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Caravaggio: A Re-Evaluation of Generalship

A Re-evaluation of Generalship Lieutenant-General Guy Simonds and Major-General George Kitching in Normandy 1944

Angelo Caravaggio

Major-General George Kitching was General Officer Commanding 4th Canadian Armoured Division from February until August 1944. Lieutenant-General Guy Simonds, commander of 2nd Canadian Corps to which 4th Canadian Armoured Division belonged, relieved Kitching of command on 21 August, ostensibly for lack of leadership. The story of Major-General Kitching and 4th Canadian Armoured Division in Normandy has so far not been portrayed in an especially positive light. Most scholarship, including the official history of the Canadian Army, accepts that Simonds was justified in relieving Kitching from command. Criticism from contemporary American and British commanders, repeated by subsequent historians, claimed that attacks by 2nd Canadian Corps, with the object of closing the Falaise Gap, were not pressed forward with sufficient resolve and thereby resulted in the escape of some quarter million German soldiers.¹ The "poor" performance of 4th Canadian Armoured Division in general, and the supposed lacklustre command performance of Kitching in particular, have been convenient explanations for this failure. Simonds viewed the case as one of leadership potential that was never achieved by Kitching. The expectation was that the Canadians should have been more successful in Operations "Totalize" and "Tractable" and that 4th Canadian Armoured Division, as the spearhead for the Canadian advance, should have closed the Falaise Gap sooner. John English even goes so far as to state that the lacklustre performance of the Canadian army in Normandy laid squarely at the feet of the divisional commanders.²

Is this assessment valid? George Kitching tried to do his duty as a general. He tried to win the battles he was ordered to fight and he tried to prepare his men as best he could for the battles they would have to fight in Normandy. He was prevented from accomplishing both objectives by his superior Guy Simonds. Taking a more multi-disciplinary approach to the question reveals that the command relationship between Simonds and Kitching was beset with serious problems. The personal performance of Kitching as General Officer Commanding 4th Canadian Armoured Division was a direct result of being forced to operate in what Ross Pigeau and Carol McCann describe as a compromised command environment and the resulting emotional and physical strain that this situation placed on him personally.³ This command environment, created by Simonds, was derived from the corps commander's mistrust of his subordinate divisional commanders after his failed attacks of July. Simonds decided he would maintain greater control and in so doing, stripped his divisional commanders of their command authority. Kitching was not responsible for the resulting compromised command environment, but he was forced to command his division within it until 21 August. Lack of sleep, combined with the stresses of sustained combat and the high casualties in the August 1944 battles, sapped what was left of Kitching's capacity to command effectively at the divisional level under Simonds.

James Jay Carafano, in his book *After D-Day: Operation Cobra and the Normandy*



Major-General George Kitching and Lieutenant-General Guy Simonds.

Photo by Frank L. Duberville, NAC PA 132650

Breakout, observes: "We do not write the history of what happened but the history of the records that remain."⁴ The statement underscores the limitations of writing operational and tactical history from the existing primary source material, which in many cases is woefully deficient. Most war diaries of the units and regiments of 4th Canadian Armoured Division are incomplete and in some cases, totally missing. The state of 4th Canadian Armoured Division's war diary itself is of particular concern. It appears that existing documents for July and August were rebuilt after the fact. The incompleteness of the July and August 1944 diaries when compared to the diaries before and after those months and the fact that Major-General Harry Foster signed off the diary for July 1944 are somewhat worrisome. Foster took command of 4th Canadian Armoured Division on 21 August after Kitching was relieved of command. Kitching had signed 4th Canadian Armoured Division war diary entries from February 1944, when he assumed command, to June 1944 and his signature should therefore

have appeared on the July 1944 entry. The crucial documents that would have shed light on the activities, conversations, and orders by Kitching are the armoured command vehicle logs, but these are missing entirely. Without these logs, it is almost impossible to track Kitching's personal activities. Donald Graves asked Kitching about these logs in an interview, and Kitching seemed surprised that they were not available, thus implying that they did exist at one time. The existing primary sources documenting 4th Canadian Armoured Division's activities during August 1944 are neither consistent nor reliable.

Most secondary sources support Simonds and his decision to relieve Kitching. In fact, other than one paragraph at the end of Chapter 14, in his book *Mud and Green Fields*, Kitching fails to come to his own defence.⁵ Surprisingly, the battles of "Totalize" and "Tractable" are not discussed in any great detail inside the book. Kitching told me during a 1990 tour of the Normandy battles that the manuscript for his

memoirs was actually much longer than that actually published. Given Kitching's close association with Simonds and his actions once relieved of command, Kitching probably would have not criticised Simonds in any way had there been further discussions of these battles. Kitching receives timid support in Reginald Roy's book *1944: The Canadians in Normandy*, which provides a detailed account of the Canadian actions and Kitching's troubles.⁶ Nonetheless, Roy leaves readers to decide whether or not Kitching was fairly treated. Donald Graves' *South Albertas: A Canadian Regiment at War* and John Marteinson's *The Royal Canadian Armoured Corps: An Illustrated History* have cast different lights on the events of August 1944, and to some extent, on what happened to Kitching.⁷ They have uncovered certain fragments of information, which become important in this reassessment. Notwithstanding, historians have generally accepted Simonds' dismissal of Kitching without question or any detailed assessment of Kitching's side of the story. Any reconsideration of the command relationship between Simonds and Kitching, resulting in the latter's dismissal, requires careful and critical reading of the war diaries from 1st Canadian Army and 2nd Canadian Corps in light of new information presented by Graves and Marteinson.

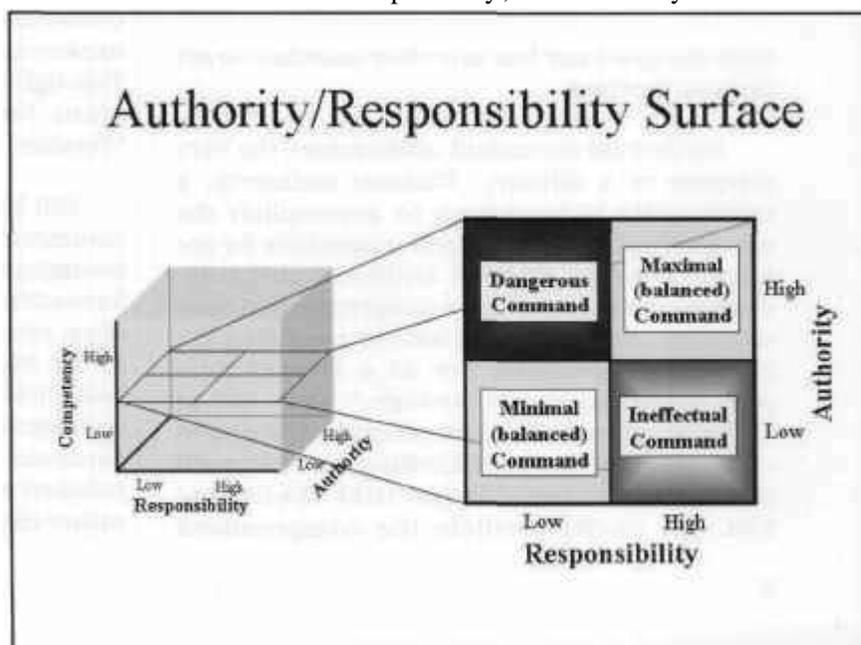
Among the principal problems with the literature as a whole is the seemingly indiscriminant interchanging of the names of Simonds and Kitching in describing 4th Canadian Armoured Division's battles during August. In certain texts, Simonds is credited for giving a specific order, while in others it was Kitching who gave the order. An example is the decision to re-route 4th Canadian Armoured Division units over a secondary bridge when initial attempts to exploit beyond Damblainville failed on 17 August. The actual decision to change the plan and redirect the attack speaks highly of the ability of that commander to assess

