

WW II D-Day Sapper Veteran Cpl Stanley Clark Fields Awarded the French Legion of Honour

The Canadian Military Engineers are pleased to advise that the Government of France has awarded Cpl Stanley Fields the Rank of Knight of the National Order of the Legion of Honour. Mr Fields is a WW II Royal Canadian Engineer veteran who landed in France on D-Day and was a participant in the Battle of the Liberation of France. Some background on this honour is found at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legion_of_Honour



Stanley Fields, age 95, grew up in Ottawa and was a page on Parliament Hill as a teenager. He worked as a plumber after high school and joined the Canadian Army in September 1939, one week after war was declared. Eventually Stan found his way to 5th Field Company Royal Canadian Engineers in February 1942.

On D-Day, the 5th Field Company was one of four Sapper companies involved in the assault phase at Juno Beach. Engineer tanks and specialized obstacle clearing parties landed at H-Hour followed by the infantry assault companies at H-Hour plus 5 minutes. 5th Field Company was split into sections across each of the assault beaches and Stanley's sections landed on "Nan Red" beach.

The tide was higher than expected when the lead landing craft touched down and thus some obstacles were too difficult to clear. The three craft with 5th Field Company's sections immediate came under heavy small arms fire as the ramps came down. The Royal Marine tanks and armoured bulldozers went ahead and the sections scrambled to shore but then had to take cover behind a sea wall for the next two hours. For the rest of D Day the sections removed explosives and mines from the obstacles and towed the heavy steel angle obstacles in order to clear and widen the beach landing lanes. By nightfall some 1600 yards of beach had been cleared.

Over the next two days the Company re-assembled near Bernieres sur Mer and prepared for the start of an 11-month campaign that led to the eventual defeat of Germany. For this advance across Northwest Europe, 5th Field was involved in all the typical sapper tasks necessary to maintain the mobility of an advancing army.

Every existing bridge became a target for the enemy and, if destroyed or damaged, the sappers built improvised or Bailey bridges. Another significant task was mine detection. The sappers were constantly learning their opponents' tricks for concealing bobby traps under mines, or burying mines in road craters to disable heavy equipment. And then there was road maintenance. As the front advanced, heavy traffic damaged or destroyed the existing roads. Mobility was especially difficult in the winter and worse when the Germans flooded large areas of Holland. The sections used whatever rubble, stone, steel matting was available, and even made log roads if wood was available.



Stanley was injured carrying a Bailey panel and was evacuated behind the lines for about ten days. He told the company he'd be back but knew that, if he stayed out of the line too long, there was a chance that he might never catch up with the unit. Accordingly, he found a truck going towards the front and hitched a ride back to his section.

After war's end, Stanley returned to Canada and was discharged in November 1945. He took two weeks leave and then started working again as a plumber and was employed in that profession until reaching mandatory retirement age of 65.

Over 400 Sappers passed through the unit during the war and Stanley and his comrades formed the 5th Field Company Association to help maintain the camaraderie. Stanley researched and wrote the unit's WW II history book: "*History of the 5th Field Company, Royal Canadian Engineers, 1941-1946*" and has been instrumental in keeping the remaining few vets in contact.

This year Stanley Fields assisted the Smiths Falls District Collegiate Institute in their "Lest We Forget" project in Spring 2014 and was an invited guest of Normandy to participate in the activities of the 70th Anniversary of D-Day.

Stanley currently lives in Ottawa and is eagerly looking forward to the presentation of his honour by General Hervé Gobillard, President of the Society of the Members of the Legion of Honour at the Canadian War Museum on 8 November.

