

2006

“Pushing Their Necks Out”: Ultra, The Black Watch, and Command Relations, May-sur-Orne, Normandy, 5 August 1944

David R. O'Keefe

John Abbott College, davidokeefe@sympatico.ca

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholars.wlu.ca/cmh>

Recommended Citation

O'Keefe, David R. "“Pushing Their Necks Out”: Ultra, The Black Watch, and Command Relations, May-sur-Orne, Normandy, 5 August 1944." *Canadian Military History* 15, 1 (2006)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Canadian Military History* by an authorized editor of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact scholarscommons@wlu.ca.

“Pushing Their Necks Out”

Ultra, The Black Watch, and Command Relations

May-sur-Orne, Normandy, 5 August 1944

David R. O'Keefe

In 1974 Group Captain Frederick Winterbotham shocked the world when he revealed in his semi-autobiographical work, *The Ultra Secret*, that the Allies had been breaking high-grade German ciphers throughout the greater portion of the Second World War in an effort commonly referred to as *ULTRA*.¹ His disclosure sparked a tempest as historians anticipated that his admission would lead to a major revision of Second World War historiography. At first, what promised to be a new vista for historical research soon turned into a quagmire. When the British Government selectively released files pertaining to *ULTRA*, only messages sent to commands in the field were originally released whereas the supporting documents necessary to properly assess and interpret the impact of *ULTRA* in general, and on Army Group, Army and Corps commanders and their subordinates in the field in particular, were retained. As a result, the reassessment of this aspect of military history met a similar fate to that of British armour at the foot of Verrières-Bourgébus ridge during Operation Goodwood – very good initial progress followed by confusion and lack of consolidation resulting in the perception that *ULTRA* was nothing more than a highly overrated white elephant. Two decades later, Government Communication Headquarters (GCHQ) in the UK wisely reviewed their policy and began a protracted release of millions of pages of material to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. Included were materials that shed new light on the production and dissemination of *ULTRA* (at Bletchley Park) and its employment by the consumer, Allied High Command, in the field.² The releases have thus

far included everything from security regulations for the handling of messages, to classified in-house accounts of the impact of *ULTRA* on commands, to high-level policy papers and distribution lists to name but a few. In addition to the *ULTRA* material, formerly classified Intelligence summaries (produced at each level of command from Eisenhower's Supreme Headquarters down to brigade level) were also declassified during this period providing the historian with two mutually supporting sources to layer upon the existing corpus of material.³ As a result, new insight and further understanding can be achieved concerning intentions, orders, decisions and operations that may have been regarded, at that time or since, as peculiar, questionable or ill-conceived. The impact of these new releases on the historiography of Canada's role in the Second World War can be witnessed in part by re-examining the costly and seemingly questionable advance by the Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada on May-sur-Orne during the afternoon of 5 August 1944.

The first attempt by the Black Watch to bypass May-sur-Orne on the morning of 25 July during Operation Spring ended in disaster as 300 of 315 men were lost attempting to capture the town of Fontenay-le-Marmion on the reverse slope of Verrières Ridge. In fact, during their first week of fighting in Normandy, the 1st Battalion of the Black Watch sustained heavy casualties that included one commanding officer, his battle adjutant, all the rifle company commanders, their second-in-commands and the majority of senior NCOs.⁴ When Lieutenant-Colonel Frank Mitchell



Senior officers of the Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada: Lieutenant-Colonel Frank Michell (left - photographed as a major) took command of the battalion following its destruction on 25 July 1944 during the advance up Verrières Ridge. Major Tom Anyon (centre) assumed command of "A" Company while Major Ronnie Bennett took over "D" Company. On 5 August Mitchell emerged from the second battle of May-sur-Orne unscathed but Anyon and Bennett were both killed. (Black Watch Archives)

took command of the remnants of the battalion the day after Spring, only two of the six remaining officers had any battle experience.⁵ This was further reduced when Lieutenant George Buch was wounded a few hours after Mitchell arrived, leaving only Captain Ronnie Bennett as the lone senior Black Watch officer to see combat.⁶ As a result, Mitchell faced the task of rebuilding and retraining four Black Watch rifle companies that suffered 95 percent casualties on 25 July, and restoring the confidence of a well-trained but inexperienced infantry battalion.⁷ According to Brigadier W.J. "Bill" Megill, commander of 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade, a battalion operating under normal circumstances could suffer 10 percent casualties per month and keep fighting, 20 percent casualties would require one month of re-training while 30 percent a full two months, and so on.⁸ Despite assurances that the Black Watch would be afforded the necessary time to absorb reinforcements and retrain, the afternoon of 5 August witnessed the newly re-composed rifle companies advancing down the road to May-sur-Orne, a mere ten days after being destroyed in the fields east of the village.

