

Major Fussell, Reel 1. Can you tell me which unit you were in in 1942 when the Dieppe raid took place?

Number four commander.

Can you tell me how you came to join the commandos in the first place?

I volunteered. I was on Boy Service. I joined the army in 1939 at the age of 16. I came onto manned service in 1941.

I was with the RAFC when I came on to manned service. I was to have gone to the Third Infantry Division. The posting didn't come about. I was at the holding depot of the RAFC, which was at that time based in Woking in Surrey.

During the period that I was there, which was two months, various officers from the commanders came around on a recruiting drive, showing film shows, lecture tours of commando activities. In those days, primarily, it was the Norwegian actions at Lofoten, Vagsoy, and various other islands around the Norwegian fjords. To me, as a young lad of 17.5, this seemed exciting. I was quite enthusiastic. Rather than staying in a depot, I wanted to see not necessarily action, but I wanted to be an active part of the British Army for which I joined.

There were several other volunteers. I was only about one of, I think, 17 from our group that were accepted for commando training. I was interviewed by the then brigade major, Major Dunning White of the 8th Hussars. I went up to Achnacarry for my commando training and back to Number Four Commando, to Lord Lovat's, after I'd passed my commando training up there.

I was up there with the police intake, a lot of the volunteers from the Metropolitan police and various other constabularies were sent up there. The majority of these ex-policemen, as it were, who were transferred to Number Four Commando, or volunteered for Number Four Commando. Some went to Number Three. Some went to Number Six.

Those that were fluent in other languages were asked if they could go into Number 10. But I personally went to Number Four. Because of my clerical experience, being a boy soldier, I was trained as a clerk in the RAFC.

I was elected to go into the ordinary room. I hadn't been in the ordinary room very many days when there was a notice on the board asking for volunteers for parachute training. We were to get another two shilling of day. Well, this suited me nice. I was a young lad and I wanted as much money as I can lay my hands on.

So I volunteered for parachute training. I went to Ringway. Did my necessary drunk jumps, qualified with my parachute badge, came back to commando, looking for the next lot of training and courses that one could go on to qualify for more pay, when they were asking for volunteers for special operations. Because no one would be told precisely when these operations were taking place, where they were going to take place.

But they always gave me the opportunity to volunteer, even although you had volunteered for the commandos. The whole commando didn't go on these operations. There were just a selected few.

Now full commando at that time, I think, was about 480 to 500 strong. But yet only about 250 were selected to go on the operation.

This is the Dieppe raid?

This is the Dieppe raid. Because this took place in August '42, 19 of August was the actual date it took place. But about six weeks to two months before the raid, we were sent on troop training to various parts. Most of it was done on the Devon coast and was Exercise Brandy Ball, where we were doing a lot of, well, landings, if you can call them landings.

In fact, they weren't landings, because the coast along that beach was so rocky that a lot of storm boats and dories and various other landing craft that we were using were just smashed on the rocks. It wasn't very successful. So we thought the whole exercise would be called off because we were sent back to the Seaford area to continue our training.

About the early part of August, we'd continued training on a troop basis. I was in F troop at this time, but attached to the ordinary room. Whether you were a cook, bottle washer, batman, driver, whatever, you were a soldier first and a tradesman afterwards. Lord Lovat did the unit training, but each troop did their own troop training.

Well, when it came to the actual operation itself, they told us this is going to be a big job, and it was only the officers who were briefed. Remember, I was only a private soldier at this time. So as far as we were concerned, there were no briefing until we boarded the assault ship. HMS Prince Albert, I think, was the name of the ship.

When we boarded that ship, Lovat then told us precisely where we were going and what we were going to do. Our training that we had done exactly fitted in with what we were about to do.

What did he tell you?

Well, initially, we were going to be split into two groups. Derek Mills-Roberts was the senior major who was going to lead one group. This was Number Four Commando. The other half, the second group, was going to be led by Colonel Lord Lovat himself, which contained three sections of three troops, plus the headquarters.

One was going to land near Berneval. Derek Mills-Roberts was going to land near Berneval. We were going to land about two or three miles to the west of a place called [PLACE NAME] We were going to be on the mouth of the river Saane.

