cessation of hostilities, the 3rd Division's monthly medical bulletin¹³⁰ carried an article on 'Promotion of the Health of the Soldier', including instructions on personal hygiene, clothing and food. To avoid causing offence, the author wrote that these elements would not be 'new to Commanding Officers, but it is hoped that the notes will be helpful to all who are concerned with the health of the soldier'. The recommendations were commonsense and clearly the fact that they needed to be made at all, showed deficiencies in discipline and leadership. The care that King displayed helped to ensure that the sick rate among the troops was kept as low as possible. During the cold month of December 1944, the monthly medical bulletin recorded a drop in the number of sick cases in the 3rd Division, which was attributed to good hygiene, good food, hot meals, reasonable billets and satisfactory bath arrangements.¹³¹ King's care therefore made good military sense, by helping to ensure the numbers of men fit to fight were as high as possible.

¹²⁹ From interview with Bill Turner 2nd January 2003.

¹³⁰ 3rd British Infantry Division monthly medical bulletin prepared by Col W. A. Robinson ADMS. From the papers of Lt Col D. Paton of the RAMC, 223 Field Ambulance. SWWEC.

¹³¹ Ibid.

As well as encouraging his men to feats they found very unnerving, some memories focus on King's source of inspiration to them as individuals, making them feel 'I wish I were like him'.¹³² This wish comes through most strongly in the writings of John Folley, who acted as Major King's driver on many occasions during the north-west European campaign. In a collection of sixteen pieces regarding his personal experiences, four directly relate to the activities of the Major.¹³³ They directly contrast his own actions with those of King; depicting himself as fearful and with an overwhelming drive for self-preservation, while his officer is portrayed as courageous and oblivious to his own safety. In one piece entitled 'Thanks for the Memory', Folley's jeep was involved in an accident with a tank. As the tank began to crush the jeep, endangering its occupants, Folley jumped on to a wall, yet 'the Major still puffing on his pipe, made no effort whatsoever to move'.

In two further accounts by Folley, entitled 'Flirting with Death' and 'Put that light out!' he recounted the Major going out alone at night to capture two German prisoners, one of whom carried a Spandau machine gun, and later, deliberately attempting to attract the attentions of a sniper by lighting a fist full of matches to reveal his position. The numerous accounts of the Major's bravery and ability to instil confidence in others are recounted to demonstrate how important he was to the maintenance of morale in the battalion, to the extent that, 'he only had to ask for a volunteer and his whole company would rally around him, in fact they so loved him, they'd die for him, even a timid fellow like myself, the Major's charisma championed me, for he was invulnerable'.¹³⁴ This differs from Joanna Bourke's assertion that soldiers often viewed heroes with suspicion because they might endanger their lives, and thereby considered them ruthless and fanatical.¹³⁵ King's bravery was viewed as inspirational rather than ruthless and it

¹³² Extract from interview with Doug Parker 17th July 1999.

¹³³ Folley, Special Collections, University of Leeds.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing. Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare.*

was stressed by the interviewees that he would not ask anything of them that he was unwilling to do himself. Keegan argued that this heroism was essential in the leadership of armies, as without it, 'victories are bought with the blood of disillusioned men'.¹³⁶ It should not be forgotten too, that the interviewees were infantrymen, men 'at the sharp end'. To these men, an officer who is willing to put their needs before his own, to always lead by example and to show no fear, is deserving of great respect. As one NCO explained;

If 'Banger' came to see you and you were under fire, he would never get down. He'd get down on one knee but never lie down. He used to give us confidence. I don't think he knew he was doing it, it came automatically. 'Banger' was a great bloke. . .He had the ability to act under fire. . .He was an inspiration.¹³⁷

The word 'inspiration' is repeated frequently in interviews. For young, frightened soldiers, under shellfire and suffering continual casualties, inspiration was vital. Brigadier S. J. Hill used this same word in his description of how a commander can influence a battle, and concluded 'example, example, example wins battles'.¹³⁸ The fact that Major King would appear relaxed and calm under fire was a boost to morale and 'his presence was an indication to those around him that things were not as bad as they seemed'.¹³⁹ Major King understood fear; before sending out a patrol he would brief the NCO and 'as soon as you went in he'd have the rum bottle out and he'd put you in the picture'.¹⁴⁰ King therefore favoured the use of rum to ward off the cold and act as 'Dutch courage', but from the story of his threatening to shoot the errant soldier, it is clear that he would not tolerate those who were unable to 'manage' the fear. For soldiers living and fighting under the harsh conditions, while tired, cold, dirty and sometimes hungry, men who appeared invulnerable were highly regarded. Examples of

¹³⁶ John Keegan and Joseph Darracott, in *The Nature of War* (New York, 1981) p.69.

¹³⁷ Extract from interview with Tommy Hall 17th July 1999.

¹³⁸ Brigadier S. J. Hill's interview SWWEC Tape 964.

¹³⁹ Lt Col Renison's tribute to Major King in *The Snapper*.

¹⁴⁰ Extract from interview with Tommy Hall 17th July 1999.

officers willing to place themselves at great personal risk to encourage their troops are certainly not rare and were frequently necessary. One instance is that of Lt J. A. Clark of the Green Howards who also served in Normandy. The Green Howards' Regimental History cites Clark's actions during one day's fighting as typifying 'coolness and gallantry', in that:

When his company was held up in front of a gap in a high wall, with a Tiger tank firing at close range from a flank, the men were temporarily disorganised, and inclined to waver. Lt Clark, with great calmness, lit a cigarette, and walked slowly up to the gap in front of the whole company. His courageous example pulled the company together, and the leading troops followed him immediately.¹⁴¹

However, those willing to display such selfless bravery often became casualties. Not only did officers suffer a disproportionate number of casualties, compared to their men, but 'the most dangerous job in the army was commanding a rifle platoon or rifle company'.¹⁴² King, of course, had been Company Commander of 'A' Company until his promotion to Second-in-Command. King regularly carried out acts similar to that of Lt Clark, yet appeared to live a 'charmed life', adding to his aura of invulnerability.

It is therefore King's courage and his care that elevates him to the status of a hero and it is the reason why he is remembered as such in the stories told. It is not that other officers did not possess such qualities; King just possessed all the qualities cherished by the 'other ranks', in abundance.

King's own morale was deeply affected by the high casualty rate and at the battle of the Chateau de la Londe:

Our last regular CQMS, a good Runner, and a Cook Corporal, all three received a direct hit in their trench, killing them and burying them in one short second. Banger, whose company they were in, was very upset. Already his Sergeant-Major had been killed and Clerk

¹⁴¹ Capt W. A. T. Synge, *The Story of the Green Howards 1939-45* (Richmond, 1952) p.317.

¹⁴² David French, *Raising Churchill's Army*, p.77.

wounded. His familiar HQ was looking familiar no longer.¹⁴³

For King, the casualties did not just mean losing 'faces' he had served with over a long period, they were his friends. He would also have appreciated that the high turnover of personnel greatly affected unit cohesion, which was essential to the successful prosecution of the war. Yet the veterans clearly feel that King did not just see them as 'anonymous men', but as individuals, with their own feelings and needs.

It is important to emphasise that Major King's dedication to his men should not be viewed as a sign of weakness or evidence that he was regarded as either soft or a pushover. One method of 'encouragement' was to watch men going to ground under shelling, while he did not, and then saying 'What a bunch of women I have'.¹⁴⁴ King would also quote the saying, 'A coward dies a thousand deaths, but a brave man dies only one'.¹⁴⁵ He was especially intolerant of men he deemed 'malingerers' or, as I have already shown, those whose behaviour endangered others. Renison explains this critical side of the Major's character by arguing that, 'if he was intolerant of the "hanger-back" it was because he was such an ardent champion of the Infantry soldier who had followed him in so many actions and whose value he knew as few other men can have known it'.¹⁴⁶ As an infantry officer, King saw at first hand that 'the task of the infantry was by far the most onerous and dangerous of any arm of the service, and the rifle companies suffered the highest casualties in the army'.¹⁴⁷ The wonder was not that so many suffered from battle exhaustion, but that so many infantrymen stuck it out without succumbing.

¹⁴³ An extract from a letter written by Lt Hugh Bone to his mother dated 23rd July 1944, IWM.

¹⁴⁴ Letter from John Folley to the author dated 26th March 2004, dictated to his wife due to illness.

¹⁴⁵ From discussion with an interviewee, Wilf Todd. Proverb traced back to Mortimeriados (1596) and quoted in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar II*, 'Cowards die many times before their deaths, The valiant never taste of death but once'. King was obviously fond of Shakespeare's plays, having quoted from *Henry V* on D-Day.

¹⁴⁶ Letter to *The Snapper* from Lt Col Renison, 1945.

¹⁴⁷ Sir Robin Dunn, *Sword and Wig – memories of a Lord Justice*, p.75.

King may have been an heroic figure, but he was not infallible. His flexibility with military regulations meant that he instructed his jeep should not be immobilised when left outside Battalion HQ in Gemert in December 1944. Consequently the jeep was stolen, a common problem. King had to attend a Court of Enquiry where he admitted being at fault. It was a mistake he would not repeat. In January 1945 King's trailer was stolen from his parked jeep. A Dutch boy helped him identify the unit of the troops who had stolen it and King discovered them about to paint out the Divisional sign and unit serial number. 'Needless to say he soon had his trailer back'.¹⁴⁸

It seems no coincidence that other examples of hero-worship I can trace mainly involve other Infantry Regiments. Colonel John Hope of 1KRRC was shot by a sniper in Italy in April 1945. One of his officers, John Waterfield, wrote of Hope that: 'he was a continuing influence and inspiration to me, far and away the most outstanding personality of my war-time experience'. The difference here, is that Waterfield was a young officer at the time of meeting Hope, who was his superior in rank, and despite the two men both being fellow officers there is an element of hero-worship in Waterfield's memories. This is due both to the difference in ages and Hope's offering 'idiosyncratic but wise' advice and guidance to the younger man. Hope had demonstrated the same care for his men that Major King did, to the extent that, 'when he went on 'Python' leave from Boufarik, after four years overseas, John Hope typically took a lot of time to visit families of riflemen and officers who had been killed'.¹⁴⁹ Rather than the element of hero-worship, Martin Lindsay of the 1st Gordon Highlanders, wrote of his CO in terms of love: 'Harry is a unique character. I have never met a CO who is less feared yet so much respected and adored, nor one for whom people would go to such pains to

¹⁴⁸ Lt Col Renison's memoir, p.234.

¹⁴⁹ John P. Waterfield, in his memoir *North Italy and Schloss Thalenstein, Carinthia 1945 – Remembered in June 1999*, p.2, SWWEC (2002-1672). Julian Wathan also recorded his own view of the shooting of 'our much loved Colonel', describing it as 'a ghastly day'. Memoir SWWEC (2002-1670).

produce good results'.¹⁵⁰ It is rarer to find such glowing references to officers in the memoirs of the 'other ranks' of the Second World War, as in most instances, senior officers were more removed from the day-to-day activities of their men; it is in action that the boundaries become blurred.

It is apparent that both Colonel Hope and Major King, demonstrated good qualities of leadership, which is 'synonymous with inspiring confidence in those who follow'.¹⁵¹

Such qualities come from a 'proper understanding of the needs and opinions of those one hopes to lead'.¹⁵² This was far more important than other factors such as 'voice, stature and appearance, an impression of omniscience, trustworthiness, sincerity and bravery'.¹⁵³

Finally, a consideration of what made King different from other officers, will illustrate why he was an important figure within the battalion. It is clear from the interviews, that many officers displayed both great bravery and good leadership qualities. What set King apart was his position under Lt Col Renison as Second-in-Command of the battalion, a role in which he excelled. King was regularly in charge of ensuring rations and supplies of ammunition reached the front lines. He was therefore a highly 'visible' officer and this facet had continued from his initial D-Day role as 'A' Company Commanding Officer. This visibility, although putting King at personal risk, was in line with the ideas put forward in military manuals, which argue that to maintain high morale, the leader must 'set himself the deliberate task of inspiring his men' so that an infantryman will be 'infected by the energy, vitality and enthusiasm of his officer'.¹⁵⁴ As Company Commander, King carried out his role along the exact lines recommended by Major General V. H. J. Carpenter, in that 'it's good man management. It's being approachable,

¹⁵⁰ In *So Few Got Through*, Lt Col Martin Lindsay DSO wrote of Major Harry Cumming-Bruce, pp.96-7. See also *The Recollections of Rifleman Bowlby*, Alex Bowlby's impression of Capt Kendall.