Originally, Megill planned to ease Mitchell's battalion into the line south of the twin towns of St. André and St. Martin in a series of small-

scale defensive actions with the dual purpose of strengthening unit cohesion and acclimatizing reinforcements to life in the Normandy bridgehead. It was here that reinforcements (some with only 6-8 weeks of total service) came under shell and sniper fire for the first time.⁹ The first of these actions occurred during the night of 4-5 August when the Black Watch relieved units of the Fusilier Mont-Royal in the St. André-St. Martin area and conducted routine patrolling in the area south of the village.¹⁰ At 1030 hours, however, the routine nature of the day was interrupted when a Liaison Officer (LO) from Major-General Charles Foulkes' 2nd Canadian Infantry Division brought instructions for 5th Brigade to prevent any enemy withdrawal or movement from their front.¹¹ The abrupt change of plans stemmed from confirmed reports that German units facing the British 53rd Infantry Division west of the Orne River had withdrawn, leaving Foulkes to wonder if the same had occurred on his front.¹² Patrols conducted during the night did not support this however, and Foulkes was informed by his LO that the "enemy was still on 5th Brigade's front."¹³ Undaunted, a second LO arrived at Megill's headquarters roughly 90 minutes later bringing orders from Foulkes to commence "active probing" and follow up any sign of enemy withdrawal.¹⁴ In response, Megill drew up a patrol programme that called

for the Black Watch to launch a company-sized fighting patrol to capture the "chateau" area southwest of St. André. If opposition proved slight, a second company would pass through to the area northeast of May-sur-Orne and probe the outskirts of town.¹⁵ Finally, at last light, a reconnaissance patrol would move south from St. Martin to reconnoitre the "factory" and if lightly held, a fighting patrol would occupy the structure and its environs.¹⁶

The leading patrols were about to sortie when Foulkes arrived in person at Black Watch headquarters just after 1400 hours and informed both Mitchell and Megill that the "enemy (was) withdrawing his depleted forces" and that the Black Watch "MUST keep contact" and "hold" the enemy in place so that "a larger plan may be successfully accomplished."¹⁷ As a result, the limited unit-size patrol programme was set aside

and a bolder Brigade-level operation adopted.

In the new three-phased plan, Mitchell's battalion would advance down the St. André/May-sur-Orne road and capture May-sur-Orne in phase I, followed by the Régiment de Maisonneuve who would pass through and assault Fontenay-le-Marmion in phase II. If this proved successful, the Calgary Highlanders would move through Fontenay-le-Marmion and advance, if possible, as far as Bretteville-sur-Laize in the final phase.¹⁸ Support for the Black Watch consisted of artillery "on call," but tank, anti-tank and heavy machine gun support was not allocated for their phase of the advance. It is unclear whether Foulkes withheld all but artillery support due to the lack of available armour, or whether he chose to reserve it for it for the later phases.¹⁹ Either way, the Black Watch would advance to May-sur-Orne without the benefit of direct fire support.

A Canadian soldier walks through the ruins of May-sur-Orne, 9 August 1944.





With little additional information other than patrol reports from the previous night, Mitchell was wary of the optimistic portrait painted by Foulkes and now parroted by Megill.²⁰ Since the debacle on 25 July, a growing acrimony between the Black Watch and their superiors had developed as each were blamed (to varying degrees) for the fate of the battalion in Spring.²¹ Furthermore, the consensus opinion within the battalion viewed both the Brigade and Division commanders as "funnels" for orders from higher command with neither displaying the tactical acumen, or intestinal fortitude, necessary to bring about less than costly results.²² Together, their less than convincing justification for the hasty change of plan on 5 August did little to dissipate the increasing non-confidence. Despite his reservations concerning the seemingly overly-optimistic picture faced by his battalion, Mitchell reluctantly placed his faith in providence and higher command and ordered the Black Watch to cautiously advance along the one kilometre stretch of road leading to May-sur-Orne.