Now Derek Mills-Roberts' group had the enormous task of going up the cliff. They had the task of going up where we were expecting to grow up as a result of our training down on Exercise Brandy Ball on the Devon Dorset coast.

But we were lucky in Lovat's. We were on the extreme flank where the banks of the river Saane was flat, but slushy on account of the water being like mud flats and very tall grass. Hard going, because we went the long way around. Mills-Roberts went direct. We went the long way around because we were going to come in from the back.

Our landing was about 4:45 in the morning. By the time we went across, it was about 7:00, 8 o'clock. There was still quite a lot of firing.

But we were lucky in that we had a dry landing. We didn't get the unfortunate opposition, as Number Three Commando got further up, because they got very badly mauled. In fact, I think out of about 22 landing craft-- I think, I'm not sure-- but I believe only about five actually touched down. The others were hit. Peter Young, who was the senior officer, he took the crowd from Number Three Commando.

We were very lucky where we were on the extreme opposite flank, further away. We could hear all the battle going on further up. We heard what was happening with the Canadians in Dieppe. A tremendous noise was going on there.

But we didn't know what results. Our task was to put out of action the coastal guns. I believe there were six in two batteries. There was a two gun battery behind [PLACE NAME] There was a three gun or a four gun battery near Berneval.

They were fairly heavily defended. They had barbed wire surrounding the gun sites. They had flak towers with light anti-aircraft weapons, pom poms, tremendous number of machine gun posts and sniper posts, minefields all around it. Minefields didn't deter us at all because the Germans were very clever in a methodic way by signposting them, *achtung minen*.

[LAUGHING]

So we, like everybody else, came well clear of them. Where there were barbed wire entanglements, gaps were blown into the barbed wire by the use of Bangalore torpedoes. But we used to use the aluminum ladders. We'd sling them across the barbed wire entanglements and run across it the same as we were doing in training, no problem at all.

The leading troops got pretty badly hit. F troop itself, the OC that let us in, he was killed. The subaltern was killed. The sergeant major took over, and he was killed.

This is where Pat Porteous came in. He was the liaison officer who was liaising between the two groups. He came over, and because there were no officers, no NCOs, no warrant officers or anything to lead us, I mean, apart from Lovat, because he was further ahead of us, Pat Porteous led the charge against the gun batteries. Now he, himself, was hit in the hand by a German defender. He killed this German defender and several others.

Cunningham was another man who attacked one of these gun batteries. I can't remember the names of all these other fellows. Anyway, the guns that Mills-Roberts were after, he was successful in dealing with them. The ones that Pat Porteous was after, he was successful in dealing with them.

But he fell. He got shot again in the thigh. He got carried back to base. Mills-Roberts, meantime, and the rest of, I think it was A troop, B troop, and F troop, and the headquarters, went in behind Berneval, into the wooded area behind, and led a rear attack.

Now this all completed by 9 o'clock, 10 o'clock. We were given orders to withdraw back to the beach. Instead of going the long way around, the guns had been put out of action, the dead had been collected and placed near the guns. The Union Jack was draped, I can recall, over the British dead.

There weren't very many German survivors. Most of them were killed. There were very, very few survivors, who were ushered down the gully where we were. We went down the route that Mills-Roberts had taken to attack the other guns. So we went up one way and down the most direct way.

Did you see any French civilians whilst you were there?

A few, there was a young cyclist, a boy, and an elderly man, a cook. Was he a cook, butcher? I don't know. He had one of these cook's caps on and a butcher's apron and pinstripes, the smock. I don't know whether he was a cook or a butcher.

He spoke to some of the officers that could speak French. I mean, I couldn't speak French at that point. I still can't speak French, anyway, a few perhaps lewd phrases or something. But they were about the only people that I saw. Because I think a lot of them when they heard the banging going around, they were more concerned with keeping their heads down.

What was the demeanor of the ones that you saw?

Very friendly, astonished, they couldn't understand, obviously, they couldn't understand what was going on, especially when the first noises were taking place. But when they realized that it was British forces coming in, they thought that this was an invasion. Hearing all the banging going on and the bombing going on in Dieppe, they really did.

I mean, there was a tremendous amount of noise going on, because we had Spitfire sorties flying over and machine gunning, well, any defenses that they could spot from the air. There were, I think, Boston bombers. They dropped quite a number of bombs. They did a number of sorties.

