

EDITORIAL

With Hartley Coles



Help us to remember

Fifty years ago next Monday, 15,000 Canadians, part of a 150,000 allied invasion force, stepped ashore on the beaches of Normandy. Called D-Day, anxiously awaited for years, it proved to be the beginning of the end for Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich's giant war machine.

As our troops stepped ashore in a hail of bullets and shells, they gained immortality beside their comrades from Britain and the United States. Many of them lie now in the beautiful military cemeteries of Normandy.

Television programs such as a recent CBS documentary from the United States, recreate for us some of the horror of that day as seen by American eyes. Scant reference is given to the Canadians, or for that matter to the British soldiers, who fought and died in those landings on the beaches. But the Anglo-Canadian sector of the invasion — code-named Gold, Juno and Sword beaches — played a large part in its success.

Of course, the U.S. military played a big part in the Normandy landings. It likely couldn't have been done without them. However, the role of the Canadians is usually downplayed in the U.S. media, which either lumps them in with the British or ignores them completely. Yet Canadians played a pivotal role in the invasion landing on Juno beach in the face of fierce resistance from the German defenders while the Americans floundered on Omaha beach.

Canadian troops had already faced their baptism of fire in the botched raid at Dieppe two years earlier. The lessons learned there were not ignored as they stepped on the French coast a second time. They distinguished themselves in the roles assigned them. The price was 5,000 men killed in the battle for Normandy.

Nowhere were the D-Day landings and subsequent invasion watched with more apprehension than in Acton and district. Many local boys were among the invasion forces. Some never returned — their names are inscribed on the cenotaph which honours the dead of two world wars on Mill Street. Some are buried in the Canadian cemetery just off the beach where the landing occurred.

Unfortunately, tours of the invasion beaches cater mainly to U.S. tourists. My wife and I were part of one such tour two years ago. It stopped at Arromanches, where ships were sunk to form a harbour to bring in supplies, and then swung over from the Gold and Juno beaches off the Anglo-Canadian sector to Omaha beach and the American cemetery where 10,000 men are buried.

It didn't take much imagination to recreate the scene of 50 years ago. German pillboxes and burned out tanks have been left as they were at Arromanches. A museum there brings the invasion scene to life. Canadians are warmly welcomed by the French residents who point out the ships still lying where they were purposely sunk by the Allies.

The American cemetery at Point Bessin, west of Arromanches, can't help but impress visitors. It sits on the eastern part of Omaha Beach, 10,000 white crosses, row on row stretching for what seems like miles. In death there is no distinction of rank. Privates are buried alongside colonels; sergeants beside majors. One views it reverently and with awe as the wind gently leaves the English Channel and evergreens, marching along the beachhead, bow in reverence.

The scene is far from the noise, the confusion and smoke which accompanied the moans of wounded and dying men 50 years ago. Many of us can only see the names on the graves and wonder who they were. We can only imagine the terror that must have gripped them, facing a hail of German bullets as they stepped into neck-deep water from their landing craft.