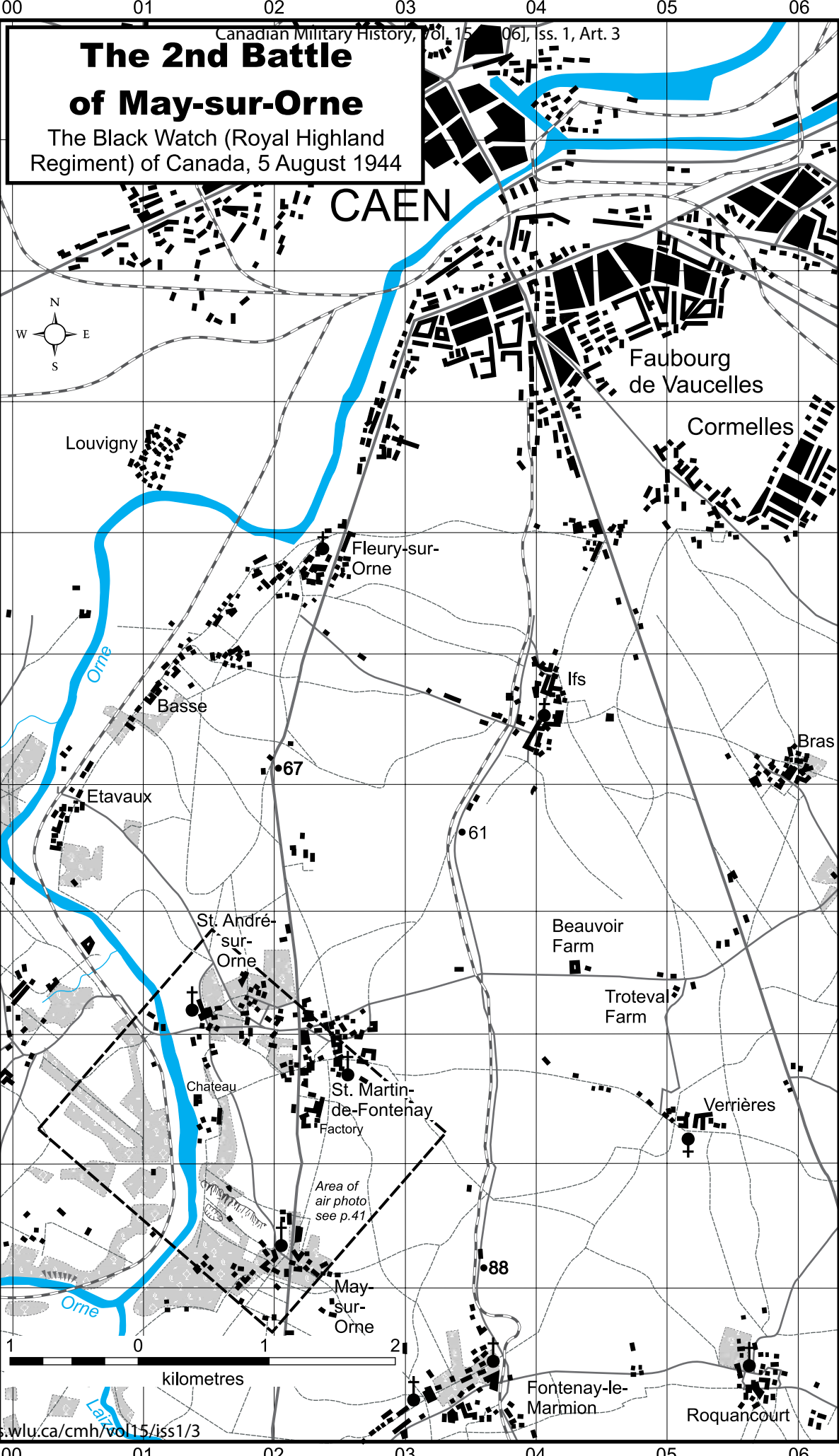
Just after 1600 hours, the battalion started up the road to May-sur-Orne with Major Tom Anyon's "A" Company in the lead. Following Anyon were Major Ronnie Bennett's "D" Company with "B" and "C" Companies and Mitchell's headquarters bringing up the rear on the flanks.²³ Mitchell elected to send only 50 men up with Anyon in "A" Company, while the rest of his "unborn but gallant little company" remained left out of battle due to their relative inexperience.²⁴ Twenty minutes after departing, Mitchell reported that the battalion had "encountered no enemy at (the) chateau" and that he was pressing on to May-sur-Orne.²⁵ Moving in single file down both sides of the road at five-yard intervals, the men of the Black Watch moved past the bloated and decaying bodies of unburied Canadians who fell in combat over the previous fortnight.²⁶ It was a "disturbing sight," which "unnerved" some in the lead companies, but the advance continued without incident until the lead companies reached the ruins of the northern outskirts of May-sur-Orne.²⁷

Opposite: This photograph is taken from the northern edge of May-sur-Orne. The mine tower in the "factory" area is visible at the top left as is the church in St. Martin-de-Fontenay (top right). This is essentially the ground covered by the Black Watch as they approached May on the morning of 5 August 1944.

From German positions in and around the town the advance of the Black Watch down the main road looked surreal. A veteran of 1st SS Panzer Division, *Obersturmführer* Preus, boasted that he could "scarcely believe (his) eyes" when he saw the lead companies advancing in plain view of the German guns:

Their forces were in a picture-book formation such as I had never seen in all my years of war. One company marched in two rows in close formation on the left and right of the road. The Company Commander was in front, right in the middle of the road...It was simply incredible!²⁸

According to doctrine, Preus' men held their fire and watched intently as the Black Watch cautiously made their way towards May-sur-Orne following an Allied artillery barrage that landed in and around the town. When the lead companies entered the northern outskirts of May-sur-Orne, the artillery support lifted early leaving the men exposed as they crossed final 100 yards. According to Preus, this presented a target that, "was enough to warm our hearts,"²⁹ and it was here that the 1st SS "snapped the trap shut."³⁰ As the Black Watch war diary noted, "not a mortar or 88 had landed within miles" until that point when the Germans opened up "plastering the lead companies with both, as fast as he could load."³¹ Both "A" and "D" Companies were immediately pinned down in the ditches on either side of the road with Anyon and one of his platoon commanders being the first to fall in what proved to be a costly afternoon.³² Without the benefit of anti-tank guns or tank support, "A" Company found itself in a dire predicament when a German tank "advanced down the center of the road," firing high explosive shells and machine gunning the men in the ditches either killing or forcing the remainder of "A" Company to surrender.³³ "D" Company was also hit hard and forced to withdraw towards St. André-sur-Orne. "B" and "C" Companies, upon viewing the slaughter up ahead, desperately pleaded in vain with 5th Brigade Headquarters for tank support.³⁴ Lacking a positive response from Megill's headquarters Mitchell personally intervened at 1820 hours and assured 5th Brigade that his companies had indeed "asked for (a) reason."³⁵ It is unclear whether tank support did indeed arrive, but either way, "B" and "C" Companies adopted holding positions that straddled the road to May-sur-Orne where they