accurately and react properly to the conditions on the battlefield. Unfortunately, the existing literature leaves a confused picture as to who actually made the decision to reroute the 4th Canadian Armoured Brigade's forces. The most probable scenario is that Kitching recommended the change and Simonds approved. What is clear from the literature is that Kitching, as a divisional commander, lacked the latitude to change a Simonds plan once it had been issued, even when it involved movement within his own divisional boundaries.

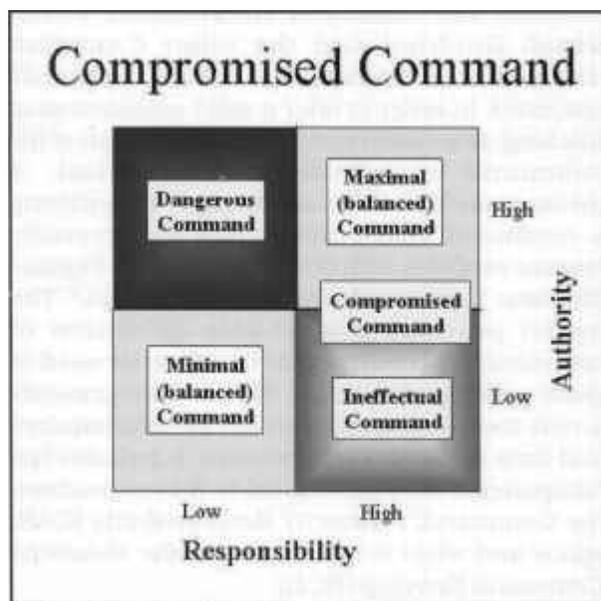
Another problem with the accepted history is the lack of a proper measurement tool to evaluate the command environment within which Kitching and the other Canadian divisional commanders under Simonds operated. In order to offer a valid assessment of Kitching as a commander, an examination of his command environment is essential. A measurement tool for assessing or quantifying a command environment has only recently become available with development of the Pigeau/McCann Command and Control model.⁸ The model provides a workable definition of command and control that can then be used to guide policy and doctrine. The model represents a rich tool for the assessment of commanders and their command environment. It includes two components that are critical to this evaluation, the Command, Authority Responsibility (CAR) space and what is referred to as the Balanced Command Envelop (BCE).

The model examines the relationship between competency, authority and

The Pigeau/McCann Command and Control model.



responsibility within a three dimensional space resulting in a four-quadrant matrix. The four quadrants are called dangerous command, maximal (balanced) command, minimal (balanced) command and ineffectual command. The quadrant of specific concern in this investigation is ineffectual command. Within ineffectual command lies a state known as compromised command. Compromised command is characterized as an acceptance of high levels of responsibility on the part of the commander without commensurately high levels of authority being given. Responsibility has been taken; however, power over resources has not



Compromised Command Environment.

been assigned nor has any clear mandate to act been authorized.

Ineffectual command undermines the very purpose of a military. Without authority, a commander is powerless to accomplish the mission properly, yet can feel responsible for not having done so. Without sufficient authority, commanders are seriously compromised in their missions, and worse, the individuals filling the command positions are at a tremendous psychological disadvantage.⁹ This set of circumstances provides an accurate description of the position in which Kitching found himself during the latter half of August 1944. The Pigeau/McCann model predicts the compromised

command environment and details the likely results of the existence of this type of environment. In the case of Kitching, the model proves amazingly accurate.

The last element of the measurement equation is success. Success in battle is usually the primary measurement tool for a battlefield commander. But what is the definition of success and more particularly, success at what cost? As Jack Granatstein states in *The Generals*, even good commanders cannot be expected to win every battle, and since Canada possessed few experienced commanders, those who were removed from command tended to be replaced by someone less experienced.¹⁰ General Omar Bradley, in his book *A Soldier's Story*, states that during the Argentan-Falaise battle, General George Patton measured his successes in miles gained, while General Courtney Hodges measured success in enemy dead.¹¹ Kitching's measurement tool was time, namely the time required to close the Falaise Gap.

Lack of Allied success in June and July, combined with the doctrinal preference for set-piece attacks, shaped the command paradigm that Simonds would establish for the August battles. Each of the set piece battles of June and July failed to meet stated objectives; yet, Simonds clung to this style of command and perpetuated it during the month of August with the same results. It appears that the most important lesson Simonds took away from the setbacks of June and July, particularly after Operation "Spring," was that he could not trust the tactical acumen of his Canadian infantry divisional commanders.¹² Simonds' solution was to exercise tighter control in future operations. This tighter control led to the detailed operation plans for the upcoming Corps operations "Totalize" and "Tractable."

Bill McAndrew has described the Simonds command environment as one where higher headquarters produced detailed plans for lower formations and units to implement. These plans often resulted in centralized planning, control at the highest level, staff management of the battlefield, reliance on indirect fire support, little consideration to the concept of maneuver, and cautious exploitation. This formula usually resulted in units attacking an enemy's strength rather than trying to outflank them. There was

little room for flexibility, initiative, originality, or the modification of the plan to meet the emerging demands of the battlefield.¹³ If the plan failed, the blame was always pushed downwards to the units and commanders involved. In some respects, fighting the enemy became secondary to executing the plan. Simonds typically believed that his plans were never the problem. Rather, it was the execution of his plans by his subordinates that resulted in failure. Nonetheless, a British report discussed the problematical nature of the plans and their implementation:

Our own tactical methods are thorough and methodical but slow and cumbersome. In consequence, our troops fight well in defence and our set-piece attacks are usually successful, but it is not unfair to say that through lack of enterprise in exploitation, we seldom reap the full benefit of them. We are too flank-conscious, we over-insure administratively, we are by nature too apprehensive of failure and our training makes us more so.¹⁴

Application of the Pigeau/ McCann model to the Simonds-Kitching command relationship reveals that the command and control framework established by Simonds created an environment in which Kitching, as a divisional commander, actually had little in the way of command authority over how his division was employed in Normandy. The Simonds' command paradigm focused on controlling the command creativity of his divisional commanders. Competency, authority and responsibility were not balanced; as a result, effective "commandership" on the part of the divisional commanders was impossible. By giving his commanders detailed instructions down to brigade level and sometimes below, Simonds minimized the authority of the divisional commanders. There was little or no room for initiative or flexibility from his subordinate commanders on the battlefield. Kitching was the divisional commander with the corresponding legal authority and responsibility, but he was never allowed to exercise freely his ability or skills in command. The key component was Kitching's lack of actual command authority.

