

Pte Harold Thomas Lewis (Service # G32609)



Harold Thomas Lewis and his twin brother Arnold were born January 12, 1919, near Port Lorne, Annapolis County, Nova Scotia, the sons of Amos Boswell Lewis and Linnie (Sabean). Amos was a seaman and farmer and the family attended the Baptist Church. Harold was one of ten children. His Brother Raymond had served with the Canadian Army in WWI and his twin brother Arnold would also serve overseas in WW2. Records show that Harold left school at age fourteen and worked for the next seven years as a fisherman. At some point, he met a young woman by the name of Elsie May Sabean. They were married on January 5, 1938. Later that same year Harold's father died.

In September 1939, Canada entered the war with Germany, and on July 10, 1940, Harold enlisted with the Saint John Fusiliers (Machine Gun) Regiment in Saint John, New Brunswick. Basic training was completed at Saint John and, afterward, he was assigned the rank of gunner and placed with the 4th Battery, Royal Canadian Artillery. Harold assigned \$23/mo of his pay to be sent home to Elsie. In July of 1943, Harold was sent overseas. In the United Kingdom he was transferred to the Canadian Infantry Reinforcement Unit (CIRU), and a month later placed with the North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment. The following ten months were spent in intensive training and rehearsing beach landings in England and Scotland.

On D-Day (June 6, 1944), Harold landed in Normandy near the town of Saint-Aubin-sur-Mer with B Company under the command of Major Bob Forbes. A and B Companies were the first units to come ashore. At about 8 a.m. their landing craft doors opened and the men poured out under heavy fire from the beach defenses. In particular, the German guns from the Cap Romain strongpoint, WN27, blasted the beach and their landing craft. B Company scrambled over barriers, barbed wire, mines, and booby traps and ran for the security of the seawall. Maj Forbes' orders were to eliminate this main German strongpoint.

For B Company there were few casualties during the dash to the beach, but they now stalled, and soon D Company was coming in behind them. Now using explosives and wire cutters, B Company cut a path into the town. It was soon apparent, however, that the approaches to the big guns were well protected by additional machine-gun positions. It appears that Maj Forbes then gave orders for two platoons to move south into the village to attack from the rear thus avoiding some of the machine guns. Many of the streets were choked with telephone poles, felled trees, and other obstacles to impede the movement of tanks. Despite the resistance B Company platoons advanced along the streets behind the German strongpoint. However, the strongpoint, the gun positions, and some of the houses were connected by a network of tunnels and trenches, allowing the Germans to easily relocate men to strengthen a position under attack. Snipers were also deadly and kept moving to different positions. Progress stalled and attacks on the eastern 50 mm gun failed repeatedly. Capt Bill Harvey wrote that B Company, No. 6 platoon had also been unable to silence one of the deadly 75 mm guns. In response, Lt McCann's men brought in a two-inch mortar. They blasted the gun a dozen times and put it out of commission. After a while, the Germans started flying white flags to surrender, but it was a trick. As B Company moved in closer, the Germans opened fire again.

Meanwhile, around 10:00 a.m. some of the tanks and antitank guns were now ashore. The landing of the tanks had not gone as planned. Some were lost at sea, and three were destroyed on the beach. Now, the noise of the battle was so loud and unrelenting that soldiers could not hear their tanks, and as a result, some of them drove straight over their own men. At this point, Flail tanks, which detonate mines, were to take the lead, but unfortunately, they were still not available and the regiment could not wait. Historian Marc Milner wrote that the Fort Garry tanks now took charge without the Flails and pushed through the minefield. In doing so three tanks were lost to mines or antitank fire, but the gap was now breached. Tanks, carriers, artillery, and other vehicles and platoons could now assist the rifle companies.

Lt Richardson stated that by this time B Company had suffered seventeen casualties killed or wounded by snipers. They needed help. B Company now launched another attack on the strongpoint, this time with the help of tanks and petards. White flags flew again, but this time they were ignored. Progress was still slow, but much of the strongpoint was captured and heavy casualties were inflicted. To eliminate the only remaining 50 mm gun at the east end of the strongpoint, a building was demolished to create an unobstructed line of fire. The now available antitank guns were brought in and quickly put the last enemy gun out of commission. The captured bunker with the 50 mm gun, still stands today along the seawall in Saint-Aubin. The war diary records that by 11:15 am the strongpoint had been silenced and all company objectives had been achieved.

At this point, B Company was tasked with clearing all remaining resistance from the town, while the regiment pushed inland to capture the village of Tailleville.

Records show that B Company suffered thirty-six casualties on D-Day. Eight were fatal. Pte Harold Lewis was killed in action on the beach and was initially buried in a nearby battlefield cemetery. He was twenty-five years of age. Pte Harold Thomas Lewis was later placed in the Beny-sur-Mer Canadian War Cemetery in Calvados, France, Plot 1. D. 4. The inscription on his grave reads "Today recalls sad memories of a dear husband at rest. Those who think of him today are those who loved him best." His name is also engraved on one of the monuments to the Canadians that stands along the seawall in Saint-Aubin-sur-Mer.

For his service to Canada, Pte Harold Thomas Lewis was awarded the following medals; the 1939-45 Star, France and Germany Star, Defense Medal, War Medal 1939-45, and Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with Clasp.

Right: The grave of Pte Harold Thomas Lewis at Beny-sur-Mer, Canadian War Cemetery. Photo by Bruce MacFarlane

Below: The 50 mm gun in the main German strongpoint still stands at the St. Aubin beach today. It was the last of strongpoint guns to be silenced by the NS(NB)R on D-Day.