We had a couple of destroyers in our support, the Brocklesby, Brocklebank, something like that, and then there was a Polish destroyer which was also in support of our landing, the Salazar, or Salzar, or some such name.

What did you think of the defense that the Germans put up?

Very solid. As I say, where we attacked, we were very lucky in that we had virtually an unopposed landing. It was only after we got onto the beach that the Germans realized that we were where we were. Because all the noise was coming over to our left, more to the east, and the other groups, Mills-Roberts, he and his group, he was Number One group of

Four Commando. We were Number Two group of Four Commando.

But the ones further in, Three Commando landed to the other side of Dieppe. We landed on one side of Dieppe, Three Commando with Peter Young, and Durnford-Slater, they landed at a place called Berneval, I think, and they got hammered. They were the people who, unfortunately, out of about 22 landing craft, I think only about five eventually landed.

We were lucky in that we didn't lose any landing craft as such because we had an unopposed landing. After, they went back and stood back in what they called the boat pool. We transferred from the Prince Albert, by the way, before we got on to the landing craft. We were on the Prince Albert all the way from UK, New Haven. Then we transferred over onto landing craft about 10 miles off shore.

Once we scrambled down the scramble nets and into the landing craft, we went underway. Of course, the beach that we could see in the not quite dawn, there is a false dawn that breaks around about 3:45, 4 o'clock in the morning, we were still 8, 9, 10 miles away. But the smoke and the oh, I suppose it's the shellfire that was coming from the port of Dieppe, covered the whole thing in, like, a fog.

You could barely see any outlines until we actually hit the shore. We saw the cliffs, but we didn't land at the cliffs. We landed as the cliffs petered out into the mouth of the river Saane.

We evacuated the area around about 9 o'clock, half past 8, 9 o'clock in the morning, by which time the landing craft came back to pick us up. We went back to New Haven. We got back to New Haven about half past 3, 4 o'clock in the afternoon.

So our day was a long day, an exciting day, well, certainly for us. For others, not so very pleasant.

What was your own personal objective?

Our personal objective was to stay in-- my small section that I was part of was in the wooded area behind the battery of guns, with F Troop, or part of F Troop. My personal intervention wasn't to attack the guns. But if there was any machine gun posts, then we were to deal with them. If there were any snipers, we were to deal with them. If we heard any firing coming from an alien area, I mean, we knew where our troops were because we were given fairly good briefings on board the Albert as to exactly where we were going and what we were going to do, the outline of the woods, and the models of the area that we were going to be involved in.

Did you hear of any breaches of security with regard to the Dieppe raid?

The breaches of security, yes. The breaches of security we heard, we had an idea that we would be accompanying the Canadians. Unfortunately, in the area where we were stationed, around Seaford, there was also a lot of Canadian units stationed. I think the Hamilton light infantry, Princess Patricia's Canadian light infantry, and the Le Chateau regiment, they were boasting of the fact days before the Dieppe raid, that there was a big operation coming up. I think I'm right in saying the word Dieppe was mentioned in pubs.

As we were not told anything about Dieppe itself, because we weren't told that we were going to land at Dieppe. We were told we were going to go on to Operation Jubilee, which was the name of the operation that was given to the Dieppe raid and our target would be Varengeville, or [NON-ENGLISH] and Varengeville. Varengeville was where one battery was and [NON-ENGLISH] was the coastal resort where the other boundary was.

So you had no inkling that you were going to Dieppe until you were on the ship?

Until we were on the ship, we had no inkling. But we did hear the Canadians talking about what they were going to do. Now we didn't connect, until we were on the ship, we didn't connect that we were going to be part and parcel of it.

We heard that the first United States Rangers battalion were going to come with us to have a look see. They later went

to-- when I say later, I mean before the Dieppe raid, they went up to Achnacarry to do the commando training. I think that these people from the first United States Ranger battalion, nice enough guys though they are, some of them had seen service in the Pacific. When they went to Achnacarry, they were quite astonished to find that we were using live ammunition in training.

[LAUGHING]

I think they suffered just as many casualties up there as they did at Dieppe. But yes, they got their baptism of fire when they went there to Dieppe. But I, myself, I mean, I was working in the orderly room in Number Four Commando. I saw maps, I must admit. I knew. And when you see on the map, you can't deny it.