The detailed plans of "Totalize" and "Tractable," followed by the tasking of divisions by Montgomery and brigades by Simonds in the Falaise Gap battles, are clear examples of Montgomery and Simonds usurping the

commonly understood authority of the divisional commander. This problem constitutes the core of the compromised command environment. Kitching was literally forced to the sidelines; his only function was to convey the continuing stream of conflicting orders from Simonds who was personally struggling to cope with a type of battlefield he could not handle. This fact is made clear in a telling summary of a series of conversations between Simonds and the Chief of Staff 1st Canadian Army, Brigadier Churchill Mann, recorded in the 1st Canadian Army Operations Log Group between 1040 hours and 1140 hours on 19 August. During the course of these conversations, Simonds stated that he was



Photo by Ken Bell, NAC PA 13173

A Sherman tank of the 4th Canadian Armoured Division near Cintheaux, France, 8 August 1944.

about to leave for a meeting with his divisional commanders, but he did not have a clear idea as to how he should operate "during today and in the immediate future." Mann endeavoured to obtain direction from Crerar or Montgomery. The Chief of Staff 21st Army Group stated that he had not been in touch with Montgomery, but that in his opinion, the instructions would direct 2nd Canadian Corps to continue to close the Gap and keep it closed until 2nd British Army was able to take over the task.¹⁵ It is evident that despite his tactical genius, Simonds was having difficulty orchestrating 2nd Canadian Corps' response to the fluid and confusing nature of the Falaise Gap battles. This difficulty also explains the nature of the constantly changing orders issued by Simonds.

The problem was that Kitching, not Simonds, was charged with responsibility and authority to command 4th Canadian Armoured Division. Pigeau and McCann argue that without such authority, a commander is powerless to properly accomplish the mission, yet can feel responsible for not having done so. Without sufficient authority, commanders are seriously compromised in their missions, and worse, the individuals filling the command positions are at a tremendous psychological disadvantage.¹⁶ There is no doubt that Kitching knew he had to succeed and felt the psychological pressure to do so. His answer to this pressure was to drive himself harder which drove him into a state of physical and mental exhaustion.

deprivation becomes important in the analysis of Kitching and helps to explain, in part, a number of anomalies in his actions during the closing of the Falaise Gap.

Studies carried out during simulated armoured and mechanized infantry operations at the US National Training Center (NTC) in the Mojave desert of Southern California involving battalion-sized task forces, and consisting of 14 days of force-on-force and live-fire exercises observed that sleep was brief and fragmented. Notable in this study was the clear correlation between sleep and rank. Whereas personnel at the squad and crew level averaged between 7-8 hours of sleep each night, those at battalion and

Photo by Ken Bell, NAC PA 1136'



Tanks of the 4th Canadian Armoured Division preparing to advance near Tilly-la-Campagne, 8 August 1944.

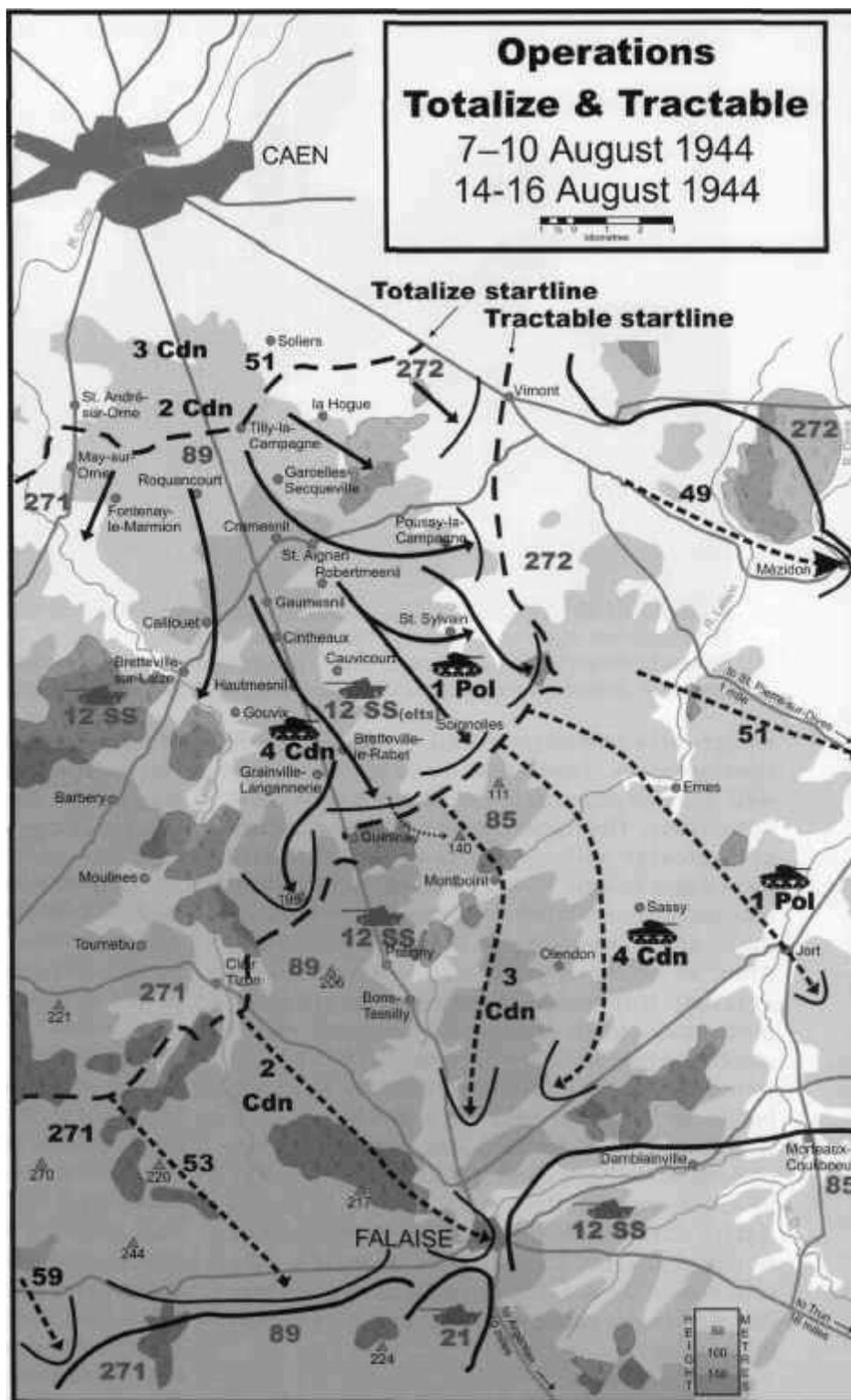
The combat/operational environment is demanding, both physically and mentally. Commanders, to be effective, must grasp complex, rapidly evolving, and often ambiguous situations and react to them. While a commander has an obligation towards the welfare of those under his command, there is also the obligation to look after his own well-being in order to ensure his performance in combat; it comprises the interplay between command responsibility and personal responsibility. Command failure will result in unit failure, wounded, dead, and for the survivors the possibility of long term physical and mental disability. A new area of research dealing with these issues is evolving, entitled self-care. Self-care, ranges from changing one's socks through ensuring that one gets adequate amounts of sleep which helps sustain an individual and hence unit effectiveness in operational settings.¹⁷ Understanding the effects of sleep and sleep