¹⁵¹ Norman Dixon, *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence*, p.212.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p.215.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.215.

¹⁵⁴ *The Instructors' Handbook on Fieldcraft and Battle Drill* 1942 edition p.46.

being able to discuss problems. You have got to make sure that the troops are looked after properly. Even if the conditions are tough, they don't mind having conditions tough as long as they know that you are doing your best for them'. King continued to display care towards the troops, even after his promotion to Second-in-Command of the battalion. Carpenter, as a young officer during the war, 'learnt to appreciate the importance of the individual soldier'.¹⁵⁵ King, as a regular officer with many years' experience, had had the time to acquire this appreciation pre-war. Of course, not all regular officers held the 'other ranks' in the same regard, but this is one of the main reasons why King was so popular with the men who served with him.

Major King was referred to as 'Banger' throughout the battalion and indeed the 3rd Division, showing he was popular with the troops and considered one of them. The clearest illustration of the use of Major King's nickname was during the battle at Schaddenhof farm in February 1945, when King's timely arrival in a Bren carrier was confirmed by wireless and 'it is significant of all that "Banger" meant to the Battalion that the only message that came back over the air was "Banger's here"'.¹⁵⁶ During this action, King managed to get ammunition through to the beleaguered men of 'C' Company, having driven through a German-held area. Two of the most seriously wounded men were then evacuated in the carrier on the return journey. Veteran Lionel Roebuck had more reason than most to be grateful to the Major. He was one of the two evacuated men, and described King's action as 'my salvation', being aware that 'many others died that night who could have lived if they had been got out earlier for the urgent medical attention which they badly needed'.¹⁵⁷ The outcome of the battle would have been very different without King's intervention. The men were surrounded by enemy troops at the farm and it was the arrival of fresh supplies of ammunition that

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Major General V. H. J. Carpenter, SWWEC Tape 1500, at the time a subaltern with the RASC.

¹⁵⁶ Lt Col Renison's memoir, p.249.

¹⁵⁷ Lionel Roebuck, memoir *The Five Yorkshire Tykes*, p.82, privately published.

enabled them to carry on the fight. For his actions, King was awarded the bar to his DSO.¹⁵⁸ His concern for the stranded men, without ammunition and suffering heavy casualties, outweighed thoughts of personal risk and King had been determined to try and reach them. His bravery was later immortalised on the front cover of an edition of *The Victor* comic, an historically inaccurate but inspiring account of derring-do.¹⁵⁹

In distinguishing what makes a good military commander, Dixon differentiates between 'task' and 'social' specialists. In the military a task specialist's role is to defeat the enemy, while as a social specialist he must maintain good relations between the group in order to maintain high morale, so that 'the ideal military leader is, of course, one who manages to combine excellence as a task-specialist with an equal flair for the social or heroic aspects of leadership'.¹⁶⁰ In both King's wartime roles as Company Commander and Second-in-Command, he enjoyed considerable success as a task-specialist and he earned the affection and respect of his men. Whether he would have displayed similar success if he had continued to be promoted is impossible to assess. His determination to be highly visible would always have put him at greater risk of becoming a casualty and his willingness to challenge orders he thought wrong, would not have endeared him to his superiors. What he was not willing to do was to 'stick to the rule book, do nothing without explicit approval from the next higher up, always conform, never offend your superiors',¹⁶¹ to ensure his promotion. Plus the Second World War was nearing an end and he would not have thrived as a peacetime soldier, waiting to fill 'dead men's shoes' on the slow promotional ladder of the reduced peacetime officer corps.

To the men, King appeared invulnerable and 'lucky',¹⁶² which were useful attributes for a successful leader. While other officers were wounded, often more than once, Hugh

¹⁵⁸ An award of the bar to the DSO was rare. King received a congratulatory phonogram on 15th March 1945 from Lt Gen Horrocks CB DSO MC, Commander of 30 Corps.

¹⁵⁹ *The Victor*, No 275, 28th May 1966.

¹⁶⁰ Dixon, *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence*, p.219.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.* p.244.

¹⁶² Lord Harewood referred to luck as 'a major part of a successful soldier's character. . .everybody believes in you and it is wonderful', interview SWWEC Tape 1044. Also Sydney Jary, *18 Platoon*, p.7.

Bone wrote that King ‘had led a charmed life disdaining all enemy fire, walking about smoking his pipe and carrying, and firing, his rifle as if out shooting birds on a Scottish estate’.¹⁶³ This added to the sense of shock when King was killed towards the end of the war in Europe, the news of which produced an outpouring of emotion, so that ‘there wasn’t a man in the battalion who wasn’t shedding tears. For an officer to command such love and respect was incredible’.¹⁶⁴

A number of the interviewees have different views as to how it happened, where King was when it occurred and at what time of the day, although there is general agreement that it was caused by driving over a mine. Only one interviewee, Ken Boulding, was in the jeep with Major King. As Boulding took the wheel to return in the dark, “Banger” says “I will drive us back”, so I said “fair enough”, because you couldn’t say no, you can’t to a bloke like that’.¹⁶⁵ As an eyewitness, Ken Boulding felt that while driving, Major King had cut the white tape left by the engineers to indicate a safe passage clear of mines, yet others gave different versions of events. What is important regarding the interviews in this respect, is that many can remember where they were, or what they were doing, at the time of Major King’s death.

John Folley claimed a special place in the funeral arrangements of the Major: ‘another soldier and myself dug the grave and attended the funeral ceremony and incidentally Major “Banger” King, to my knowledge, was the only Officer, of many who were killed, whose body was draped with the Union flag, prior to interment’. It was prophetic that Lt Col Renison wrote: ‘It is tragic that we lost so great a friend when final Victory is so near; but wherever men meet in the future, there will be tales and memories of “Banger”’.¹⁶⁶ Renison had realised the enormity of this loss when he wrote ‘no words can really express what this means to the morale of the battalion, and as the days and hours passed by, I

¹⁶³ Hugh Bone’s unpublished memoir *An Ordinary Person*.

¹⁶⁴ Extract from interview with Wilf Todd 20th March 1999.

¹⁶⁵ Extract from interview with Ken Boulding 8th January 2000.

¹⁶⁶ Lt Col Renison’s letter in *The Snapper* 1945.

realised more and more how much I had depended on him in so many things'.¹⁶⁷ Not only was King's death a blow for the battalion, it was remembered more widely through the Division too and was mentioned by the Divisional Commander in his personal diary.¹⁶⁸ In Lt Col R. F. Fendick's typescript memoir '*A Canloan Officer*' he clearly remembered receiving the news:

I remember very vividly standing and leaning on the CO's jeep when someone brought the word that Maj Banger King had just been killed. Banger was 2ic of the East Yorks and was a famous character throughout the Div. He'd landed on D-Day and almost made it to the end.¹⁶⁹

The manner in which King died deprived the Major of a hero's death. Driving over a mine so close to the end of the war was more tragic to his men because it was not fitting for 'Banger' to become a casualty in this random way. If he had been hit while crossing the bridge to the farm when he was under a hail of gunfire, or while crossing the D-Day beach, that might almost have been expected. He was not the only heroic figure to have met death in an inglorious way. Sir Henry Havelock, a national hero following the Indian Rebellion of 1857-8, died of dysentery.¹⁷⁰

Although *The Times* obituary, placed by King's family, was sparse and offered no clue as to his military achievements, the obituary in *The Snapper*, the Regimental newsletter, was effusive. Written by journalist Hugh Gunning and issued by the Ministry of Information, it said of King: 'Between 6th June 1944 and 15th April 1945 he packed into his soldiering enough excitement to fill a book of personal adventure. . . If only half the stories told about "Banger" were true, he would still qualify as one of the greatest characters of this campaign'.¹⁷¹ Clearly then, stories about King were well-known

¹⁶⁷ Lt Col Renison's memoir, p.338.

¹⁶⁸ Sir John Smyth VC, *Bolo Whistler. The Life of General Sir Lashmer Whistler*.

¹⁶⁹ Fendick served with 2nd Bn The Middlesex Regt, a Divisional Support Battalion in the 3rd British Infantry Division. Memoir p.205.

¹⁷⁰ Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*.

¹⁷¹ When Gunning, was asked to name a composite D-Day man by *The Hull Daily Mail*, during the 20th anniversary of the landings, he opted for 'Banger' King, calling him 'the happy English warrior'. He had selected King as a man 'big enough to be representative of the men and women, civilians and serving

throughout the battalion and beyond, and were liable to refinement and exaggeration in their re-telling. The obituary stresses his role as an officer in the infantry, in that 'he was a born leader of Infantry. He understood Infantry. He championed Infantry at every opportunity. He prayed that England would never forget her debt to Infantry'. In emphasising King's affinity with the infantrymen under his command, Gunning reminds the reader of the importance of the foot soldier 'at the sharp end'.

The Snapper also featured tributes by two senior officers who had commanded King, Lt Col Renison and Lt Col Hardy Spicer. Renison's tribute to King differed from that of Gunning, who had described the Major as having 'a thirst for danger'. Renison argued instead, 'it would be unfair to "Banger" to say that he deliberately courted danger; he knew too much about fighting for that and it was just this knowledge and a complete fearlessness that enabled him to succeed where others, without his leadership, would not have dared to start'. Here we can see the difference between a war correspondent wishing to attach more drama to the Major's character, as opposed to the more measured view of a man who knew King well and understood him. Lt Col Hardy Spicer was more lyrical:

How can one think of 'Banger' as dead? It is impossible. He is not, and never will be, to not only officers and men of the East Yorkshire Regiment and countless children who loved him, but also to his Sudanese troops who loved him too. You cannot kill a spirit like that, for by so doing you would kill all that his beloved Regiment stands for and, indeed, England herself.

Hardy Spicer had not always displayed such understanding towards King's character. Prior to D-Day, when Hardy Spicer was the Commanding Officer of the battalion, Jack Reid recalled being sent out by King to perform a task. When Hardy Spicer heard of the order, he told Reid to go back to the Major and 'tell him I'm running this outfit, not

men, who made D-Day, June 6, 1944, the crowning day of the British war effort'. *The Hull Daily Mail*, 6th June 1964.

him'.¹⁷² Major King, although understanding the strict chain of command, was altogether more flexible in his approach and therefore more suited to the ever-changing requirements of the battlefield. He flourished in an environment that demanded initiative.

I have examined memoirs and interviewed veterans to find out why the Major was so popular with his men that to them he remains a hero. Since 'heroes are made, not by their deeds, but by the stories that are told about them',¹⁷³ I have looked at the stories told of his exploits and it is clear that 'Banger' was a superlative Infantry officer with a clear understanding of how to get the best from his men, while ensuring unnecessary casualties were kept to a minimum. In turn, the 'other ranks' appreciated his care and leadership which helped them endure the harsh conditions of battle. Life in the infantry was, and is, tough, and infantrymen need support of friends and their leaders to endure battle conditions. King's bravery and charisma, his care for the men and pride in the battalion, have led to the stories told about him forming a personal and group living memorial to this officer. In the following chapter, I will consider how King has been remembered after his death in more detail, how the stories of his exploits are retold as veterans of the battalion meet for the first time, and how these stories act as a group unifier.

Conclusion.

One member of the 2nd Battalion wrote of his best times in north-west Europe, as hearing shouts that the mail had arrived, that food or the rum issue was ready, the showers were coming up or that they were due to be relieved. Other than the physical necessities, his morale was boosted by seeing planes going over to attack Germany, or seeing German positions coming under heavy fire. Naturally his worst occasions were

¹⁷² Extract from interview with Jack Reid 4th July 1999.

