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# Some thoughts about Private Harold L. Green of the Scout Platoon, First Battalion, The Royal Hamilton Light Infantry

**Doug Shaughnessy**

**H**arold Green was always known as "Harry" to me and to him I was known as "Sandy." I had hair then and that was its colour.

I met Harry in the early fall of 1943 when I was posted to The Royal Hamilton Light Infantry (RHLI). He had arrived in the Battalion a week or so ahead of me and had not yet become accepted as a member of the unit (you sort of had to win your spurs, so to speak, before being one of the boys). This was understandable because many of the men had been overseas since 1940 and many had fought at Dieppe so we were considered pretty much as raw recruits even though we had some strenuous training in Canada before going overseas.

I was put into the same hut as Harry, in fact, the same Section of the same Platoon. This was No. 13 Platoon of "Charlie" Company of the First Battalion, The Royal Hamilton Light Infantry, located at Strood Park near Horsham in Surrey, England.

We became very close friends from our first meeting, I suppose partly because of the resentment of the older men in the unit and partly because we came from relatively the same area back home. He from Port Sydney and me from Barrie, Ontario.

Harry was a good sized young man and tough. I was quite a bit smaller but determined to take all they could dish out so, as a pair of young infantrymen, we gave a good account of ourselves and were soon well accepted members of the

Regiment. The training was very arduous and the field manoeuvres went on day and night for weeks at a time. It was a real break to get back to our primitive camp at Strood Park for a few days between field exercises.

We often talked of home and of our families and of our plans for after the war and on occasional Sunday afternoons when we were free we would walk through the fields and pastures to Horsham or to Broadbridge Heath. We enjoyed each other's company and it was great to have someone to confide in. Even to be wet and tired and chilled to the bone during training was somehow easier to bear when you realized that a close friend was sharing the same discomfort.

To mention all the interesting incidents that occurred during my friendship with Harry Green would take a book and perhaps much of it would only be of interest to myself. There are, however, some occurrences which will be of interest to his remaining family and to mine.

During February 1944 everyone in the rifle companies of the Regiment were informed that in March there would be a new Platoon formed that would be called the Scout Platoon. Its members would be strictly volunteers. We were told that reconnaissance would be its main role but no further information was given.

By March there were 58 men who had volunteered and the day of selection was at hand. Harry and I were two of the volunteers. During the briefing by the Second-in-Command of the



Photo by Alexander M. Stirton, NAC PA 132776

*Canadian troops training in England for the invasion.*

Regiment we learned that the sole purpose of the Scout Platoon was to gain information about the enemy by patrols, much of this to be done behind enemy lines. There would also be sniper assignments. We were to be given the best possible training in camouflage and concealment, marksmanship, map and compass reading, unarmed combat, all aspects about enemy rank structure, vehicles, weapons and aircraft recognition, demolitions and about anything else required to survive by our own wits.

In the months that followed, our training was very concentrated and of a special nature. We worked in pairs mostly but there were some who preferred to work alone. Harry and I were a team and were always together.

During the last days of June 1944, activity in our tented camp at Wootton Park was confined to putting the finishing touches on vehicle waterproofing, and for us Scouts, continuous practice in locating and disarming "Booby Traps." The Third Canadian Infantry Division had gone to Normandy with the D-Day invasion force so we knew it would not be long before we would be crossing the channel.

There were many preparations before going to France. One that stands out were the haircuts. I was one who had every last hair removed. I was a complete skin head. Harry had more sense

and kept his to brush cut length. I do not recommend my kind of haircut to anyone who is going into action and has to wear a steel helmet day and night. I can only say that I was glad when it finally grew out a bit and at least afforded some protection and cushion for those horrible items of head dress that are so necessary but so despised by every soldier.

We finally got word to move to our Transit Camp and were sent by train from Shepperd's Well to a crowded tented camp outside the port town of Newhaven. Here we were issued with newly-printed French script (Invasion Money) and completed whatever other administrative details that are necessary before sending soldiers off to a theatre of operations. On 3 July 1944, we were formed up and moved off in single file for the mile or so we had to march to the port of Newhaven. A few hundred English people lined the streets as we moved by to the dock side. You could hear the odd "Good Luck Canada" from some of the old codgers.

