



Military Service Report: Army Number 3976528

Subject: Service History & Combat Deployment (1939–1944)

Unit: 4th Battalion, Welch Regiment

Executive Summary

This report reconstructs the wartime trajectory of an early war volunteer (Army Number: 3976528) serving with the 4th Battalion, Welch Regiment. It traces their journey from initial home defence duties in Northern Ireland to their deployment in the Normandy theatre during the summer of 1944, specifically focusing on the costly war of attrition fought in the Odon Valley around Caen.

Service Timeline & Deployment Geographies

1. Home Defence: The Northern Ireland Deployment (1939–1944)

As an early volunteer, the soldier spent the majority of the Second World War stationed in Northern Ireland. During this prolonged period, the 4th Battalion, Welch Regiment focused on intensive training, anti-invasion preparations, and maintaining a strategic presence in the region before being earmarked for the liberation of Western Europe.

2. The Normandy Landing (June 27, 1944)

- Point of Debarkation: **Courseulles-sur-Mer** (Juno Beach sector).
- Role: The battalion landed three weeks after D-Day as part of the designated "follow-up" sector for British and Canadian reinforcement troops.
- Initial Movement: Upon landing, the unit immediately advanced inland toward the historic crossroads of **Bayeux** to assemble for upcoming offensive operations.

Combat Operations: The Battle for Caen

Immediately following their arrival in Bayeux, the 4th Battalion was thrown into the grinding British efforts to capture the strategic city of Caen. This thrust brought them directly into the Odon Valley Campaign (June–July 1944).

Strategic Objectives of the Odon Offensives

The operations in this sector—primarily code-named Operation Epsom and Operation Jupiter—were vital to General Bernard Montgomery's overarching Normandy strategy:

- Outflanking Caen: Rather than launching a catastrophic frontal assault on the heavily fortified city, British forces attempted a sweeping encirclement from the west.

