How far were the Commonwealth forces in Normandy handicapped by deficiencies in skill or boldness?

Reading - Overlord, Max Hastings

- “Among many naval crews who displayed exemplary courage, there were others whose lack of experience and determination magnified the confusion” (p 96)
- 21st Army Group intelligence report of 22 June, found in Rommel’s soldiers, “...the same mixture of brash arrogance (chiefly SS), forlorn hope and outright despair that has appeared in similar collections in the past. The reprisal weapon is still the white hope and the German Air Force the main disappointment. The insistence that, despite his heavy equipment, ‘Tommy is no soldier’ is still common.” (p172)
- “‘They told us that the Germans were very, very good.’” (p196)
- “The campaign in north-west Europe was industrialised warfare on a vast scale. For that reason, veterans of earlier campaigns found this one less congenial - dirty and sordid in a fashion unknown in the desert. Many responded by focussing their own loyalties exclusively upon their own squad or company. One of the chronic command difficulties of the campaign was that of overcoming the conviction of men that another unit or another division’s difficulties were essentially its own affair.” (p202)
- “The great majority of Allied soldiers - it was in Normandy had never before seen action. Many thousands of British troops, especially, had lingered at home for two, three, four years of training and routine. They approached battle with an eagerness that promised much to their commanders. ‘We were all very scared, but glad that we were now going into battle,’ said Lieutenant Andrew Wilson of The Buffs. ‘We had been frightened that the war would end before we were really in it. People had no great urge to kill, but they wanted to face the challenge to their manhood of being in danger.’” (p206)
- “The first shock of battle, the first losses however sever, did not entirely destroy the sense of wonder, exhilaration and fulfilment that was created by the consummation of month and years of training.” (p206)
- “Men discovered that they could sleep on their feet, under bombardment, in their tanks, on the march. Fatigue, and the struggle to overcome it, ruled their lives.” (p207)
- “Even within an infantry battalion, a man serving heavy weapons with the support company possessed a markedly greater chance of survival than his counterpart in a rifle company. It was here that the losses, the turnover of officers and men, became appalling, far more serious than the planners had allowed for, and eventually reached crisis proportions.” (p210)
- “The British forecast casualties on the basis of staff tables known as the Evetts’ Rates, which categorised levels of action as ‘Intense’, ‘Normal’ and ‘Quiet’. After the army’s early experiences in Normandy, it was found necessary to introduce a new scale to cover heavy fighting: ‘Double Intense’.” (p211)
• “The reports of the engagements with the enemy paratroops west of Brévands said that we had succeeded in squeezing them into a narrow strip but that they were now defending themselves with extraordinary tenacity” - p196
• “On fighting for localities, the enemy, with his submachine guns and quick-reload rifles, was superior to the German troops which had only very few of the latter” (p204)
• “The parachutists who had landed did not succeed...Most of them kept in hiding and surrendered, offering no resistance” (p223)
• “The success of the invasion is mostly due to the heroic fighting by troops in the first landings of enemy airborne divisions.” (p235)


• “Those most likely to volunteer were the young who had grown up under National Socialism and who, for the most part, knew little and cared less for the outside world. This Nazified youth often proved to be the most fanatical - though frequently also not the most long-lived - German soldiers.” (p8)
• “Junior officers did not simply learn ‘school’ solutions to the problems they might encounter but were instead taught to think for themselves, to apply their military knowledge and expertise, to have confidence in their own decisions, and to act upon them.” (p9)
• “German infantry fought with impressive tenacity and effectiveness throughout World War II, even after their units had suffered extreme losses. Statistical analyses have concluded that German troops typically inflicted 50 per cent greater casualties on their opponents than they suffered in return, regardless of whether they were attacking or defending, even in the face of overwhelming Allied numerical and air superiority and in the war.” (p21)

Reading - English, John, The Canadian Army and the Normandy Campaign, (New York, 1991)

• “The restricted battlefield of Normandy, which reflected a German troop-to-space density two and a half times that of the Russian front” (p204)
• “In very large measure, responsibility for the relatively lacklustre showing of Canadian arms in Normandy must be laid at the feet of division commanders. Clearly, neither Keller nor Foulkes were as tactically competent as Simonds.” (p306)
• “Foulke’s contention that Canadian troops without air and artillery were no match for battle experience Germans has had the effect of camouflage for years his own tactical shortcomings...German troops when not poorly deployed gave good accounts of themselves>” (p306-307)
• “It is true, of course, that lack of equipment and collective training opportunities hampered officer development generally and the training of higher commanders in particular...What must not be lost sight of, however, is that most armies endured similar shortcomings to greater and lesser degrees...Many successful higher commanders also developed their operational theories and war fighting approaches at schools and staff colleges on cloth models, by individual study, or through the medium of war games. That this was true of Montgomery and even Simonds sets