As we lay at anchor waiting to move out to sea I had too much time to think. There was no turning back now! My thoughts were a mixture of pride, apprehension, concern for those at home and relief. Pride, because at last the first Shaughnessy was going back to France as did three of the previous generation in World War I. To embark on this kind of adventure without

being somewhat apprehensive about what tomorrow of the future might bring would, I think, be totally impossible. I was relieved when I was finally on board this Landing Ship. After all the training, the war games and exercises, the toughening up and skill at arms training, I was at last going to come face-to-face with the enemy. It was as though I had a reserved space on this deck and nobody was going to deny me this crossing of the English Channel.

During the late afternoon of 3 July we pushed slowly out of our berth along with several other landing ships and moved out to sea to join the convoy for our cruise. Every once and a while a Spitfire or a Hurricane would fly low over our ships which gave us a morale boost.

We slept below deck that night. The day's activity had tired us out so we had a reasonably good sleep. I recall going on deck the following morning. The whole convoy was moving quite slowly and there was an unmistakable land mass away in the distance in front of us. In the next couple of hours we were organized to disembark and we had moved to a mile or so from the Normandy coast. The anchor was dropped, scramble nets thrown over the side and the Assault Landing Craft were lowered. In the early morning sunlight we were able to view some of the devastation that the previous 28 days had left on this part of the landing area. There were great ships completely burnt out, lying on their sides, some sunken bow first with only their stern exposed above the water. There were wrecked landing craft everywhere and the skeletons of wrecked buildings above the beach ahead.

It was time. Down the scramble nets we went and into the tossing, heaving little boats that would take us to the beach. In the ALCs (Assault Landing Craft) you could feel every ripple and swell of the water for they were only shallow draft vessels. Our run in to the shore was mostly uneventful although some of us got wet feet when the ramp went down too far off shore. We were very thankful that we did not have to fight our way ashore.

The stark reality of war faced us as we came up the beach and saw the line of wounded men, bandaged, dirty and bloody, some walking, some

on stretchers all waiting to take our place on the little ALC for the return trip to hospital in England.

I recall the wrecked vehicles and piles of barbed wire on that beach, and the stacks of German Teller mines (Anti-tank) and "S" mines (Anti-personnel) all of which had been removed by the sappers of The Royal Canadian Engineers who had also marked safe lanes through the minefields with white mine tape so that we could move in relative safety off the beach and up through the dunes to the high ground beyond.

After a considerable march we ended up in an orchard near a badly-demolished village where we were to remain until our vehicles and support weapons and the rest of Second Canadian Division came ashore. This took a few days.

### Baptism of Fire

In the five days that followed our landing we had dug trenches in our orchard and things were relatively quiet, although we were becoming accustomed to the continuous gunfire up ahead. The battle noises were still far enough away to allow some relaxation.



*The author, Private Doug Shaughnessy, photographed in Belgium near the end of September, 1944.*

We in the Scout Platoon did a bit of sniper hunting as there were still a few left behind to harass the Allies. I recall a French woman being captured by one of the boys. She had been sniping at our men from an old church steeple. She was obviously a German collaborator.

Harry and I ventured out on a few patrols of our own to familiarize ourselves with the area. We talked to some British pioneers who were with the beach control unit and met some men of the First Canadian Parachute Battalion who had landed before the actual assault on D-Day. Their job was to land fairly well inland and gain surprise as well as capture some strategic bridges, etc.

We began to take notice of the white crosses here and there that marked the grave of the occasional Chaudière or Queen's Own and quite a number simply read "Unknown Canadian Soldier" and the whole atmosphere changed to one of a more serious nature.

In our daily briefings by our Scout Officer, Lieutenant Hugh Hilton, we got very little information about what was in store for us. It seemed that the future plans called for the scouts to enter Caen over the roof tops and get whatever information we could. This turned out to be a rumour, thank goodness, but it certainly did make us sit up and take notice. There were very few roof tops left in Caen by the time we got there. In the early evening of 8 July from the high ground at the edge of our orchard we watched 500 Lancaster bombers from the RAF and the RCAF take part in a low level bombing raid on Caen. It was like having a ringside seat at a performance that one never wants to see again.

First the Pathfinder bomber went in over the city and dropped its shower of illuminating marker flares and, though it was broad daylight, it was like watching a shower of tinsel with an extremely bright light reflecting from it. Then came the waves of bombers, perhaps 50 at a time and as they passed over our position we could see the bomb bay doors open and the planes level out for a straight run over the target.

The German flak was so intense that many of the first wave of bombers were hit before they released their bombloads. The sky seemed full of burning planes but many continued in and released their bombs, then veered out to sea.

