



A Company, 1944. In May 1944 the Royals exchanged their wedge caps for khaki berets, which dates this photograph sometime after that date. The company has not been ranged properly, otherwise the tall soldier third from the right in the front rank would be the far right man of this rank. By this time, everyone was waiting for the invasion, which all knew would be coming shortly. (RRC Museum)



Royals officers, early summer, 1944. By the late spring of 1944, everyone was keyed up. At left, (left to right) Lieutenants H. Boake, John Dousley, Larry O'Connor, Jim Medhurst and Bob Downie are in good spirits as they examine rations to be consumed in the field. That task done, they put on a show for the cameraman. (RRC Museum)



is, the number of guns to be used and rounds to be fired). This information was sent to the Gun Position Officers (GPOs) of each regiment or battery who would order the gun detachments under their command to undertake the requested fire mission. A troop of four guns was generally the smallest fire unit used in the Parham system, and the battery of two troops was the most common. Parham's work resulted in a system which, if the situation warranted, could quickly bring down a varying weight of artillery bombardment on the enemy. An observation officer could request a "Mike," "Uncle," "Victor" or "Yoke" Target. A "Mike" Target – the one most commonly used – would be engaged by the 24 guns in a field regiment; an "Uncle" Target by the 72 guns in the three field regiments of an infantry division; a "Victor" Target by all the guns in a corps – as many as 250 weapons; while a "Yoke" Target would receive the fire of every gun within range, which during the last years of the war meant that it might be fired at by upwards of 500 weapons.*

Each infantry division had an integral artillery component of three field regiments, each having two dozen 25-pdr. (87.6 mm)

* Although it was very rarely used, there was also provision for a "William" Target, a target to be fired at by every gun in an army. It is recorded that the first "William" Target fired by the Commonwealth artillery during the war was called for by Brigadier W.S. Ziegler, the Commander Royal Artillery, 1st Canadian Division, in Italy in 1943.

gun/howitzers. In practice, one field regiment was assigned to each of the three infantry brigades in the division and the 4th Brigade was normally supported by 4th Field Regiment, with its 2nd Battery usually backing the Royals. The 25-pdr. gun/howitzer was a very effective weapon. It had a maximum range of 7.5 miles and the normal rate of fire was 3 rounds per minute, although it could fire up to 5 rounds per minute for short periods. It was equipped with a circular traversing platform, something like a steel wagon wheel, beneath its carriage, which permitted it to be quickly traversed 360 degrees. The 25-pdr. was the backbone of Commonwealth field artillery during the Second World War and its range, rate of fire and ability to be brought quickly onto a target saved many an infantryman's life. Although infantry units were able, later in the war, to call on tactical air support, the artillery was available much more quickly at any time, day and night.

An important aspect of the infantry battalion was the provision of medical care in combat, as all soldiers were concerned about receiving proper and timely treatment for wounds. Every infantry battalion had a Medical Officer, who was assisted by a medical orderly, a sergeant and 20 stretcher bearers. All infantrymen were trained in basic first aid and carried a First Field Dressing for immediate use in a pocket on the right leg of their battle dress trousers. Most men also carried a shell dressing – a larger bandage – under the camouflage net on their helmets.



Tea's up. If there was nothing else happening, you could always have a cup of tea. Royals queue at the tea truck during a break in England. This vehicle was purchased by the bowling alley owners and patrons of Hamilton, and presented to the YMCA to operate. (LAC, PA-150138)

Stretcher bearers and company and platoon officers were issued two morphine syrettes – disposable needles with a single standard dose of the painkiller – which they could use if necessary. A casualty would be evacuated through the medical evacuation chain, which was an upgraded version of that used in the First World War. After his comrades had rendered first aid, bearers would transport a wounded man by stretcher, jeep or carrier to the Regimental Aid Post (RAP), where the battalion MO, assisted by his orderly, would examine him and give immediate treatment. He would also triage the wounded. If the casualty had priority he would be taken in one of the 16 ambulances of 10 Field Ambulance, Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps (RCAMC), attached to the 4th Infantry Brigade, to an Advanced Dressing Station, then the Main Dressing Station and thereafter, in sequence, to a Casualty Clearing Station and a General Hospital.

In June 1944, however, while the Royals waited at Betteshanger for their embarkation orders, medical matters such as these lay in the future. As the English summer unfolded in all its pastoral glory, the officers and men played cards and baseball and followed the progress of the fighting in Normandy on the radio and in the newspapers. It was during this time that the first V-1 flying bombs began to make their way across the skies by day and night, their loud and distinctive engine noise described by one soldier as "blattering."⁴⁴ In all, during a five-month period that ended when their launching platforms were overrun in late 1944, more than 8,000 of these 25-foot-long, primitive missiles would be sent against Britain, killing 10,335 people, wounding 26,000 and destroying or damaging thousands of buildings including private homes, churches, schools and hospitals.



On 19 June, the same day that the regiment dispatched an advance party to France, a ferocious storm destroyed one of the Mulberry artificial harbours constructed on the Channel coast to supply the Allied forces in Normandy. This caused a further delay but on 1 July, Dominion Day 1944, under a gentle rain, the Royals left Betteshanger bound for France. The vehicle party embarked from Tilbury Docks near London, while the personnel boarded landing craft at Newhaven. It goes without saying that Lance-Private Royal accompanied his two-legged comrades, although with his marked aversion to water travel he undoubtedly proved obstinate about embarking.

And then they were off. After all the years of waiting and preparing during which, one officer recalled, every Canadian soldier in Britain,

regardless of rank, has had to confront and manage frustration, boredom, and periodic lowerings of the spirit to levels that could only be described by the expression "totally browned off." This will never be appreciated by anyone who has not for years been denied all the freedoms civilians take for granted, including the freedom to come and go as you like and to pick and choose where you live, where you sleep, what you wear and what you eat, and (equally important) when and where, and with whom you eat it.⁴⁵

Every cloud has a silver lining, however, and this same officer noted that in the Canadian army there was now "a real sense of belonging to a brotherhood forged and tempered by years of hard training and discipline – fully prepared and ready to confront whatever the future has in store."