

25th July 2025

Introduction

It's 1630 hrs on 6 June 1944, Captain Foreman just arrived at his company harbour near Colleville. An hour earlier, he and the 11 lorries of C Platoon 90 Company RASC (90 Coy) disembarked the LSTs they had been stuck on for the past six days waiting to cross the English Channel to support Operation Overlord, the Anglo-American invasion of Normandy France.¹ Loaded in these 11 lorries are supplies for 6 Airborne Division currently operating to secure the British left flank over the Orne. These loads consist of 'pet[rol], [ammunition], R[oyal] E[ngineer] stores, and water', stores vital for the paras of 6 Airborne Division to resist a German counter attack.² Alas, despite the urgency of these stores, Major Cuthbertson, 90 Company's Officer Commanding has yet to make contact with 6 Airborne so C Platoon has little to do but wait for contact to be established.³ Thus, doubtless, the men of C Platoon, 90 Coy would have dismounted their lorries and pause. Likely, they would have appreciated being once more on dry land having spent the last few days being bounced up and down in the English Channel. A few kilometres away, the men of the 6th Airborne Division, the 3rd British Infantry Division, and 90 Coy's home brigade, 27th Armoured Brigade were, in the case of 6th Airborne, guarding the British flank, or in the case of 3 Div and 27 Armoured Bde, pushing inland to try to reach Caen.

Of course, the vital efforts of the 6th Airborne Division and the other fighting troops of the British Army in Normandy have been fairly well studied. Extensive critiques and

1. 90 Coy RASC War Diary, WO 171/2377, The National Archives UK (TNA), Kew, 1-6 June 1944 (hereafter cited as TNA WO 171/2377).

2. TNA WO 171/2377, S & T Report (June History Report) p 4.

3. TNA WO 171/2377, 6 June 1944.

justifications have been made on British infantry-armour co-operation, the aggression — or lack thereof — displayed by British troops, Allied inadequacies in armour, Montgomery's personality, tactics, vs firepower, etc. In short, we often discuss what went wrong or how we fought; however, what we often ignore is the critical question of what enabled us to fight. The work done by troops a few kilometers behind the front line is generally ignored as a side-show; yet, the work of ensuring the combat arms are well supplied with all the minutiae of war from ammunition, to food, to water, and other general supplies is what will make or break an army. Thus, in light of this gap, I hope to argue for the centrality of logistics in the British preference to expend firepower rather than lives. The British Army seems quite helpless compared to the might of the Wehrmacht until one looks at this Army from a systems approach. It is however, this systems approach that reveals the British Army's strengths.

To examine the centrality of logistics in British Army operations, we will follow Major and 90 Company RASC as they work their way across the English channel, landing in Normandy and following them as the units they support attempt to capture the city of Caen, and we will examine their role in the closure of the Falaise Pocket in August. Along the way, we will first examine how the British Army structured logistics administratively, before joining 90 Coy as they support the 27 Armoured Brigade as they partake in the Battle for Caen. After 27 Armoured Brigade is broken up at the end of July, we will see how 90 Coy integrated into a larger and longer supply column as they support infantry units through Normandy. Following this, we will have a brief discussion on historical methods and how they apply to military logistics.

Historiographical Review

The Battle of Normandy is of course, a well studied topic. Much has been written on this battle from books on the Second World War at large to publications that focus squarely on operations and tactics in Normandy. Curiously, there is also a second historiography which discusses logistics at large; however, the precise area of military logistics in Normandy is less well covered.

On WW2

Britain's Other Army: The Story of the ATS
Why the Allies Won

On Normandy

Clash of Arms

Overlord

Fields of Fire: Canadians in Normandy

Montgomery and 'Colossal Cracks': The 21st Army Group in Northwest Europe, 1944-45

The Normandy Campaign 1944

Gators of Neptune: Naval Amphibious Planning for the Normandy Invasions

Neptune: the Allied Invasion of Europe and the D-Day Landings

From the Normandy Beaches to the Baltic Sea: The North West Europe Campaign 1944-1945

Feeding Mars: The Role of Logistics in the German Defeat in Normandy, 1944

On Logistics

Supplying War: Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton

The Lifeblood of War: Logistics in Armed Conflict

A Great Feat of Improvisation

War of Supply: World War II Allied Logistics in the Mediterranean

Supplying the Troops: General Somervell and American Logistics in WWII

Military Logistics and Strategic Performance

The Story of the Royal Army Service Corps

Logistics and Modern War

Logistics Diplomacy at Casablanca: The Anglo-American Failure to Integrate Shipping and Military Strategy

Strategy and Logistics: Allied Allocation of Assault Shipping in the Second World War

The Science of the Soldier's Food

D Day to VE Day with the RASC

Tools of the Trade

A Note on My Sources

Overlord as Planned

Op Overlord was made up of a number of smaller operations. The seaborne landings were part of Op Neptune. This was the operation that established a 50 km wide logistical beachhead in Normandy. Neptune divided this section of Normandy coastline into five discontinuous beaches. The Allied right was anchored by Utah beach on the Cointine peninsula and the Allied left was anchored by the River Orne and the Caen Canal at Sword beach.