Canadian Military History, [vol. 15, 2006], ss. 1, Art. 3

The 2nd Battle of May-sur-Orne

The Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada, 5 August 1944

CAEN

Map drawn by Mike Bechthold ©2006



CFJIC ZK 924-6A

Photo by Michael M. Dean, LAC PA 145558



Major-General Charles Foulkes (left), commander of 2nd Canadian Infantry Division and Brigadier Bill Megill (right), commander of 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade were seen as merely "funneling" orders from high command and as a result Lieutenant-Colonel Mitchell, commanding officer of the Black Watch, lost confidence in his immediate commanders.

remained for the next few days.³⁶ German shelling also took its toll on Mitchell's headquarters during their advance behind the lead companies. Despite being "constantly where the going was the toughest," Mitchell survived the advance without a scratch, but others accompanying the Black Watch CO were not so lucky.³⁷ Mitchell's signaller, Corporal S. Smith, was killed by shrapnel as he stood next to him while mortar shells severely wounded the Battalion Intelligence officer, Lieutenant P. Mackenzie, and took the life of "D" Company commander Captain R.E. Bennett – the sole remaining Black Watch officer with combat experience.³⁸ As the Black Watch war diarist noted, the afternoon took not only a heavy physical toll on its participants, but also affected the nerves of many of those who were experiencing battle for the first time. "Some of the new lads whom we have recently received as replacements are taking this action quite hard, for most of them are fresh from Canada."³⁹

The costly failure of the operation, coupled with its haphazard and seemingly ill-conceived nature, served to exacerbate an already tense relationship between Mitchell and Megill.⁴⁰ In addition, as no explanation or appreciation of the motives that prompted the attack on 5 August had been available until now, a generation of historians has pointed to this attack as an

illustration of the ineptitude of Canadian High Command.⁴¹ Fortunately, the recent release of classified intelligence material sheds new light on the origins of the operation and in particular, the hasty manner in which it was carried out.

Between 27 July and 5 August, events in the Normandy bridgehead evolved at a rapid pace. During this period it became apparent to Allied High Command that American forces in the area of St. Lô had achieved a breakout in Operation Cobra, and as a result, the complexion of the Normandy campaign changed from static to fluid on the western end of the bridgehead. Unfortunately for Canadian troops to the east, their earlier attempts to punch a hole in the German line south of Caen had attracted the bulk of the German armour reserves to Verrières Ridge and forced 21st Army Group commander General Bernard Law Montgomery to modify his strategy. Realizing that the armoured weight of the German defence was too strong along Verrières, Montgomery decided late on the evening on 26 July to pin or "fix" the bulk of the German Panzer reserves on the ridge.⁴² As a result, units of the 2nd Canadian Corps were tasked with the unenviable role of "holding" the panzers in place.

While the Black Watch hurriedly reformed its depleted ranks, its sister battalions in the 5th

Canadian Infantry Brigade were committed to the holding operation south of Caen by way of a series of limited battalion-sized probing attacks around the towns of Tilly-la-Campagne and May-sur-Orne.⁴³ Despite the valiant, and at times desperate, efforts of the troops in these assaults, the fact remained that the Canadian holding attacks along Verrières Ridge did not succeed. From 27 July until 5 August, German High Command extricated all of its panzer divisions from the Canadian front in an effort to plug holes in front of the surging American and British armies. Allied High Command was painfully aware of this situation as ULTRA revealed that the 2nd, 21st and 116th Panzer, along with the 9th and 10th SS Divisions, had already moved west of the Orne River by the night of 4-5 August.⁴⁴ In addition, there were strong indications that 1st and 12th SS Panzer Divisions were pulling out too, headed either into reserve positions around Bretteville-sur-Laize or across the Orne River to face the British or Americans.⁴⁵ Neither scenario was in the prescribed plans, and Montgomery put pressure on First Canadian Army to prepare an attack for that afternoon. This was designed either to pin the two remaining panzer divisions to the Verrières Ridge sector or to take advantage of what appeared to be a wide open road to Falaise.⁴⁶