Soon the dust and flames from one of Normandy's oldest cities filled the sky and still the bombers kept coming. We found ourselves counting the parachutes of those that got out of the planes that were hit for we knew how many there should be if everyone got out – pilot, co-pilot, navigator, bombardier, and three gunners. We cheered when we counted seven, we screamed at the disabled planes to get their men out (as though they could hear us), we were dumbfounded when a bomber would literally explode in the air or nose dive into the sea and no one escaped. Then there were the few that got one, two or three out and the rest perished. Here we were watching the stuff that American film-makers dramatize from the sacrifice and misery of others. The reality for us was that these had been real live human beings like us only moments ago. This pile of rubble that entombed German and Frenchman alike was a proud Norman city only a few minutes before. From our position near Graye-sur-Mer we in the RHLI had just had a preview of the kind of hell that was to follow in the months to come.

By 8 July all of Second Canadian Division was ashore with its vehicles and support weapons and we were preparing to move forward to relieve some war-weary Third Division boys who had been in the line for a long time and had not had much rest since D-Day.

We received our instructions on 9 July to move up that evening under cover of darkness. At dusk a platoon of British Royal Army Service Corps TCVs (troop carrying vehicles) arrived and we were loaded on these for a bumpy ten mile ride without lights and it seemed without roads either. On our way to the assembly area one of the vehicles overturned and some men were shaken up. Sergeant Owen, who had been our Platoon Sergeant in the old 13 Platoon of "Charlie" Company during training in England had the misfortune to badly injure his eye in this mishap. He was returned to England and eventually to Canada so the war was short for him.

We moved forward on foot from the debussing point. The darkness was made even darker because every few minutes there would be the flash of a bursting mortar or artillery shell and it took a considerable period of time for our eyes to become accustomed to the dark again. The stench of death was nauseating in the night air.

*Some of the Scout Platoon, photographed in Belgium, September 1944. Back row (l. to r.): Pte. Wouri, Pte. Ron Wood, Pte. Walt Witherspoon, Pte. Trussler, Pte. Alfie Surrette; Middle row: Cpl. Peter Grice, Pte. Jack Chew, Pte. Tommy Grey, Pte. Joe Fryia, Pte. George Kutcheon; Front row: Pte. Bruno Kunzelman, Lieutenant Johnny Williamson, Sgt. Jack Proctor, Cpl. Hank Sams, Pte. Earl Tapp*



It was one of those hot July nights and there was scarcely even a breeze. Our clothes stuck to us and the pack and web equipment made it most uncomfortable.

Finally we were allotted a position along a hedgerow to "dig in" and spend the night, what was left of it. I didn't sleep that night, I doubt many of us did. Even after my trench was dug and I was dead tired the noise of the firing just up ahead was upsetting and every once in awhile the smell of rotting flesh wafted over our position.

One is more apt to be frightened of things he cannot see or a situation he doesn't fully understand and that was the case on my very last night as a teenager. The next day I would be 20, not a boy any longer but not quite a man either. At least I didn't feel much like a man as I waited for the daylight. But I was not alone, for somewhere out there in the dark were some 600 other members my Regiment who I am sure were preoccupied with their own special feelings.

When the daylight came we could see ahead of us in the distance a large area of flat high ground with a few battered buildings. We learned later that this was Carpiquet airfield which was in Allied hands but still very much under enemy fire. To the rear about 200 yards was the wreckage of an old Abbey that had been almost completely destroyed by our rocket-firing Typhoons, Spitfires and Mustangs.

That morning we heard the distinct roar of our Bofors anti-aircraft guns all around us and the sky was full of airbursts, then a German Messerschmitt roared low overhead trailing smoke. It crashed a short distance to the rear. A second plane climbed very quickly out of the flak and headed back the way it had come.

As I watched the German plane disappear, my eyes focussed on a bomb-shaped object falling end over end out of the sky toward our trenches. I screamed "Look out for the bomb!" Everyone hit the bottom of their trench and stayed there for some time.

