

# CANADA IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

## Normandy Massacres 1944

The 3rd Canadian Infantry Division and the 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade landed on Juno Beach on D-Day, June 6th .



*Soldiers of the German 12<sup>th</sup> Panzer Division in a temporary prisoner of war cage in Normandy. Two Canadian Provost Corps soldiers stand guard, July 7-8, 1944.*

The Canadians overcame the beach defences after a collective effort but at a heavy price in lives. The move inland began the same day and by evening, Canadian troops dug into their captured positions. It was the next day that the Canadians first encountered the division that would become their main nemesis in Normandy, the 12th SS Panzer Division (Hitler Youth). In the days following June 6th hundreds of Canadian prisoners of war (POW) fell into the hands of the 12th SS. Unfortunately for many of these Canadians, their capture led to them being murdered in cold blood.

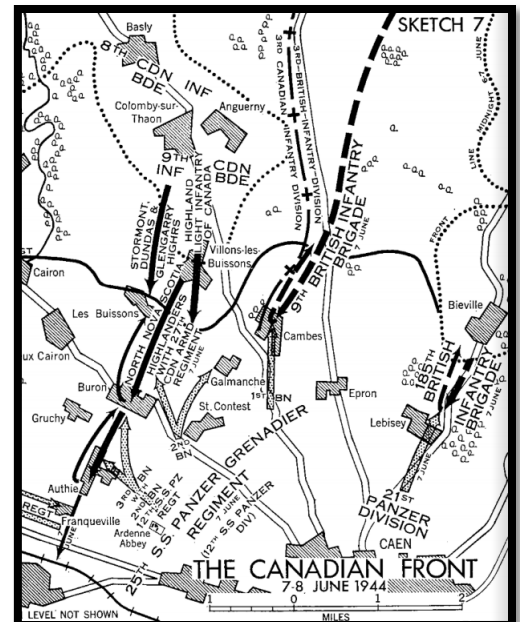
The 12th SS Panzer Division was made up of Hitler Youth members, aged seventeen to nineteen years old, as well as battle-hardened officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) from the 1st SS Panzer Division (*Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler*). This division began as Hitler's personal guard and had fought on the Eastern Front against the Soviet Union. The combination of fanatical Nazi teenagers and an NCO corps that had fought in the brutalized conditions of the east led to the division having the propensity to murder POWs.

*The Canadian Front, 7-8 June (Victory Campaign Sketch 7).*

### **Authie, Buron, and the Abbey d'Ardenne**

On June 7th infantry of the North Nova Scotia Highlanders and Sherman tanks of the 27th Canadian Armoured Regiment (the Sherbrooke Fusilier Regiment), acting as the spear point of the 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade's advance toward Carpiquet, moved toward the village of Authie through Buron. The tanks pushed past Authie, where they were attacked by tanks of the 12th SS Panzer Regiment (not to be confused with the whole division) which, along with the 25th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment, were under the command of *Standartenführer* Kurt Meyer. As the tank fight subsided, the infantry of "C" Company of the North Novas in Authie were attacked by German infantry of the 3rd Battalion, 25th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment led by *Obersturmbannführer* Karl-Heinz Milius. The North Novas fought until surrounded, after which they surrendered.

Prior to the Allied landings in Normandy, Meyer had reportedly told his troops to make use of the coming invasion to retaliate against the Allies for their bombing of German cities. It was at Authie that the murdering of POWs by the 12th SS began, seemingly in line with what Meyer suggested they do. A group of Canadians were simply shot after surrendering, while others were bayoneted and beaten to death. Dead Canadians were purposefully run over by a German tank. Outside Authie, the troops of "A" Company were eventually cut off and surrendered as well. Several of these men were shot by their German captors soon after their surrender.



## Massacres at Normandy

The fighting moved to Buron where elements of "D" Company were captured outside the village. They were marched to Buron after it had been captured by the Germans. Everything of value was stripped from the POWs. One Canadian was shot for carrying a grenade, although Canadian witnesses testified it was a chocolate tin. As the column of Canadian POWs moved towards the German rear, a truck with Red Cross markings deliberately veered into the prisoners, killing two and wounding another. Other POWs were murdered when a commander of an SS detachment shot them while they were marching to the rear.



*The memorial garden at the Abbey pays tribute to the soldiers murdered on these grounds.*

Dozens of Canadians were taken as POWs during the fighting at Authie and Buron. Those not killed in the immediate aftermath were sent to the nearby Abbaye d'Ardenne, where Kurt Meyer had set up his headquarters. On the evening of June 7th, eleven Canadians from both the North Novas and Sherbrooke Fusiliers were executed in the abbey's garden. The next day seven more POWs, all of them North Novas, were brought to the abbey, interrogated, and sent one by one to their deaths. **They were shot in the back of their heads in the garden.** Each

man shook hands with their living companions before facing their fate among the bodies of their murdered comrades.