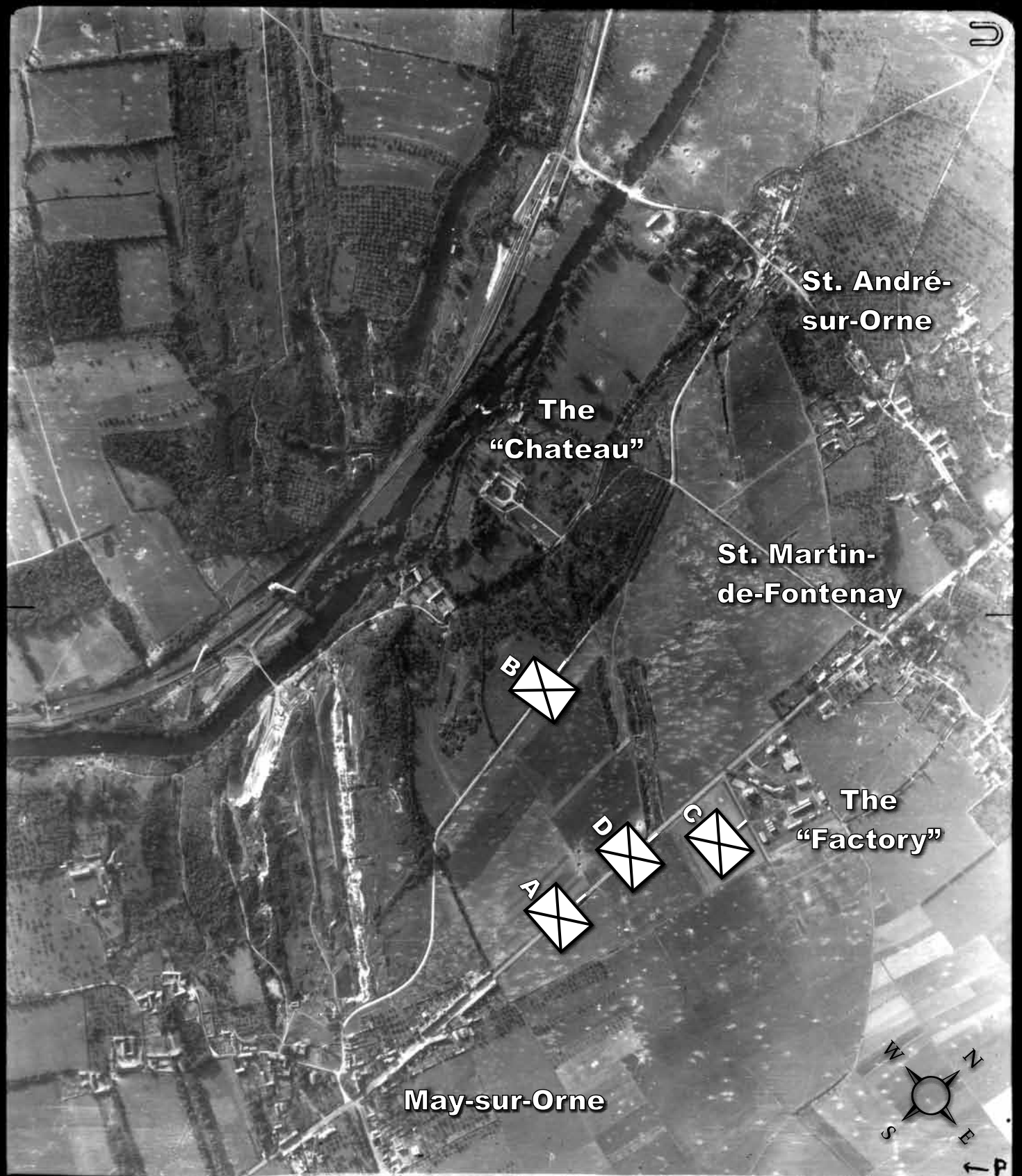
By 1944 ULTRA had become the “defining hand” in Allied intelligence. It was used to guide planning and decision-making, and both Army and Army Group commanders relied heavily on what it had to offer.⁴⁷ Although Montgomery, Crerar and Simonds were aware of ULTRA to varying degrees, security restrictions prohibited revealing the source of this information to lower levels of command. This meant that Foulkes, Megill and others at or below that level had to trust that higher command knew what was best.⁴⁸ In addition, the security regulations surrounding ULTRA made its utilization on the battlefield an art in itself. Winterbotham, who was responsible for the indoctrination of ULTRA users, made sure to press home the point that no action based solely on ULTRA could be taken which would indicate to German High Command that their most secret communications were compromised. As a result, there was always a pressing need to cover the source of the information and alleviate any suspicions about signals security lurking in the minds of the German High Command. The general approach taken by Allied High

Command was to utilize reconnaissance flights, patrols and battalion-level actions designed to either obtain identifications of enemy units or capture prisoners. These could then be used to foster the illusion that any subsequent decisions were generated by these efforts and not signals intelligence.⁴⁹

Despite its seemingly Delphic nature, there was no guarantee that the intelligence provided by ULTRA would be either exact, complete or more importantly, interpreted correctly. As a result, ULTRA proved to be a double-edged sword. If the information gleaned was appreciated correctly, and a “cost-efficient” victory ensued, then confidence in the abilities of the ULTRA-indoctrinated command or commander would result. However, if an incorrect appreciation, defeat or pyrrhic victory resulted, coupled with the inability to explain to subordinates the reasoning behind such an ULTRA-inspired or dictated decision, acrimony and non-confidence could ensue. This proved to be the case for Foulkes, Megill, and Mitchell as Allied High Command failed to draw the proper conclusions from ULTRA.