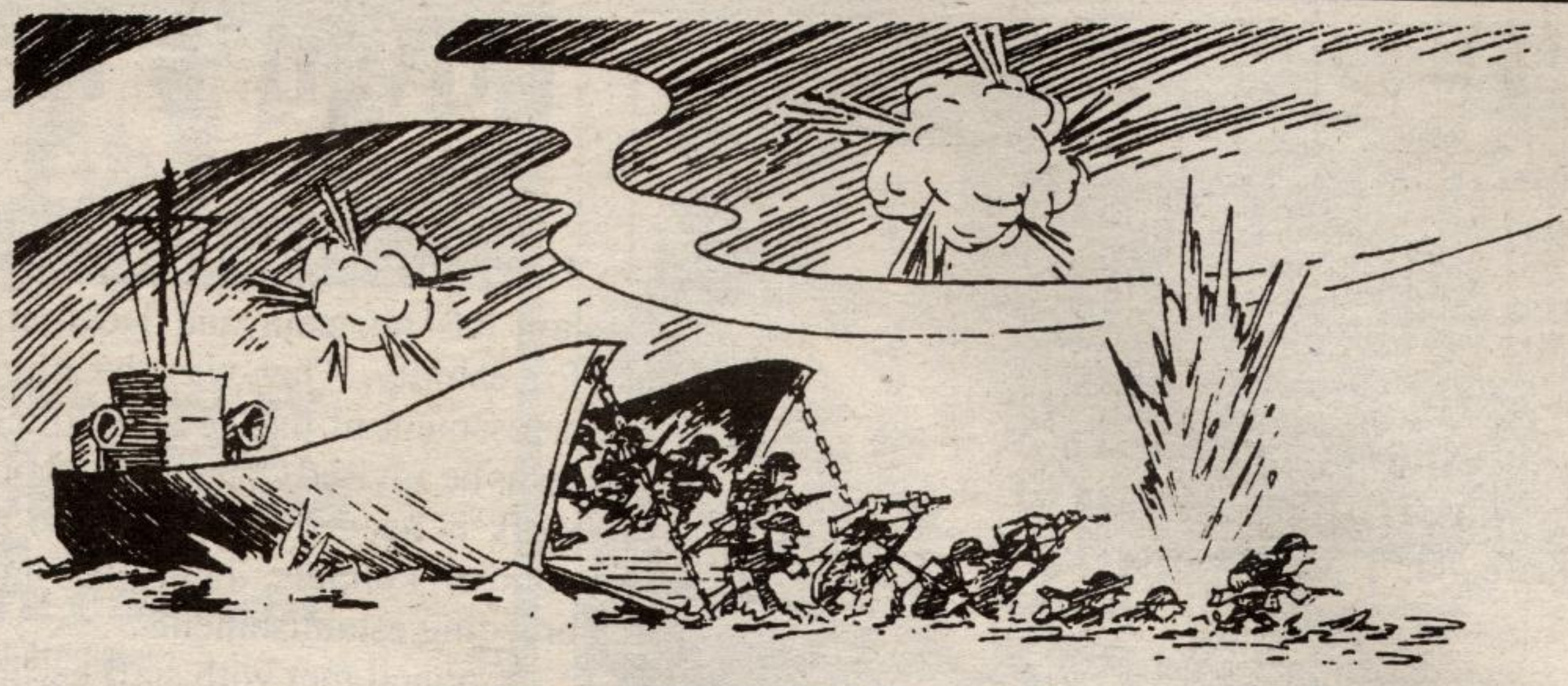
For others in their 60s it brings back memories of school chums and relations who now lie in the Canadian cemetery. Most were young. Enlistment meant stepping into a new adventure, away from the hum drum existence in the small towns of Canada.

This writer, an apprentice at the Acton Free Press, remembers the heartbreak as words and pictures of local boys killed in the invasion came from defense headquarters. Each day families prayed their loved ones would be spared. Each week there would be new casualties.

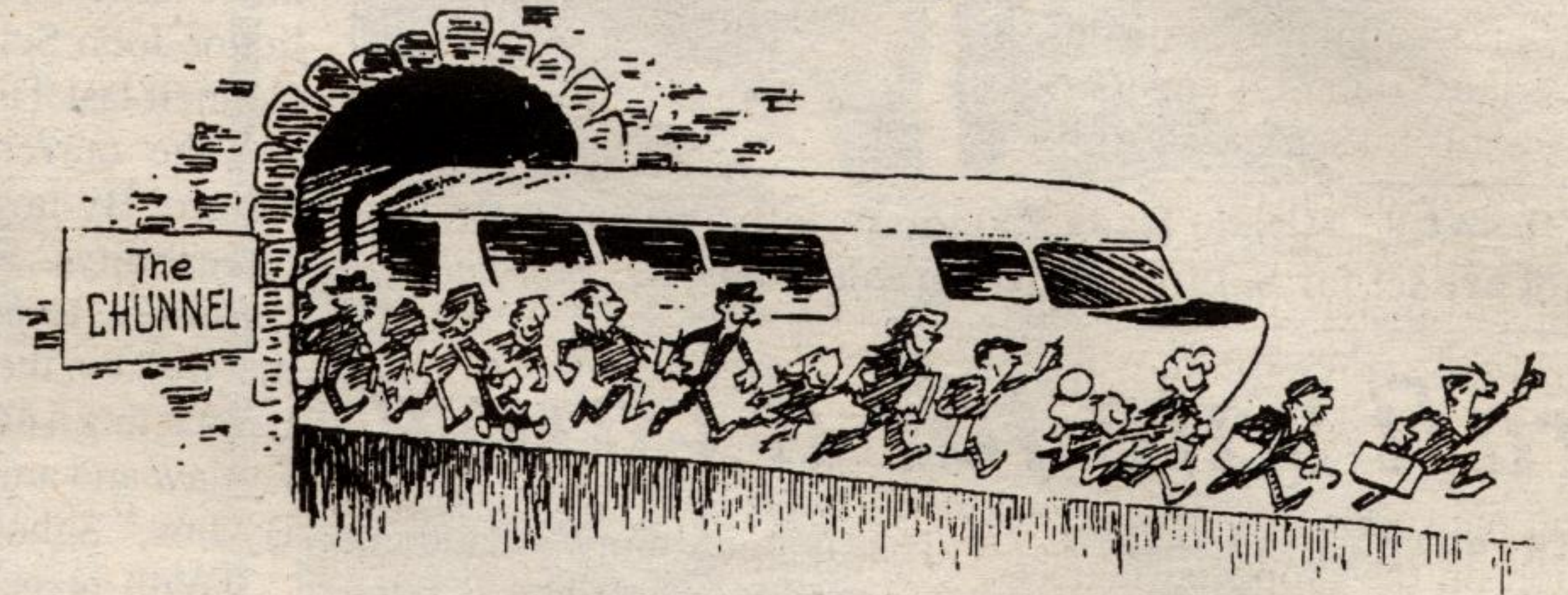
Far from a new adventure, the reality of invasion and battles was a hell from which they couldn't escape except by wounding or death. So many died to preserve the way of life that hadn't been kindly to them.

