

D-Day, 6 June 1944 - 6 June 1984

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Troops of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division landing at Bernières-sur-Mer, Normandy, 6 June 1944.

...It has been a matter of great satisfaction and pride to have had Canadians with me both in the Eighth Army during Sicily and Italy and also during the invasion of Northwest Europe. They have proved themselves to be magnificent fighters, truly magnificent.

From a communique issued by Field Marshal Montgomery at TAC Headquarters, 21 Army Group on 1 February 1945.

Their job along the Channel Coast and clearing the Scheldt Estuary was a great military achievement for which they deserve the fullest credit. It was a job that could have been done only by first-rate troops. Second-rate troops would have failed...

The Canadians had come a long way to be part of the operations and they were determined that they should do their job well. From farms and ranches on the prairies, from towns and cities across the country, from fishing villages and lumber camps, they enlisted by the thousands to join the Allies in the fight for freedom.

Canada's contribution to the war effort was impressive. Some 700 000 men and women joined the Army with nearly 250 000 in the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) and almost 100 000 in the Royal Canadian Navy. Of these, 85 per cent were volunteers, with 41.5 per cent of the male population between the ages of 18 and 45 and about 50 000 women having enlisted.

All three of the Canadian armed services fought together on D-Day in the greatest combined operation of all time as the Allied forces assaulted the strongly fortified coast of Normandy, France in the early hours of 6 June 1944 and broke through the German defences. For the Canadians, the Maple Leaf Route, so called after the symbol used to mark the path that Canadians travelled on their long road to victory, was one of the costliest and toughest roads in their history. Every mile was paved with blood, sweat and tears; but they also represented moments of glory and national pride.

This year marks the 40th anniversary of that decisive and great battle and many of the Canadian veterans who took part in the European Campaign will be back in Britain and the beaches of Normandy to join their Allies in the D-Day ceremonies. Their return will not be to glorify war, but to give thanks for their survival and to remember their friends who never came back.

Many Canadians lost their lives in the first few hours on 6 June 1944 as they fought gallantly for a foothold on Juno Beach, a four and a half mile stretch of coastline between the towns of St Aubin and Courseulles. They were flanked on both sides by the British 50th and 3rd Divisions.

For the vast majority of Canadians it was their baptism of fire, but on Juno Beach they carved their names with pride and the regiments taking part will always have a place in Canadian military history: the Royal Winnipeg Rifles, the Regina Rifle Regiment, the 1st Canadian Scottish Regiment, the Queen's Own Rifles of Canada, le Régiment de la Chaudière, the North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment, the Highland Light Infantry of Canada, the Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders, the Nova Scotia Highlanders, the 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade, the 14th and 19th Royal Canadian Artillery Field Regiments, the HQ 3rd Canadian Division, the 6th, 16th and 18th Canadian Field Coys RCE, the 3rd Canadian Divisional Signals, The Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa (MG), the 14th, 22nd and 23rd Canadian Field Ambu-



River Crossing Near Caen, oil painting by William A Ogilvie showing troops of the Calgary Highlanders crossing the Orne River, 19 July 1944.

Photo: Canadian War Museum