When there was no explosion, we cautiously peeked out after a reasonable waiting period. What we saw was an auxiliary fuel tank that most fighter aircraft carry to increase their range of operation and are able to drop in case they have to get away in a hurry. This tank, of course, was empty and as we were soon to learn, bombs from aircraft don't fall end over end, nor do they give you that much time to take cover. We stayed close to our trenches through the remainder of that long hot day and kept movement to a minimum. A couple of Canadian Scottish Regiment lads came through our lines on a patrol. One stopped to talk to Harry and I for a few minutes. He looked like someone who had just come out of a mud bath and his eyes showed that he had not had a proper sleep for some time. He was critical of the type of trench we had dug and I will never forget his brief words of advice as he left: "When you go up there fellas, dig'em narrow and dig'em deep," he said pointing toward the enemy. Good sound advice which served us well in the days to come.

As darkness fell on 10 July we got ready to move forward to relieve a British regiment that had captured the high ground beyond a little town called Verson. We moved out in single file into the darkness and as we crossed Carpiquet airfield we came under German artillery fire several times and each time we would take cover by lying flat on the ground because there were no ditches or trenches nearby.

It was about midnight when we reached the other side of the airfield and started down through the town of Verson. Again the ever present smell of dead cattle and human bodies seemed to hang in the air so as well as being somewhat scared we were sick in the stomach but since we hadn't eaten much that day. It was just horrible nausea that wouldn't go away.



We crossed a stream on the edge of the town which I believe was properly called the Odon river and emerged out into a meadow. Then all hell broke loose. Enemy mortar fire landed all around us. It would let up for a few minutes but when we would get up and start to move again, another "stonk" would hit and we would dive to the ground again.

In the confusion and the darkness many of us got separated from the leading sections. We could have very easily wandered off in the wrong direction. Finally Sergeant Jack Proctor got the situation in hand. He directed us to stay where we were while he and the Scout Officer, Lieutenant Hugh Hinton did a reconnaissance to locate the main body. It was about 0500 hours when we were re-united with the unit.

Part of the Scout Platoon's job was to protect the Battalion Tactical Headquarters so we were allotted a piece of high ground in front of Lieutenant-Colonel Whitaker's Tac HQ. The ground was like concrete – almost impossible to dig in – but we had to dig in as there was nothing between us and the Germans but wheat fields and a few hedgerows.

By daylight we had managed to dig down about five or six inches, but even with picks it was next to impossible to make any progress. It didn't take long for the enemy to spot us and they opened up with their artillery. The first shell in our position somehow missed Moose Jondreau, Earl Tapp, Harry and I but we could feel the heat of it in the fraction of a second before it exploded about 20 yards away where Joe Jacobs was also struggling to dig his slit trench. Joe was killed instantly and so became the first of the Scout Platoon to be killed in action.

All that day the Germans pounded our position with 88s and mortar fire. There would be a short let up of perhaps 20 minutes then another bombardment, but the problem was that there was no pattern to it, so you couldn't plan on doing anything in the open. If the intention was to demoralize us, the Jerries did a pretty good job of it.

Contact patrols were organized by Lieutenant Hinton. The purpose was to link up with patrols of the Royal Regiment of Canada who were on our right flank. We would bring back any information they may have about the enemy

situation and also make sure that there had been no enemy infiltration between the two battalions. Harry and I led off the first of these patrols. They were made every hour on the half hour. Our route was along an old farm wagon track on the reverse slope of our position. The distance was only about 700 yards but there was no cover of any kind except the trampled wheat. The heat was suffocating and the possibility of getting caught in the open by enemy fire made it a most unpleasant experience. The high point of these patrols (and I emphasize the word "high") was that right at the cross roads in the village of Eterville where we were to meet the Scouts from the Royals was a large dead horse that had obviously been there for a long time. The stench was impossible to describe. Needless to say we did not spend much time exchanging pleasantries with the Royal's patrol.

The following night became our night to go out on a listening patrol. These patrols were a nasty business because you had to get as far forward of your own position as possible and remain there until early morning, then get back just before daylight. Quite often listening patrols give the first warning of enemy attack and often they are the first to be taken prisoner – or worse. Then too was the problem of getting back through our own line in the early morning hours when everyone is on "stand-to."

Harry and I moved out quietly, sometimes crawling on our stomachs, sometimes moving in a crouched position but always hopeful that we would not end up in an enemy minefield or pull one of those hateful trip wires that would set off a flare or explosive charge. I'm sure neither of us had any idea where we would set up our position for the night but we continued on anyway. At last we came upon two shell scrapes which were about ten feet apart. We agreed that this was as good a place as any so we each took one and settled in for a long night.