But we were all sworn to secrecy and we all had these little identification passes with a Red Cross. It was a green card with a Red Cross on it. You had your identification there.

Yes, in the orderly room, I mean, I used to see. I used to type the damned operation orders and the administrative instructions. So I knew what was going on.

But my colleagues, people with whom I used to work with, unless they were exclusively in the know, the only people that were in the know were the people who were immediately associated with us, and of course, the officers that used to do the dictation. Because I was a shorthand writer, so I used to take the minutes of meetings, along with another gentleman called Cliff Luff.

We saw the operation orders. We saw the battle plans. We saw the maps. So we knew precisely where we were going.

But the actual telling the people exactly what they were going to do in-- when I say in public, I mean, telling everybody the briefing that we were given, was when we went to the landing ship Prince Albert.

This was the first time, I think, that you were in combat for real. Between then and D-Day, were you involved in any other action?

No, no.

Can you tell me the preparations you made for D-Day and the personal part that you played in it?

Yes. Now after the Dieppe raid, the commandos were sorted out. We were originally a SS brigade. When the Royal Marine Commandos joined the SS brigade, we got so unwieldy that combined operations headquarters decided to form four commando brigades. From being known as the DSS brigade, we became the first special service brigade, or first commando brigade. Then there were three others, two commando brigade three and four.

Now first commando brigade consisted of, then, three army commando, four army commando, six army commando, 45 Royal Marine commando. Now they were all part of the first SS brigade later to become the first commando brigade. We did an awful lot of training from July to August '42 right through till D-Day itself on the 6th of June 1944.

Volunteers were being called from these commandos for other operations. There were operations on the Island of Sark. There were operations in Madagascar. There were operations in the Middle East.

But they were all individual volunteers who had gone to these various other theater of operations. But I personally wasn't involved in any of them. Because when the then brigadier of the SS brigade, Brigadier Laycock went to North Africa at the end of 1942, his place as the brigade commander was taken by Lord Lovat, on promotion from lieutenant colonel to brigadier.

He was joined by a lot of officers from Number Four Commando into brigade headquarters. And of course, a lot of the orderly room staff followed him as well. His intelligence officer was Captain Tony Smith, ADC Smith. His DAQMG, Major Max Harper Gow who is now a titled man, he is Maxwell Harper Gow he followed him. A lot of the staff, the

orderly room staff, came up as well.

We moved from Dorchester to Cowdray House in Midhurst. The whole of 1943, we did training in various functions. We even did jungle training because we thought we were going to be nominated for Burma. About three commando brigade went to Burma. Two commando brigade went to the Middle East and Italy. It left numbers one and four commandos in the United Kingdom for training for the so-called second front.

Volunteers, again, were asked-- individual volunteers were asked for operations to assist the boffins, where they used to do nightly raids onto the coasts of France, Holland, and Belgium, bringing back samples of sand, particles of water, any underwater obstacles that they were able to discover, either at high tide or low tide, study of aerial photographs, units of the aerial photographic interpretation unit used to study any changes in the outline of the defenses and the areas that were being looked at by SHAEF headquarters.

In September '43, we had an exercise called Harlequin, or we participated in an exercise called Harlequin. This was an exercise conducted by southeast command headquarters around the Kent coast. It was a bluff to see how quickly the Jerry could presumably, this is what we were told, it was about to see how quickly the Germans could muster their armored forces on the continent. We were located around the Dover area.

We kept going over from these MTBs, Because the MTB pens were in Dover. We kept going over into the channel. We did this for about 17 nights.

Major Fussell, Reel 2. You were just saying about trying to provoke the Germans in the Straits of Dover.

Yes, well, this was part of the exercise Harlequin, where our plan was to go across with these MTBs, to see if we can get across to the Channel ports, Dunkirk, Calais, without being seen. But obviously, such a short stretch of water, and we were detected, so we had to abort all these crossings. I believe one of the operations after Exercise Harlequin, they succeeded in getting across to Cali. But I wasn't on that one at all.

