



CWM 19710261-5376, Beaverbrook Collection of War Art, Canadian War Museum

*Tanks Moving Up for the Breakthrough*, by Captain George Douglas Pepper.

## NORMANDY, 1944

Reviewed by Donald E. Graves

### **Stout Hearts: The British and Canadians in Normandy 1944**

by Ben Kite

Solihull, UK: Helion Press, 2014

466 pages, \$30.57

ISBN 978-1-911096-18-4

### **The Armored Campaign in Normandy, June-August 1944**

by Stephen Napier

Philadelphia, PA: Casemate, 2015

446 pages, \$32.95

ISBN 978-1-61200-324-5

### **21 Days in Normandy: Maj. Gen. George Kitching and the 4th Canadian Armoured Division**

by Angelo Caravaggio

Barnsley, Yorkshire, UK: Pen and Sword, 2014

362 pages, \$35.71

ISBN 1473870712, \$38.57

ISBN -10-1473878710

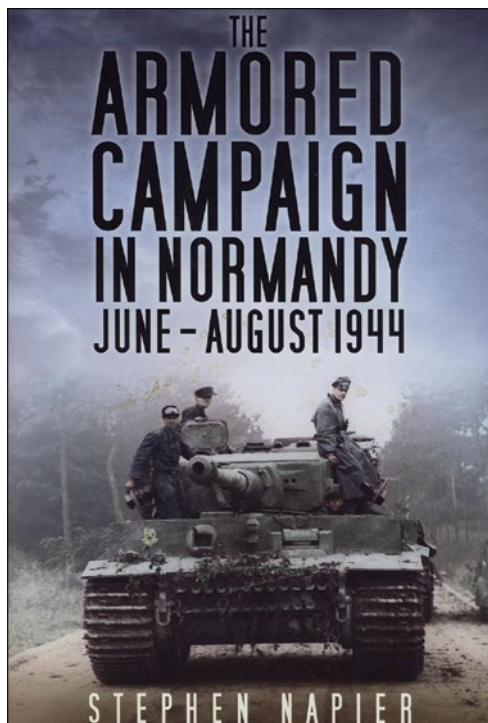
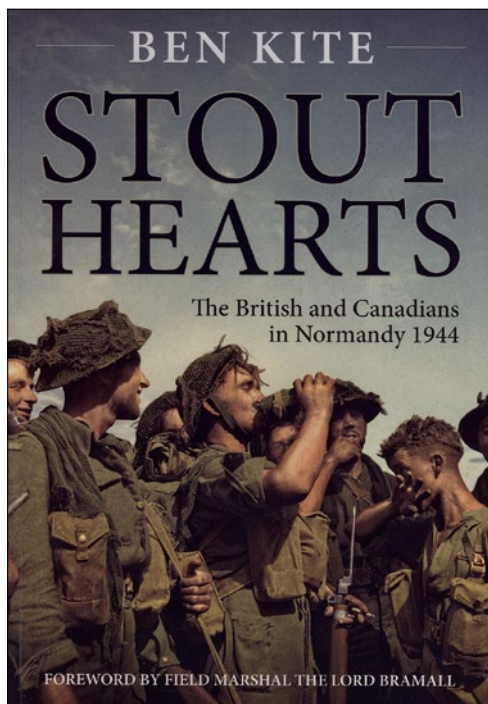
More than seven decades after it was fought, the Normandy campaign continues to attract the attention of military historians. Three recent titles offer new insights into one of the most important and hard-fought campaigns of the Second World War.