By way of explanation, a shell scrape is a very shallow trench, just deep enough to give a man a bit of protection from shrapnel or small arms fire and also to afford a measure of concealment. The ones that Harry and I stumbled onto had probably been used by the Germans the night before for the very same purpose. The previous occupants had been using field telephones because there was quite a lot of telephone wire lying about and this became very useful. We each

wrapped the end of a length of wire around our hand and used it as communications from one trench to the other. A slight tug would get the attention of the other.

We could hear German tanks moving about in the woods just ahead and we could also hear our own Shermans to the rear, each side moving to better strategic positions in preparation for daylight. Harry and I were out in no-mans-land at the mercy of both sides.

Later in the night the sky was lit up by flares from a German aircraft. Our greatest fear was that we might be spotted by the enemy on the ground because the whole area was lit up brighter than daylight. As the flares drifted closer to the ground, the plane made another pass and dropped a load of anti-personnel bombs over to our left where some of our rifle companies were located but they did no harm. Then the aircraft dived down to strafe the area with machine gun fire. This was of some concern to us because it seemed to be right near our own scout platoon position. Fortunately no one was hit. What Harry and I had just witnessed was something that would become a ritual every night of good flying weather for as long as the war lasted. There was scarcely a night without some sort of air raid. As the morning approached we decided to get back to our platoon. The night had been a spooky one. Every strange sound tends to make your imagination play tricks on you so we were happy to crawl back through the grain field that was soggy with dew. When we heard the challenge of the first half of the pass word, "Halt - Orange" we were quick to give the counter word "Crush" and were safely allowed back to our trenches for a short rest.

I feel compelled to relate a humorous incident concerning passwords. Passwords are highly secret and are issued by Brigade Headquarters daily and are effective for 24 hours beginning at 1600 hours. When they are received they are passed by whisper from one ear to another until everyone is informed of the daily password. The first part of the password is the challenge, the second part is the counter so there are always two words, for example "Apple-Pie," although they are often more complicated. It is very serious business and many a man has been seriously

injured or even killed because he forgot the password. On the night this incident occurred, the password was "Holy-Night." One of our scouts, Ace Bailly, a Nova Scotian who was a real comical character, was returning from a patrol in the early hours of the morning. I happened to be on guard in my trench when I heard someone approaching our position. I immediately challenged him with "Halt - Holy," there was a short silence, then the reply came back "Holy, holy, holy Jeez, I forgot." There was no mistaking who it was.

On about the second day of our stay on this position, Lieutenant-Colonel Whitaker decided that he needed a Command Post where he could hold his "Orders Group" ("O" Group) with his Company Commanders. A couple of the Pioneer Platoon boys were summoned to set demolition charges to break up the hard ground and make the digging easier. When the charge went off the dirt and dust caused a huge column that went at least 200 feet in the air and must have been seen by every German artilleryman for miles. Most of the Scouts and everyone available in Tac Headquarters were engaged in cleaning out the loosened earth and trying to deepen the hole when the inevitable barrage came, 88s and mortar fire. There was no cover except for this large crater which was only about a foot deep and too wide to afford any protection. A couple of lads were hit but not too seriously. Hank Sams of the Scouts had his watch band severed and it went spinning away, watch and all. We never did find it.

It wasn't too long before someone decided that if we worked in shifts less people would be exposed at one time and there would be more room for each to work and so it was that the task was completed. The Command Post was a



*Hank Sams of the Scout Platoon.*



model of military field defences to be proud of except that it became the focal point for every “stonk” of enemy fire that came in our area and all because of that tell-tale demolition charge that sent its aiming mark into the sky. It was not long before the Command Post received a direct hit and Lieutenant-Colonel Denis Whitaker was wounded in the face and had to be evacuated.

We were sort of relieved to move out of our location above Verson. So much had happened since we had arrived. Harry had received word that his brother, with the Highland Light Infantry, had been killed in action. His grief was unmistakable. My attempts to console him were not very successful. What can you say to a friend who has just lost a brother? I remember him saying very seriously, “I will never take a German prisoner,” an attitude that would probably be the first thought of any infantry soldier that had suffered a similar loss.

### **To Caen and Beyond**

With Lieutenant-Colonel Whittaker wounded, command of the Battalion went to the second-in-command, Major G.M. MacLachlan. We received orders to move forward on 18 July. Our “B” Company made an attack to secure the flank of the Royal Regiment that had just cleared the enemy from Louvigny woods.

