

Halton Hills veteran recalls fighting The Forgotten War

When the Canadian troops were preparing for the invasion of Sicily in the summer of 1943, very few knew the actual time and place that they would be landing in Sicily to begin what would later be referred to as The Forgotten War.

But Halton Hills resident Ed Rollinson knew in advance— even before his commanding officer was aware of the details. In fact, he was given the responsibility of transporting the printed orders in colour-coded bags from London to his regiment's location in Scotland, to be opened upon the commencement of the invasion.

Growing up in Toronto, working in the Vaughn Road area, Rollinson had signed up in January of 1941, and by February 10, he had finished basic training. With the rank of Trooper in the Ontario Regiment, 11th Canadian Armoured Regiment, he was shipped overseas in June, before finishing his advanced training.

He was originally supposed to be trained as a gunner on a Churchill tank, but ironically, he never once saw the inside of a tank throughout the war. Instead, through some stroke of luck, he became a staff car driver.

At the end of 1942 however, Rollinson was still a staff driver, and had been promoted to the rank of Lance Corporal. He was sent on an engineer assault course, assigned to a special 'W' squadron, the W for 'water.'

"There were members from three regiments," said Rollinson, "And we worked

on the new RAM tank, testing it in the Bristol Channel. It was designed to operate under water.

"For six weeks, we cleaned, water-proofed and tested those tanks, but they were not very successful. In fact, my personal assessment was they were unfit to do the job."

Regardless, they were required to do a demo for the squadron, and during that time, Rollinson was injured as a sticky bomb accidentally went off, resulting in him receiving some shrapnel in his face.

"I received first aid from a medic, and by the time I was able to return, my unit had moved to Scotland in May of 1943, so I reported back to them," said Rollinson. "I wasn't sure what to do—I had a spot in a tank, but my colonel had other ideas."

The fact Rollinson had a knack for taking an interest in the German people and their country, it wasn't long before his superiors noticed him—he was a natural to become the intelligence officer for his squadron.

"I had always taken an interest in people, and I studied civilians in all the countries we were supposed to be passing through," said Rollinson, "I also loved reading maps. As a result, I was well suited for their (the regiment's) needs, learning all I could about the enemy, and providing that information to the troops who would be fighting."

In May of 1943, Rollinson was sent to the Canadian Army Headquarters in London to help prepare plans for the



Ed Rollinson of Georgetown looks over some of the many maps he used in his capacity as intelligence officer with the 11th Canadian Armoured Regiment during his four and a half years overseas, in which he took part in the invasion of Sicily and Italy, often called The Forgotten War.

Photo by Ted Brown

deployment of the 1st Canadian Armoured Brigade to the invasion of Sicily, utilizing all those natural intelligence skills he'd had all those years.

"I spent three weeks in the War Office, studying various aspects of the landings in Sicily," said Rollinson, "I was sent there without an official pass, wearing

non-descript British (battle) fatigues, with a telephone number I was to give to clear me if I were picked up by the local authorities.

"My job was to assemble all the info I could about Sicily—the tides, the roads, the vegetation—every piece of informa-

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