Course: HIST 394

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Veteran's Oral History Term Paper:

Three Perspectives on Canadian Army Operations in Normandy during the Second World War

It has been well over sixty years now since the conclusion of the Second World War and veterans who have survived to tell the tale of what that war was like are becoming fewer in number. Although there is a vast array of written histories, documentaries, and movies about the Second World War, there are still stories to be told by those who were actually there. Three veterans of the Canadian Army were interviewed for the purposes of this essay and it is through their oral accounts that new insights will be gained on the Canadian experience of the Second World War. Lieutenant George Wilkinson joined the Provost Corps in 1941 and served first with the 2nd Infantry Division before going on to the No. 8 Provost Company which served under the 4th Canadian Armoured Division. Major Charles Goodman served with the South Saskatchewan Regiment (SSR) as a private and later as a signaller between July 1944 and May 1945. Colonel John Edmondson was also with the SSR, serving as both a second-in-command and company commander during the Dieppe Raid and later in the Normandy campaign. This essay will recount the experiences of these three soldiers in Normandy, highlighting the commonalties of their individual experiences and considering their recollections alongside published histories of the campaign. Focusing specifically on the actions of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division in France both during the summer of 1942 and 1944, the essay will seek to add new meanings to existing written sources in the hopes of capturing the subjective nature of combat. Official written histories do provide important objective information about events during the war; however oral sources provide multiple perspectives on the same event.

By the spring of 1942 the United States had entered the Second World War and the German Army was waging a war of expansion on the Eastern Front against the Soviet Union. Pressure mounted for the United Kingdom to take some action that would relieve the pressure on the Soviets by opening a second front. Lacking the resources for a full scale invasion, plans were drawn up for a large scale raid on the German held French coastline. The task of carrying out this raid fell to the Canadian 2nd Division, which was then stationed in the south of England. After extensive training operations on the Isle of Whyte the Canadians prepared for the real raid which was codenamed 'Rutter'. For most of the men this was to be their first taste of combat; something that weighed heavily on every soldier as they wrote letters to their next of kin. Knowing that the letter would only be delivered if they were killed in action, those writing had to carefully consider these last words for their loved ones. Reflecting on this experience, Lt. George Wilkinson said that it was "not easy, you know you try to write a letter which you know isn't going to be delivered unless you're gone and it's not easy for a twenty-one-year old kid."[1]What this comments reveal is that the dangers of the planned raid on Dieppe were known and there was an expectation that significant casualties could occur. Until the go ahead was given the troops were forced to wait on the transports west of Cowes, England, where conditions at sea were not the most comfortable for those aboard these vessels. Ordered to stay under cover at all times to avoid German detection, some of the infantrymen had to sleep under the 42 ton Churchill tank, resting uncomfortably on steel ribbing that poked up every eighteen inches "just wide enough to hit your shoulders."[2] Although it has been written that when the planned raid was called off "the bitterly disappointed soldiers left their ships,"[3]George Wilkinson recalls that not all the men would have been upset about moving out from the confines of the crowded ship decks. Operation 'Rutter' was called off on 8 July 1942 and a report of the cancelled raid was soon sent to South Eastern Command for the review of General Montgomery. Through the pouring rain rode Lance Corporal Wilkinson of No. 2 Provost Company to deliver the report.

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[1] Lieutenant George Wilkinson, interviewed by Ryan Hill, 17 November 2009.

[2] Ibid.

[3] C.P Stacey. Six Years of War. Six Years of War: The Army in Canada, Britain, and the Pacific (Ottawa: Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationery, 1955) , 339.

Having personally delivered the report, Monty asked him a number of questions before Wilkinson rode back to his unit on his Harley Davidson.[4] Shortly thereafter Montgomery "recommended to the powers that be that the operation be off for all time."[5]

Despite the cancellation of 'Rutter' the planned raid on Dieppe was taken up again and a month-and- a- half later almost identical orders were given to the Canadians for 'Operation Jubilee'. A good deal of controversy surrounds the decision to go through with a plan that had changed little and that many people were familiar with. But for the men who had the responsibility of carrying out the orders, such considerations were of secondary importance. Aboard the HMS *Princess Beatrix,* Col. John Edmondson of the South Saskatchewan Regiment had more practical problems to sort out. "D" Company had been issued brand new Sten guns that were fresh out of their crates, meaning that his men had to "get all the grease off of them, and see if [they] knew how to handle them."[6] Choosing to issue new weapons rather than those already tried and tested in England would have significant implications for Col. Edmondson on the morning of the raid when his weapon seized up when he needed it most[7]. Rushing ashore at dawn on the beaches at Pourville, published histories recall that "the South Saskatchewan Regiment landed unopposed, on time, and in near darkness."[8] However, despite a slight element of surprise, they were soon under heavy fire and taking casualties. Historians have written about the lack of adequate support for the troops at Dieppe. Brian Villa, for example, commented that