¹⁷³ Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, p.188.

the opposite – times of being soaked to the skin, or hungry, or in physical danger, or particularly when resting after a battle, ‘only to hear the order “push on, we have them on the run”’.¹⁷⁴ This soldier’s feelings were replicated by many others within the 2nd Battalion during the campaign, and also in the infantry generally. The interviews have highlighted the poor physical conditions and the difficulties of prolonged service, and this element of the interviewees’ experience has been reconstructed within the chapter. Hearing of the stresses first-hand, and thereby acquiring an understanding of the nature of comradeship, is a reminder that the interviewees of the 2nd Battalion were actually participants in the war and the making of history, which makes it more personal than the reading of a globalised account of the period. The infantryman’s constant exposure to the elements means he will be reliant on a regular supply of food, good clothing, washing facilities and opportunities for rest. He will be sustained by his comrades and requires good leadership in order to perform his role. Where these are lacking, morale becomes affected, and it becomes more likely that the soldier will succumb to battle exhaustion. Although it is clear that members of the 2nd Battalion did succumb, and some deserted, the numbers were never so high that the fighting performance of the battalion was seriously affected. Instead, the battalion maintained a creditable performance despite the physical conditions, due primarily to overall good leadership and small-group loyalty.

Within the wealth of secondary literature pertaining to the Second World War, little has been made of the achievement of the line regiments in this campaign in remaining largely steadfast, despite the physical and mental hardships. On the contrary, as has already been noted in Chapter One, the British Army has been considered second-rate compared to the Germans, and a great deal of emphasis has been placed on the Allies’ material superiority as an explanation for their eventual success. Such arguments do a

¹⁷⁴ Harry Smithson’s recollections.

great disservice to individual infantrymen, most of whom served for many months under increasing strain. The long-term repercussions of this strain, as recorded in the following chapter, were borne by the men and their families during the subsequent years.

Afterword - Post-War Life

As the war in Europe came to a close, the men of the 2nd Battalion and their families could at last begin to look towards their futures. In this section I consider what post-war Britain had to offer the men of the 2nd Battalion as they returned home, how they coped with civilian life and the longer-term effects of service in the north-west Europe campaign. The reason for an exploration of post-war life, is that for many, the Second World War did not end at the cessation of hostilities, and its repercussions remain. On mainland Europe, the ramifications of large numbers of displaced persons, refugees, the destruction of property and transport, called for Allied efforts for several years.¹ However even in the UK, with its avoidance of occupation, there were years of shortages in all areas to come. In this 'total war' the civilians of the UK had been involved on an unprecedented scale. Consequently, soldiers were expected to return home, find jobs, build new families and to settle down to civilian life, without a fanfare. However, some returned home with physical injuries whose effects lasted a life-time, and others suffered mental difficulties that were 'hidden' within the family. As the veterans aged, they had more time to reflect on their war service and wonder what had happened to their comrades, resulting in the formation of the 2nd Battalion Veterans' Group in the 1990s.

For many of the younger men of the battalion, the end of the war in Europe did not signal the end of their service. Infantrymen of the 2nd Battalion, in line with those in other regiments, were not demobbed automatically, as the war in the Far East continued and there were a range of duties still to be performed in Europe. It was announced that the 2nd Battalion would form part of the expected invasion force on the coast of Japan and the soldiers were assessed for fitness. The news was greeted with dismay; some infantrymen had been in the frontline since D-Day and few anticipated they would make

¹ See Tony Judt, *Postwar. A History of Europe since 1945* (London, 2007) and Gregor Dallas, *Poisoned Peace. 1945 – The War that never ended* (St Ives, 2005) whose title acknowledges that the ramifications of the war continue.

it home alive from an assault on Japan. The only positive aspect was that the battalion would be sent to the US initially, for further training, delaying their involvement in any invasion. In the event, the atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki resulted in Japan's unconditional surrender; to the relief of the interviewees who were due to be deployed there.²

In the short-term, members of the battalion assisted with repatriation of refugees and forced labourers, with some interviewees being sent to Brussels to guard prisoners, and others being sent to train the Belgian Army. It soon became clear that the battalion would be sent to Egypt and Palestine instead, for peace-keeping duties, as part of the 'Imperial Strategic Reserve' and the news came as a blow to some of the interviewees' wives, who had thought their husbands would be returning home.³

The 2nd Battalion arrived in the Canal Zone of Egypt in October 1945, and moved to Haifa in Palestine in December of that year, before returning to Moascar in Egypt in 1946. This period witnessed terrorist activities by the Stern Gang and Irgun Z'vai Leumi who sought to establish an independent Jewish state.⁴ During 1946 and 1947 the interviewees were gradually demobbed and the battalion returned to the UK in 1948 for amalgamation with the 1st Battalion. In respect of the interviews covering this period, details of life in Egypt and Palestine are invariably richly detailed and include recollections of the different climate, the food and leisure activities. What was apparent in a few of the interviews, but by no means all, was the difficulty some had in reconciling their views on the Jewish situation in Europe, with their orders to stop Jewish refugees entering Palestine in their unauthorised vessels. They expressed

² This relief is not confined to the 2nd Battalion. Dr D. Paton of the RAMC described hearing the news: 'I am not going to Japan now. Oh lovely bomb'. SWWEC (2001-1354). Also General Sir R. Ford was earmarked for the invasion: 'Thank God that never came off' SWWEC Tape 1496.

³ Harold Isherwood wrote to reassure his young wife: 'Well Darling I guess you will know by now that I am on my way to Palestine. I guess it came as a shock to you Sweetheart, but never mind it will soon pass on when I will be home with you for good'. Letter undated - supplied by Mrs Isherwood.

⁴ Alex Danchev, *The Army and the Home Front 1939-45* in *The Oxford History of the British Army*, ed. David Chandler (Oxford, 1994).

surprise that the Jews were now regarded as the 'enemy' and they, in return, were considered a target for terrorists. One of those targeted was Wilf Todd, who recalled, 'I was out in Haifa, and Slim and I had just come out of an Arab shop, when a taxi came up the pavement and tried to knock us down'.⁵ In this instance, the interviewee considered he had been recognised because he was in command of the prisoners' cage. The confusion as to the purpose of their service in Palestine was in direct contrast to the feelings the interviewees expressed about active duty in north-west Europe, which was regarded as being totally justified.

Mainly however, the interviewees held no firm political opinions about their situation, rather they spoke of interminable guard duties, and being called on to suppress a 'mutiny' by other battalions over delayed demobilisation dates. Information concerning this mutiny proved interesting as it was not mentioned in the Regimental history. Some interviewees also viewed this period as a useful one for coming to terms with their service in north-west Europe, although it did not alleviate their nightmares and flashbacks after the interviewees returned to the UK.

For married couples the separation often proved difficult as some wives had had to live with their parents or in-laws during the war, due to the low pay earned by infantrymen. By the end of the war, one-third of the male working population, one-half of them married, were in uniform and serving away from home, leaving two and a half million women at home, enduring the separation and often living in poverty.⁶ Of the small sample of wives interviewed, all but one had worked during the war, and as their husbands returned, they followed the Government's preferred route, which was to return to the home instead of remaining in the workplace.⁷ Elsie Hall had moved in with her

⁵ Extract from interview with Wilf Todd 1st May 1999.

⁶ Robert Mackay, *The Test of War. Inside Britain 1939-45* (London, 1998).

⁷ See Cynthia Enloe, *Does Khaki Become You? The Militarization of Women's Lives* (Boston, Mass, 1983) on the role of women during the war.

sister, as she received one pound 12 shillings a week for herself and her son.⁸ Elsie's husband, Tommy, was in the building trade before he was called up, and consequently he was able to come home quickly under the 'B' release scheme. Other than early release for essential industries, demobilisation for those categorised Category A, was decided by age and length of service.⁹

When Arthur Lumb was demobbed in January 1946, his son had been so pleased to see his father that he would not leave his side, greeting his father with the words 'Is this my daddy?' This reaction was not always typical; in many instances, children experienced problems in bonding with fathers who were often strangers to them. On being taken ill with tuberculosis, contracted while in Belgium guarding prisoners, Arthur's family discovered the cost of health care prior to the formation of the NHS in 1948. Edna Lumb explained, 'my dad said we'd all club together and get a specialist which would cost five pounds. The doctor and specialist came and he wouldn't come in the house until we'd given him the money'.¹⁰ Following treatment, it took a year before Arthur was fit enough to return to work. The couple considered themselves extremely fortunate to qualify for a prefab house post-war. Few houses were built during the war, so there was a pressure on housing in the early post-war years, alleviated only slightly by the construction of 125,000 prefabs by 1948.¹¹ The wives interviewed, recalled that wartime austerity and rationing remained until the early 1950s, and particularly remembered the harsh winter of 1947, when the British Isles 'was blotted out by a blanket of white'¹² and there were difficulties in obtaining coal due to the fuel crisis.

⁸ From interview with Elsie Hall 13th June 1999.

⁹ Angus Calder and Dorothy Sheridan, eds. *Speak for Yourself. A Mass-Observation Anthology 1937-49* (London, 1984).

¹⁰ Extract from interview with Edna Lumb 1st May 1999.

¹¹ Paul Addison, *Now the War is over. A social history of Britain 1945-51* (London, 1985) Chapter 3.

¹² Peter Hennessy, *Never Again, Britain 1945-51* (London, 2006) p.282.

The husbands, fathers, and sons, who returned to their families, were not the same men who had left.¹³ Physical changes were apparent; often the men had grown taller, had changed weight, or had suffered injuries which altered their appearance permanently. In one instance, the interviewee had not returned to his wife at all; she had left him during the war and he had instigated divorce proceedings.¹⁴ Although reluctant to discuss the circumstances, it was clear that this had deeply affected him during his service and afterwards. Despite a significant rise in the number of divorces during the war years,¹⁵ this situation was not typical for the interviewees; instead it is a testament to attitudes of sixty years ago, that so many marriages have lasted. Indeed, some of the wives have had to care for husbands who have suffered greatly as a result of their wartime experiences. It is still not widely recognised that many of the returning infantrymen of the Second World War suffered mental health problems post-war. For the interviewees the effects varied; some were open to discussion about the problems they faced, however others denied any difficulties and in one instance it was a wife who interjected to talk of her husband's nightmares: 'Well, he didn't know about it but he used to be shouting and of course, moaning. He was always shouting . . . you could tell he was upset you know'.¹⁶ It must be taken into account that this is a generation not encouraged to discuss such matters, which are deemed 'private' and, as men, they can find it difficult to talk about mental health issues openly. Taking this into account, the admissions of difficulties I have recorded are frank and illuminating for the listener. One interviewee spoke of the aftermath to his injury: 'If I got agitated about anything I used to start to tremble, and it probably lasted a quarter of an hour, twenty minutes...'¹⁷ He was destined to suffer this

¹³ See Richard Holmes, *Acts of War. The Behaviour of Men in Battle*, Chapter 10, for a discussion of post-service effects. Also Sean Longden, *To the Victor the Spoils. D-Day to V E Day, the Reality behind the Heroism*, Chapter 18.

¹⁴ This interviewee wished the details to remain anonymous.

¹⁵ Divorce numbers increased from 9970 in England and Wales in 1938, to 47,041 in 1947. From Addison, *Now the War is over*.

¹⁶ Extract from interview with Ken and Joyce Boulding 8th January 2000.

¹⁷ Extract from interview with George Burnham 26th February 2000.

reaction for the next couple of years, before it finally started to subside. For another interviewee, his experiences have affected him throughout his post-war life:

I felt the effects straightaway afterwards. I couldn't relax. If I went to the pictures I had to come out in the middle of the picture. I just couldn't stand it. When I was at home I couldn't sit down. I used to pace about all the time. All the time I've been married I've always been on a short fuse. I dream every night and at times I have panic attacks. The whole thing changed me. My wife ... has had a lot to put up with for 47 years.¹⁸

Despite many visits to his doctor in the early years, medical and practical help was not forthcoming, until in more recent times the Combat Stress organisation offered assistance. This same interviewee was told by his doctor that he was a time-waster, so 'I used to take Sanatogen powder. Well it was 1947. It was stress you see, but it wasn't recognised. Now you see all these people wanting counselling when something happens'.¹⁹ He was angry at the lack of help on offer in the immediate post-war years, when his doctor failed to understand the effects that serving in the infantry had had on him psychologically. Similarly, Jim Fetterly returned home to Canada in September 1945 and experienced dreams, finding that he 'kept fighting the war at night'. Hospitalised for five weeks, Jim received 'excellent care' which 'put 35 pounds back on my carcass'.²⁰

For another interviewee, the symptoms did not become openly apparent for many years afterwards, but his breakdown was precipitated by witnessing an horrific car accident: 'the thing I remembered most was the smell of the blood at this accident. When you were in action you had the smell of the blood mixed with the smell of cordite from the explosions. You couldn't get rid of it. I think that awoke latent memories'.²¹ Winter and Sivan attributed this traumatic recall as being triggered by extrinsic contexts, such as a similarity of noise or smell and, as Wilf Todd discovered, at this point the memories can

¹⁸ Extract from interview with Doug Parker 17th July 1999.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Extracts from letter to author dated 31st October 1999.