We continued with our training from September 1943 right through to D-Day by going all round various terrain which could be a replica of the actual area where we were going to operate. We did a lot of our training around Chichester. We were stationed down at Seaford. We had our brigade HQ at Cowdray House. But we had to do our training, the same as each commando unit.

Up until about March 1944, each commando unit did their commando training, and we in Brigade HQ would participate in this brigade training. We did training around the New Forest area, things like fire and movement. We used to go across in landing craft, and we'd land at Worthing, Angmering, on to the beaches.

We'd move from there across the coastal road up towards Arundel. Our first objective during training was to cross the river Arun near Arundel, because I believe it was a very fast flowing water. There were no boats. We had to cross it by use of the commando training, rope and toggle.

There were one or two mishaps. There were people being swept into the water. Because the river at that time, at that particular time, this was March, April time, not only was it cold, but it was between five and six knots. Well, you get caught into this, and you're carrying a rucksack, your rifle, or your personal weapon. If it was a rifle, it was 50 rounds of ammunition. If you had a rucksack containing anything upwards of 80 pounds of kit and, well, your ammunition boots.

Getting across this water was an arduous thing. It was like going through a commando course on its own. Across, up to Arundel, and Arundel castle was the first objective. I mean, that was our target, although we never entered it, obviously. But that was our first target.

We had to reach that. Of course, the whole ploy was that by the time we landed on the beach at 6 o'clock, we had to cross the river, which was later to become the river [PLACE NAME] canal. The high ground where Arundel castle is located is the high ground at Amfreville and La Plagne, which was to be our base for many weeks after D-Day.

Now we carried on with this training right up until the end of May 1944. At the end of May, we were told to leave because we were going to continue with our further training down in the Southampton area. When we got to these transit camps in the Southampton area, we had a pretty good idea that this was it. Because once you got in, you weren't allowed out.

We referred to them as concentration camps. I mean, they weren't, in the true sense of it. But once you got in there, no way could you come out.

Letters, you still could write letters and you could post them in any post box inside the camp. The only trouble was, they never left the camp till after D-Day. We were there for the best part of a week.

During this week that we were in these transit camps at Southampton, we were then given the proper briefings. This time, for the first time, every single man Jack knew exactly where he was going, knew exactly what landing craft he was going to be on, knew where he was going to land, the name of the beach he was going to land, the people that he was going to have to the left and right of him-- unless, of course, he was on the extreme left or the extreme right-hand flank-- the forces that were going to be in support of us, models of the area we were going to land at, hypothetical cases whereby-- when I say hypothetical, they were assuming that certain gun batteries would be put out of action by the RAF, or by naval bombardment, certain ground defenses, like machine gun posts, and various other mines were going to be put out of action, again, by the RAF and bombardment from sea.

We were told the armada that was going to assist us. There was going to be in excess of several thousand ships. We were going to have the Rodney, the Howe, the Nelson, the Roberts in our support. I mean, they're the four major British battleships afloat at that time.

We were going to have several cruisers, rocket ships, flagships, barrage balloons escorting us. So we wouldn't be dive bombed if there was any enemy air attack. We had all the information that we needed.

In fact, more information than we needed. Because we were told that the RAF were going to, or not the RAF necessarily, but the Allied air forces were going to put out the guns, and they were going to put out-- there was going to be no mines to worry about. We were going to have a dry landing, and we were going to be taken up, basically, to our first-- I mean, this is the sort of impression we were getting. We were getting a little bit alecky, we can say -- oh, come on, let's get over with it. Let's go now.

The actual landing was supposed to have taken place on the 5th. On Saturday, the 4th of June, we were getting ready to leave our transit camps to embark on the ships which were now tied up alongside the various wharves and jetties at Warsash. At about four o'clock in the afternoon, we were told stand down.

It's off. We were given the reasons. They said the weather is broken, and it's unlikely that we shall be landing, certainly not for the next 24 hours. They were going to make a decision by midday on Sunday.

Every man Jack, whatever his religion, all went to church. It didn't matter what denomination you were, whether you were agnostic, atheist, Church of England, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Jew, you stood at some church, and you were being blessed by someone. We were told at about two o'clock in the afternoon that the postponement was only for 24 hours and that we would be embarking that evening.

So we got all our weapons ready, weatherproofed and waterproofed in case we had a wet landing. We got the ammunition ready. We got all our kit ready. Packed the rucksacks.

