

## MY MEMORIES OF D DAY 1944

Staff Captain, HQ 3, Canadian Infantry Division

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I awakened about 5:30am on June 6, 1944 too excited to sleep any longer. HQ 3 Canadian Infantry Division was en route to HMS Hillary - a passenger ship of about 10,000 tons which had been used as an HQ ship for the invasion of Italy the previous winter. I went up to the mess to try to get some breakfast and some eggs, toast, and tea were soon available.

Going on deck I could see ships in every direction. *200/115* The Hillary was moving very slowly south about ten miles from the coast of France in the Baie de la Seine. The sky was cloudy and heavily overcast with a lot of noise in the distance, but the shore line was too fogged over to be visible. The bay had two to four foot waves and white caps covered the water as far as the eye could see.

It was the intention that HQ 3 Cdn Inf Div would land near Berniers sur Mer, going ashore in three groups in the hope that if the HQ ran into serious trouble landing at least one or two of the groups would survive to get the HQ operational. We waited and watched ... About 8:00am the rumble and roar in the distance intensified as our assault troops began to land.

At approximately 9:00am an LCA (landing craft assault) came alongside the Hillary and the first group of the HQ crawled down the rope ladders into the bouncing craft. This LCA earlier had carried ashore infantry assault troops some seven miles south from the ship. There was little we could do but wait until our turn came to go ashore. At about 10:30am the LCA returned and the second group headed for shore.

Finally, about 12 o'clock noon the *Landing craft* LCA came for our group. We hurried down the rope ladders into the rocking boat. As we headed for shore waves broke over the ramp at the front - all of us were wet and a few were seasick. The naval officer in charge announced that we would be unable to land at Berniers because of the congestion on the beach and the change in tide. He headed for Courseulles sur Mer, about a mile and a half west. What a way to start the day!

I expected the boat to run up on shore but instead it stopped about 100 feet from shore where the ramp was lowered and we jumped off into water up to our armpits. We hurried across the beach along lanes roughly marked earlier by the beachmaster's team. There were a number of killed and wounded Canadians lying around with a few stretcher bearers providing first aid. A few days previously, at the briefing by General Keller (GOC 3 Cdn Inf Div), we had received strict instructions that we must not stop to help a wounded comrade but must hurry forward to carry out our D Day responsibilities (and he added, this included himself). A few sorry looking German prisoners of war were herded under the bluffs about a hundred feet from the waters edge.

Fortunately my group of about 30 men, which included most of Div Artillery HQ, four war correspondents, senior medical ordnance, chaplain, and various other HQ personnel, was intact and we walked through the beach exits into the Normandy countryside. After moving south a few hundred yards we came to an east-west country road and turned east. From a neighbouring farm house a small girl about 8 years old rushed up to me as I was leading our group and handed me a flower. All I could do was say Merci, Thank you and carry on.

We hurried along the country road. There was alot of noise coming from all directions but I did not see a soul as we continued along not far from the bay. It was mid afternoon when we reached the HQ assembly area. Luckily all members of the HQ had arrived safely and it was now fully operational.

I reported for duty at the tent which served as an operations room - when not on liaison duty it was my responsibility to work there. I soon found out that communications with our brigades was unreliable. The radio was faint at best, the Germans were trying to block the airwaves, and to code and decode the messages we were trying to send and receive was a very slow process. We were able to determine that things seemed to be going reasonably well but the utter confusion which reigns on a battlefield was very evident.

*He truly was a nice guy & our hero.*

General Keller called me over and said he would like me to go up to 7 Brigade HQ and try to find out what was holding them up as he had not had any word of Brigade progress for the past two hours. I checked the operation room map to determine the last reported location of 7 Brigade and to ascertain the route I should take to get there. Then I looked around to find out what transportation was available. Fortunately a DUKW (a large vehicle capable of travelling on both land and water) had brought in a couple of Famous James motor bikes. In England we had used Harleigh Davidsons and Nortons. The Famous James was a much smaller bike. It did not have a battery and had to be cranked to give the magneto enough electricity to get the motor started. I had never ridden a Famous James before but it presented no problems once I got it going.

Taking the road to Beny sur Mer I proceeded south for a couple of miles. There were a few dead soldiers along the roadside and in the fields, most of them marked by a rifle stuck in the ground with its butt up. Some of them were Canadian, others German. I could hear rifle and machine gun fire from several directions but no signs of life anywhere. Just North of Beny I turned west towards Riviers and then southwest on to Colombiers sur Seulles, about five miles away.

As I rode along, near Colombiers, I saw Brig. Foster, Commander of 7 Brigade, and a few of his officers standing at the doorway of a house along the road. After a few words of greeting I conveyed the General's message. Brig. Foster took me by the arm to the side of the house and pointed in three directions, explaining that the enemy were to his east and west and that his battalion (the Canadian Scottish) south of us, were facing heavy resistance and were in danger of being cut off. The Winnipegs to the west had not been able to make as much progress and had not yet joined up with the British division to their right. On his eastern flank 9 Brigade, having run into serious delays on the beaches, had not been able to move as far forward as 7 Brigade and there was an area three or four miles wide still in enemy hands. Later I realized that this was the area I had just ridden through!