²¹ Extract from interview with Wilf Todd 4th April 1999.

be paralytic.²² The interviewee credited his return to full mental health as being due to help from his family and friends, who gave 'sympathy and understanding', as well as a good medical practitioner.

From my small sample of interviewees of the 2nd Battalion, 10 per cent have described moderate to severe mental health issues which required medical treatment. A significantly higher number have described milder symptoms, which include bad dreams and an inability to settle down to civilian life, typified by a move from job to job. If this percentage were transposed to the wider British Army it is obvious that many thousands of servicemen have suffered problems since the end of the Second World War, and will have received a variable quality of assistance. Since this generation is of the 'suffer in silence' school, then much of the strain will have been borne by the families of those afflicted. One returning serviceman, suffering nightmares, found that it helped to talk about his experiences with his father, who had served in the First World War.²³

The partners of the returning servicemen bore the brunt of the problems faced by their husbands during this difficult period of re-adjustment. John Folley paid tribute to his wife's forbearance: 'I wish to put on record, my wife deserves recognition for her loyalty, affection and patience in counselling me through my horrific nights of terror'.²⁴ During his final years, John spoke 'for hours of his experiences – almost an obsession' and these experiences were 'very vivid, he talked as if it was yesterday'.²⁵ He felt compelled to re-live his experiences, re-visiting them by day and night, waking 'scared, sweating and shaking'. In John Folley's case his experiences appear to follow Jo Stanley's argument that not all remembrance is welcomed by servicemen, indeed a number of them suffer from 'involuntary commemoration'; re-living traumatic events from their service

²² Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, p.15.

²³ From interview with Horace Pinfold 2nd December 2000.

²⁴ John Folley Recollections – Special Collections, University of Leeds.

²⁵ Letter from Janet Folley held with John Folley's papers. Dated 22nd July 1996.

repeatedly²⁶ and becoming ‘involuntary walking memorials’ to their experiences. Jo Stanley ascribed this process as being caused by traumatic events in wartime, however other aspects of military service, such as peace-keeping tours, can result in similar mental health issues.

Even today, some veterans find it difficult to fully come to terms with their war experiences and their daily lives are dominated by them. Not all the symptoms were mental. Another interviewee attributed his years of suffering from stomach ulcers as initially due to the army food, but admitted that the sights and sounds of war were probably more of a factor in his ill-health. Certainly his daughter felt that her father’s experiences had adversely affected him.²⁷ Patently, none of these mental health issues pertain only to the Second World War. A recent report from the New England Journal of Medicine shows more than a quarter of US soldiers seeking hospital treatment after service in Afghanistan and Iraq, are suffering from mental disorders.²⁸

Although it is impossible to establish how many ex-servicemen from the Second World War suffered such disorders, it is important to note that at that time, treatment for mental health problems carried a stigma which discouraged men from seeking help. In an effort to come to terms with their experiences, some veterans have written memoirs or short recollections for their families and organisations including the IWM. One 2nd Battalion veteran, Melville Hardiment, produced a collection of stark poems²⁹ and described his memories of the wounded and dying in an article in *The Daily Star*³⁰: ‘In my dreams, I not only see their agony. I hear it. Every scream, every whimper, every last word’. The writing of poetry and memoirs is one way of processing traumatic or

²⁶ Jo Stanley, ‘Involuntary Commemorations. Post-traumatic stress disorder and its relationship to war commemoration’, eds. T. G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper, *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration*.

²⁷ From interview with Crowther Goldie 19th December 1999.

²⁸ Article in *The Daily Mail*, 1st April 2005

²⁹ Melville Hardiment, *Remembering the Huns* (Cambridge, 1993).

³⁰ *The Daily Star* 6th June 1984.

overpowering memories, in order to come to terms with them.³¹ Of course, not all veterans experienced problems on returning home; one veteran, a reinforcement, said he 'slept like a log' and was proud of his war service, 'it's an achievement in one way that you did do your part'.³² Whether the 2nd Battalion veterans suffered mental or physical health problems or not, neither circumstance is unusual, and instances of both are recorded in memoirs and oral recordings. However it was the scale of the mental health issues, ranging from the mild to the severe, that was surprising, as no long-term studies on numbers affected by their service in the infantry during the Second World War, have been carried out.

British post-war policy towards ex-servicemen was 'very low-key and, by modern standards, tough'³³ and was very different to that adopted by the US. For those returning home, there would be a lump sum payment and accrued leave, during which time the demobilised would need to search for future employment. For the interviewees, jobs seemed not too hard to come by generally, although it became harder for those demobbed later, after they had completed service in Egypt and Palestine. This reinforces Addison's assertion that, post-war, finding a job was not too arduous.³⁴ The problem lay in finding a job that paid well and constituted regular employment.³⁵ Many of the interviewees returned to their pre-war jobs, 'held open' for them under the provisions of the Reinstatement in Civil Employment Act of 1944, which specified returning servicemen should be employed on the same terms and conditions that would have applied had the war not removed these men from their jobs. Of course, while the servicemen had been in the forces, those remaining in civilian life had had further training opportunities and possibilities of promotion. Some interviewees returned to

³¹ Social support is one coping strategy; others are avoidance of the memories, or processing them by developing narratives about them. See Nigel Hunt and Ian Robbins, 'Telling Stories of the War: Ageing Veterans Coping With Their Memories Through Narrative', *Oral History Journal* Vol. 26 Autumn 1998.

³² Extract from interview with Norman Lucas 9th October 1999.

³³ Ben Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, p.328.

³⁴ Paul Addison, *Now the War is over. A social history of Britain 1945-51*.

³⁵ E. Cox recalled 'Going to the labour exchange and being told there were no vacancies for ex tank drivers was no help'. Memoir SWWEC (2003-2325).

their original employment but could not settle. One discovered that following his service he felt happier being outdoors, so re-trained firstly as a joiner and then later as an electrician, when he married and needed a higher wage.³⁶ Others moved from job to job, trying to secure higher wages.

While Dewey argues that the war was the catalyst which led to a greater equality of income,³⁷ the interviewees did not benefit from this change in the early post-war years. None of those interviewed had held down high income jobs prior to the war; they were primarily young men on their first or second jobs at the time of call-up and this was reflected in the types of employment they initially found when they returned home, with a high proportion becoming labourers, drivers, railway workers, textile workers and storemen. Albert Eccles was determined that he would not become a miner, which was the job of his father and two brothers. However he eventually relented, after years of working seven days a week on low pay. As working in the mines remained dangerous, with harsh conditions, the general trend was a move away from mining by the workforce, and higher wages had to be offered to stem the tide.³⁸

For Wilf Todd, who had risen to the rank of Company Sergeant Major by the time of his demobilisation, his new job in the transport department was not personally satisfying: 'It was a thankless job – you took all the abuse from the travelling public. . . It was hard to acclimatise, but you have to change and accept things as they are'.³⁹ For Wilf, his previous position of authority counted for nought in the civilian world.⁴⁰ Prior to his demobilisation, he had applied to join the Fire Service: 'A sergeant from the Army Fire Service asked me all sorts of questions and I had to pick a ladder up and run with it. It caused quite a bit of amusement from the lads seeing their sergeant major running with

³⁶ From interview with Horace Pinfold 2nd December 2000.

³⁷ Peter Dewey, *War and Progress, Britain 1914-1945* (London and New York, 1997) p.321.

³⁸ Addison, *Now the War is over* Chapter 7.

³⁹ Extract from interview with Wilf Todd 4th April 1999.

⁴⁰ See Philip Ziegler, *Soldiers. Fighting Men's Lives, 1901-2001* (London, 2001) in which he focuses on the lives of nine Chelsea Pensioners. He argues that the Army sent soldiers into civilian life unprepared; their skills were often irrelevant, and the authority they had enjoyed was denied them.

a ladder and being interviewed by this sergeant'.⁴¹ On returning home, Wilf had to take other jobs while waiting for a place in the Fire Service to become available.

Clive Crauford, having reached the rank of Major, summed up the difficulties in re-adjustment. When asked if he had returned to University to finish his Degree course, he replied:

No, it wasn't on. . . it was necessary to start earning some money, apart from the usual army pay, and I joined a firm of stockbrokers and worked my way up through the normal routine. I had no knowledge of finance, I knew how to strip a Bren gun, (laughing) it wasn't very helpful.⁴²

One of the sample, unable to find steady employment, re-enlisted for the £100 pay-out on offer, and served during the Korean War with the Duke of Wellington's Regiment.⁴³

Others considered re-enlistment, but the 2nd Battalion had changed; their friends had returned to civilian life and the Army had returned to its peace-time role with guard duties and emphasis on 'spit and polish'. This indicates the difficulties of acclimatising to a former way of life that seemed almost alien to the young soldiers, and a wish to return to a military system that seemed familiar and thus reassuring.⁴⁴

When asked how their war service had changed them long-term, if at all, interviewees spoke in vague terms of self-discipline, growing up overnight, and learning to take care of themselves. Clive Crauford felt that 'nothing has ever seemed quite so important. I don't think the ups and downs of life have been so difficult to cope with. . I think it made me more likely to shrug my shoulders and say "oh what the hell"'.⁴⁵ Denis Cade raised the more profound point: 'We went in the army to learn to kill. When we came out we were never untrained, if you know what I mean. You had to live with it. We

⁴¹ Extract from interview with Wilf Todd 4th April 1999.

⁴² Extract from interview with Clive Crauford 5th November 2000.

⁴³ From interview with Alf Harrison 5th November 2000.

⁴⁴ Re-enlistment was not a rare occurrence, nor restricted to the other ranks. Lt General Sir D. House recalled of his battalion, 'I missed them like fury and I was unhappy and I couldn't wait to get back in again', during interview with SWWEC (2002-1779).

⁴⁵ Extract from interview with Clive Crauford 5th November 2000.

went out to do a very hard job'.⁴⁶ Until the men came home, the skill that had been most highly prized by High Command was the ability to kill the enemy. This 'skill' had to be forgotten or suppressed in order to adjust to civilian life.

Most of the interviewees came home wanting to put their experiences behind them and re-build their lives, particularly towards finding a partner and starting, or enlarging, families. In the first three years post-war, marriages rose by 13 per cent and births by 33 per cent compared to the years 1936-1939.⁴⁷ None of the interviewees mentioned the wider welfare changes post-war, such as the National Health Service, education changes, state pensions, family allowances and unemployment insurance.⁴⁸ The interviewees appeared apolitical when reflecting on the immediate post-war period, which does not tally with secondary literature that focuses on the strong political move towards Labour.⁴⁹ For them, the pressure was personal, not societal; the need was to find employment and settle back into civilian life.⁵⁰ There was often little time or inclination to become involved in regimental reunions.⁵¹ Consequently few joined groups in the early years. As Albert Eccles argued, 'I wouldn't even join a Christmas club'.⁵² Later, more recognised the potential benefits of joining the Regimental Association, going to the local British Legion or becoming a member of the Normandy Veterans' Association.

⁴⁶ Extract from interview with Denis Cade 4th July 1999.

⁴⁷ Peter Hennessy, *Never Again, Britain 1945-1951* p.169.

⁴⁸ As John Stevenson summarised, in *British Society 1914-45* (London, 1984), Angus Calder and Henry Pelling argue that the welfare changes were merely a hastening along old lines of provision, however Paul Addison and Arthur Marwick argue that a degree of change must be attributed to the war. Tony Judt, in *Postwar*, argues that across Europe, the 'change was most marked in Britain', p.73.

⁴⁹ Arthur Marwick, *Britain in the Century of Total War: War, Peace and Social Change, 1900-1967* (Harmondsworth, 1970). Also see S. P. Mackenzie, *Politics and Military Morale. Current Affairs and Citizenship Education in the British Army 1914-1950*, pp.186-187. Mackenzie asserts that this trend was due to the experience of war and the attendant changes in people's lives.