Somehow we have got to make sure the sacrifices these men made is not forgotten; that school children appreciate the role their forbears played so they have the advantages they enjoy now. It seems the further we get away from the events which shape our lives now, the less we appreciate them.

Perhaps the D-Day celebrations will help us to remember.



BEACHHEAD 1944/1994



LETTERS

Just like falling from an airplane

To the Editor,

The day after the Ontario Budget was tabled last week, the major media presented it as a "no event — big sleep" budget. But who is really sleeping is the media.

The previous Liberal government, by their own calculations, left the Province with a balanced budget (\$23 million surplus). The NDP was quick to reassess it as a \$700 million deficit. Within eight weeks the NDP had accumulated \$2.5 billion in new debt.

Please consider the following:

— Each year the budget deficit adds to the existing debt. The current debt is \$90.4 billion. The cost of servicing this debt adds \$1 billion per year to the budget expenses (the beginning of a down-fall spiral).

— Do you really relate to billions? The height of a stack of \$1,000 bills totalling \$1 million is

about 7 cm tall (three inches). The height of a stack of \$1,000 bills totalling \$1 billion would be about 70 meters high (220 feet). The stack of \$1,000 bills that would cover Ontario's debt would be 6.3 kilometers high; 12 times higher than the CN Tower.

— It is estimated that each family in Ontario inherits a debt of \$18,000, in addition to the federal debt.

The NDP stepped into government with an essentially balanced budget and has PLANNED to spend \$9 billion more than their revenues each year, doubling our debt in just four years.

This year there is no change in their plans: they have tabled a budget that will put us a further \$8.5 billion in debt!

Is the media asleep? Is the opposition asleep? (Do not judge only by Mike Harris' yawn).

We are like someone falling from an airplane with no parachute who says, "This is not too bad after all, I am not hurt, the view is great and the speed of my fall does not seem to increase..."

No surprises in the last budget... we are still falling fast.

Giuseppe Gori
R.R. 4, Acton

Save the wetlands

To the Editor,

Hi. This is Brandon and Justin in Ms. Spiak's Grade 4/5 class at St. Joseph's School in Acton. We noticed that the wetlands are disappearing a few houses away from St. Joseph's School.

They are building houses for other people on a wetland. Why are they doing that?

Our class has been studying

about the wetlands for Earth Day. Our class went to the marsh on Mill Street. We cleaned it up. We found tires, green hose, pop cans, a fishing rod and lots other things.

What we are trying to say here is to not pollute our wetlands and please don't build on them because pretty soon they're going to be all gone.

Brandon and Justin
St. Joseph's School

Preserve wetlands

To the Editor,

My name is Cathy Jones and my friend's name is Ashley Campbell. We both live in Acton. Ashley and I want to know if you can make a difference to the wetlands by writing an ad to eve-

ryone in Acton. We've got to enjoy the wetlands.

If you have time this week or next week can you put an ad in the paper saying not to hurt or pollute the wetlands' wild life.

Cathy and Ashley
St. Joseph's School

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