*The faces and names of the 20 Canadian soldiers murdered at the Abbey in June 1944 are displayed on the garden wall, 2017*

Much later, on June 17th, two more Canadians, Lieutenant Fred Williams and Lance-Corporal George Pollard were also murdered at, or nearby, the abbey. The bodies of all those killed at the abbey were later found, except for Pollard. In total twenty Canadians were murdered by the 12th SS at the Abbey d'Ardenne.

### Château d'Audrieu

The murder of Canadian POWs was not isolated to the 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade's front. Troops from the 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade were also murdered at the hands of the 12th SS. These killings followed the fighting around Putot-en-Bessin. On the afternoon of June 8th, the 12th SS Division launched a fierce counterattack toward the positions of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles defending the village. The Winnipeg Rifles fought to hold the village but were pushed back. The German attack cut off several of their companies, leading to several Winnipeg Rifles soldiers being executed by the Germans near Putot. The details of their deaths are unclear as their bodies were found after Putot had been retaken by the Canadians later on the 8th.

Most of the killings took place at two locations. The first was the Château d'Audrieu. *Sturmabführer* Gerhard Bremer, commander of the 12th SS Reconnaissance Battalion, set up his headquarters in the chateau. When POWs started to arrive, Bremer, who spoke fluent English, questioned three POWs, Major Frederick Hodge, Lance Corporal Austin Fuller,

and Private Frederick Smith. When they provided no information, they were executed. Privates David Gold, James McIntosh, and William Thomas were also executed on the chateau grounds shortly after the first killings. More Canadian POWs were machine gunned near the chateau later in the day. In total, the SS murdered nineteen Canadians at the Château d'Audrieu.

### **Le Haut Du Bosq**

*Obersturmbannführer* Wilhelm Mohnke, commander of the 26th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment, set up his headquarters near a cluster of houses known as Le Haut du Bosq, located in a wooded area between Grainville and Cheux. On the night of June 8th, Mohnke ordered the murder of many POWs in a field near Fontenay-le-Pesnel after racing to meet a column of POWs headed for his headquarters. Mohnke was driven into a murderous rage after his previous order to *Sturmbannführer* Bernhard Siebken (commander of the 2nd Battalion of the regiment) to stop sending POWs to the rear, was not followed. Mohnke also ordered the killings of three Canadian POWs, Private Harold Angel, Riflemen Frederick Holness, and Ernest Baskerville, at Siebken's headquarters. The SS carried out these murders on the morning of the 9th. On June 11th, a further three Canadians, Sappers John Lonel and George Benner and Private Allan Owens, were murdered in a field with Mohnke watching. Forty-one POWs were murdered either by direct orders of Mohnke or by troops under his command.

### **Conclusion**

The sites above were not the only places where the 12th SS murdered Canadian POWs. Regina Rifles Lance Corporal David Moloney and Privates Cecil Borne, Norman Morin, and John Sawatzky, were executed in a clearing south of the Caen-Bayeux highway near Bretteville l'Orgueillesue after being captured when their outpost was overrun by the 12th SS. Another lesser-known series of executions of Canadian POWs was after the battle at Le Mesnil-Patry on June 11th. There were as many as six separate incidents of POWs being murdered near that battlefield. In total as many as 156 Canadian soldiers, mostly taken prisoner by the 12th SS, were executed by their captors during various incidents in June

1944 in Normandy. Some chilling statistics result from these murders. **One out of every seven Canadians killed in Normandy from June 6th to 11th was not killed in combat but was executed as a POW.**



### ***SS Brigadeführer Kurt Meyer standing in court with escorts***

The 12th SS commanders faced few consequences for the killings that were carried out either by their direct orders or by troops under their command. Mohnke escaped prosecution after an investigation by Canadian authorities in the immediate aftermath of the war. Mohnke's case was re-examined in the mid-1970s, but West German prosecutors concluded that there was insufficient evidence to bring charges. He died at the age of 91. Bremer also escaped prosecution for the murder of the Canadian POWs. He moved to Spain in the late 1940s. Siebken was the single commander responsible for the murders

who was executed for his crimes. He was convicted for the murders of Angel, Holness, and Baskerville and was hung on January 20th, 1949.