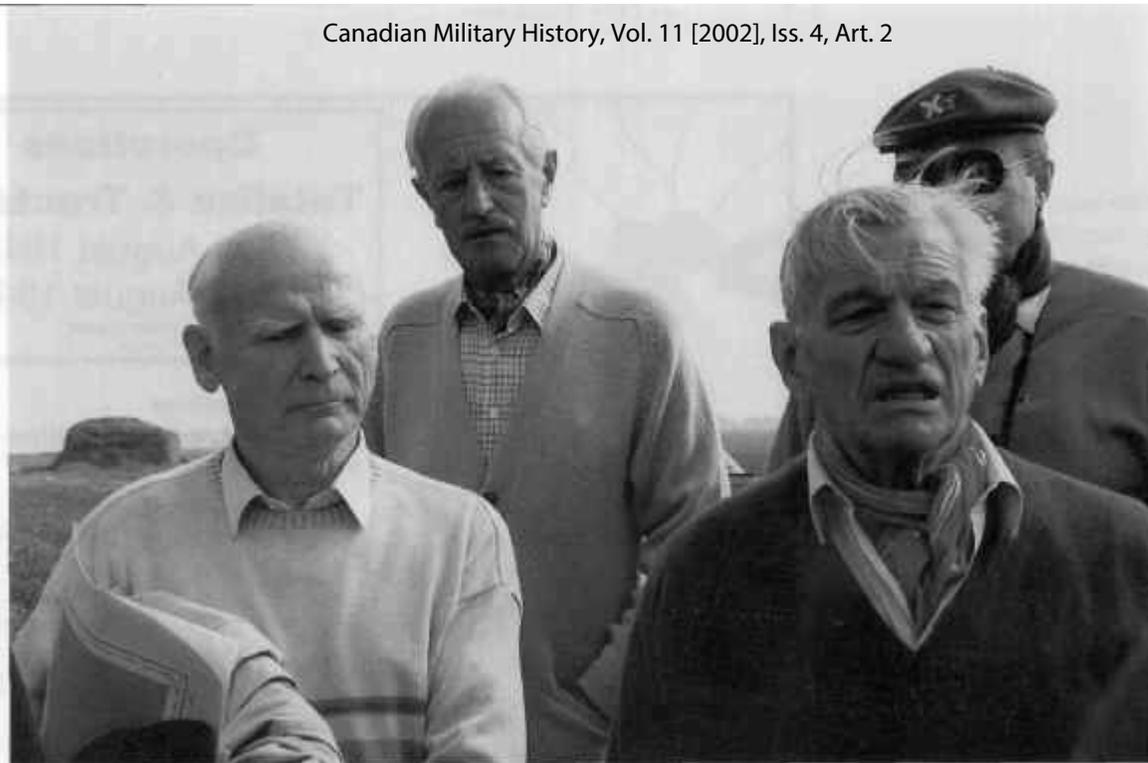
brigade level averaged little more than 4 hours of sleep each night. From the perspective of sleep and its effects on performance, it would be expected that personnel at the lower echelons would be more effective than individuals in the higher echelons. The study confirmed this prediction. Junior personnel improved their performance over the course of the exercise, with the more senior, higher echelon personnel entering into a state known as "droning."¹⁸ The tests revealed that the higher the echelon of command and control, the greater the sleep deprivation. Accumulated data has shown that 7-8 hours of sleep per night is required to sustain high levels of performance over days and weeks. The problem is that continuous combat is characterized by brief, fragmented sleep, which has little or no recuperative value. This realization accounts for the common practice of routinely rotating combat units out of the line into rest areas.

The tests also revealed that sleep deprivation (SD) in the higher echelons of command and control was greatest in the force-on-force phase, the most realistic simulation of combat. The ability to perform a simple task (i.e. to lay cross-hairs on a target and squeeze rounds off accurately) remained intact but the ability to perform more complex cognitive (thinking) operations, and thus to be oriented to and have a grasp of the tactical situation was lost.¹⁹ Recent findings reveal that sleep deprivation impairs mood, alertness, and cognitive performance and in general degrades complex cognitive performance. Laboratory studies have revealed that mental work declines by as much as 25% during each successive 24 hours of continuous wakefulness. The Canadian Forces manual *Command* states that after 18 hours of sustained operations, logical reasoning degrades by 30%; after 48 hours it degrades by 60%.²⁰ While the percentages vary slightly between studies, research has proven that if, during a prolonged crisis, key decision-makers remain awake beyond 24 hours, then it is reasonably clear that despite their best efforts to perform well, their decision-making ability will become impaired.²¹

Despite the scarcity of studies concerning executive-type decision-making following sleep deprivation, Yvonne Harrison and James A. Home, in one of the most thorough reviews of sleep deprivation research, have highlighted several areas for concern.²² These include impaired language and communication skills, lack of innovation, inflexibility of thought processes, inappropriate attention to peripheral concerns or distraction, over-reliance on

previous strategies, unwillingness to try out novel strategies, unreliable memory for when events occurred, change in mood including loss of empathy with colleagues and the inability to deal with surprise and the unexpected. The impact of sleep deprivation on behaviour is likely to be significant in a situation that changes rapidly when personnel have to adapt to a wide





Old foes meet again in Normandy, 1990: Oberst (ret'd) Hubert Meyer, first general staff officer of 12th SS Panzer Division (left); Major-General (ret'd) George Kitching (centre); and Air Vice-Marshal (ret'd) James Edgar (Johnnie) Johnson, commander of Canadian Wing of 83 Group, RAF (right).

range of continuous and unpredictable developments. Tasks that demand other than well-learned automatic responses will be most vulnerable. They also found indirect evidence of a greater willingness to take risks with increasing fatigue. There are clear behavioural consequences related to sleep loss with major decrements occurring in cognitive processes. After 54 hours of sleep loss, subjects had a marked difficulty maintaining efficient performance levels on cognitive tasks with higher mood and performance degradation.²³ From the time 4th Canadian Armoured Division went into battle for the first time as a formation on 8 August until Kitching was removed from command on 21 August (14 days), the unit was in continuous combat operations for all except 3 days. Even with those 3 days out of the line re-equipping and preparing for "Tractable," the unit suffered from German mortar and artillery fire. Adequate, uninterrupted sleep was almost impossible.