Between these flank beaches was Omaha, Gold, and Juno beach. The Americans were responsible for Utah and Omaha, whilst Anglo-Canadian forces were responsible for Gold, Juno, and Sword beaches. Each beach was subdivided into a 2 – 4 sub-beaches and assigned a letter from A to R. This study will primarily concern itself with the affairs of the troops of the 3rd British Infantry Division and 27 Armoured Bde that landed at Sword beach, specifically, Queen beach.

This study will also concern itself with the work done by 6th Airborne Division as part of Op Tonga. Their objective was to execute a series of airborne landings East of the River Orne, Caen Cannal, and Sword Beach to secure the British left flank. They were also to capture the only bridge crossing these water features North of Caen along a road running between Benouville and Ranville. All this was to be done during the night before the forces of Op Neptune landed. For approximately six hours, the paras of 6th Airborne would be cut off. Once the British landed at Sword beach, they would push inland, to Benouville, cross the bridges if they were still intact, and reinforce and resupply 6th Airborne. That is how the 11 lorries of C Platoon 90 Coy finds itself waiting in Colleville, around 4km away from Benouville waiting for their CO to link up with the Paras so that C Platoon could resupply 6th Airborne who would likely be running low on stores by this point. C Pl would then keep the paras supplied via Queen Beach until 6th Airborne's RASC unit could take over on D + 1 after landing at Juno.⁴

4. S & T History 90 Coy RASC Armd Bde-Assault an account of the work carried out during the first four days of the Invasion, June 1944, WO 171/2377, The National Archives UK (TNA), Kew, 1 (hereafter cited as TNA WO 171/2377 June History Report).

C Pl was not however, the only element of 90 Coy that landed on D - Day, B pl also landed. Their tasking to simply support 27 Armd Bde primarily in terms of their fuel requirements and to otherwise keep the Bde supplied. Their 13 lorries were mainly loaded with fuel for the Bde's Sherman tanks. As a curiosity, you may have noticed how B Pl was not preloaded with ammunition. This was because the Bde brought their own ammunition ashore firstly with the ammunition they carried in their tanks, but also with the ammunition they towed behind their tanks in *Porpoise* sledges.⁵ These sledges would be released shortly after the tanks made it ashore. Collecting the ammunition in these sledges also became one of B Pl's tasks in the first hours of the invasion.

A & D Pls remained in the UK to be sent across the channel at a later date. Thus was the dispositions 90 Coy on D-Day, two Pls would make their way ashore: one to support their parent unit, 27th Armd Bde and one help the Division to their left — 6th Airborne — until their own RASC unit could make it. Here, one can begin to see the role of 2nd line transport companies such as 90 Coy. They form the final interface between the wider supply system and the fighting units — it is these units that *deliver the goods* — however, what is it that these 2nd line transport units interface with?

Logistics Working Practices in Theory

5. TNA WO 171/2377 June History Report, 2–3.

The Structure of Supply

The Base Supply-Area (BSA)

L of C Area

Corps or GHQ Area

Div Area

Warehousing

Base Supply Depots

/* Figure out where to incorporate the fact that the British/Canadians focused on firepower over manpower. This means materiel is critical — A is for ammo, B is for beans, C cold water, D: diesel, E-everything else... */

/* Do I want to expand to include things like traffic control? Traffic jams on Sword Beach may have made the Br fail to capture Caen on D. 10m of dry beach between water and sea wall at high tide. Perhaps an MP or two would have solved the issue. IIRC, RAF beach sqn dealt with it. (See RAF beach sqn/det Was this a critical oversight? Not a lack of tenacity or anything else, but a good, old fashioned traffic jam VI's-a-vis Toronto at rush-hour caused the failure to take Caen? lol — what a way to win a war! */

Return to the moment

Operation

The Arrivals of A & B Plns

Operation Mitten 27–28 June 1944

British Artillery

Support to Operations

Figure out a name

Operation Aberlour

The Lead up to Charnwood

Pre Goodwood

Goodwood (18-20 Jul 44)

Post Goodwood

Criticality of Supply

Conclusion

Bibliography

90 Coy RASC War Diary, WO 171/2377. The National Archives UK (TNA), Kew.

S & T History 90 Coy RASC Armd Bde-Assault an account of the work carried out during the first four days of the Invasion, June 1944, WO 171/2377. The National Archives UK (TNA), Kew.