Beginning with *Stout Hearts: The British and Canadians in Normandy 1944*, the author, Ben Kite, is a serving officer in the British Army Intelligence Corps. His book is an attempt to enable the reader, particularly the *general* reader, "...to understand the battle of Normandy rather better, but also the Second World War more generally," by describing the "...equipment, tactics and procedures and how tired, frightened servicemen used them." (p. 18). Kite attempts to do this by analyzing and assessing each arm and service separately, first summarizing the applicable doctrine, and then illuminating it through the personal experiences of Normandy veterans. He begins with an introductory campaign overview and continues with chapters devoted, not only to the major arms, but also to the engineers, intelligence, and medical corps, and, finally, the air and naval forces. He includes an excellent chapter on the soldier's life in Normandy that discusses food, drink, and

recreation. Useful appendices contain orders of battle for land, air, and naval forces, as well as tables of organization, weapons capabilities, and samples of a typical fire plan, an intelligence report, and an operation order. The result is basically a manual on how the British army worked in Normandy, (p. 406), "...highlighting the complexity of land operations as well as the organizational efficiency required to make an Army operate effectively."

Unfortunately, it is very clear that, when Kite refers to "an Army," he is talking about the British army, *not* the Canadian army as, despite its title, there is very little Canadian content in this book. Kite quotes from about 150 eyewitnesses, but only three or four are Canadians. It is evident from his bibliography that he neither interviewed nor corresponded with a single Canadian veteran, nor does he seem to have consulted the manuscript papers or memoirs of any Canadian veterans in the archives and institutions at which he researched. Kite certainly did not research in the Library and Archives of Canada in Ottawa, although he made abundant use of the LAC's image collection, which is available online. The author does list several books by Canadian historians in his bibliography, but he does not seem to have made much use of them.

Still worse, it appears that Kite does not understand the major difference between the British and Canadian soldier—that every Canadian soldier who fought in Normandy was a volunteer, because Canada did not send conscripts overseas until the last months of the war. The Canadian soldier may have worn a similar uniform to his British counterpart (although of better cut and cloth), he may have nominally spoken the same language and used the same weapons and doctrine, but to say that the Canadian fighting man "...brought in to the Army the cynicism of the factory floor" is to do him a grave disservice. I could go on in this vein at some length. I could, for example, talk about the 632 CANLOAN junior officers who served in 63 different British combat units and suffered a 75-percent casualty rate during the war. I could point out that recent research (based upon a British army source, I hasten to add) demonstrates that the two Canadian infantry divisions in Normandy spent more time in "intense combat" conditions than their British counterparts in 21st Army Group, and they suffered cor-



respondingly heavier casualties.<sup>1</sup> I could emphasize that Kite seems unaware that three of the twenty-one Canadian infantry battalions that fought in Normandy were francophone, a type of unit that was not found in the British army.<sup>2</sup> I could do all these things—and a lot more—but the purpose of a critical book review is not to smite an erring author with the jawbone of an ass, but gently, to point out the errors or weaknesses in his or her work. In sum, the contents of *Stout Hearts: The British and Canadians in Normandy 1944* do not accurately reflect its title because it really is a book—and a good one despite my comments above—about how the British army made war in 1944, and I recommend it to readers interested in that subject.

The criticism of ignoring the Canadian contribution to the Normandy campaign cannot be leveled against Stephen Napier, a Briton living in Australia who devoted, he tells us, five years to working on his subject. The result is *The Armored Campaign in Normandy*, a title that covers the tank units of all combatants with the objective (p. 8) of discussing operations, "...from the perspective of the armored units and their generals, commanders and tank crews." In my opinion, Napier admirably accomplishes his objective. Following an introductory chapter on the experience of tank crews on D-Day, he continues with a most interesting and informative chapter on "Fighting the Tank." He then surveys Normandy operations in chronological order and they are all there—*Perch*, *Goodwood*, *Epsom*, *Cobra*, *Totalize*, and the rest. Napier takes particular pains to analyze British tank losses in the ill-fated Operation *Goodwood*, and reduces the number considerably from the oft-quoted figure of 400-500 vehicles lost. It is encouraging to see that Napier, unlike Kite, actually seems to have done research in this country, and has used Canadian

operational orders, quartermasters' returns, and intelligence summaries, as well as a number of recent and reliable secondary sources.<sup>3</sup>