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[4] Wilkinson. November 17 2009.
[5] Stacey, 340.
[6] Col. J.S. Edmondson, interviewed by Ryan Hill, 20 November 2009.
[7] Edmondson, "There as I came around the corner of the building I saw a German just putting his uniform on and I up and pressed the trigger on my Sten gun. Nothing happened." 20 November 2009.
[8] Denis and Shelagh Whitaker, Dieppe: Tragedy to Triumph (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd, 1992),239

"support from the destroyers offshore and the fighter's overhead were insufficient."[9] This was confirmed by Col. Edmondson, who recalls a conversation he had with a Forward Observation Officer (F-O-O) named Cpt. Carswell on the west side of the River Scie at Pourville. Having asked for support from the naval guns offshore, the F.O.O responded to Edmondson that "I can't do it unless you can tell me exactly where the troops are." Unable to give exact coordinates but feeling confident that naval support would help his men, Edmondson responded that "you could try and if you can't help us in a dire need, and take a chance, then get lost!"[10] It was a conversation that was remembered verbatim some 67 years after Dieppe, and the story reveals the difficulty that F-O-O's had in being able to effectively direct fire power from off shore. C.P Stacey, Canada's official historian of the Second World War, also commented on the problem when he wrote that "attempts to obtain artillery support from the destroyer *Albrighton* were nullified by the Forward Observation Officer's inability to observe and lack of knowledge of the exact position of our own troops."[11] Lacking support and losing man after man, the SSR pulled back to the beach wall for a hasty evacuation back to England. Col. Edmondson recalls running from the sea-wall at Pourville to a lone landing craft with approximately seventeen other men. Having warned the men, "don't stop or they'll zero in on you,"[12] Edmondson and five others were the only ones to make it to the landing craft. Similar scenes played out at the other landing beaches on that day. Bloodied and exhausted, only "2,110 of the 4,963 Canadians who had set sail the day before could be found."[13] For the survivors, many of whom had lost friends they had been training with for years, thoughts turned elsewhere so as not to have to dwell on the carnage they had seen. Col. Edmondson, for example, vividly recalled a “beautiful sandwich of baked white bread with bully beef.”[14] It was his first meal in over thirty hours. What is striking about the description of the events that occurred on 19 August 1942 is not only the correlation with written history, such as the reminder that food was scarce during the operation, but also the blurring together of time into brief moments of clarity and extended periods of obscurity. When asked questions relating to the timing of events on the day of the raid, Col. Edmondson’s response was “time, you don’t measure time,”[15] underlining the chaotic nature of war that can be easily overlooked when trying to pin- point what happened in combat. The 2nd Canadian Infantry Division spent much of their time after Dieppe replacing casualties and renewing their gruelling training regime in southern England. It was not until after the D-Day landings on 6 June 1944 that the sounds of German artillery and mortars would be heard once more.

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[9] Brian Loring Villa, Unauthorized Action: Montbatten and the Dieppe Raid. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1989) , 15.

[10] Edmondson, November 20 2009.

[11] Stacey, 370.

[12] Edmondson, November 2 2009.

[13] John Keegan, Six Armies in Normandy: From D-Day to the Liberation of Paris (London: Trinity Press. 1982), 123.

The 2nd Canadian Infantry Division returned to France in the first week of July 1944, approximately one month after the D-Day landings. The Allied bridgehead at that point contained almost a million Allied soldiers and over 200,000 military vehicles.[16] Under the command of Lt.-Gen Simonds, the 2nd Canadian Corps took over operational control of “roughly 8,000 yards of frontage along the River Orne through Caen.”[17] One of the first things that struck those who landed there were the bodies. Shortly after arriving off the beachhead Lt. Wilkinson recalled coming across a group of young Canadian soldiers staring at a group of corpses that were lying on their backs with their arms up in the air almost as if they were saying “why me lord?” Wilkinson, using his training acquired with the provost corps, explained the process of

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[14] Edmondson, November 2 2009

[15] Ibid.