Those that hadn't got automatic weapons, because the automatic weapons, like Bren guns and all that, they had an awful lot of ammunition to carry. So those that only had their own personal weapons, like I had a rifle and 50 rounds of ammunition, I had to carry two smoke generators. Others had to carry three mortar bombs, had the two-inch or three-inch mortar bombs. This was all to assist the heavy weapons troop with the machine guns and mortars.

Well, we moved out of camp and we boarded our landing craft at Warsash. It was a landing craft infantry. This is the

first time I'd ever been on one of them.

It was one of these front ramp unloading, loading type of vessels. It looked nice. It looked like a river launch.

We pulled out, and we assembled in the Solent till about 7 o'clock, when we joined a tremendous amount of-- there were ships carrying barrage balloons. There were flagships. There were rocket ships. There were destroyers cruising up and down, up and down, up and down, corvettes, minesweepers. You name it. They were there.

We left the Solent at about 9 o'clock. We were told that we were going to have our last hot meal before hitting the beaches. That was a tin of Maconochie's self-heating vegetable soup. I must admit, it tasted marvelous.

[LAUGHS]

We stayed up on deck as long as we could, for as long as we were allowed, actually. Because once we started pulling off, there was radio silence and people had to be quiet and they weren't allowed to do this. Meantime, there were about 2,000 ships with all of their engines chugging away and churning away, making a tremendous amount of noise.

But they didn't want us up on board, so we had to go below decks. Of course, the tension below decks was terrible. I mean, the smell of the diesel and all that sort of stuff, plus the fact that once we got out into the mid-Channel, the sea was pretty rough.

Not being very good sailors, you know, we were violently ill down below. I was breaking my neck to get up on deck, get a breath of fresh air. But we weren't allowed. Till about 5 o'clock in the morning, the gangway was opened up, and they said, all right, you can come out on deck now. It was lovely to smell the fresh air.

When we got up on deck, we looked across towards the beaches. We could see nothing but ships, hundreds of aircraft above, going in relays, strafing, bombing, using cannon fire. We could hear the guns of the battleships and cruisers opening up, and we could see the flashes.

Well, by about 5 o'clock, just after 5 o'clock, we went under the guns of the Roberts, that's the dreadnought. The Rodney, and Howe, they were pounding their guns. There was another battleship there.

You can imagine the tidal wave, that every time these salvos went off with these four enormous battleships. And it was, it was tidal waves. We got even more seasick by the movements of these waves, because we were getting awash with these massive things.

It was nearing 6 o'clock when we were given the order to get our kit on, get our weapons ready, and weapons loaded, one up the spout, ready for a landing. Of course, the rumor's always we're going to have a dry landing, says one. So that's passed down the line.

Somebody says we've got a little bit of enemy opposition. Where did that come from? Oh, the naval rating over there. Just heard it on the wireless.

Of course they were sort of listening into communications between flotillas. Some people were being fire at. Others weren't.

Well, we saw the outline of the coast. Aircraft were flying backwards and forwards laying down smoke. So we couldn't see much in land, although we saw the outline of the coast. We saw ships running in ahead of us.

Four Commando, of which I was not part now, I'm Brigade HQ now, Four Commando had gone in with the French commandos of Four Commando and of 10 Commando, the two French troops and 10 Commando. They were allocated to Four Commando.

Their task was to go into Ouistreham, a direct assault on Ouistreham. They were to bottle up the extreme left-hand flank

of the whole of the invasion force. We came in next with Number Six Commando. Three Commando and Six Commando landed together.

45 Royal Marine Commando landed on our right flank. That was our first brigade front. That was on Sword Beach. We landed about a mile and a half to the west of Ouistreham.

Well, when I say an opposed landing, I mean, it wasn't like Dieppe, where the Germans were waiting for us on the beaches. There was shelling on the beach, because the guns at Merville that were supposed to have been put out of action, weren't. There were four guns in the battery there that was still firing at us. They were the big guns from Le Havre, right across the other side of the bay, with, I don't know, 14-inch, 15-inch guns. Each shell weighed a ton and kept lobbing over one at a time.