As the Falaise Gap battle dragged on, faced with massive casualties, constantly changing orders, and a broken command system under him, Kitching descended a slippery slope into sleep deprivation. In fact, Kitching states that for the first three days of "Tractable" and the Falaise Gap battles, he did not even have a bed.²⁴ Not sleeping further reduced his effectiveness to command, to the point where by 20 August, he was exhibiting the clinically recorded effects

of someone suffering from 54 or more hours of sleep deprivation. His actions on 20 and 21 August are consistent with someone suffering from prolonged sleep deprivation.

In their book *Battle Exhaustion*, Terry Copp and Bill McAndrew have provided extensive research into the numbers and impact that psychiatric casualties had on 1st Canadian Army. These were very real casualties but casualties which Simonds refused to acknowledge. Simonds would never have accepted exhaustion as an excuse for poor performance from one of his commanders since, as Dominick Graham states, he expected his commanders to drive themselves as hard as Simonds drove himself. Unfortunately, Kitching and probably the other 2nd Canadian Corps divisional commanders could not avail themselves of the eight hours of uninterrupted sleep that Simonds insisted upon each night. The brief hours of sleep that Kitching probably took would not have been sufficient to sustain him, thereby reducing his ability to command effectively during the 16-21 August timeframe.

Recent research has begun to question the effectiveness of Montgomery and Simonds in Normandy. A key component of this research is the debilitating effect that the detailed plans issued by both of these commanders had on the conduct of the Normandy campaign. Both Bill McAndrew and Roman Jarymowycz cite

Simonds' lack of armoured training and experience as the cause for the failure to get to Falaise. In spite of Simonds' glowing reputation as the best Canadian general of the Second World War, his command decisions in Normandy and particularly Falaise must be criticized. Depending on two weakened, inexperienced armoured divisions to plug the escape routes of over 200,000 German soldiers was an unrealistic expectation and militarily unsound. Bradley refused to send three divisions into the Gap because he felt they would be overrun. At the same time, Bradley felt that he needed three divisions simply to guard the American side of the Gap.²⁵ Much is made of the fact that Montgomery did not reinforce the Canadians with units from 2nd British Army. However, the opposite side of that argument is that there is no evidence that Simonds asked for any more units. In previous battles when he asked for additional help, he always received it.

Did Kitching have the correct set of competencies to command an armoured division in Normandy or from the model perspective, was he on the Balanced Command Envelope? The answer can only be no. Kitching, from a professional military educational perspective, had the courses necessary for higher command in the Canadian Army. Unlike many of his Canadian counterparts, he had attended the

British Royal Military College in Sandhurst in 1929 and in 1940 he attended the Staff College in Camberly for 6 months. His rapid rise through the ranks was extraordinary. Kitching joined the Royal Canadian Regiment as a 2nd lieutenant in 1939. By 1943, he was commanding an infantry brigade in Italy and by February 1944, he was a major-general in command of an armoured division without any further formal education or training. By modern standards, this rise through the ranks represents a fantastic accomplishment, but in the rapid expansion of the Canadian Army in the Second World War was not uncommon.

Kitching had no previous armoured training or armoured command experience. He was an infantry officer. While it was not uncommon to have armoured divisions commanded by officers from other branches, Simonds made a conscious decision to appoint Kitching to command 4th Canadian Armoured Division. Simonds must have felt Kitching capable of command; otherwise, he would not have made the appointment. With the reality of expanding the peacetime Canadian Army into a wartime footing it would be surprising whether any senior officers would have been placed on the Balanced Command Envelope. Within 2nd Canadian Corps, the infantry divisional commanders would have been better placed within the

The Break Through, near Perrieres, Normandy by Will Ogilvie.



Canadian War Museum CN 13254

Balanced Command Envelope since they were infantry officers, in command of infantry divisions and had held commands of smaller Infantry formations earlier in their careers. Kitching did not have this advantage. Where Kitching was different from many of his contemporaries is in the amount of combat-related experience that he gained while fighting and working with Simonds in Sicily and Italy. Even with his unique combination of education and experience, Kitching was outside the preferred Balanced Command Envelope for the commander of an armoured division.

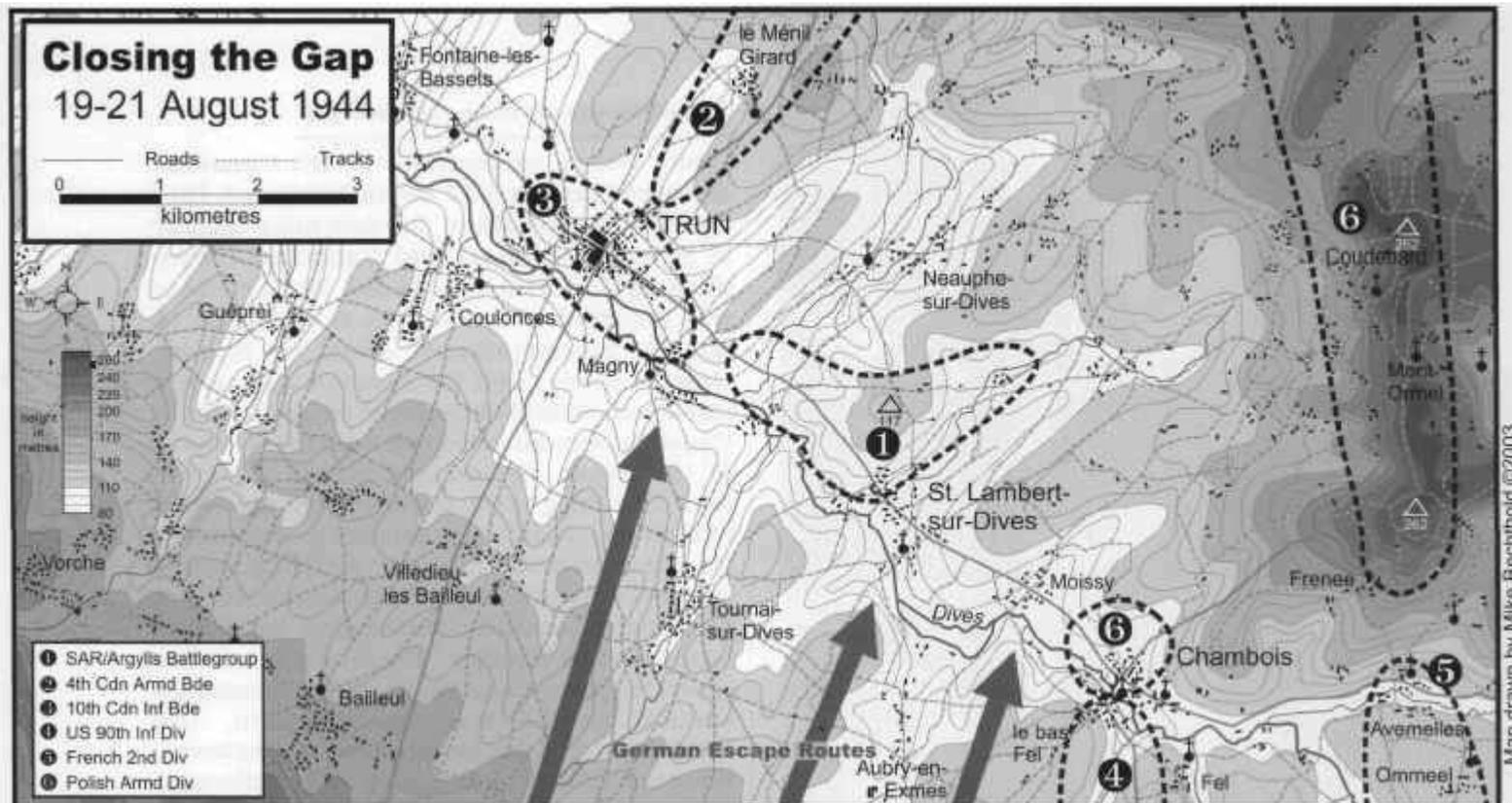
The respective positions on Kitching's dismissal provide some very interesting insights. When considering the Simonds' position, Graham claims that Simonds was too trusting when it came to his subordinates and friends because he was inexperienced as an armoured commander. By August, he had become hardened and demanded that the men under his command should drive their subordinates in his own impersonal, objective manner. Graham states that Simonds sacked Kitching because he felt Kitching lacked this hardness. Graham further states that in Normandy, Simonds demonstrated intolerance for weakness in his subordinates and their units whether from heavy casualties, inexperience, fatigue, bad weather, or unforeseen and changing orders. Graham presents an interesting list that seems to be targeted specifically at Kitching since it conveniently dismisses the factors he put forward in defence of his actions. It is interesting to note that Graham skirts the entire issue of Simonds' performance during the closing of the Falaise Gap, arguably one of the most critical and highly debated battles in Canadian military history, by only dedicating one page to it.