[16] Reginald Roy. Roy, 1944: The Canadians in Normandy (Macmillan: Canada. 1984) , 66.

[17] John A. English, The Canadian Army and the Normandy Campaign: A Study of Failure in High Command (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1991), 222.

postmortem lividity and reasoned that the bodies had been turned over so that the soldier's dog-tags could be removed. Given that they had died quite recently rigor mortis was still in effect which is why their arms were still stiff.[18] Death was to become a frequent sight for the 2nd Infantry Division and the recollections of the smell of decaying bodies stand out very clearly in the memory of those who proceeded inland towards the front through Caen and the surrounding areas. Wilkinson in his interview remembered a rumour that pilots flying at heights of 7,000 ft "could even smell the stench from up there." As Paul Thompson has written, "rumours do not survive unless they make sense to people,"[19]so clearly the smell of decaying animals and humans is something that has stayed with veterans of the Normandy campaign even sixty years later. The Provost Officers, like Wilkinson who were tasked with controlling traffic and movement behind the front line put up large traffic signs to guide men and vehicles around the unfamiliar territory, and soon "the blue patches of the 2nd Division and the green patches of the 4th Division began to appear on signs at crossroads around the Caen area."[20] The traffic became so intense at times that the men joked that if someone wanted to go down to the bridgehead they could "stand on this moving train that was like an escalator." Closer to the front, however, concerns rested more with German shells and mortars than with traffic congestion. With the launch of Operation 'Atlantic' the 6th Brigade comprised of Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal (FMR), Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders, and the aforementioned South Saskatchewan Regiment, which once more entered into close combat with the enemy.

The first attack on Verrières Ridge, which was carried out by these units, occurred on the 20 July 1944 and proved to be a costly battle that highlighted crucial errors in leadership and planning. Several accounts of the battle have been written underlining the lack of proper armoured support, inaccurate maps, and poor communication during the battle.[21] However, what these descriptions lack is the personal reactions of the soldiers following their exposure to German tanks in the wheat and pea fields on the slopes of Verrières. Maj. Edmondson, who was in command of a rifle company with the SSR during this battle, saw firsthand the futility of trying to engage German panzers with small arms fire. The SSR had set off at 3:00 pm towards their objective, which was the crest of Verrières Ridge, following close behind a supporting artillery barrage. Under direct observation from the Germans, Maj. Edmondson was trying to organize a platoon of men to continue their advance when what appeared to be a German Mark IV tank appeared over the crest of a small hill. The tank edged forward firing both high explosives (HE) and machine gun (MG) at the vulnerable infantrymen. "One of my Sergeants who I was talking to disappeared in front of my eyes. An HE had blown him apart."[22] Soon Edmondson himself was being strafed by tracer from the tank and he only narrowly escaped by rolling out of the wheat field he was in and into a nearby pea field. When asked if he had felt afraid at this point in time he responded "afraid? I didn't have time to be afraid. I was too busy, commanding."[23] His response reveals an attitude about the responsibility of leadership that he personally believed in; a responsibility for the lives of dozens of men who that terrible day. The sentiment that leadership of a company or a battalion required an outwardly fearless attitude was revealed once more when Edmondson was questioned about how he felt when one of his superior officers requested to be relieved of his post. He replied "bloody mad. I knew this chap should never have been with us."[24] Yet another instance of Edmondson's apparent intolerance of fear is present in an anecdote he told about a transport officer who did not want to drive down a road knowing that there was a German gun emplacement along the way. “Either be shot by them or by me”[25]was the choice he offered to this soldier, who chose to drive with Edmondson down the road. Although these views about fear in the face of danger reflect the opinion of one officer told many years after the events in question, they are useful in that they reflect an attitude about war that is hard to find in traditional narrative accounts of the Normandy campaign. How the attitudes of an officer commanding a rifle company compare with those of a private soldier in the same regiment does much to highlight the subjective nature of the experience of war.

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[18] Wilkinson, November 17 2009.
[19] Paul Thompson, The Voice of the Past: Oral History (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988 edition), 139.
[20] Roy, 66.

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[21] See Roy pp. 86-88 and English, pp. 229.

[22] Edmondson. November 2 2009.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Edmondson, November 20 2009.