We had an awful lot of mortars from the villages behind Ouistreham, Hermanville Berneval, Granville. They were firing at us. Quite a lot of sniper fire was coming as well. The beaches were cleared to a certain extent of mines.

By the time we landed, the Royal Naval beach clearance people had been in front of us. They had cleared a narrow strip. They'd taped. The strip that had been cleared and declared safe through which flail tanks were going.

This was a great support to us, because at least now we had something to hide behind. If any snipers were available, well, then, we could pop them off from either side if we were able to see them.

The battles were going on in Ouistreham. They were pretty well-tied down by Number Four Commando and also Three Infantry Division, because we were in support of Three infantry division. There was already a brigade of Three Infantry Division on shore.

We cleared the beaches straight after we hit them. Unfortunately, some of the infantry units of one of the brigades who landed along with us, part of the infantry training, I gathered at that time, was to once you land, dig in. Well, that was not what we were taught in the commandos. Our idea was to get the hell out of it as quickly as you can, as fast as you can and as far as you can.

So one or two of our officers shouted at these chaps and said for God's sake, don't dig in here. You're going to get shelled and mortared. You're going to be counterattacked. For God's sake, get clear of the beach and get to the other side of the road.

Anyway, these chaps didn't know what to do. They followed us, which was probably just as well. Because at least it made easier the people who are coming in behind us. It cleared the beaches for those people to land and bring in further supplies and all that sort of stuff without cluttering up the beaches with a lot of holes that filled in with sand, anyway.

We didn't have a dry landing, as we were first told. We had a very, very wet landing. Because these landing craft that we were on, the LCIs, by the time they let their ramps down, we were in about four feet of water. Our coxswain said that he couldn't go any further, he said, because he'd struck one of these underwater spikes and was filling up with water.

Well, we were lucky that it had only struck a barren spike. Because most of these spikes had Teller mines on them. The ships weren't so lucky because it blew a hole in the bows when they struck.

Anyway, we got on shore. We went across the first lateral coastal road, which was only a narrow road. We got into a marshy area behind. Now that's when we were lobbed and had to get our heads down. Because the mortars were picking us off then.

But somebody in the crowd shouted out, we better get moving. Because once they get targeted onto us, they were just trying it out for distance. Again, we were lucky. We had flail tanks that were moving up to our left and right.

We also had a Sherman tank, about 100, 120 yards away to our right. He was able to pick off where the known machine gun posts were. He was engaging them with his tank fire and very successfully, too.

So that left the smaller chaps, like the snipers, and the people who we couldn't see, who were hidden in dugouts, and people who got caught being in areas where they shouldn't have been, and the night before. They came out, only too willing to give themselves up.

We saw very little opposition till we reached Hermanville. We had a few snipers at Hermanville. But Lord Lovat, who was our brigade commander whom we were following said don't worry about the opposition here. Bypass it. The infantry will clear it up, because this is what they are here for.

Our job is to meet up with the airborne on the two bridges. We haven't got long to do it. It was now getting towards 11 o'clock, and we were still about three, four miles away from the bridges.

Anyway, we bypassed the village of Hermanville. At a fairly quick pace, again, we were fairly well-laden. We had our rucksacks, nearly 60 to 80 pounds each man was carrying plus his personal weapon. We were wet from the waist down with little hope of changing our clothes till we got to our destination, which were the high ground at La Plagne.

We reached the bridges just after 12:00. We were due to reach them at 12 o'clock. Major John Howard of the parachute regiment who came in with the first fleet of gliders met Lovat on the beach, on the bridge.

Lovat said something, or the famous remarks that he is alleged to have said was in the film, *The Longest Day*. "I'm sorry, John, we're late." I think it was two minutes past 12:00 or something.

So it wasn't bad going, really. We had the best part of 4 and 1/2, 5 hours to travel 12 miles. I admit we went fighting all the way. But you know, every now and again, we had to take cover because there was the odd sporadic machine gun and odd sniper that kept hindering us, annoying us from time to time.

Well, we got to these bridges. They still had a little bit of opposition on the bridge of the [? Cannes ?] canal. Because there was a machine gun post that hadn't been put out of action. He was causing an awful lot of problems on the right-hand side of the bridge.

Now the bridge is a metal bridge to allow the ships to pass through. And on either side of the bridge was, like, a wall, a metal wall on which you could walk. There was a walkway on either side.