The result is that the *Armored Campaign in Normandy* is a succinct overview of that aspect of the campaign. It will be useful for Commonwealth readers who are not as familiar with armoured operations in the American sector of the beachhead as they are with those in the eastern sector. Concerning the Commonwealth sector,

## BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

I noted with interest that Napier reproduces (p. 178) a terrain “going” map created by First U.S. Army, which describes the ground south of Caen as, “...generally less favorable for the employment of large armored units.” Actually, that assessment is not accurate, as the ground south of Caen is very good tank country, but, unfortunately, what is good tank country also happens to be good anti-tank country, as British, Canadian, and Polish tank crews discovered to their sorrow. Napier’s conclusion on the campaign (p. 427) is, in my opinion, very apt. Although he gives credit to “the bravery and sacrifice” of the tank crews, as well as the soldiers of other arms, Napier feels that victory, “...came to the Allies in the end through their dominance of the air and their superiority in firepower, numbers, logistics and code breaking skills.” I agree with that assessment, but I think that perhaps firepower—in the form of a superb artillery arm—should receive more credit than is perhaps emphasized by the author. The best testament to that assertion is provided by those who were ‘on the receiving end.’ Consider the comments of *Generalmajor* Heinrich von Lüttwitz, commanding 2nd Panzer Division, who stressed in a report on his formation’s battle experiences in July 1944, that:

The incredibly heavy artillery and mortar fire (of the enemy) is something new, both for the seasoned veterans of the Eastern Front and the new arrivals from the reinforcement units..... The average rate of fire on the division sector per day is 4,000 artillery rounds and 5,000 mortar rounds. This is multiplied many times before an enemy attack..... The Allies are waging war regardless of expense.<sup>4</sup>

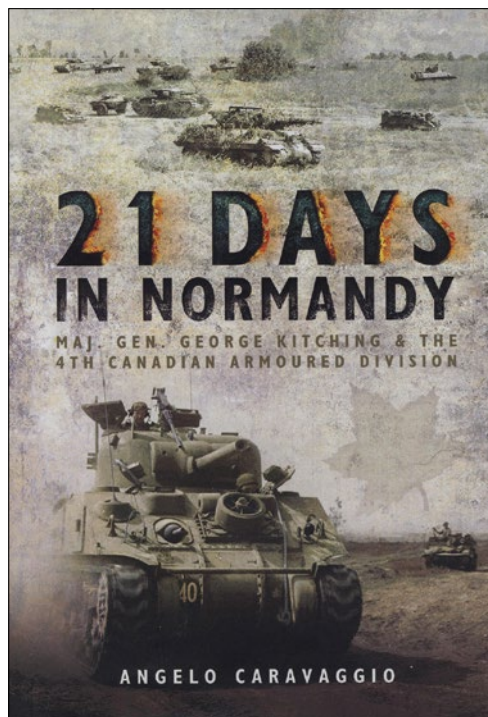
I do have one criticism of *The Armored Campaign in Normandy*, and that is that Napier’s maps are inadequate. This book is largely concerned with the operational and tactical levels of war, levels where good, clear, and detailed maps are absolutely necessary. Unfortunately, the book fails in this respect, and I was forced several times while reading it to consult better maps in other publications to fully comprehend his text. I did note (with no little amusement) that the best maps in the book are from the Canadian official history, *The Victory Campaign*. Napier states that these maps were “adapted” from the originals, but I can see no evident “adaptation” or changes from the coloured versions in the official history, and, in fact, Napier’s versions of these maps appear to be rather crude black-and-white scans.

Angelo Caravaggio, the author of *21 Days in Normandy: Maj. Gen. George Kitching & The 4th Canadian Armoured Division*, was inspired to write this book after being present on an April 1990 battlefield tour of Normandy organized by 4 Tactical Air Force. Three prominent veterans were on that tour: Major-General (ret’d) George Kitching of the Canadian army; Air Vice-Marshal (ret’d) J.E.

