

Normandy Is Like Home For French-Canadians

By WILLIAM STEWART

With the Canadians in France, June 18 (CP).—French-speaking Canadian troops are right at home on the Normandy front, where they have fought on ground much like parts of Eastern Canada, and just now they are dug in around one of the little front-line villages enjoying the present lull in the Canadian sector.

The enemy is only a short distance away, beyond the top of a sloping green field.

The troops mix and chat with the villagers, practically all of whom work the rich farmlands. There are no wooden houses in the village, only the stone walls of Norman houses battered by shell fire and pocked by shrapnel. The tower of the church has been wrecked by direct hits.

The village was a battleground only five days ago. British commandos, on a sweeping offensive march, captured the settlement after battling their way through a half-dozen others nearby. At the time the special service force moved into the village, now held by companies of a Canadian French-speaking battalion, their ranks were depleted and they were desperately short of ammunition and tired and hungry.

Help Commandos.

A company commanded by Major Hughes Lapointe of Quebec City got a call about midnight to move into the village and give the commandos a hand. They advanced through the darkness, joined the small British forces in the village street and fought there for three hours until nearly dawn. Then Lapointe got orders to withdraw and brought his men back to their original positions.

The next day they went in again and now hold the village on the outskirts of which are the graves of some of their own men, some Commandos and some Germans. One group of German dead was buried around the 78-mm. guns abandoned when the Germans were forced out of the village.

Officers who have led companies since their landing on D-Day with a Canadian reserve formation include Majors Fernand Lesperance of Montreal and Georges Sevigny of Plessisville, Que.

A company led by Major Lapointe, son of Canada's late Justice Minister, has seen plenty of fighting and early in the invasion performed a thorough job of destroying a German armored column which came rolling down the road near the village of Le Mare, some miles from the present position.

Lapointe's company was just about dug in when the enemy ap-

peared, their leader apparently not knowing the Canadians were so far forward. The company went to work with rifles, sten guns and grenades and the company commander did some shooting with his revolver. He took care of one German at a range of about 10 feet, so close was the fighting along the narrow road running up between fields of tall grass.

In the brief but fierce fight the entire enemy column, which included eight armored cars, was accounted for. Germans were killed before they were able to make a move. Those who got out of their vehicles were engaged in hand-to-hand fighting along the road.

These Canadian troops haven't had a fight like this since. In their present positions they have to watch for enemy snipers and are within easy range of the enemy mortars. But the lull gives the men a chance to write letters home and improve the trenches they've dug by adding earth-covered roofs to them.

149
WAR
EUROPEAN
1939
EUROPE
INVASION