This sense that Kitching was not "tough enough" comes out often in the literature. Had Kitching been more ruthless, would he have received more out of the troops? The answer is not so clear-cut. The 4th Canadian Armoured Division was a green division learning its trade in an unforgiving environment; it was forced to fight at a disadvantage in both terrain and weapons. The terrain favoured the German defenders and their anti-tank weapons; 4th Canadian Armoured Division tank crews were also at a technological disadvantage when the Sherman tanks are compared to their German

opponents.²⁶ John Marteinson argues that the problems that had occurred in 4th Canadian Armoured Division since its introduction on the battlefield were, in large measure, the fault of Simonds routinely making last-minute changes to plans to which battle-inexperienced units could not react quickly.²⁷ The 4th Canadian Armoured Division never had the same opportunity, as did 5th Canadian Armoured Division in Italy, of being able to reflect on its operational performance in its first battles and carry out a deliberate training programme to correct apparent faults. Once the Poles and Canadians were launched into the maelstrom of the Gap, there was little Simonds or Kitching seemed able to do to help. Like the remnants of 20 shattered German divisions, Canadian and Polish tank regiments and infantry battalions were destined to fight their own desperate battles.²⁸ There is no doubt, however, that during the actions in the Falaise Gap commanders at all levels learned quickly from their first combat experiences and showed far better practical application of all-arms co-operation tactics than in previous battles.

Kitching states in his book that under the circumstances he did not think that anyone else could have done much better with the division than he did. He also states that it was unrealistic for Simonds to expect him to swing his armoured division around in the enclosed countryside of Normandy in the same way that the British 8th Army had when Kitching and Simonds had observed these units in the desert.²⁹ The changing orders and casualties, combined with the breakdown of communication and the inexperience of battle, were key factors that greatly affected the division's ability to function in the first two battles.³⁰ Even though casualties severely crippled the armoured brigade, Kitching and many contemporary authors felt that the individual regiments fought well under adverse conditions and without firm direction. This belief is consistent for "Tractable" and in the closing of the Falaise Gap.

Roy claims that Kitching lost his command because "the promise he showed failed to materialize" and he "failed to exercise the requisite grip, which can only come from personal supervision." Simonds' A.D.C. related the following to Professor Roy:



...Shortly afterwards General Simonds told me what he had done...and that it was the most difficult thing he had ever had to do; that he had tremendous confidence in him because of their close association in Sicily and Italy and almost loved him as he would a brother, and admired his great courage and personal ability; that he found it impossible to understand how things in the 4th Armoured had got so out of control. He felt he had no other choice than to replace him; that lives were at stake and he could take no more chances.³¹

Had Kitching lost control and, if not, why would Simonds think that he had? The question as to why and how Simonds developed his impression of Kitching is not readily available from Simonds himself. Kitching states that he rarely saw any staff officers from 2nd Canadian Corps at his headquarters. This assertion suggests that Simonds would have formed his opinion on Kitching through direct observation or through contact with 4th Canadian Armoured Division units.

Within this context, a series of scattered but recorded incidents involving Simonds and Kitching or units of 4th Canadian Armoured Division probably formed the basis for Simonds' perception that Kitching had lost control. There is a series of six incidents recorded between 7 and 20 August that individually do not create a picture of someone who had lost control.

However, when put together with the added weight of the anxiety over the fact that 4th Canadian Armoured Division was the lead unit of the 2nd Canadian Corps attack and it was taking so long to close the Gap, one could understand how Simonds may have formed his opinion. Kitching, in his taped interviews, spoke of the enormous pressure that was being brought down on him from Simonds and Montgomery to close the gap. The pressure to succeed was tremendous. But the basic question remains: what more might have been accomplished, given the command environment, the enemy's superior battle experience, their distinctive advantages in both armour and anti-tank weapons and the tremendous problems that Kitching experienced in his first series of battles?

The incident that probably sealed Kitching's fate as General Officer Commanding 4th Canadian Armoured Division occurred on the evening of 20 August. Simonds once again changed the orders of 4th Canadian Armoured Division and ordered 4th Canadian Armoured Brigade to go rescue the Poles. As far as Kitching was concerned, the new orders did not make any sense and he told Simonds so. Kitching responded: "To hell with them. They have run out of food and ammunition because of the inefficiency of their organization; our people have been fighting just as hard but we have managed



A Polish trooper sits on his Cromwell tank.

Leslie Booth, commander of 4th Canadian Armoured Brigade, if he should be injured. They agreed on Moncel who at that time was a member of Simonds' staff at 2nd Canadian Corps. Kitching knew Moncel quite well. When Kitching was informed of the injuries to Booth on 14 August, he immediately asked for Moncel. Unfortunately, and for reasons not clearly explained, Moncel did not take command of 4th Canadian Armoured Brigade until the afternoon of 19 August. The delayed arrival of Moncel forced Kitching to rob his armoured regiments of their commanders to provide a commander for the armoured brigade. Kitching's most talented armoured regimental commander was Lieutenant-Colonel D. Worthington, but he had been killed in "Totalize." Kitching was left with Scott, Halpenny, and Wotherspoon. Kitching's second choice was Wotherspoon, the commander of the South Alberta Regiment. Kitching talked to Brigadier Jim Jefferson, commander of 10th Canadian Infantry Brigade, about the possibility of promoting Wotherspoon, but Jefferson would not hear of it. Jefferson argued that it would be fatal to the regiment and would upset the whole brigade because of the familiarity that had been built up among the regiment and squadron commanders.³⁴ What was not said at that point was that Jefferson relied heavily on the tactical expertise of Wotherspoon and Lieutenant-Colonel Stewart, commanding the Argyll and Sunderland Highlanders of Canada in the handling of that brigade. It is not clear whether Kitching already knew this about Jefferson but it could help explain why he accepted Jefferson's arguments so easily and settled on Moncel.

to keep up our supply system." That was about as far as Kitching got because Simonds peremptorily ordered 4th Canadian Armoured Brigade to rescue the Poles immediately.³² This outburst at Simonds' orders to help the Poles was totally uncharacteristic for Kitching. Unfortunately, what Kitching probably did not know was that Simonds was with elements of the Polish division when the orders were issued.