‘Johnnie’ Johnson of the RAF, and *Sturmabführer* (colonel and *definitely* retired) Hubert Meyer, in 1944 the chief of staff of the 12th Waffen SS Panzer Division. I was one of the DND historians on that tour, and although I do not recall meeting Caravaggio, I must have done so.<sup>5</sup> I did, however, get to know George Kitching better, as I interviewed him a number of times for my book, *South Albertas: A Canadian Regiment at War*. I may have been the last historian to interview Kitching, or it may have been Caravaggio. For this reason, I was interested in *21 Days in Normandy*, which really has two subjects: Major-General Kitching, and the 4th Canadian Armoured Division, which Kitching commanded in Normandy.

Let us start with the 4th Armoured Division... It was initially raised as an infantry division in June 1940, and for the next two years, it was scattered in garrisons across Canada, with the composition of its brigades undergoing constant change. Finally, in December 1941, it was concentrated at the Debert Military Camp in Nova Scotia, but severe winter weather hampered training efforts above the unit level. In February 1942, Major-General Frank Worthington assumed command, and he began to convert the 4th into an armoured division, but a shortage of vehicles and instructors prolonged the process, and the new tankers had only reached the level of crew training by August 1942, when the division was embarked for the UK, leaving its tanks in Canada. Unfortunately, it was nearly four months before a trickle of AFVs began to reach the division, but, just as the first tanks arrived, the formation underwent a major re-organization which resulted in two of its six “armoured” regiments being stripped from it, while a third was converted into a new entity called the “armoured reconnaissance regiment,” about which nothing was known. A full complement of *Ram* tanks did arrive by the spring of 1943, but a shortage of facilities again restricted training to the unit level throughout most of the following summer. It was not until October and November 1943

that the 4th Division carried out brigade and divisional level exercises, culminating in a two-day battle with the 9th British Armoured Division. It resumed unit training over the following winter, which not only saw the division receive new tanks (*Shermans* and *Stuarts*), but also experience a change of command, as Kitching replaced Worthington. Unfortunately for Kitching, he did not get an opportunity to do any serious formation training, as in May 1944, his division was ordered to waterproof its vehicles, after which they could only be moved short distances. And that was the sum of the division’s preparation for battle... When it landed in Normandy in late-July, the 4th Canadian Armoured Division—just over four years after it had been raised, and 27 months after it had been converted to armour—had undergone exactly five days of brigade and divisional-level exercises!



The exclamation point is warranted, because knowing the 4th Division's preparation for battle (or lack thereof) is necessary to understanding the problems it experienced during its first three weeks in action—the *21 Days* of Caravaggio's focus. The author gives a very good account of how the formation operated during that period at the staff and senior command level, but perhaps less so at the unit level. As Caravaggio notes (p. 191), this inexperienced formation and its leadership, "...were placed under significant stresses," but, eventually, "...proved resilient to these stresses, allowing them to function effectively in very difficult circumstances." The 4th Armoured Division, the last Canadian formation to enter battle, has often been derided as the 'poor step-sister' of the wartime army. Historians have been critical of its uneven performance in Normandy without balancing that criticism with a discussion of how well the division performed after it had "...shaken down," and its component parts began to work effectively. One might well add that, compared to the record of this raw Canadian formation, the veteran 7th British Armoured Division of North Africa fame, did not do all that well in Normandy. The result was that the commanding officers of both divisions were relieved.<sup>6</sup>

This brings us to Major-General George Kitching and the circumstance surrounding Lieutenant-General Guy Simonds's decision to relieve him of command. Caravaggio takes care to point out that many of the factors that eventually led to Kitching being fired were beyond that officers' control, and not a few of them were actually the result of decisions made by Simonds himself. The author stresses the fact that, after Brigadier E.L. Booth was killed on 14 August, Simonds delayed his replacement with Brigadier Robert Moncel for a crucial five days, and thus, is more than a little responsible for the 4th Armoured Brigade's rather variable record during that time. Caravaggio suggests that Brigadier H. Lane, the CRA of 4th Division, might have replaced Booth, but that Kitching did not want to remove "effective leadership" from his artillery units (p. 188).