⁵⁰ The interviews reflect Alison Rowetz's assertion that 'the main goal of this peace was self-containedness and the chance to re-build family relationships in private' p.147, in *Housing the People, from Labour's Promised Land? Culture and Society in Labour Britain 1945-51* (London, 1995) ed. Jim Fyrth. See also J. A. Crang, 'The British Soldier on the Home Front: Army Morale Reports, 1940-45', eds. Addison and Calder, *Time to Kill*, p.71.

⁵¹ This tallies with Jo Stanley's assertion that in the 1950s the aim was to put the war behind them. It was easier and deemed more 'manly' to forget. From 'Involuntary Commemorations. Post-traumatic stress disorder and its relationship to war commemoration', eds. T. G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper, *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration*, p.252.

⁵² Extract from interview with Albert Eccles 11th September 1999.

Few kept in contact with other East Yorkshire servicemen when they first came home, except in cases where those veterans lived locally. For some interviewees this became a source of regret in later years and attempts were made to trace friends through electoral rolls, telephone directories and appeals on the Service Pals page on Teletext. I was also regularly asked if I had knowledge of old friends through my network of interviewees, some of whom did not belong to the 2nd Battalion Veterans' Group. This demonstrates how important their war service was to so many of the interviewees, who spoke of the extraordinary comradeship discovered through the sharing of adversity, and feel that civilians cannot appreciate how strong these bonds remain.

The 2nd Battalion Veterans' Group was for some, the first and only group they had joined. Its disbandment at Christmas 2003 was a disappointment for the members, although the annual reunion remained, albeit with fewer attendees, until April 2006. This is a similar situation for many Second World War veterans groups, including the Dunkirk Veterans Association, and is due to the ageing membership. One interviewee felt that membership had not always been beneficial for him, as it reminded him of his experiences, particularly on receipt of the newsletters, rather than allowing him to suppress his memories.⁵³ Copies of the quarterly newsletters have been sent to the IWM by the Secretary in an effort to preserve the experiences of the 2nd Battalion and gain a measure of public recognition. The group founder, Norman Lucas, felt that until starting the group 'there had always been that gap' and it was satisfying through the newsletters and reunions to 'put together many of the pieces of the jigsaw that you would never have done without coming together in a group'.⁵⁴

Personal memories have been either altered or reinforced by membership of the 2nd Battalion Veterans' Group and the Regimental Association. Until its disbandment, the veterans' group newsletters included pieces written by members of the group about their

⁵³ From interview with Wilf Todd 4th April 1999.

⁵⁴ Extract from interview with Norman Lucas 9th October 1999.

experiences of life with the battalion, including humorous incidents, memories of training and extracts from memoirs. Although these newsletters often acted as a unifier, with group and individual acceptance of the experiences contained therein; certain aspects, such as names and dates, were sometimes questioned. The newsletters also featured requests for information, and veterans would respond to 'fill-in' gaps in others' memories. It became apparent that some veterans would submit several articles for inclusion, while others did not wish to take part. A request for specific information, such as an appeal for stories about training at Inverary, received a good response, with the information being sent to the local museum. However, general appeals for reminiscences were less successful.

For the 2nd Battalion Veterans Group, the short annual service held at Beverley Minster each April was a suitable and welcome setting for commemoration.⁵⁵ The service of prayer was held in the Regimental Chapel, where the 'Colours' hang overhead, the Regimental silver is displayed and the Kneelers, embroidered by local women, have been partly funded by the Veterans' Group and partly by private donation. It was a solemn event, offering time for private thought, and prayers were said for those killed during the war, their families and for those serving in the armed forces today. The veterans identified with these prayers and with infantrymen serving in today's army, as despite progress in transport and technology, they appreciated that active service in the infantry still comprises digging-in, patrolling, exposure to the elements and close-quarter fighting. For the veterans, this service in Beverley Minster was deemed important, as it recognised those killed from their battalion. It was a formal event during an otherwise informal reunion.

For the remainder of the reunion, commemoration took the form of a 'Do you remember. . .?' exchange of reminiscences. During the reunions, talk would often be political, focusing on national issues highlighted in the press. Despite the expression of

⁵⁵ Winter and Sivan, eds. *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, argue that individuals reinforce their recall of memories through rituals such as saluting the flag, moments of silence etc. p.14.

national pride and homage towards those lost during the war, many veterans feel that they are marginalised in society. Denis Cade argues, 'we as the military went to war to fight for our country for everyone's freedom. We gave our todays at our young age for your tomorrows. We fought for the country we loved. Now we wish that our country would love us as much now we are old and frail'.⁵⁶ There is a dissatisfaction that war pensions can be difficult to achieve and that pension levels are low, while other sections of society are seen as 'milking' the benefits system or being granted benefits undeservedly. For some veterans therefore, their feelings of marginalisation range from being overlooked as a battalion, as a regiment, and as a branch of the Army deemed 'inferior', to being excluded as pensioners and feeling that they are undervalued members of society. The reunions were first and foremost an opportunity to reinforce friendships and sometimes to air grievances about the country they live in today.

The focus during the reunions was on comradeship, the type of deep-rooted friendship that evolves from shared experiences and dangers. This is evident both during 2nd Battalion reunions and those of other organisations, such as Regimental Associations, the Normandy Veterans Association and the British Legion clubs.⁵⁷ During the exchanges it was apparent that the men of the group had developed shared memories, in particular concerning the battle at Schaddenhof farm, and also between those veterans who had served in the same companies. As many of the veterans were reinforcements who joined the battalion during the winter of 1944-45, this was the main battle in which they were all involved and common memories were therefore easier to establish. If any group member 'doubted' his own memory, he would use the group setting, to approach other group members for clarification about that event.⁵⁸ In such instances, group memories tended to take precedence over individual memories and the veteran would

⁵⁶ Extract from interview with Denis Cade 4th July 1999.

⁵⁷ E. Cox described this as 'a common bond that can only come from what we all went through' in his memoir SWWEC (2003-2325).

⁵⁸ For example, I was able to settle a long-standing, but amiable, dispute about the situation of different companies at Schaddenhof, by taking documents to a reunion for all to consult.

'alter' his memory to fit. For most of the group, this was the only occasion on which they would meet each year and it was important to reinforce the group memories, as these encouraged a sense of inclusion and membership of a tight-knit fraternity. Within the group, the D-Day veterans were held in high regard, as having experienced more action than the later reinforcements and their memories held more weight.⁵⁹

It has already been noted in the previous chapter that Major 'Banger' King, DSO and Bar, was a central figure in the 2nd Battalion East Yorkshire Regiment during the war. However he also remains so, to the veterans of the 2nd Battalion, today. By the time of his death, in April 1945, the infantrymen of the 2nd Battalion had amassed a wealth of stories about his personality and exploits which continue to be retold and which have now become a 'living memorial' to the officer who became Second-in-Command of the battalion. This collective remembrance acts as a 'group unifier' with which everyone can identify, and Major King has come to symbolise to the veterans, all that was 'right' about the war. Many of the interviewees had their own anecdotes about him, forming both an individual as well as a group memory, once the stories have been shared with other veterans, and the Major continues to be spoken of with great respect and affection. To all veterans in the group the Major was, without doubt, a hero; a man distinguished by exceptional courage, and a man who is idealised for possessing superior qualities in any field.

The stories, elevated to the level of myths, are not a matter of historical record, but are a group record, and a reinforcement of group and battalion solidarity, and are extremely important to the individual veteran and the group as a whole. There is clearly a difference between an anecdote, or story told about King, and its change to the status of a myth. A 'myth' is used here in the sense that it is 'the construction in narrative, or story, of a collective memory. That memory involves acts of forgetting and fantasy as

⁵⁹ See eds. Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, p.27, who quoted Roger Bastide as likening this position to elders of a tribe.

much as of preserving'.⁶⁰ It is not to argue that the stories told about Major King are 'fantasy', more that in their re-telling the stories are enhanced and refined to highlight the 'glamorous' aspects of this officer and reinforce the acts of bravery for which he was renowned. The purpose is to encourage the listener to gain an appreciation of King's importance to the story-teller. Certainly, in telling the stories, the interviewees became animated and were happy to express their opinions; 'he should have had a VC',⁶¹ 'he was a great bloke',⁶² 'he was a man's man',⁶³ 'he was a gentleman in every respect'.⁶⁴ This level of animation and obvious pleasure in talking about King was not apparent in any other area of the interview and was my first indicator that the Major was held in high regard by the veterans. Such positive stories also act 'as a counter-weight against darker images'.⁶⁵

As King is a pivotal figure to the Veterans' Group, the remembered and shared stories of the officer are an important feature of reunions and are used as 'conversation openers', since they reinforce a common bond between those who served in the battalion. The stories thereby act as a group, as well as individual memorial to King, a 'living' and continually evolving memorial, as opposed to the fixed obituaries in *The Snapper* and *The Times*. Of course, these group memories have a 'shelf-life', limited to the existence of the group and the individuals therein and, unless they are recorded, the stories of Major King will be forgotten. During the sea crossing for the 60th commemorations of D-Day, two veterans met for the first time. "Do you remember 'Banger' King?" was the first question which Daniel Keenan asked Wilf Todd. It was the opening to a conversation of exchanging personal memories, which reflected the Major's importance to the 'other ranks'. Wilf remembered the Major's pipe giving off

⁶⁰ John Hellmann, 'The Vietnam Film and American Memory', eds. Martin Evans and Ken Lunn, *War and Memory in the Twentieth Century*.

⁶¹ From interview with Tommy Hall 17th July 1999.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ From interview with Jack Reid 9th May 1999.

⁶⁴ From interview with Denis Cade 4th July 1999.

⁶⁵ Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, p.36.

sparks in the dark, while Daniel spoke of his giving out chocolate and cigarettes and playing his banjo while singing 'dirty' songs (although his instrument was in reality a mandolin). Certainly, in group situations some veterans find it easier to speak of the deeds of others rather than their own experiences, fearful that in putting forward their own memories it may seem immodest. Since the Major was also so well-known in the battalion, stories about him are 'safe ground' for two ex-battalion members meeting for the first time.

For the unfortunate few, commemoration is 'involuntary' as has been outlined in this Afterword, and is interwoven with traumatic memories that dominate their post-war lives. However for many ex-servicemen, although not all, membership of the different veterans' groups has reinforced their feelings of comradeship towards their fellow ex-infantrymen, particularly in their later years. Certainly the members of the 2nd Battalion Veterans' Group found mutual support and friendship within the group, which was clearly demonstrated at the reunions.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to re-construct the history of, and examine the performance of, the 2nd Battalion East Yorkshire Regiment during the north-west Europe campaign. Marginalised and criticised, the members of the battalion had had few opportunities to record their own experiences of the period. The written sources are scarce and scanty, comprising a small number of memoirs of varying lengths and detail, as well as the War Diary and Regimental newsletter. Taken separately, the existing sources offer only one view of the battalion, be it strictly military, or the view of one particular infantryman, which is the reason for the thesis' title. To gain an in-depth knowledge of the performance of the battalion and in order to re-construct the history of the battalion using all the available source material, the best course of action was to approach battalion members directly. In so doing, the interviews revealed much about the battalion and provided a unique view of the D-Day landings on Sword Beach and the life of the average infantryman. Many others have written about these areas but to find a good number of sources from just one unit is rare. The interviews produced countless examples of evocative and expressive language, as well as rich and dramatic detail, particularly during the D-Day operation, for example, Wilf Todd recalled:

The next thing, the ramp dropped, the steel doors were opened and a machine gun fired up the middle of our landing craft, hitting a lot of the chaps. We were up and out. Capt. McGregor was shouting everyone out and we were all slipping on the vomit and the blood.¹

The interviewees displayed conviction and compelling authenticity, and both attributes were enhanced by the opportunity to question the sources. The only drawback has been the restriction on space within the confines of the thesis to include more than a few limited extracts.

¹ Extract from interview with Wilf Todd 20th March 1999.