An Allied court investigation recommended that Milius be indicted for war crimes but he was later released with no charges filed. In December 1945 a Canadian Military Court tried Kurt Meyer for war crimes. He was acquitted of twenty-three murders near Authie and Buron on June 7th 1944. However, Meyer was ultimately found guilty on several counts, linked to the murders at the Abbey d'Ardenne. Meyer was sentenced to death, which he appealed. He was successful in his appeal and his verdict was commuted to a life sentence after Canadian Major-General Christopher Vokes was reluctant to sentence Meyer to death without evidence of a direct order to execute Canadian POWs. After serving prison time in Canada and West Germany, Meyer was released after less than ten years of serving his sentence. He died in 1961.

**The 156 Canadians Murdered in Normandy June 7<sup>th</sup>- 17<sup>th</sup>, 1944**

Adams, William C.  
Anderson, H.E.  
Angel, Harold S.  
Arsenault, Joseph F  
Arsenault, Joseph  
Bailey, Harold W.  
Barker, Reginald D  
Baskerville, Ernest  
Beaudoin, Oscar J.  
Beebe, Charles  
Bellefontaine, Oswald  
Benner, George A.  
Beresford, William  
Birston, Hilliard J  
Bishoff, Emmanuel  
Bolt, James E.  
Booth, Walter J.  
Borne, Cecil M.  
Bowes, Arnold D.  
Bradley, Ernest W.  
Brown, George  
Brown, Lome  
Brown, Walter  
Bullock, Paul  
Burnett, Donald J.  
Campbell, John R.  
Charron, Albert A.  
Chartrand, Lawrence  
Chartrand, Louis  
Cook, Etsel J.  
Cranfield, Ernest  
Cresswell, Sidney  
Crowe, Ivan L.  
Culleton, Stewart  
Daniels, Walter  
Davidson, Thomas  
Doucette, Charles  
Doherty, Walter M.  
Dumont, John D.  
Fagnan, Anthony  
Ferguson, William  
Findlay, Robert M.  
Firman, Roger J.  
Fleet, Lambert A.  
Fontaine, George  
Forbes, J.  
Freeman, Lant  
Fuller, Austin R.  
Gilbank, Ernest N.  
Gill, George V.  
Gold, David S.  
Gosse, Silby  
Grant, Thomas J.D.  
Guiboche, Lawrence  
Gurney, Robert J.

Hancock, Arthur R.  
Hargreaves, Jeffrey  
Harkness, Alvin J.J.  
Harper, Robert J.  
Harrison, Francis D.  
Henry, Thomas H.  
Hill, John W.  
Hodge, Frederick E  
Holness, Frederick  
Horton, Charles A.  
Lonel, John  
Izzard, William L.  
Jones, Henry C.  
Julian, Anthony  
Keeping, Reginald  
Kines, Clare D.  
Kyle, James F.  
Labrecque, Herve  
Lawrence, Kenneth  
Leclaire, Joseph  
Lefort, Elmer J.  
Lewis, Gordon J.  
Lockhead, Roger  
Loucks, William D  
Lychowich, John L  
Macdonald, Chas  
MacDonald Hugh  
MacIntyre, Joseph  
MacKinnon, James  
MacLeod, Angus  
MacRae, Roderick  
Marych, Frederick  
McGinnis, William  
McIntosh, James D  
McKeil, Hollis L.  
McKinnon, Will  
McLaughlin, Thos  
McNaughton, Geo.  
Meakin, Frank V.  
Meakin, George E.  
Metcalf, John  
Millar, George E.  
Moloney, David T.  
Mont, Thomas E.  
Moore, Raymond  
Morin, Norman J.  
Morrison, Wesley  
Moss, James A.  
Muntion, George  
Murray, John B.  
Mutch, Robert  
Nichol, William  
O'Leary, Gerard J.  
Orford, Douglas S.  
Ostir, Frank

Owens, Allan R.  
Parisian, Percy  
Perry, Clayton G.  
Peterson, Alfred M  
Philp, Harold G.  
Poho, William  
Pollard, George G.  
Povol, Ervin  
Preston, Lee I.  
Reid, James A.  
Reynolds, Henry E.  
Riggs, Cecil  
Rodgers, Henry  
Ryckman, Frank  
Sawatzky, John  
Scott, Robert  
Scriven, Gilbert H.  
Sigurdson, Kjartan  
Silverberg, Frank  
Simmons, William  
Smith, Edward  
Smith, Frederick  
Smith, Richard G.  
Smuck, Harry L.  
Slywchuk, Steve  
Sutton, Lawrence F  
Taylor, James A.  
Thomas, William  
Thompson, John A.  
Tobin, Douglas V.  
Vickery, Nelson J.  
Webster, James S.  
Willett, Gerald L.  
Williams, Fred  
Williams, James P.  
Windsor, Thomas

**“Ten” known but to God**

*Wanda Zenner – March 2024  
Excerpt from Juno Beach article*