Our march took us through the devastated city of Caen. We halted at the southern edge of town and were ordered into a 24-hour rest period. The Battalion next moved out along the highway towards Falaise and dug in on the right-hand side of the highway where the wheat fields begin again and stretched for miles up the long slope past Ifs and on to Verrières Ridge and beyond.

We had comfortable trenches with wheat straw for mattresses and the promise of a good night’s sleep. Why they located a battery of 155 mm howitzers across the road from us was a mystery but at least it must have been reasonably safe when you get the big ones up this far. Well, they attracted enemy counter-battery fire like honey attracts flies and made our stay here a bit unpleasant.

That night after last light stand to, I settled into my trench and was about to drift off to sleep

when the drone of our nightly visiting Gerry aircraft brought us to consciousness. Our area was soon ringed with flares and it was brighter than daylight. He dropped a 500 lb bomb across the road in the artillery battery area but the concussion was so strong that the sides of my trench caved in and trapped me. Everything but my head was under the blanket and I couldn’t move a muscle. When the plane left I called for Harry to get me out. He could see my predicament in the last light of the flares and he laughed and seemed to be enjoying my lack of mobility. It was the first time I had heard him laugh since he had learned of his brother’s death. It was a great relief when he finally got me out of that hole and so I didn’t ring his neck or do any of those other nasty things that I had promised if he didn’t stop laughing and do something to help.

Our next task was to help capture Verrières Ridge, a high ground feature that had to be taken before any advance to Falaise could begin. Lieutenant-Colonel J.M. Rockingham was now back in command of the RHLI. The details of this battle can be read elsewhere but there are some personal involvements that stand out in my memory and are generally not the kind of stuff that get recorded.

Lieutenant-Colonel Rockingham wanted to know of the village of “Ifs” was clear of the enemy. It was a couple of hundred yards south of our forward companies. Harry and I were given the task of doing a daylight patrol into the village. It was a door-to-door creepy kind of leap-frog patrol but no enemy were seen. We did discover that the Jerries had made sure we would not enjoy the drinking water. They had dumped a dead donkey down the village well. As we came out into the open on our return the enemy spotted us and let loose a barrage of “Moaning Minnies” (those 8-barrelled mortars that make such a demoralizing noise). We were pinned down in a big shell hole for nearly an hour. We finally got back through “D” Company lines and made our report to Lieutenant Hugh Hinton, the Scout Platoon Commander.

### **We Were Looking For Them – They Were Looking At Us**

On 23 July Lieutenant-Colonel Rockingham was told that the RHLI would take part in a large-scale attack in the near future. Harry and I

*An aerial photograph, taken on 30 July 1944 showing Beauvoir Farm (top left) and Troteval Farm (top right) and Verrières at the bottom.*