The narrative of the battalion, despite encompassing the military sphere, has proved to be a social history. The interviews have provided the history of a small unit with its members experiencing the same events, albeit while joining and leaving the battalion at different times. There have been several interesting outcomes to this research. The most positive outcome is that the veterans interviewed have realised that their battalion, and their own actions during the period, have a place in history. Overwhelmingly, the interviewees wanted to record their own memories of service in a regiment of which they remain proud. More than sixty years on, it continues to be a source of bewilderment to the veterans, as to why their part in the D-Day landings has been marginalised and receives so little press coverage during anniversaries. The interviewees therefore had their own goals within the process and the interviews acted as a validation of their personal experiences.² The image that is portrayed in secondary literature is that put forward by Commando sources, who claim that a lack of training and good leadership resulted in a poor performance by the 2nd Battalion during the operation. Although many 2nd Battalion veterans remain ignorant of the scale of the criticism, their own accounts reveal a very different picture to that portrayed to date. The level of training received by those serving on D-Day was high, due primarily to the length of time available in which to cover both the specific duties of an amphibious landing, and those skills which would be in greater demand subsequently. It was the increasingly urgent need for infantry recruits that necessitated a short training period for reinforcements and hence a more superficial range of skills, which needed to be intensified on arrival at the battalion. Naturally, without a point of comparison, the interviewees who had joined the battalion as reinforcements, considered their own training to be adequate. Yet it was clearly deemed essential that reinforcements be helped to acclimatise to the stresses of the battlefield by use of a 'buddy' system. It was

² The importance of 'reminiscence' work with elderly people is assessed by Joanna Bornat in 'Oral History as a Social Movement: Reminiscence and Older People', *Oral History Journal* Vol. 17 Autumn 1989.

the individual memories of the interviewees, when assessed as a group, which revealed the clear differences in the quality of the available training.

Interviewees who joined the battalion after D-Day also held the longer-serving veterans in high regard and classed them as 'superior' soldiers because of their involvement in the Normandy landings. The major factor in eroding the British Army's performance was the high casualty rate, particularly for junior officers, which meant that they often had very little time available to settle into their roles. It was the sheer number of casualties that led the battalion to become increasingly reliant on inexperienced reinforcements, yet despite the high turnover of soldiers, the battalion still put in a solid performance. With regard to the campaign from D+1 onwards, the interviews confirmed the official version of events, however their historical value lay in the rich, dense detail which overlaid the War Diary records.

With the exception of the 'Life in the Infantry' chapter, the interviews have been used firstly to counter criticisms, or to confirm or refute existing written sources, thus illustrating that oral history can be valuable in different ways. However in all chapters the strength of the oral evidence has been the rich detail that has revealed previously unknown facts about active service in the battalion, those elements of the battalion history that cannot be read about in the Battalion War Diary or Commanding Officer's memoir. It is the battalion history from the point of view of the ordinary soldier, his training, his actions on D-Day, how he fought despite the conditions and how he shaped his life post-war.

The interviews were used differently for the 'Life in the Infantry' chapter as there, they were the main source, and revealed the strong link between the physical circumstances and the place in which the battalion was serving, for example Troarn being remembered for problems with mosquitoes. For some of the interviewees, place names were impossible to recall, and the questions were tailored to suit these difficulties, for

example, I would ask if the interviewee remembered the swarms of mosquitoes, rather than asking if they recalled serving in Troarn. This became possible once the strong link between the natural environment and memory had been established. This was especially pertinent to infantrymen as they spent long periods outdoors and exposed to the elements, and their sensory memories remain richly detailed.

Within secondary literature, judgements on how the soldiers coped with combat and what their lives were like during this period, are usually based on various regiments and different areas of service. However the oral accounts of the 2nd Battalion provided a large degree of congruence which permitted valid conclusions to be drawn. In some instances I was able to interview several witnesses to the same event, for example, Arthur Smith spoke of being buried, when a wall fell on him after a shell was dropped at the Chateau de la Londe, and I traced the two men who saw the incident and dug him out.³ I also interviewed two men in the same platoon, who were out in front of Schaddenhof farm. Both remembered the German Paratroopers attacking them frontally, and who appeared to them to be giants. Their descriptions of hurriedly pulling back to the perimeter of the farmhouse are very similar.⁴ These are seemingly small details, however their degree of overlap and congruence are replicated in many of the areas of active service undertaken by the battalion.

One of the central concepts throughout the thesis has been memory, both individual and group, and at the 2nd Battalion reunion events it has been possible to view the inter-play of both elements and how one is influenced by the other. Taken together, the interviews form an overlapping 'jigsaw' of memories which provide an in-depth view of what it was like to serve in this battalion during the north-west Europe campaign. Individually, with two notable exceptions, they allow a more superficial 'snapshot' of life in the

³ Arthur Smith bemoaned the loss of his Treacle Pudding in the incident and complained that the other man buried with him made a lot of fuss, when he was in reality unharmed. Hugh Bone and Jack Reid dug them out. Interviews 27th September 1999, 15th July 2004 and 4th July 1999 respectively.

⁴ Wilf Todd's interview 4th April 1999 and Peter Brown 19th September 1999.

battalion. It is therefore as a group record that the interviews are more unusual, and useful, historically. They have also revealed that there exists a distinct 'group memory' beyond that of the individual, most evidenced in the reminiscences about Major 'Banger' King. The interviews proved vital in establishing the character and actions of Major 'Banger' King, when assessing what it was about this officer that made him an inspirational leader. Despite effusive obituaries, there is only a small collection of letters to give clues to his personality. The interviews produced numerous stories, descriptions of his leadership style and a reinforcement of the distress resulting from his death.

In addressing the issue of post-war life, the oral accounts clearly showed the difficulties encountered by the interviewees on returning to civilian life, and coming to terms with wartime experiences. Post-war, the veterans received no assistance in finding jobs and any mental health issues were met with a varied response. It was the level of trauma, and how widespread it appeared, that was the most interesting aspect of this area of the interviews. Although the existence of trauma is recorded elsewhere, from my small sample it could be said to be more pervasive than so far acknowledged.

The only negative aspects to the research relate to the effects of the interview process on a small number of the interviewees. One interviewee remarked that I now reminded him of the war whenever I saw him, whether or not the subject was raised during my visit. This often resulted in bad dreams afterwards. He was not the only interviewee for whom the interview process 're-awakened', or reinforced, the traumatic aspects of his service. This finding has also been an outcome of further interviewing since conducted on behalf of another regiment.⁵ This is a reminder of the responsibility of the interviewer and researcher towards the interviewees. However most interviewees welcomed the opportunity to share their memories of the period, and found the experience rewarding

⁵ Nigel Hunt and Ian Robbins argue however, that veterans should be encouraged to talk about their experiences, to enable them to 'take control' of their memories. 'Telling Stories of the War: Ageing Veterans Coping With Their Memories Through Narrative'. *Oral History Journal* Vol. 26 Autumn 1998.

and enriching. For all, the interview process was an affirmation that their life experiences are important and historically significant.⁶

It appears that the interview process can have various outcomes, both in the nature of the testimony supplied, and the effect on the respondent of supplying it. Certainly the frank nature of some of the material has ethical implications for the future use, or archival storage, of the interviews and it is clear that, on occasion, the recall of distressing memories strayed into the realm of therapy, an area in which I am not qualified to assist the interviewee.⁷ In order to transfer the recordings to the public domain, probably the archive of the Prince of Wales' Own Regiment of Yorkshire in York, each interview will require an examination of the contents to ensure that those elements conveyed in confidence, are edited out of the final version.

It was beyond the remit of the thesis to interview wives and family members of the veterans in any great numbers, although the limited interviewing conducted provided a good insight into conditions on the Home Front during the period, and the strain imposed on wives while their husbands served abroad. Most of the veterans interviewed were unmarried during their service years, because they were largely of a young age. However of the small number who were married, four of the wives were interviewed separately and their testimonies were rich with anecdotes and observations. It would have been rewarding personally to expand this field of enquiry.

On a personal level, the most rewarding aspect to the research was the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of comradeship among ex-service personnel, an appreciation of the feelings of pride associated with their service in the armed forces, and a look into the way infantrymen cope with the pressures of front-line duties. In today's challenging environment for the infantry it is evident that while spheres of operations are different, the scale of the stresses involved are similar. What is most

⁶ Stephen Caunce, *Oral History and the Local Historian* (London and New York, 1994).

⁷ This area is discussed by David W. Jones in 'Distressing Histories and Unhappy Interviewing'. *Oral History Journal* Vol. 26 Autumn 1998.

apparent is the long-term impact the experience of shared danger has for those serving through it, so that the bonds of friendship and regimental loyalty remain for life. It is true that 'war is a source of pain and grief and sometimes of shame; yet it may also offer satisfactions – excitement, comradeship, pride, such as peacetime cannot equal'.⁸

Interviewees often asked if I had come across friends they had served with, and gave me their names. On one occasion I was able to reunite an officer with his batman.

Veterans referred both to fellow servicemen and their regiment in terms of 'family'. Many spoke nostalgically of their service years for primarily this reason, despite instances of traumatic events, the discomforts and hardships, and long spells away from their biological families. Many also stressed that friendships forged under such circumstances are intense and cannot be replicated in civilian life. This explains why so many join Regimental Associations and attend social events held by the regiments. The atmosphere at such events is that of an exclusive 'club' with membership limited to those who have shared similar experiences.

For the 2nd Battalion East Yorkshire Regiment, the amalgamation of the East Yorkshire and the West Yorkshire Regiments in 1958, to form the Prince of Wales' Own Regiment of Yorkshire, signalled the loss of their regimental name and identity. Some of the interviewees retained membership of the new Association, while others did not, because for some veterans the new regiment was not deemed their own. The 2nd Battalion Veterans' Group included some members of the Regimental Association, although many were not. For a civilian researcher, the depth of feeling associated with detailing on a cap badge, or the correct procedures to be adopted in a Sergeants' Mess, were entirely unfamiliar and were part of a steep learning curve.

After a careful examination of all available sources, the battalion appears to be a sound, ordinary, county formation, like so many others of the north-west Europe campaign. It

⁸ Samuel Hynes, *The Soldier's Tale. Bearing Witness to Modern War* (Pimlico, 1998) p.283.

displayed moments of extraordinary tenacity, such as at the battle of the bridge near Schaddenhof farm, and periods of inaction and being 'marginalised' such as the final battles to close the Falaise Gap. This is a normal record of service for the campaign and despite criticisms of the performance of the British Army during the period, the infantrymen of the 2nd Battalion have every reason to be proud of their service. First and foremost they are the survivors of a battalion which incurred, like so many others, a high casualty rate. Most can easily recall names and distinctive attributes of friends who were killed. Secondly, a detailed analysis of the existing written records has revealed nothing to suggest the battalion failed to gain any of its objectives, although delays in achieving them were common. This too, was quite usual amidst the chaos and confusion of the battlefield. More importantly, the battalion was never forced to retreat from an objective once taken.

Other than the battle at Schaddenhof farm, none of the actions in which the battalion was involved can be deemed 'spectacular'. However, as discussed in the Introduction, the word 'spectacular' in military terms usually denotes actions in which objectives are taken against all the odds, or a unit holds an objective against overwhelming forces; that is, an action in which a unit would not normally be expected to succeed. Such circumstances were not actively sought, or planned for, by High Command. The key to success militarily is to take an objective while employing more forces than the enemy, and hence to consolidate the area against counter-attack, using sufficient forces in order to do so. To leave a position exposed, or to fail in an attack due to insufficient forces engaged, or a lack of support from other Arms, is thereby inviting a strong military reaction from the enemy. The battle of Schaddenhof farm became the 2nd Battalion's finest achievement militarily under these very circumstances. Other than the back-up of the artillery, there were no other regiments involved to claim a share in the victory, and the only armoured support came from a lone tank of the Artillery FOO (Forward

Observation Officer). Despite calls from the enemy to surrender, those defending the farmhouse considered it 'a fight to the finish' in which they would most likely lose their lives. The importance of the battle and the lessons that could be drawn from it, is shown in the fact that a training film was subsequently made of the development of the battle, for, I was told, use in officer training at Sandhurst.

The success of a battalion in an action is sometimes measured by the number of awards made to its officers and men. The 2nd Battalion received an average number of awards during this campaign but no Victoria Crosses. Two VCs were awarded to other battalions in the Division, but tended to be in response to personal actions which changed the course of a battle. For example, Private J. Stokes of the KSLI, made brave charges without orders, at the cost of his life, to ensure the remainder of his platoon could advance, not usually the role of a private, and therefore worthy of the highest award.⁹ The awards to the 2nd Battalion are in the same region as those to other battalions in the Division, except for a higher number of awards of the Distinguished Service Order, four, of which two went to Major King. The battalion appears under-represented in the area of Military Medals compared to other battalions in the Division. However it is on a par with the two other battalions of 8th Brigade, the 1st Suffolk and 1st South Lancashire Regiments.¹⁰ Thus the number of awards made to the battalion were average and reinforce my conclusion that the performance of the battalion was a solid one.