Actually, an ideal replacement for Booth was available in the form of Lieutenant-Colonel G.D. de S. Wotherspoon of the South Alberta Regiment, under command of the 10th Infantry Brigade. Wotherspoon was one of the most 'armour-minded' officers in the army. He had graduated from the Royal Armoured Corps' Senior Officers' School at the top of his class in 1942, and had then joined the directing staff until Worthington handpicked him to take over and train the new armoured reconnaissance unit in the 4th Division. Kitching had actually raised the question of having Wotherspoon replace any senior officer casualties in the 4th Armoured Brigade, but had backed off after Brigadier J.L. Jefferson, commanding 10th Brigade, had strongly resisted losing the man. Being the divisional commander, perhaps Kitching should have been more insistent, but George Kitching was a true gentleman, as well as an officer, and he let it go.

Unfortunately, Kitching was working for a general who was considerably less sensitive to the wishes of his subordinates. Never mind the fact that Simonds constantly interfered with Kitching's

division during those crucial three weeks. Never mind that Simonds ordered most of the 4th Armoured Division away from the actual Falaise Gap, allowing a considerable portion of the trapped German armies to escape. The fact was that Lieutenant-General Guy Simonds conceived perfect plans, and, if they did not work, it was never *his* fault, but that of his subordinates, who failed to execute them properly. Whether Kitching was at fault or not – and Caravaggio makes a very strong case that he was not – Simonds was not going to take the blame for failures. "Someone," Major General Stanislaw Maczek of the 1st Polish Armoured Division remarked, "had to pay for the broken pots," and George Kitching got the bill.<sup>7</sup>

Although the reader may find that the author's inclination to staunchly defend Kitching lacks objectivity, *21 Days in Normandy* is an important book. It reveals a great deal about the intricacies of higher command in the wartime army, and it emphasizes the operations of a single division. We need this type of analysis, and this one can take its place in a constantly-growing body of historical literature about Canadian soldiers in Normandy, alongside such recent efforts as Marc Milner's *Stopping the Panzers*, and Brian Reid's *No Holding Back*. I recommend it to all readers interested in our army's operations in Normandy.

Donald E. Graves is the co-author, with W.J. McAndrew and M.J. Whitby, of *Normandy 1944: The Canadian Summer*, and the editor of *Blood and Steel: The Wehrmacht Archive: Normandy 1944*. He has also written three regimental histories that cover in detail the experiences of a Canadian armored regiment, artillery regiment, and infantry battalion in the Normandy campaign.

### NOTES

1. See Terry Copp, "To the Last Canadian? Casualties in 21st Army Group," in *Canadian Military History*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (Winter 2009), pp. 3-6.
2. Those francophone units being Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal, Le Régiment de la Chaudière and Le Régiment de Maisonneuve. I should add that the 4th Medium Regiment, RCA, was also a francophone unit, while the Sherbrooke Fusilier Regiment (CAC) was largely francophone.
3. Napier, however, puts more faith in Canadian unit war diaries than I do. In one armoured regiment that fought in Normandy, and with which I am very familiar, bringing the war diary up to date was a standard punishment for erring junior officers. For this reason, its accuracy cannot be entirely trusted.
4. Battle Experience of Recent Operations by 2nd Panzer Division, First Canadian Army Daily Intelligence Summary, No. 37, 3 August 1944, contained in D.E. Graves, (ed.), *Blood and Steel: The Wehrmacht Archive, Normandy 1944* (Barnsley, 2013), pp. 22-30.
5. When not occupied with my official duties, I spent much of my time on this tour with Meyer because I speak some German. I was also frequently called upon to 'corral' the numerous CF-18 pilots with us, as they were frequently led (quite willingly) astray by "Johnnie" Johnson, the top-scoring Commonwealth fighter ace of the Second World War.
6. The new commander of 7th Armoured Division was, in turn, also relieved of his command for the poor performance of his formation.
7. Stanislaw Maczek, *Avec mes Blindés* (Paris, 1967), p. 219. The translation is mine.