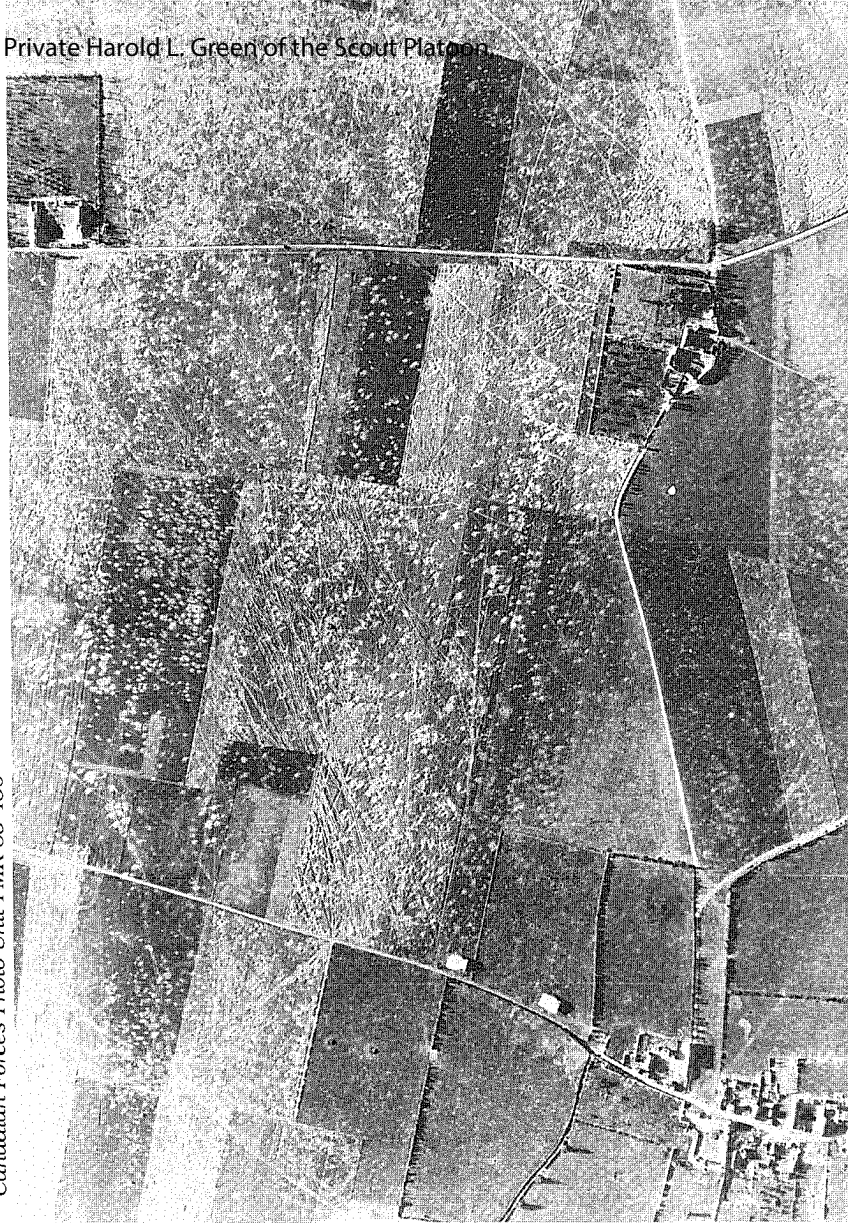
were sent to report to Lieutenant Hinton and Lieutenant-Colonel Rockingham's command trench. We were briefed by the Colonel himself as well as Lieutenant Lyle Doering, the Intelligence Officer. The Colonel wanted to know what the enemy situation was at Troteval Farm, just a couple of hundred yards north of the village of Verrières. This was to be the start line for the attack on Verrières and was supposed to have been secured by units of the 6th Brigade, particularly the Fusiliers Mont-Royal (FMRs).

This would be a long patrol into no-man's-land. It had to be done in daylight so we could see the layout. We would be leading the advance troops to this start line when the attack began in the very near future. A cart trail ran up the long gentle slope through the wheat field and branched off in a "Y" shape about a thousand yards forward of our position. It was important that we took the right hand fork because it led to Troteval Farm, the other one led away off toward the village of Rocquancourt.

We moved out in the late afternoon through "D" Company lines, on past IIs and up the trail through the endless wheat fields. We moved in a crouched position taking turns at leading the way and resting frequently because of the heat and the uncomfortable crouch we had to maintain to afford at least some cover from enemy view.

The enemy was shelling off to our right and we could see the shells bursting on the horizon which seemed to be about where the Calgary Highlanders would be. In any case as long as they didn't get any closer they were no danger to us.

When we reached the fork in the trail we had no trouble deciding which way to go and though we were tired we did not stop here. Cross roads and road junctions are reference points for zeroing in artillery and are to be avoided as rest areas. Although neither of us said anything, I'm sure we were both thinking that we were a long way from the relative safety of our own troops.



I doubt if Harry or I had given any thought to what we might do if we were confronted by enemy troops. We were armed only with a rifle and bayonet and two hand grenades each plus a bandolier of ammunition but I'm sure our past training would have brought an appropriate reaction. When we finally stopped to look over the waist high grain, the stone walls that surround Troteval Farm were only about two hundred yards in front. We had travelled about 3/4 of a mile and it occurred to us that if there had been enemy at the farm they could have been watching us for at least the last half mile. We felt relieved, so moved on with much less caution.

Suddenly we broke into a clearing in the grain field and we were in the midst of a maze of German trenches. Harry cocked his rifle and



*In celebration of VE-Day, Doug Shaughnessy and Gord Kennerley pose in front of Lieutenant-Colonel Denis Whitaker's Caravan.*

jumped in front of one trench. I pulled the pin of one of my grenades and jumped in front of the entrance to another. I heard Harry yell, "Come out you so and so," and I heard a German voice "Nix Shasen Kamerad, Nix Shasen." The German came out of the trench with his hands in the air after throwing his pistol out first. The look on Harry's face told me that this Jerry had only seconds to live so I yelled "No, Harry – we need him." Harry eased the action on his rifle forward.