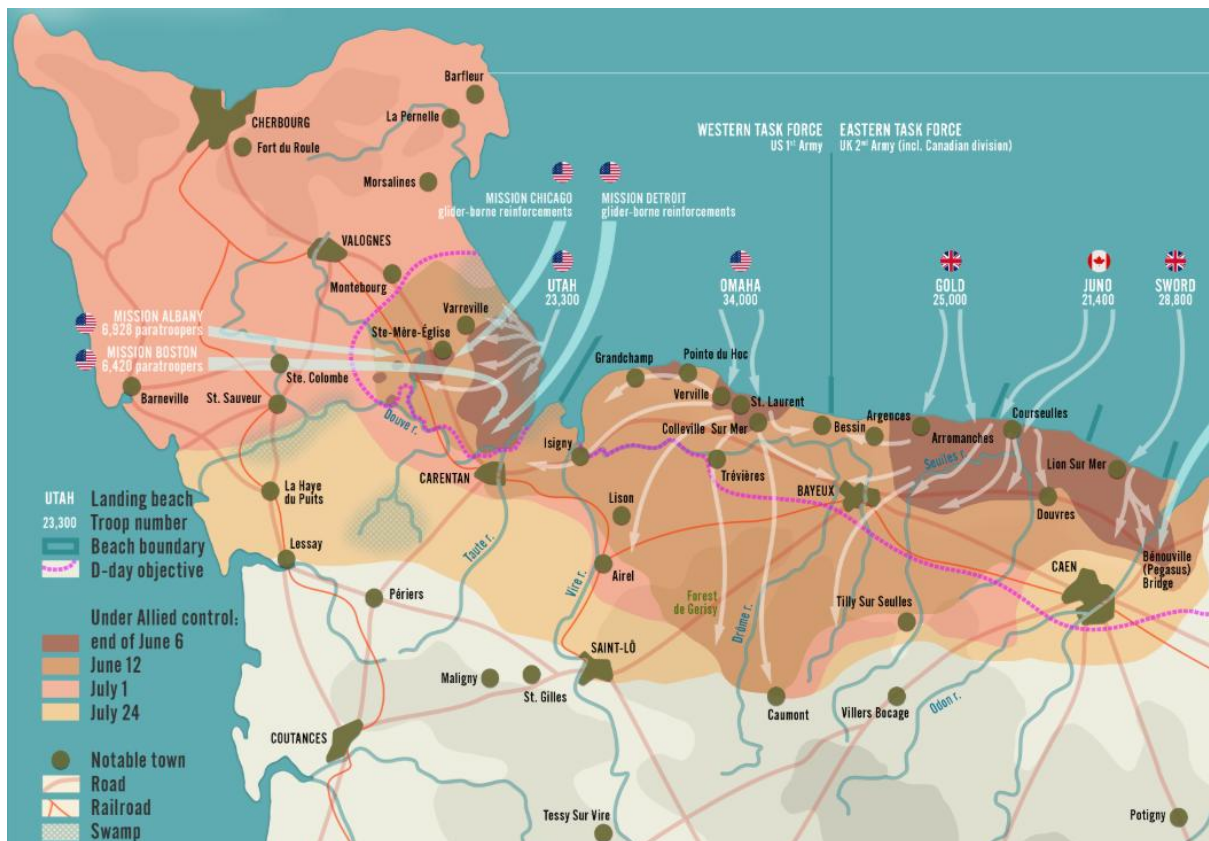


- Drawing German Armor: By aggressively attacking southwest of Caen, the British successfully pinned down elite SS Panzer divisions. This deliberate attrition strategy prevented the Germans from shifting their armor westward, allowing U.S. forces the breathing room needed to plot their eventual breakout.
- Securing Key High Ground: The fighting heavily focused on Hill 112, a dominant ridge in the valley that provided sweeping observation lines over the entire region.

Terrain and Combat Conditions

The fighting in the Odon Valley is recorded as some of the most brutal of the Normandy campaign. A narrow corridor, the valley quickly transformed into a muddy, choked bottleneck. The landscape became a graveyard for both British infantrymen and elite German Panzer units, characterized by close-quarters engagements, relentless artillery shelling, and heavy casualties on both sides.

Operational Map



This map perfectly highlights why your grandfather's efforts were so vital. He landed at Courseulles-sur-Mer which can be seen at the north-east of the invasion. He then headed south-east, straight to the logistical hub and staging ground of Bayeux.

It was vital that the Allies took Caen. It was the major transport route east, on both road and rail. It was also surrounded by flat land which the Allies needed to construct airfields. However, the



Germans knew this and so poured in their elite Panzer Divisions, just as your grandfather was arriving.

The original plan for D-Day was for Caen to be captured on day 1, the 6th June. However, after fighting towards Caen for 6 days, the assault bogged down. The next major push to secure Caen would be the Operations of Epsom and Jupiter which your grandfather would have been fully involved in.

Manchester?

It is completely normal to be confused about why a boy born and raised in Gorton, Manchester, would end up in a Welsh regiment. During the early years of the war, volunteers and conscripts were frequently assigned to regiments based on where reinforcement numbers were needed most urgently, rather than where they lived.

Medal Explained

It was mentioned that your grandfather has medals for France, Germany, and Belgium. This aligns perfectly with his unit's timeline:

- **France & Germany Star:** Awarded for operational service in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany between D-Day and VE Day.
- His battalion fought its way out of France, through the liberation of Belgium, and ultimately into Germany itself.

Guide for Your Normandy Trip

Since you are visiting Normandy at the end of the month, here are the key places you can visit to retrace his exact steps from June and July 1944:

1. **Courseulles-sur-Mer (Juno Beach):** Stand on the beach where he physically stepped off the landing craft onto French soil on June 27th.
2. **Bayeux:** Visit the historic town where his battalion first assembled after moving inland.
3. **The Odon Valley & Hill 112:** Located just southwest of Caen. Today, Hill 112 features an impressive memorial site where you can stand on the exact high ground his regiment fought so hard to secure.