Private Charles Goodman was brought in as a reinforcement to the South Saskatchewan Regiment from a holding unit after the battle at Verrières Ridge where “13 Officers and 209 Regulars were killed, wounded and missing.”[26] Digging slit trenches, six feet long and about four feet deep, was common practice for the infantrymen who fought in Normandy during the summer of 1944. As Goodman recalls, “most of the time was spent cowering in those trenches.”[27] The almost constant risk of mortars, artillery, and the six- barrelled *Nebelwerfer*, which let out a “real screaming noise,” was a daily part of life. Military operations that are now infamous meant little to the sharp-enders who did not need to know the grand strategy behind an offensive. For instance, Operation Totalize which is credited to General Guy Simonds, involved a huge advance wherein “seven mobile columns spearheaded the initial break-in, with each typically fielding an embossed infantry battalion, armoured forces and supporting arms.”[28] These columns were ordered to make a rapid night advance into German held areas with the assistance of “radio beams; Bofor guns firing tracer along the axes of advance...- and ‘artificial moonlight’ from searchlights directed southward.”[29] Memories of the artificial moonlight and tracer fire of “three incendiaries and then one” do exist, but, as Goodman recalls, “nobody ever told me much where we were going what we were doing or anything like that.”[30] The days before and after Totalize, which occurred on the night of 7-8 August 1944, were spent on night patrols with rifle companies seeking out enemy positions and trying to get prisoners. When asked about engagement with the enemy and the motivation for trying to kill them, the answer was not related to hatred or ideology. “Usually what we were thinking about was: ‘Did they have a wrist watch? Did they have any money we could take or any souvenirs?’”[31] Danger was not limited to the enemy either, as the events of 14 August revealed. Hoping to knock out German defensive positions, the Allied leadership coordinated an aerial bombardment involving “417 Lancasters, 352 Halifaxes and 42 Mosquitoes.”[32] Some of the bombs fell short and attempts to alert the airmen above were in vain as there was no ground- to- air radio contact. Taking cover in his slit trench, Goodman recalled seeing his company commander and his batmen running towards their nearby dugout. When he looked up again “they were gone and their trench was gone, they just disappeared.”[33] To hear the retelling of the event in such plain language reveals how commonplace it was for soldiers to encounter near-death experiences on the front lines. In hindsight, it is clear that of all branches of the Canadian Army, the rifleman was the most likely to be wounded or killed in action during the Normandy campaign. Indeed, as C.P Stacey has pointed out, “down to 17 August in Normandy the infantry had had 76 per cent of the Canadian casualties, the armoured corps only 7 per cent and the artillery 8 per cent."[34] Goodman's recollections even reveal a slight feeling of satisfaction when others experienced the kind of danger that these riflemen experienced on a daily basis, as well as their bitterness towards higher ranking officers. When word spread that the bombs had come very close to the SSR headquarters "and scared the hell out of them" we all cheered hooray battalion headquarters got to see what it's like up here on the frontlines!"[35] Faced with the constant risk of death, and left out of the information loop on most operations, infantrymen like Goodman were left with only their thoughts of survival and their souvenirs gathered from the battlefield rather than the larger picture of troop movements and strategy.

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[25] Col. Edmondson, interview by Chris Bell, Reginald Roy Collection 5: 21:35, August 12 1982.
[26] SSR War Diary <http://cap.estevan.sk.ca/SSR/documents/jul44/index.html>
[27] Maj. Charles Goodman, interviewed by Ryan Hill, 18 November 2009.
[28] Stephen A. Hart, The black day unrealised: Operation TOTALIZE and the problems of translating tactical success into a decisive breakout (New York: Routledge. 2006) , 107.

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[29] C.P. Stacey, Victory Campaign: The Operations in North-West Europe 1944-1945 (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer and Controller of Stationery, 1960), 227.
[30] Goodman, November 18 2009.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Stacey, The Victory Campaign, 243.
[33] Goodman, November 18 2009.