'Spectacular' is not an appropriate adjective for the majority of the infantry battalions of the British Army during this campaign. Solid, reliable, able to take, and hold, its objectives, and make a valuable contribution to the outcome of a battle, these are the attributes of the 2nd Battalion. Since commencing the research, quite a few of those interviewed have passed away. At their funerals, very often the coffins will be decorated

⁹ Norman Scarfe, *Assault Division*, p.215.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* Appendix A, Summary of Decorations Awarded.

with the Union flag, a beret bearing the East Yorkshire Regiment cap badge, and a much-polished collection of medals. A careful examination of the evidence shows that their regimental pride is not misplaced.

Appendix A
2nd Battalion Interviewees.

Arthur Abbott enlisted in the East Yorkshire Regt as a Band Boy in March 1936 and, as a regular soldier, served in India before the outbreak of the Second World War. He joined the 2nd Battalion as the replacement Medical Sergeant early June 1944 and treated the wounded throughout the campaign. He was briefly captured in Venraij but returned to the battalion as part of a proposed prisoner exchange scheme. He was posted back to England and demobbed in June 1947.

Alf Ackroyd enlisted in Hull in June 1940 and served with the 70th West Yorkshire Regt until February 1943 when he transferred to the 2nd Battalion. He landed on D-Day as a member of 10 Platoon, 'B' Company and served until he was wounded and evacuated to the UK. Alf was demobbed in September 1946. Post-war, Alf worked for Leeds Metals Company and then became self-employed.

Ron Allen enlisted in the Army in November 1931 at Catterick camp. He was a member of the East Yorkshire Regimental Band and served as a stretcher-bearer before being evacuated from Dunkirk in June 1940. Ron remained with the Band in the UK and transferred to the Band of the Scots Guards post-war.

Hugh Bone joined the Army in November 1939, and having undertaken officer training, was posted to the 2nd Battalion at Watford, in 1942. He was made Signals Officer and served as such through the long training in Scotland before landing on D-Day. Despite an injury in July, Hugh remained in Normandy and served throughout the north-west Europe campaign. At the cessation of hostilities Hugh became the Battalion Education Officer and then looked after 14 Displaced Persons Camps, before his demob, when he started training for the ministry.

Ken Boulding joined the Army in July 1943 and served as batman to Jim Fetterly during the Normandy campaign. He was later batman to Capt Simpson until he was demobbed in July 1947. Ken was in the jeep with Major 'Banger' King when it blew up on a mine. Post-war, Ken returned to his trade as a joiner.

Dennis Bowen joined the East Yorkshire Regt in 1941 as a Band Boy and after serving with the 70th (Young Solders) Battalion of the West Yorkshire Regt, he went to Richmond as a Junior NCO Weapons Instructor until early 1944. Dennis landed on D-Day with the 5th Battalion East Yorkshire Regt and transferred to the 2nd Battalion in December 1944. He remained with the battalion until 1948, when he transferred to the Green Howards, where he remained for the next 17 years. Dennis worked as a civilian within the Police Force until his retirement.

Dennis Brown was conscripted into the Sherwood Foresters in August 1944 at the age of 18. He joined the 2nd Battalion after the Schaddenhof farm battle and his first battle was at Goch. Dennis served in the Middle East and was demobbed as a Corporal in November 1947. Post-war, Dennis worked at Flotex Carpets.

Peter Brown was conscripted into the Army in July 1943 at the age of 18. He served in 'C' Company of the 2nd Battalion and landed on D-Day. Peter was wounded but rejoined the battalion and also served in the Middle East. He was demobbed in July 1947 as a Corporal, and post-war worked for a brewery.

George Burnham volunteered for the Army in January 1942 and initially served with the West Yorkshire Regiment, then transferred to 'D' Company of the 2nd Battalion East Yorkshire Regiment in time for the training in Scotland. Having landed on D-Day, he was a Corporal until the battle of the Chateau de la Londe when George suffered blast injuries and was evacuated to the UK. After recuperating, George was posted to the General Service Corps as a Sergeant, in charge of escorting prisoners. Post-war, he sold heavy trucks, as a Sales Manager.

Denis Cade was conscripted into the Sherwood Foresters in July 1944 when he was 18, having unsuccessfully applied for the RAF, and was transferred to the 2nd Battalion during the battle for Goch. He was in 'A' Company and was demobbed in September 1947, after serving in the Middle East, in the Officers' Mess. Post-war, Denis worked on the railways and on the family farm.

Clive Crauford MC volunteered for the Army in 1940, at the age of 20 and was commissioned into the East Yorkshire Regiment. He joined the 2nd Battalion at the end of 1942 and was Second-in-Command of 'C' Company during the D-Day landings. Clive was then promoted to Company Commander and in October was seriously injured at Overloon by shell fragments. After treatment, Clive was downgraded medically and demobbed at the end of the war. Post-war he worked as a Stockbroker and Financial Journalist.

Albert Eccles worked in a butcher's shop before call-up, and on a farm. After basic training in Richmond he joined the 2nd Battalion in time for the training in Scotland and drove a truck on D-Day. He served in HQ Company during the north-west Europe campaign and in the Middle East thereafter, before being demobbed in November 1946. Post-war, Albert worked as a driver then became a miner.

Llewelyn Francis, or 'Taffy', who was known for his singing, was called up at age 21, after working in Sheffield steelworks, and joined the 2nd Battalion before the training in Scotland, landing with 'C' Company on D-Day. He was a Lance Corporal and was seriously wounded on patrol in Holland. After evacuation he spent two years recuperating from his injuries.

John Gardner joined the Army in May 1944 and was sent to the Leicester Regt for initial training. In October that year he transferred to the 2nd East Yorkshires. He served in 'C' Company and fought at the Schaddenhof farm battle. John also served in the Middle East, as an officer's driver, in GHQ. He was demobbed in 1947 and worked as a Machine Operator at Lucas.

Crowther Goldie was called up in December 1940, when he was 34, and already married with four children. He initially joined the Tanks Corps and when his regiment was disbanded, he transferred to the 7th Battalion East Yorks. Crowther was sent to the 2nd Battalion when it was near Caen. He cooked for his company and also took part in infantry actions. At Vire he was injured by 16 pieces of shrapnel. Post-war he went back to the building trade and later ran a pub.

Ernie Goozie joined the East Yorkshire Regt at Richmond in April 1942 when he was 19. He was posted to the 7th Battalion and remained with this battalion until its disbandment in August 1944, when he transferred to the 2nd Battalion. Ernie joined 'B' Company and served throughout the remainder of the campaign as well as in the Middle East, where he was the Post Corporal. He was demobbed in December 1946. Post-war, Ernie worked as a guard, then signaller on the railways, and then joined the Water Authority.

Arnold Grave was conscripted into the Army in December 1941 at the age of 19. He completed a cook's course and was then posted to the 2nd Battalion in the spring of 1942, as a regimental cook in 'A' Company. Before D-Day, Arnold played tenor sax in the battalion dance band. He served food close to the front lines throughout the north-west Europe campaign and later served in the Middle East. He was demobbed in October 1946 and returned to his pre-war employment as a baker.

Tommy Hall joined the East Yorkshire Regt in December 1941. He played football for the battalion, and boxed for the regiment. He served with the 7th Battalion until its disbandment, when he transferred to 'B' Company of the 2nd Battalion. Tommy served as a Corporal and was demobbed in December 1945, after turning down the offer of a posting to Palestine as a Sergeant. When he returned to the UK, it was to his former trade as a builder and bricklayer.

Dennis Hallam MC joined the Army in 1940 and was commissioned into a Royal Artillery Regt which later converted to infantry. He joined the 2nd Battalion in Scotland early 1944 and commanded a platoon in 'C' Company. Dennis served throughout the campaign and thereafter in the Middle East, before being demobbed as a Captain in September 1946.

Alf Harrison volunteered for the Army in 1939, before the outbreak of war, and initially joined the Middlesex Regiment, before transferring to the 2nd Battalion in advance of the exercises in Scotland. He served in 'B' Company on D-Day, through to the end of the war, and thereafter went to Egypt and Palestine. Alf was demobbed at the end of 1946, but after four years he re-enlisted and served with the Duke of Wellington's Regiment for sixteen years.

Ted Heslop joined the East Yorkshire Regiment in 1940, after seven years working in stables as an apprentice jockey. He served in the Officers' Mess of the 3rd Division Battle School and on D-Day he landed as batman to Captain Danby of Support Company, before transferring to signals later in the campaign. Ted was demobbed in 1946 and worked for 32 years on the railways as a porter.

Albert Holdsworth, known as 'Butch', volunteered for the Army in June 1940 and served with the East Yorkshire Regt initially in 'D' Company and then HQ Company. Albert completed a catering course in May 1944 and remained with the 2nd Battalion as a cook during the north-west Europe campaign. He served in the Middle East and was demobbed in June 1946, returning to his pre-war job as a butcher, hence his nickname.

Norman Lucas was conscripted into the Army in April 1944 at the age of 18 and was posted to the 2nd Battalion at Venlo in October 1944. He was in 'D' Company and served as a rifleman, mortarman and Bren gunner. Norman was wounded in the leg in the Schaddenhof farm battle, but returned to the battalion, and he went on to serve in the Middle East. He was demobbed as a Corporal in October 1947. Norman then worked at a glass factory, where he became manager of the mould shop.

Arthur Lumb joined the East Yorkshire Regiment in June 1940 and served as a Dispatch Rider and then with the Regimental Police. He landed on D-Day and served right through the campaign, involved in duties such as directing traffic. At the end of the war, Arthur guarded prisoners in Belgium and after his demob in January 1946, Arthur returned to the textile industry, in charge of a warping department.

Ted Nicholson joined the Army in early 1944 and underwent his basic training in Scotland and County Durham. Initially Ted was in the Duke of Wellington's Regiment but joined the 2nd Battalion as a reinforcement near Ghent in Belgium. Ted served in 'D' Company until he transferred to HQ Company at Moascar Garrison in Egypt, and was demobbed in 1947. Post-war, Ted worked for the Post Office as a driver.

Doug Parker initially joined the West Yorkshire Regt in 1941 as a young soldier and was transferred to the East Yorkshire Regiment in December 1942. He served in 'B' Company and landed on D-Day. Doug served throughout the north-west Europe campaign and in the Middle East thereafter. He was demobbed in December 1946 as a Corporal.

Horace Pinfold joined the Army in May 1944 and trained with the King's Royal Rifle Corps before joining the Leicester Regiment. He transferred to the 2nd Battalion in October 1944 after the Venraij battle and was in 'B' Company. Horace served throughout the remainder of the campaign and also in the Middle East, where he was Company Clerk, until his demob in December 1947, when he trained to be an electrician.

Jack Reid enlisted in the East Yorkshire Regt in March 1930 and served in India before the Second World War. He was evacuated from Dunkirk in 1940, and after landing on D-Day, served as a Dispatch Rider with HQ Company during the north-west Europe campaign. At Venraij Jack was injured after being knocked off his motorcycle and was

evacuated to the UK. He was demobbed in 1946. Post-war Jack worked in the stores department at Rolls Royce and then in the Qualcast factory.

Ray Robinson was conscripted into the Army in June 1944 and underwent training in Northern Ireland. He joined the 2nd Battalion in January 1945 and served with 'D' Company. Ray was wounded while training Belgian cadets post-war and served in the Middle East until his demob in October 1947.

John Scruton MM joined the East Yorkshire Regt at Beverley in July 1941, having completed his degree course, and remained at the depot as a training instructor until March 1943, when he was posted to the 2nd Battalion. John served with 'C' Company and landed on D-Day. He was promoted from Corporal to Lance Sergeant, and he remained with the battalion until he was seriously wounded in October 1944. After successful treatment, John served with the Mobile Disarmament Unit in Norway. Post-war, John worked for Reckitt and Colman (Overseas) Ltd in a managerial role.

Wilf Slater was conscripted into the Army in March 1944 and was posted to 'D' Company of the 2nd Battalion at Tilberg in November of that year. He fought at the Schaddenhof farm battle during which he was wounded in both legs, and served in the Middle East as a truck driver after recuperation. He was demobbed as a Corporal in May 1948 and drove coal lorries post-war.