Kitching was naturally very shocked and emotionally upset at the decision to relieve him and made a number of points in his defence. The first involved the long delay in sending Lieutenant-Colonel Bob Moncel to command the armoured brigade. He also complained that the division had had too many changes in orders over a period of ten days and had taken very heavy casualties in commanders, soldiers, and tanks in its first battles. It is interesting to note, according to Kitching, that Simonds had no rebuttal for either of these points.³³

The issue with Moncel is perhaps the most crucial. During the early stages of phase 2 of "Totalize" (8 August), Kitching and Simonds had a discussion as to who would replace Brigadier

Why did it take five days for Moncel to get to 4th Canadian Armoured Brigade when he was physically no more than two hours away? Unfortunately, this question may never be properly answered and is crucial in the dismissal of Kitching. It seems peculiar that the 2nd Canadian Corps diarist felt compelled to make an entry in the 2nd Canadian Corps war diary on 17 August to say that Moncel was taking over 4th Canadian Armoured Brigade.³⁵ Kitching's request had obviously gone to Corps Headquarters but why a three day delay in the notation and why did it take a further two days for him to get to 4th Canadian Armoured Brigade? The frustrating fact is that Moncel

proved to be an effective brigade commander who could have provided the needed leadership to the armoured regiments on the critical day of 15 August. The replacements that Kitching was forced to use proved incapable, for various reasons, of handling the job.

Despite arguments to the contrary, casualties within the division were a significant factor in its performance. A typical regiment, both armoured and infantry, had 38 officers.³⁶ Of the officers that began the month of August in the armoured regiments of 4th Canadian Armoured Division, the Governor General's Foot Guards had suffered 50% casualties, the Canadian Grenadier Guards 42%, the British Columbia Regiment 58%, and the South Alberta Regiment 40% casualties. On average, 48% of the original officer complements were casualties by 26 August or after 14 days of combat. These casualties caused a leadership vacuum that was compounded by the robbing of the regimental commanders to command the armoured brigade. The worst case was the decimation of the British Columbia Regiment where the unit lost its commanding officer, adjutant, all squadron commanders and rear link captains, six lieutenants and 101 other ranks, and 47 tanks all in one day of combat, 9 August.³⁷ At one point, during the advance to Trun, the Canadian Grenadier Guards were commanded by a captain. Even more compelling was the loss of senior officers (major and lieutenant-colonel) in the armoured brigade. The casualty rate at these ranks was 56%, with the brigade

commander and two of the three regimental commanding officers killed.³⁸

Casualties among the other ranks are another telling statistic. A typical armoured regiment had an established strength of 657 other ranks, while an infantry regiment had 811. On 15 August, even after receiving its portion of reinforcements the 4th Canadian Armoured Division was short 509 general duty infantryman.³⁹ This number represented almost an entire regiment. By 26 August, the armoured regiments were manned at 85% of their established strength and the infantry regiments at 74%. It is interesting to note that a typical German division of 12,000 men was considered used up when its ration strength was reduced to 11,000 men or reduced by roughly 10%. Part of the rationale for this figure is that the casualties were primarily in the fighting echelons of the division and not in the support troops.⁴⁰ If the same criterion is applied to 4th Canadian Armoured Division, the division would have been considered used up by 12 August.

It is interesting to compare the accomplishments of 4th Canadian Armoured Division during the closing of the Falaise Gap with the efforts of the veteran British 7th Armoured Division during the same time frame. Early on 17 August, 7th Armoured Division passed through 51st Division with orders to exploit success by a drive on the Seine River, 65 miles away. The division took three days to travel nine miles to the town of Livarot, which was

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Canadian tanks of 4th Canadian Armoured Division move into battle south of Robertmesnil, 14 August 1944.



found empty, against opposition that was described as slight, consisting of small rear parties. The division took another four days to travel to the town of Lisieux another nine miles away against little or no opposition.⁴¹ This effort must be compared with the intense combat that 4th Canadian Armoured Division was embroiled in around Trun and Chambois. Rapid exploitation of the collapsing German position elsewhere may have relieved pressure on 2nd Canadian Corps. Bradley steadfastly refused to send his three divisions into the cauldron around Chambois until late in the battle. There, in the middle of the Falaise Gap, stood the decimated units of 4th Canadian Armoured Division. Not only did they have to deal with Germans attacking from all sides and thousands of surrendering Germans, they also had to rescue the Poles.⁴² Before rendering any realistic assessment of success or failure, the actions of all units must certainly be compared and placed into context.

The 4th Canadian Armoured Division had led the way in the August battles, but as a new division it had to learn its business as it fought. The division gained valuable experience and so did its commander.⁴³ Unfortunately, Kitching was never allowed to exercise freely command of his division. Pigeau and McCann argue that there have been adequate commanders in history who have shared the same set of traits as their more successful counterparts, but who were less successful because of extenuating circumstances such as resources limitations, personnel differences and adversary competence. There has also been a tendency to judge those who had not attained greatness as somehow deficient in their personal traits and skills, when the deficiency, in fact, may not be the case.

Within the three dimensions of influence of the Pigeau/McCann model (authority, competency and responsibility), Kitching was both competent and accepted the requisite responsibility. Kitching had no previous armoured experience, but few Canadian armoured units were commanded by armoured officers at the time. Kitching did have valuable combat experience from Italy and Sicily and was probably as competent as any other officer to command 4th Canadian Armoured Division once Simonds decided he did not want Worthington.

Kitching was left to shoulder the blame for the perceived poor Canadian performance in Normandy; yet, the blame was not his to hold. Kitching certainly did fail. He failed to look after himself and as a result his performance suffered. But, if Kitching failed 4th Canadian Armoured Division, Simonds failed Kitching. It was a failure on Simonds' part to not provide Kitching with the resources he needed to accomplish his mission. Moncel arriving to command 4th Canadian Armoured Brigade on 15 August could have had a profound effect on Kitching's command and the tactical battle by re-establishing the framework of command within the division. Effective leadership for 4th Canadian Armoured Brigade on that date might have put 4th Canadian Armoured Division in Trun much earlier, thereby closing the Gap before the German order to withdraw had been given. Regardless, the opportunity to end the Normandy campaign early with a sweeping victory had been lost on that fateful morning of 8 August. What ensued afterward was a display of ineffective senior Canadian leadership in a wasteful slugging match that should have never happened and went far beyond the sphere of influence of only one divisional commander. It can be argued that the lacklustre showing of the Canadian army in Normandy for June and July rests with the Canadian divisional commanders, but the same cannot be said for the battles of August. The blame for the August battles must rest squarely with Simonds. Given the command environment and unfolding circumstances of the August 1944 battles, Major-General George Kitching and the 4th Canadian Armoured Division performed much better than they have ever been given credit for. In the end, Kitching was an able commander placed in an almost impossible situation.