As the stream of supplies needed to sustain the advancing Allied forces moved up, the flow of wounded soldiers and prisoners of war flowed back. For this movement to occur without interruption, "hundreds of ten-, six-and three-ton vehicles were involved, and needed to be strictly controlled on the "Up" and "Down" routes."[36] These vehicles obviously needed fuel and there were "piles and piles of gasoline and four gallon non-returnable gas cans, as high as a house, all over the place." The Canadian II Corps handled 1,114 prisoners of war between 18 July and 8 August 1944 and by the end of August that number had reached over 15,000.[37] The handling of these prisoners of war was handled by the Provost Corps and it was their responsibility to guard the prisoners before they were taken to a more secure area. Historical literature on the experiences of provost officers is limited, perhaps owing to the smaller number of provosts in relation to other servicemen. One particular experience that Lt. Wilkinson brings to light in relation to his service in No. 8 Provost Company of the 4th Canadian Armoured Division, is the resource shortages that his unit faced in 1944. The German prisoners were being held in an open field and guarded by approximately twelve provost corporals with machine guns at each corner of the field. Approaching the field on his motorcycle, Wilkinson came under small arms fire from Germans hiding in a nearby forested area. It was at this time that one of the German officers, "an SS guy, got up and he started haranguing these men that their fellow soldiers were opening fire to knock off these twelve guys and restore them to the German Army."[38] Wilkinson's Sergeant proceeded to walk up to the German officer and "thumped him right on the nose," knocking him to the ground and, effectively quelling any thoughts of a revolt. Shortly thereafter, three tanks arrived and "we said '-sick em.'"[39] His story highlights shortages in man-power that had the potential for serious consequences. As for the wounded Canadians moving back down the same roads as the P.O.W's, they were first gathered at the regimental aid post's before going on to casualty clearing stations (CCS). Wilkinson remembers visiting a CCS at the Carpiquet airfield, near Caen, and seeing one of the operating tents. "There were bodies piled outside the back of it as high as the wall of the tent. Fifty, sixty bodies wrapped in blankets. Died on the operating table."[40] The mental image of blanketed bodies piled as high as a tent seems more real than a table of statistics placed in the appendix of a history book. The role of Canadian nurses "dressed like soldiers" and who "worked twenty-four-seven" is another feature of army operations that is easily left out of documented battle narratives. [41]

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[34] Stacey, The Victory Campaign, pg 284.
[35] Goodman, November 18 2009.
[36] Roy, 159.
[37] Terry Copp, Fields of Fire: The Canadians in Normandy (Toronto: U of T Press, 2003.) , 321.

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[38] Wilkinson. November 17 2009.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.

The perspectives of each individual- major, private, and provost- differed significantly depending on the units they were in and the places they went. However, there were definitely commonalities shared by all of them.

The great equalizers of fatigue, flies, and dysentery affected thousands of soldiers on both sides of the battlefield. The dysentery that plagued troops was a "violent form of diarrhea known as Normandy Stomach."[42] Memories of this ailement range from slightly humorous to tragic. Col. Edmondson referred to one particular bout of dysentery where he found himself in the latrine at a command post when it came under enemy shell fire. Having learned to judge how close incoming shells were to his location he quickly realized that they were coming his way and jumped for cover in a nearby bush, but "[he] didn't have time to pull up [his] pants."[43] Lt. Wilkinson, who was also afflicted with a severe case of dysentery had a similar moment of vulnerability but his reaction was quite different:

"The war was waging on about a mile ahead of where I was and there were shells going off, bloody aircraft crashing, and all hell's going and I just sat there and said 'Forget it!' I couldn't have cared less."[44] He stayed in the latrine. It is possible that Lt. Wilkinson was exaggerating his experience of dysentery in the field but to say that he did not care about the clear and present danger around him indicates, even if it is slight hyperbole, how exasperated an individual could become in such circumstances. For Maj. Goodman, his anecdote had more profound consequences. Feeling a "touch of dysentery" coming on, Goodman made a stop on the side of the road to relieve himself. Having fallen behind the rest of his company, he hustled to catch-up. It turned out that the Goodman's company commander, Major Sharpe, had stepped on a German anti-personnel mine which jumped up and exploded, spraying shrapnel everywhere. Maj. Sharpe was killed, several other men were wounded, and Goodman had only narrowly escaped a similar fate:

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[42] Denis Whitaker, Normandy: The Real Story (New York : Presidio Press/Ballantine Books, 2004) , 50.

[43] Edmondson, November 20 2009.

[44] Wilkinson, November 17 2009.

"If I'd been behind the company commander like I should have been I would have been badly hurt. Makes a guy wonder, why did I have dysentery on that particular day?"[45]

These first- person testimonies attest to bodily realities that soldiers of all ranks had to cope with. Furthermore, they underline the arbitrary nature of warfare in that they reveal to what extent the difference between safety and great harm often seemed like the work of chance.