We made the German lay flat on the ground while we quickly searched the remaining trenches. There appeared to be no one else there and we were not about to search too thoroughly. I replaced the pin in my grenade and we started off down the trail with our prisoner. The pace was much quicker now because there was no need for crouching or crawling. If there had been Germans in the area of Troteval Farm we would have both been dead by now – or so we thought.

The men in the forward Companies watched us come through our lines with the first prisoner the Scout Platoon had ever taken and probably the first live German soldier many of them had seen. They would see many more in the next few days.

Our prisoner was whisked away to Brigade Headquarters in a jeep where he was interrogated by the Brigade Intelligence Officer. He was from the German 272nd Infantry Division. His information was that the Germans were expecting an attack by the Canadians and that the 177th Panzer Regiment was moving up for the

counterattack. The attack on Verrières was supposed to start at 0300 hours on 25 July, however, the start line which was Troteval Farm had still not been taken by the FMRs before dark on the 24th. The continued failure of the FMRs to secure the start line resulted in a change of timing for the attack to 0400 hours. To make matters worse, our own reserve company – Charlie Company – had to clear the enemy from Troteval Farm which left us no reserve Company to handle the counterattack which always comes within a half hour of pushing the Germans off an objective.

I had a special feeling for Charlie Company as I had trained with them in England and knew every man so was pleased to be detailed to lead the company commander and the leading platoon to the pre-designated start line just forward of the "Y" junction in front of Troteval Farm. Captain Hunter was the acting company commander for this operation and one of my favourite officers. As we moved off up the cart trail we talked quietly of better days back in England and about the nasty job ahead. We could see the three platoons of "C" Company stretched out behind us ready to do whatever was required of them. We had to side-step the bodies of dead Canadians long before we reached the road junction where Harry and I had patrolled such a short time before. They had been cut down by machine guns mounted on the stone walls that surrounded the farm.

When we reached the company start line the Captain and I shook hands and wished each other good luck. The men fanned out into their

attack formations which was an eerie sight under the artificial moonlight provided by the search lights back near Caen. Captain Hunter was killed a few minutes after our parting but the Company went on to capture the farm and the main attack went in against Verrières at 0410 hours and lasted all through the day. Lieutenant-Colonel Rockingham did not declare the objective secure until 0750 hours on the 26th of July.

Our time at Verrières was spent in defence of Tac HQ and in anti-tank defence. It seemed there were German tanks everywhere. We were also responsible for prisoners of war. Not only did we have to guard them, we also had to get them back to the POW cages that were operated by the Canadian Provost Corps (The Military Police).

\* \* \* \* \*

**M**y letters home always made mention of Harry. By a strange coincidence, my father, who was working in a bush camp near Sundridge happened to mention that he had three boys serving overseas, one of them with the RHLI. A fellow-worker by the name of Ed Green mentioned that he also had a son in the RHLI. As it turned out this was Harry's Dad. It is a small world. Unfortunately, I did not meet Ed Green until a couple of years after the war when I was able to give him much of the same information I am recording here.



B.157861 PRIVATE  
H.L. GREEN  
THE ROYAL HAMILTON  
LIGHT INFANTRY  
12th AUGUST 1944 AGE 21  
IN LOVING MEMORY OF HAROLD  
A DEAR SON AND BROTHER  
SADLY MISSED BY FAMILY  
Private Green lies buried at the  
Canadian war cemetery at  
Bretteville-sur-Laize, France

who had been felled by a German machine gunner.

Shaughnessy states that this tribute to Harry was "written by a soldier who probably knew him better than most and was his closest friend at least in the last year of his life and who buried him in a soldier's grave on a hill top above the town of Bretteville-sur-Laize in Normandy."

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*Editor's note: On 12 August the RHLI was ordered to advance towards Clair Tizon. At a small crossroads near the abandoned hamlet of Barbary, the Regiment met German resistance. As the unit moved through the wheat fields, it encountered German infantry and armour. The maelstrom that engulfed the Rileys was later described as "the most intense mortaring and shelling the unit ever witnessed." All day long the Battalion endured German counterattacks designed to keep the Falaise pocket open. At dusk the Germans withdrew leaving the field to the Canadians. The cost of the battle was high - 20 men killed and 100 wounded. Doug Shaughnessy was detailed to help recover the men killed during the battle. While carrying out this duty, Shaughnessy had the heartbreaking experience of discovering the body of his best pal and scout buddy, Private Harold L. Green,*