Notes

1. J.L. Granatstein. *The Generals: The Canadian Army's Senior Commanders in the Second World War* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1993), pp.169-170.
2. John, English. *The Canadian Army and the Normandy Campaign: A Study of Failure in High Command* (Westport: Praeger, 1991), p.306.
3. This article is a distillation of my unpublished research project, *The Human Dimension of Compromised Command: Major-General George Kitching and the 4th Canadian Armoured Division in Normandy*, 2001,

- available though the Information Resource Centre at the Canadian Forces College in Toronto.
4. James Jay Carafano. *After D-Day: Operation Cobra and the Normandy Breakout* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), p.267.
 5. The chapter is called "TOTALIZE, TRACTABLE and the Gap."
 6. Reginald Roy. *1944: The Canadians in Normandy* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1984).
 7. Donald Graves. *South Albertas: A Canadian Regiment at War* (Toronto: Robin Brass Studio, 1998), John Marteinson and Michael McNorgan. *The Royal Canadian Armoured Corps: An Illustrated History* (Toronto: Royal Canadian Armoured Corps Association, 2000).
 8. The details of the Pigeau/McCann model are drawn from Ross Pigeau and Carol McCann. "What is a Commander," a paper presented to the Human in Command Workshop & Symposium 5-8 June 2000 Breda, Netherlands, pp. 8-9.
 9. *Ibid.*
 10. Granatstein, *The Generals*, p. 170.
 11. Lieutenant-General George S. Patton commanded 3rd US Army and Lieutenant-General Courtney Hodges commanded 1st US Army. Both belonged to Bradley's 12th US Army Group.
 12. They were Major-General Charles Foulkes and Major-General R. Keller. Kitching felt that Simonds was intent on getting rid of Foulkes who, in his opinion, did not have the right qualities to command 2nd Division. Brigadier Ben Cunningham was being relieved of command over 9th Brigade because of his failure to take the small village of Tilly, as were two of his battalion commanders. On three occasions Simonds confided in Kitching that he was going to get rid of Foulkes. It can only be assumed that Crerar intervened and insisted that Foulkes remain because nothing happened. Kitching, p. 189.
 13. Bill McAndrew, "The Canadian Army Way of War," in *The Operational Art: Developments in the Theories of War*, ed. B.J.C. MerKercher, and Michael Hennessy (London: Praeger, 1996), p.91.
 14. Bill McAndrew, "Canadian Doctrine: Continuities and Discontinuities," *The Army Doctrine and Training Bulletin* Vol 4, No 3. (Fall 2001), p.42.
 15. National Archives of Canada [NAC], RG 24 Series C-3 Vol 13624 Reel T-6683, War Diary, General Staff 1st Canadian Army, August 1944, Appendix 74 Ops Log, Memorandum Summary of Conversations with Commander 2nd Canadian Corps and Chief of Staff 21st Army Group, 19 August 1944
 16. Pigeau, McCann, "What is a Commander," p.9.
 17. <http://www.usafa.af.mil/jscope/JSSCOPE97/Belenky97/Belenky97.htm>
 18. "Droning" is defined as a state where individuals can perform routine functions such as putting one foot in front of another and respond if challenged, but have difficulty grasping their situation or acting on their own initiative.
 19. Belenky *et al.*, "The Effects of Sleep Deprivation on Performance During Continuous Combat Operations," *Food Components to Enhance Performance*, Washington D.C. National Academy Press, pp.127-135.
 20. Department of National Defence. *CFP 300 (3)Command.*{Ott&wa: Dept of National Defence, 1996), pp.2-11
 21. Belenky *et al.*, pp. 127-135.
 22. Yvonne Harrison and James A. Home, "The Impact of Sleep Deprivation on Decision Making: A Review," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied* 2000, Vol 6, No 3.
 23. Robert Angus and Ronald Heslegrave. *The Effects of Sleep Loss and Sustained Mental Work: Implications for Command and Control Performance*. Toronto: DCIEM, 1983.
 24. University of Victoria, MacPherson Library, Special Collections, Reginald Roy Collection, Record Identification No. 210- Kitching, George, Maj.-Gen., C.B.E., D.S.O., 1910-Title *My Army Recollections*; interviewed by James Murphy, Kitching interview tape.
 25. Granatstein, *Bloody Victory*, p. 181.
 26. Roman Jarymowycz, "On Doctrine-A Brief Comment," *The Army Doctrine and Training Bulletin*, Vol 4, No 3 (Fall 2001), p.59.
 27. Marteinson, p.288.
 28. Granatstein, *Bloody Victory*, p. 176.
 29. George Kitching. *Mud and Green Fields: The Memoirs of Major-General George Kitching* (Langley: Battleline Books, 1986), p.206.
 30. *Ibid*, p. 199.
 31. Roy, p.318.
 32. Kitching, p.204.
 33. *Ibid*, p.205
 34. Graves, p. 132.
 35. NAC, RG 24 Series C-3 Vol 13712 Reel T-1865, War Diary, 2nd Canadian Corps, 17 August 1944.
 36. The composition was broken down as follows, 1 Lieutenant-Colonel, 5 Majors, 20 Captains and 20 Lieutenants.
 37. "Manpower Problems of the Canadian Army in the Second World War," *Report No. 63*, Historical Section (G.S.) Army Headquarters 17 August 1953, p. 169.
 38. Numbers were taken from the Field Returns of Officers and Other Rank from the respective war diaries of 4th Canadian Armoured Division units on 5,12,19 and 26 August 1944. A detailed table of the casualties is located at Appendix 5 Casualty Figures- 4th Canadian Armoured Division, in Caravaggio, *The Human Dimension of Command*.
 39. Manpower Problems of the Canadian Army in the Second World War," *Report No. 63*, Historical Section (G.S.) Army Headquarters 17 August 1953, p. 183.
 40. Frido von Senger und Etterlin. *Neither Hope Nor Fear* (London :Presidio, 1989), p.196.
 41. Canadian Forces Land Forces Command and Staff College. Publication RB/01 /P Part 2 *Realities of Battle Operations inNormandy*, October 1991, p.7.
 42. The SAR alone reported German casualties during their time in St Lambert at 7,000 German POWs, 2,000 killed and 3,000 wounded. NAC, RG 24, Series C-3 Vol 14295 Reel T-12767, War Diary 29th Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment (South Alberta Regiment), Ops Log, 21 August 1944.
 43. Roy, p.316.

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