These oral histories of army operations in Normandy during the Second World War not only reveal how the individual telling the story felt or reacted to given circumstances, but also how those around them felt. The three-day battle in the Fôret de la Londe in late August 1944 stands out as one of the worst engagements of the war for those who were there. The South Saskatchewan Regiment "suffered 185 casualties, 44 of them being fatal."[46] They had fought against elements of the German 331st Division, a unit described by the German Lieutenant-General Walter Steinmuller as being "well-officered with young troops of good morale, training and equipment."[47] During the close fighting in the forest where the rifle companies were "going from tree to tree, shooting from tree to tree," nightly patrols were sent out to gather intelligence and scout out enemy positions. [48] Charles Goodman was sent on one of these patrols along with a corporal and another private. The three of them had gone past where they thought the German positions were and began to wonder what to do next. Suddenly, the sound of a horse could be heard coming along a nearby road. The three SSR's laid an ambush out "and up comes a horse and wagon..., it was a German mobile kitchen."[49] The two German cooks quickly surrendered to the Canadians and they began to head back to their company lines with their newly acquired prisoners. But soon after leaving the horse and wagon one of Goodman's fellow riflemen, a young man from Saskatchewan, remarked "that horse is going to be tied up there; we should go back and let him loose so he can escape."[50] So the group of five decided to go back to the wagon to release the horse so that it could escape. Despite the fact that the Canadian men were behind enemy lines, with prisoners, they still opted to go back and release the horse. Even in these dangerous surroundings a certain prairie sensibility remained in place and prompted soldiers of the SSR to show some compassion for the Germans' horse. In hindsight the battle in the Fôret de la Londe "failed to make any important impressions upon the strong enemy positions,"[51] and the memory of saving a horse on a night patrol is today overshadowed by the fact that "there was a higher percentage of casualties than they had in the battle of Paschendale."[52] Yet, in spite of the horrible loss of friends, the story about the horse is still remembered and re-told. This is significant because it shows that in spite of the loss and risks that surrounded them, Canadian soldiers were still inclined to perform simple acts of kindness.

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[45] Goodman, November 18 2009.

[46] C.P. Stacey, Victory Campaign, 292.

[47] Terry Copp,. Cinderella Army: The Canadians in Northwest Europe 1944-1945 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006) , 30.

[48] Goodman, November 18 2009.

This essay has not focused on the tactics used by the Canadian Army in Normandy during the Second World War, nor has it given detailed accounts of the specifics of battles, troop movements, or grand strategy. Instead it has used the stories told about the events that occurred by the men who were there. This essay has briefly explored a range of perspectives that ranged from the company commander leading his men, to the private soldier whose exposure to danger was unparalleled, to the provost whose experiences behind the front lines reveal the often neglected elements of warfare. As Tim Cook has pointed out, much of the hidden history of war "the experiences of men in combat"[53] has tended to go unrecorded in many historical narratives of the Second World War. Furthermore, as we have seen, these experiences "can equally convey the individual and collective consciousness which is part and parcel of that very past."[54] For that reason, it is fitting to conclude with a quote from Maj. John Edmondson:

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[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Stacey, The Victory Campaign, 292.

[52] Goodman, November 18 2009.

> "I'm dreaming about the war. I'm dreaming about myself. Was I a coward? Did I do the right thing? Did I show fear? Am I sure I did everything that I could do, or could I have done more? You ask yourself those questions. All I know is that my nickname was 'Ironside'. So I tried to hide any of my nervous feelings."[55]

We see here that Edmondson is questioning his legacy in light of his actions during the Second World War. Whether or not published histories will remember him as 'Ironside' is of minor importance. What does matter is his own remembrance of who he was. All the oral histories cited here should be seen with this same idea of legacy in mind. Knowing that interviews were recorded, and that they would serve as a legacy to their lives, might well have shaped and influenced the stories being told some sixty years after the event. The meal a soldier ate, the letter home that was never sent, or the simple acts of kindness in an otherwise brutal war- all serve to add another layer to the existing documented history of the Second World War.

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[53] Tim Cook, Clio's Warriors: Canadian Historians and the Writing of the World Wars (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005) , 133.

[54] Paul Thompson, Voices of the Past: Oral History (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) , 148.

[55] Edmondson, November 20 2009.

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