Arthur Smith joined the East Yorkshire Regt in Beverley in June 1940 and served with the Signal Platoon. He landed with 'D' Company on D-Day and served until December 1944 when he suffered hearing impairment and was posted to Military / Civilian Affairs in Antwerp. After taking a course he transferred to the RASC until demob in March 1946.

Leonard Steel was called up at the age of 18 and undertook initial training with the Green Howards Regiment in 1942. He joined the 2nd Battalion in time for the exercises in Scotland and landed on D-Day carrying a Brigade wireless set. He served throughout the north-west Europe campaign and at the time of his interview, was staying in a nursing home, having undergone amputation of both legs. His interview was consequently limited in scope, due to his need to rest.

Wilf Todd enlisted in the Army in November 1941 and joined the 70th (Young Soldiers) Battalion of the West Yorkshire Regiment. He transferred to the East Yorkshire Regt and served in 'C' Company and the Carrier Platoon. Wilf was wounded on D-Day but rejoined the battalion to serve throughout the remainder of the campaign as well as the Middle East. He was demobbed as Acting Company Sergeant Major in October 1946. Post-war, Wilf joined the Fire Service for 29 years.

Les Turner was a Sergeant in the 2nd Battalion, having joined 'B' Company before the exercises in Scotland and going on to land on D-Day. He was wounded in Normandy but returned to the battalion and both he and his brother served until the end of the war.

Bill Turner, Les' brother, was a Private in the MT section of the 2nd Battalion, driving a Bren carrier. He joined the East Yorkshire Regiment at 18, in December 1938, and was posted to France with the BEF. His carrier was one of those acting as rearguard during the withdrawal towards Dunkirk and he was evacuated with the battalion.

Ron Walker joined the 2nd Battalion at the beginning of the Second World War and served with the BEF in France, before being evacuated from Dunkirk. He volunteered to be transferred to the Parachute Regiment in 1942, before the combined exercises in Scotland.

George White was conscripted into the Army in May 1944 and posted initially to the York and Lancs Regiment. He joined the Mortar Platoon of the 2nd Battalion in March 1945. He served in the Middle East and was demobbed in January 1948. Post-war, George returned to his previous occupation as a butcher.

Partners Interviewed.

Phyllis Allen and her husband Ron, were married just before he left to go to France with the British Expeditionary Force. Phyllis had gone into service at the age of 14, as a lady's maid. She followed Ron to Beverley with young children and had difficulty finding somewhere to live during the war years. Post-war the couple lived in London while Ron played in the Band, then they moved north to Blackpool.

Elsie Hall and her husband Tommy were married in October 1940, and had a young son the following year. Elsie had been a packing case maker before her marriage but moved into her sister's house during the war to look after her sister's daughter and her own son, while her sister was at work. Post-war, Elsie became a butcher and the couple bought a house that Tommy had built.

Winnie Isherwood met her husband Harold when she was 17 and he was 18. They were married when Winnie was 21 and serving in the Wrens as a batwoman. Harold landed on D-Day and served throughout the campaign. He suffered from ill-health post-war, due to his wartime experiences and retired early after working on the railways and down a mine. They returned to Normandy for the 50th anniversary of D-Day.

Edna Lumb met her husband Arthur in Beverley when he joined the Army and became friends with Edna's brother. Married during the war, Edna worked in munitions, making bullets for the RAF, before the birth of her son Peter. Later Edna worked in a mill and then a confectionery shop. During the war, Edna lived with her mother. After Arthur's demob, in January 1946, their first house was a pre-fab, which Edna described as 'gorgeous'.

Vera Scruton met John at a dance in Hull, a few days before war was declared. She had just started teaching and had been evacuated with children to the Selby area. The couple were married in 1943 and Vera managed to visit John at various postings in the UK before D-Day. Their daughter was born at the end of the war, and Vera and John moved into their first home in Hull.

Mary Todd and her husband Wilf were married in October 1943 when she was 18 and he was already serving with the 2nd Battalion. During the war, Mary sewed uniforms for the armed forces and remembers receiving the news by telegram of Wilf's injury on D-Day. Post-war, the couple initially lived with Mary's parents until a pre-fab house became available in 1949. Mary eventually became an auxiliary nurse in the maternity unit of St. James' Hospital in Leeds.

Canadian officers corresponded with.

Jim Fetterly MC joined the Canadian Army in 1940 and volunteered to serve in the British Army after three years. He was posted to the 2nd Battalion in May 1944 and landed on D-Day in command of a reserve platoon. After receiving a head injury he set up a sniper school for three weeks, but asked to be returned to the battalion, with whom he remained for the remainder of the campaign. Jim returned to Canada in September 1945 with the rank of Captain. He worked for an investment company and later sold property in Alberta.

Len Robertson MC, known as 'Robbie', joined the Canadian Army in 1940 and by 1943 he was QMS of the Orderly Room and decided to apply for a commission. He volunteered to serve in the British Army and left for the UK in April 1944. Len opted to stay with two of his friends, Stirling Reid and Hugh Neily, and all three were posted to the 2nd Battalion in time for D-Day. After suffering wounds, Len returned to Canada in April 1945 with the rank of Captain, and began work for his pre-war employer, a home furnishing company, from which he retired as a Director.

Appendix B

Order of Battle for Sword beach – 6 June 1944

3rd British Infantry Division.

8th Infantry Brigade

1st Bn The Suffolk Regiment

2nd Bn The East Yorkshire Regiment

1st Bn The South Lancashire Regiment

9th Infantry Brigade

2nd Bn The Lincolnshire Regiment

1st Bn The King's Own Scottish Borderers

2nd Bn The Royal Ulster Rifles

185th Infantry Brigade

2nd Bn The Royal Warwickshire Regiment

1st Bn The Royal Norfolk Regiment

2nd Bn The King's Shropshire Light Infantry

HQ 3rd Division

3rd Recce Regiment RAC

7th, 33rd and 76th Field Regiments, RA

20th Anti-Tank Regiment, RA

17th, 246th and 253rd Field Companies, RE

2nd Bn The Middlesex Regiment (MG)

Units under command for initial assault phase:

27th Armoured Brigade

13th/18th Royal Hussars

The Staffordshire Yeomanry

The East Riding Yeomanry

1st (Special Service) Brigade

3,4 and 6 Commandos

45 (RM) Commando

2 Troops 10 (RA) Commando (French)

1 Troop RM Engineer Commando

Elements of 79 Armoured Division 22nd Dragoons

5th Assault Regiment, RE

218 Bty and HQ 73 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, RA

1 Troop 318 Bty (of 92 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, RA)

263 Field Company, RE

629 Field Company, RE

41 RM Commando (from 4 Special Service Brigade)

3 Troops 5 Independent Armoured Support

Battery SP, RM

Beach Groups

5th Bn The King's Regiment

1st Buckinghamshire Bn

Units of 51st Highland Division which landed on D-Day and came under command of 3rd Division:

5th Bn The Black Watch

1st and 5/7th Bns, The Gordon Highlanders

Plus elements of:

Royal Corps of Signals

Royal Army Service Corps

Royal Army Medical Corps

Royal Ordnance Corps

Corps of Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers

Corps of Military Police

Pioneer Corps.

Sources:

Remembering D-Day. Personal Histories of Everyday Heroes Martin W Bowman (London, 2004) and Tim Kilvert-Jones *Sword Beach. British 3rd Infantry Division /27th Armoured Brigade.* (Barnsley, 2001)

Appendix C

Lt (later Major) Reginald Rutherford's LCA on D-Day.

10 Pln HQ

Lt Rutherford	
Sgt Patterson	W
Pte Peachy	
Pte Wise	W
Pte Williams	KIA
Pte Mitchell	

No 1 Section

Cpl Hawks	KIA
Cpl Stout	KIA
Pte Stead	W
Pte Wells	W
Pte Senior	W
Pte Scott	
Pte Wilson	W
Pte Gateson	

No 2 Section

L/Cpl Marsden	KIA
Cpl Ackroyd	
Pte Patterson	
Pte Marsh	W
Pte Rawlins	W
Pte Ambrose	W
Pte Harrison	W
Pte Hopkins	KIA

No 3 Section

L/Sgt Fenwick	KIA
Pte Ron Major	W
L/Cpl Spiers	W
Pte Taglione	
Pte Burgess	W
Pte Brooks	
Cpl Housley	W
Pte Preston	

LOBs (Left out of Battle) Sgt Clegg and Ptes Seed, Day, Barritt, Rogerson, Mason, and Coulthard.

This table shows the high casualty figures incurred in one platoon during D-Day, with fourteen wounded and six killed, leaving just ten men able to advance to the inland objectives.

A copy of the original document, supplied by Alf Ackroyd, who noted what happened to the occupants of the LCA, is overleaf.

Men of Lt. R. Rutherford's LCA on D-Day

Supplied by Alf Ackroyd

KILLED XX WOUNDED "D DAY" 6-6-44

No. 1 Section.

No. 2 Section.

No. 3 Section.

L.O. Pln. H.O.

Lt Rutherford. C.COV. 25th Y.

Sgt Patterson. XX 27th LANC

Pte Peachy DENIG

Pte Wis. XX 6th

Pte Williams XX 28th

Pte Mitchell. H.M.

Cpl Hawkes X 6th

(L/C Stout) X 6th

Pte Stead XX 6th

Pte Wells XX 3 27th LANC

Pte Senior - XX 3 27th LANC

Pte Scott ?

Pte Wilson XX 3 27th LANC

Pte Gateson. H.C.

L/C Marsden X 6th

L/C Ackroyd !! C 20th LANC

Pte Patterson - 27 3

Pte Marsh XX C R 10th LANC

Pte Rawlins XX 6th

Pte Ambrose XX 6th

Pte Harrison S XX 27 3

Pte Hopkins. X 6th

RAWSON.

L.C.Bs.

L/S Clogg, Ptes, Seed, Day, Barritt, Rogerson, Mason, Coulthard.

L/C MILLARD ?

Appendix D

2nd Battalion East Yorks Christmas Card 1944



SCAN OF CHRISTMAS CARD SUPPLIED BY V. VAYRO

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Interviewees

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Alf Ackroyd	10 th February, 25 th February, 11 th March 2002
Ron Allen	19 th February 2000
Hugh Bone	15 th July 2004
Ken Boulding	8 th January 2000
Dennis Bowen	23 rd January 2000
Dennis Brown	9 th May, 4 th July 1999
Peter Brown	19 th September 1999
George Burnham	26 th February 2000
Denis Cade	9 th May, 4 th July 1999
Clive Crauford MC	5 th November 2000
Albert Eccles	11 th September 1999
Llewelyn Francis	6 th April 2003
John Gardner	2 nd December 2000
Crowther Goldie	19 th December 1999
Ernie Goozie	8 th April 2000
Arnold Grave	8 th April 2001
Tommy Hall	13 th June, 17 th July 1999
Dennis Hallam MC	1 st October 2005
Alf Harrison	5 th November 2000
Ted Heslop	19 th February 2000
Albert Holdsworth	8 th April 2000
Norman Lucas	9 th October 1999
Arthur Lumb	1 st May 1999
Ted Nicholson	7 th December 1999
Doug Parker	17 th July 1999
Horace Pinfold	2 nd December 2000
Jack Reid	9 th May, 4 th July 1999
Ray Robinson	19 th September 1999
John Scruton MM	31 st May 1999
Wilf Slater	13 th April 2003
Arthur Smith	27 th September, 7 th November 1999
Leonard Steel	22 nd April 2000
Wilf Todd	20 th March, 25 th March, 4 th April, 1 st May 1999
Les and Bill Turner	2 nd January 2003
Ron Walker	7 th April 2001
George White	6 th April 2003

Partners Interviewed

Phyllis Allen	19 th February 2000
Elsie Hall	17 th July 1999
Winnie Isherwood	11 th September 1999
Edna Lumb	28 th April 2000
Vera Scruton	31 st May 1999
Mary Todd	1 st May 1999

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A70 87-6 A brief tour of the countryside East of Caen captured during Operation Goodwood. Cameraman Sgt A. E. Wilkes, 19th July 1944.

A70 181-1 Units from the 3rd Division's 8th Brigade occupy Venraij. Cameraman Sgt R. V. Watkins, 7th October 1944.

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