

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. 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.¹ 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.² 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 justifications have been made on British infantry-armour co-operation, the aggression — or

1. 90 Coy RASC War Diary, WO 171/2377, The National Archives UK (TNA), Kew, S & T Report (June History Report) p 4 (hereafter cited as TNA WO 171/2377).

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

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.

Historiographical Review

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

WTF are we doing here!?

Logistics Working Practices in Theory

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.