Unknown to Foulkes, his appearance at the front was prompted by a series of ULTRA decrypts that arrived at First Canadian Army Headquarters just before noon. These indicated that a pull out by the 1st SS had begun during the night.⁵⁰ Although ULTRA revealed that a staged withdrawal *was* indeed taking place, First Canadian Army Intelligence was not convinced of the currency of the ULTRA and suspected that the withdrawal may have been completed by midday. To confirm this supposition, Crerar’s Headquarters contacted 2nd Canadian Corps at 1330 hours and ordered their divisions to “push their necks out.”⁵¹ Within 15 minutes, Elliot Rodger (Chief of Staff at 2nd Canadian Corps) contacted Foulkes who came to Mitchell’s headquarters in person a short time later, and expanded the scope and nature of the operations.⁵² Due to the strict security regulations, the reasons behind this could not be disseminated to division, brigade or battalion levels; thus when Foulkes and Megill issued orders without putting Mitchell into the complete picture, their conduct was

Opposite: This air photograph, taken on 16 July 1944, shows the southern edge of St. Martin-de-Fontenay, the “Chateau,” the “Factory” as well as May-sur-Orne.



3 11 -00/550 16 JULY 44 F36//16 TASK SA 1137 30 000

influenced by the fact that they too were ignorant concerning the detailed motives underpinning the operation. It is quite likely that Foulkes and Megill were also similarly informed that the operation was imperative so that a “larger plan could be carried out.” Not only did they have to accept this explanation, but in turn, had to issue orders to their subordinates based on this ambiguous rationale. As a result, the impression left with Mitchell, particularly *post facto*, was that Foulkes and Megill were simply funnelling orders from high command. On the surface, this was indeed correct; not due to any failings of their own, but rather to the structural constraints of a highly secret source of intelligence of which they were unaware and to which all three were unwitting servants. Should the advance on May-sur-Orne have been a complete, or less-costly, success, it is likely that this impression would not have taken root with Mitchell. However, as the operation concluded with heavy losses and what appeared to be little or no tangible gain, the *prima facie* reasons given did not hold water for the ULTRA un-indoctrinated, leaving a misleading legacy of professional ineptitude for over six decades.

Notes

1. F.W. Winterbotham, *The ULTRA Secret* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1974).
2. The GCHQ releases are contained in the Public Record Office HW class which was created in 1995 and continues to be updated annually.
3. Both the British National Archives in the UK (NAUK) and Library and Archives Canada (LAC) have released intelligence summaries in War Office (WO) and Record Group 24 (RG 24) classes respectively.
4. Black Watch Archives (BWA) Black Watch War Diary (WD), July 1944. From its original cadre of 750 officers and men that entered into battle on 18 July, only six officers and 328 other ranks remained on the morning of 26 July.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. BWA WD Black Watch, July and August 1944. In the space of one week of fighting in Normandy, the Black Watch had been reduced to the strength 6 officers and 326 other ranks from its original cadre of 750 troops.
8. Terry Copp interview with Brigadier William J. Megill, 1988. Courtesy of Terry Copp.
9. BWA WD Black Watch, August 1944 and LAC RG 24 VOL 14,109 5 Canadian Infantry Brigade (CIB) Message log 5 August 1944 and BWA Interview with Stan Matulis March 2000; BWA Letter dated 26 September 1944 from Lieutenant-Colonel Frank Mitchell to Lieutenant-Colonel A. Wright. Mitchell told Wright that the “typical story is

the lad who saw the invasion pictures of D-Day in Loews (theatre) in Montreal, thought the time had come to join up and was killed at May-sur-Orne on 5 August – we got them with 6 to 8 weeks total service.”

10. BWA WD Black Watch August 1944 and BWA interview with Stan Matulis March 2000.
11. LAC RG 24 Vol.13,751 WD Second Canadian Division Ops Log 5 August Serial 3833 1030 hours.
12. LAC RG 24 Vol.13,751 WD Second Canadian Division Ops Log 5 August Serial 3830 1000 hours. On the eastern edge of Verrières Ridge, 4th Canadian Armoured Division was ordered to push its neck out as well. This they did but in a more cautious fashion than Foulkes’ Division. At 1530 hours word was received from Major-General Kitching to send a platoon strength fighting patrol from the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada into Tilly-la-Campagne to ascertain if the enemy was indeed still in the town and if so, in what strength. It was felt that due to the American success further to the west, there was “a real possibility” that the enemy might have started to, or were in the process of, withdrawing. While awaiting word from the Argyll’s patrol, a battalion-sized pursuit group was organized consisting of the Algonquin Regiment and two squadrons of the 29th Canadian Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment (South Alberta Regiment) with the standard allotment of supporting arms. The group was prepared and briefed to move at a moment’s notice to pursue a withdrawing enemy. At 1800 hours, the Argyll’s patrol returned after “severe fighting” and reported that the northern edge of Tilly was held in some strength with numerous machine guns in support. Kitching regarded this as nothing more than a determine rearguard and decided to launch a stronger attack on Tilly in an effort to keep pace with a fleeing 1st SS Panzer Division. This consisted of the Argylls with two troops of tanks, one troop of 17-pounder anti-tank guns, and all of the divisional artillery in support while two squadrons of the South Alberta’s launched a feint to the west of the village. In reserve were the Lincoln and Welland Regiment who were on-call to either support or consolidate any gains. The feint began at 2145 hours and succeeded in drawing a great deal of small arms fire and some anti-tank fire. The Argylls launched their attack at 2300 hours and found it tough going in the outskirts of Tilly with their lead company being “roughly handled by the Hun” and it was concluded that the town was still held in some strength. After ordering the Argylls to dig in and consolidate, the Lincs were told to stand down with the exception of one company that aided the Argylls in their attempt to consolidate their meagre gains. LAC RG 24 Vol. 14,156 WD 10th Canadian Infantry Brigade August 1944.
13. LAC RG 24 Vol.13, 751 WD Second Canadian Division Ops Log August 5th Serial 3836 1055 hours.
14. LAC RG 24 Vol.13, 751 WD Second Canadian Division Ops Log 5 August Serial 3842 1230 hours.
15. *Ibid.*
16. LAC RG 24 Vol. 14,109 War Diary 5 CIB Message Log 5 August 1944.
17. BWA WD Black Watch, 5 August 1944 and LAC RG 24 Vol.13751 WD 2nd Canadian Infantry Division Ops Log Serial 3848 1345 hours. At 1345 hours Brigadier Rodger (Simonds’ Chief of Staff at 2nd Canadian Corps) called Foulkes presumably with the news from First Canadian Army Headquarters that the Germans were pulling out and his division must keep contact.