Well, there was also a sniper who kept picking people off. But he can only keep picking one or two people off. When there was about 20 or 30 of us in a line, we made a dash along one side of the bridge behind this wall. So we were out of sight of the machine gunner from this machine gun post.

Somebody from Six Commando decided he'd had enough with this machine gun post. He went in. How he got so close to the machine gun post and lobbed the grenade, don't ask me. I don't know.

It's just one of these fantasies of war. He happened to be lucky enough. Without being spotted, he got up to this machine gun post, he lobbed his grenade, and obviously, whoever the occupants were, it silenced them, and no more machine gun post. But this irritating little sniper that we had on the left-hand side was causing a little bit of problem.

But by now, quarter past 12:00, the entire brigade could come through over the bridge. So they were able to virtually march across the bridge, because there was no opposition there at all. The paras and glider pilots had seen to that, except for this one machine gun post. There were a lot of bodies that we passed, poor chaps from the airborne and the paras.

I don't know. We left the sniper to get on with it. He wasn't going to hold an entire brigade up. So we knew he was going to run out of ammunition.

I think, thank God for us, the shooting wasn't particularly brilliant, if he was a sniper. Sometimes I have my doubts. It could be a French sympathizer.

It could have been. I mean, it was known that they did have some sympathizers in that area. They'd been in there for four or five years.

Anyway, we reached our first target at La Plagne and Amfreville. Four Commando took up positions at a place called Hauger, H-A-U-G-E-R. We took up positions in La Plagne. Six commando took up positions at Amfreville.

Three Commando went with Peter Young to-- oh, dear. I can't think of the name of it. 45 Royal Marine Commando were charged with the task of putting out of action and silencing this gun battery at Merville.

Well, they went in, but they got held up. They called for support. So Three Commando went in as well. So we had 45 Royal Marine Commando and Three Commando.

They went in. Merville battery itself was a bit of a mess. Two of the guns had been pounded pretty badly by the RAF. But there were still two guns that were operational. Anyway, they got put out of action and the crews were silenced with the help of, I think, Five Para Battalion, Three Commando, and 45 Royal Marine Commando. Anyway, at least it silenced those guns.

So 45 Royal Marine Commando, they took up their positions, Six Commando, Four Commando, and Three Commando, Brigade HQ being in the middle of the whole bang shoot. Brigade HQ, although it wasn't directly in the front line, we were all in trenches with a farmhouse as our headquarters. We were literally about 300 yards away from what you can call the front line.

We had occasions when German patrols would come in behind us and drop one or two snipers off. This harassment went on for about two or three days. We soon got used to it, and we began to find out where their points of entry. So we used to lie in wait for them. As soon as they'd come through, we'd pop them off.

Because in those days, even today, I suppose, we would have a code word each day. There would be a reply, like, you might have eggs. The answer would be bacon, or bacon, the answer would be eggs, fire, smoke, alternatives, things that we sort of use every day in the bread, butter, that type of thing. These code words used to be issued every day, and it would be changed every day.

Now if anybody got caught, if one of our patrols got caught and we knew that they knew the code words, then that code word for that particular day would be changed. The people in the FDL would be told, the forward defense lines, they would be told. So watch out if anybody comes in.

We had to be careful, too, with the people in the FDLs. By changing these code words so often, patrols sometimes used to go out, get caught coming back, well, once they get caught, get spotted coming back. They'd lie low. They may have to lie low till that night.

Now if they can't move out of that area, they would still lie low until it was safe enough to travel. If it was after midnight, and the code word changed again, now they didn't know the code were two days ahead.

So the people in the FDL had to be very, very careful. Of course, the usual thing was revert to the old army slang. Somebody would get a challenge, like you get a code word come out from an FDL. You have some bright spot, you probably turn around and use some pretty strong expletives, which I won't use. But if you can get the sense of it, they'd be rather crude and cruel and vulgar.

Which the Germans would [BOTH TALKING]

[LAUGHING]

They wouldn't know what it meant, anyway. But we did have, on occasions, well, once or twice, I think. Some of the Germans, they would dress up in American uniforms or even Canadian uniforms, which they'd captured presumably at Dieppe and try an --

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