18. WD Calgary Highlanders, 5 August 1944 and LAC RG 24 Vol. 13,751 Serial 3862 Ops Log 2nd Canadian Infantry Division 1345 hours 5 August message from 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade to 2nd Canadian Infantry Division. From this message it is clear that tank, machine gun and anti-tank support were only available once the Black Watch occupied May-sur-Orne. It seems that the quick nature of the operation precluded the participation of these support units in the opening phase leaving artillery as the only support for the Black Watch advance to May-sur-Orne.
19. There is some dispute as to whether artillery and tank support was laid on for that advance. According to C.P. Stacey in the *Victory Campaign: The Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer 1960), a squadron of the Fort Gary Horse accompanied the Black Watch up the road to May while Terry Copp in his work for *The Brigade: The 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade 1939-1945* (Stoney Creek, ON: Fortress Publications, 1992) states that tanks were unavailable to support the advance – neither source makes mention of artillery support at all. After checking the war diaries of the units involved along with the war diary and message logs of Brigade and Division it is clear that tank and anti-tank support was not organic to the Black Watch portion of the plan but was reserved for the later phases.
20. George Buch interview with author, January 1993.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*
23. LAC RG 24 Vol.13, 751 WD Second Canadian Division Ops Log 5 August Serial 3867 1620hrs and BWA WD Black Watch 5 August 1944.
24. BWA Letter from Mitchell to Colonel P.P. Hutchison, 25 October 1944.
25. LAC RG 24 Vol.13, 751 WD Second Canadian Division Ops Log 5 August 1944, 1620 hours.
26. BWA Interview with Stan Matulis March 2000.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Quoted in Rudolf Lehmann and Ralf Tiemann, *The Leibstandarte IV/1* (Winnipeg: Fedorowicz Publishing, 1993), p.181.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*
31. BWA WD Black Watch, 5 August 1944.
32. Stacey, *The Victory Campaign*, p.207. The casualties for the Black Watch on 5 August amounted to 70 in total with 20 being fatal including Majors Tom Anyon and Ronnie Bennett.
33. *Ibid.*
34. LAC WD 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade Message Logs 5 August 1944. One curiosity concerning the 5th CIB Message logs on this day is that no incoming or outgoing messages were recorded for nearly 7 hours between 1030 and 1730 hours.
35. *Ibid.*
36. BWA WD Black Watch, 5 August 1944
37. As Mitchell's tenure of command with the Black Watch increased so did his reputation for personal bravery and above all luck. On several occasions, the War Diarist made special mention of his skill and bravery in handling the battalion in action and his growing reputation for being one the luckiest men in the Regiment. Unfortunately, the War Diarist was also quick to record that the men who surrounded Mitchell sometimes did not benefit from his good fortune and hoped that some of Mitchell's luck may well rub off on all concerned.
38. BWA WD Black Watch, August 1944. The loss of Bennett, (the nephew of former Canadian Prime Minister R.B. Bennett) who had been instrumental in rebuilding the Battalion after the debacle on 25 July 1944 was a hard blow for the Regiment with many officers describing their shock and profound sadness upon learning of his death. Described by his superiors as an "excellent officer," who was "keen, capable," and "efficient," Bennett was considered to be a "mature type" who possessed "brains" and was "very reliable and steady." BWA 1st BN BWC CASF Confidential Memo for OC 1st Battalion the BW (RHR) of C (CAA) Concerning Officers sent forward on Draft from the Reserve Units of the Regiment.
39. BWA WD Black Watch, 5 August 1944
40. Author interviews with Captain N.E.G.H. Buch, January 1993, Lieutenant Joe Nixon, March 2004 and Lieutenant William MacKenzie Wood, April 2004. Mitchell was understandably wary of Megill's skills after the results of Operation Spring. After the capture of Verrières Ridge on 8 August, Mitchell tasked Lieutenant William Mackenzie Wood (who had joined the battalion hours before the attack on 25 July) to take the Black Watch CO over the same ground that the battalion had advanced during Operation Spring in an attempt to understand what the battalion was up against and what went wrong. His conclusions about the action led Mitchell to infer that Megill in particular acted as nothing more than a "funnel for orders" and as a result, he increasingly ignored orders from Megill and conducted operations in a fashion that he saw fit. This approach led to his eventual undoing as commanding officer of the Black Watch during a botched operation on the Albert Canal in late September.
41. Terry Copp, *The Brigade*; J.A. English, *The Canadian Army in Normandy: Failure in High Command* (New York: Praeger, 1991); Dominick Graham, *The Price of Command: A Biography of General Guy Simonds* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1993); David Bercuson, *Maple Leaf Against the Axis: Canada's Second World War* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1995) and David Bercuson, *Battalion of Heroes: The Calgary Highlanders in WWII* (Calgary: Calgary Highlanders Regimental Funds Association, 1994).
42. Imperial War Museum (IWM) Diary of Bernard Law Montgomery (BLM Diary) 26 July 1944.
43. LAC WD Calgary Highlanders, July and August 1944; WD Régiment de Maisonneuve, July and August 1944; WD 5th CIB, July and August 1944; WD Second Canadian Infantry Division, July and August 1944; WD 2nd Canadian Corps July and August 1944; WD First Canadian Army July and August 1944.
44. NAUK DEFE 3 XL4166, XL4378, XL4405, XL4413, XL4426, XL4437, XL4439, XL4474, XL4475, XL4493, XL4499, XL4509, XL4517, XL4529, XL4559, XL4597, XL4631, XL4682, XL4685, XL4688, XL4718;
45. PRO DEFE 3 XL4685 4 August 1617 hours "According to Flivo from I SS Panzer Korps 1130 hours 4 Aug, 12SS Panzer div. had been relieved by 272 division." XL4795 August 5 1040hrs "Pulling out of division (Strong indications) began during night according to Flivo I SS Panzer Division 0530hrs Aug 5." XL4803 August 5 1137hrs "Main body of 1 SS Panzer division relieved by 0350hrs Aug 5 according to Flivo I SS Panzer Korps"
46. IWM BLM Diary, 26 July 1944; English, *The Canadian Army in Normandy*, p.253.
47. NAUK WO 208/3575, Brigadier E.T. Williams, "Notes on the Use of ULTRA at 21 Army Group" (London, 1945). When Montgomery took over command of 21st

- Army Group in January 1944 he demanded immediate ULTRA service on "which he planned his battles." NAUK HW3/126 Letter from Hut 3 to all Commands 25 January 1944, Note 590.
48. NAUK WO208/3575, Brigadier E.T. Williams, "Notes on the Use of *ULTRA* at 21 Army Group" (London:1945).
 49. Winterbotham, *The ULTRA Secret*, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers,1974). A particularly revealing account of this came on 10 August when Sir Stewart Menzies (the head of British Intelligence) sent a note to Williams at 21st Army Group HQ concerning a BBC report that he felt may tip off the Germans to ULTRA. "Was disturbed to hear that a Wing Commander (Typhoons) referring to the German counter-attack directed on Avranches in BBC War Report after nine o'clock news Tuesday, said 'we had information that the enemy was probably going to counter-attack here.'...feel it is desirable to try and counter suspicions that may be lurking in enemy's mind. Suggest that statement incidentally but not obviously introduced into broadcast to effect that extensive and unhindered Tac R, volubility of prisoners nowadays by comparison with earlier stages of was and number of current documents captured in such fast-moving battle gives us better picture in such fast-moving battle gives us better picture of enemy than ever before, might do good. Grateful your comments and whether you could arrange." NAUK HW 14/109 Special Unnumbered signal to 21st Army Group. Strictly Personal for Williams from "C" 1320 hours, 10 August 1944
 50. NAUK DEFE 3 XL4795 5 August 1040 hours "Pulling out of division (Strong indications) began during night according to Flivo I SS Panzer Division 0530hrs Aug 5." XL4803 5 August 1137 hours "Main body of 1 SS Panzer division relieved by 0350 hours 5 August according to Flivo I SS Panzer Korps"
 51. Directorate of History and Heritage, Ottawa, Diary of Brigadier N.E. Rodger, 5 August 1944.
 52. BWA WD Black Watch, 5 August 1944. Security precautions for the distribution and dissemination of ULTRA were strict. Only commanding officers and their staffs from Army and Army Group were entitled to be 'indoctrinated' into ULTRA. Even Corps commanders (who had a sense that Army and Army Group had something up their sleeve) were not officially indoctrinated with the exception of 2nd Canadian Corps Commander Guy Simonds whose relationship with Montgomery and the role that he would play as defacto deputy Commander of First Canadian Army, allowed for his inclusion in the very exclusive ULTRA club. NAUK WO 208/3575, Brigadier E.T. Williams, "Notes on the Use of *ULTRA* at 21 Army Group" and Winterbotham, *ULTRA Secret*, p.183.

David O'Keefe is a Professor of History at John Abbott College in Montreal and the Regimental Historian with the Black Watch. His documentary about the Black Watch in Operation Spring (On a Ridge in Normandy) debuts on History Television in Canada in November 2006.