

***Account of 'A Company Royal Hamilton Light Infantry in the Attack on Verrieres, 25 July 1944
Given by Major Halliday to Captain Engler at Louvigny, 4 August 1944.***

Before moving to the start line the battalion occupied positions EAST of IFS in the area between junction 046636, 051635, 048643. Here 'A' Company occupied the right rear. According to the first plan 'C' Company was to move last, and form a firm base there. When the tank threat on the start line was encountered 'C' Company came ahead to clear the start line through 'A', 'B', and 'D' Companies. 'A' Company came up on the road through IFS and moved to the start line just short of the ST ANDRE-SUR ORNE—TROTEVAL Road, roughly behind and somewhat EAST of the farm. Because of the need to clear the start line, H-hour was delayed from 0330 hrs and the Company did not move until 0410 hrs. They moved through with TROTEVAL FARM on the left down to our objective. This was roughly the right sector of the town including the X-rds. It contained several large barns and the areas NORTH and SOUTH were made up of orchards and open fields. The company plan was to have two platoons forward. The platoon on the right flank was to neutralize any enemy fire from the right flank while the other platoon cleared the hedgerow, building, and houses. 9 Platoon was to clear the barnyard and barns as far as the main road. Upon 9 Platoon clearing this, 8 Platoon was to go through by the left and clear up the town SOUTH of the road. The plan worked out well. The move began in darkness. Before the first hedgerow (048606-051605) was reached four MGs there opened fire on the company and an additional MG opened up from the grain fields to the right rear about 048608. This caused a very great number of casualties but the company did push on though officers, platoon sergeants, and section leaders were gone. They got into the hedgerows and cleared the enemy out from there. They killed about ten and took ten additional prisoners. This was just about dawn. By this time the plan had to be changed as 9 Platoon had only seven men left and could not be expected to clear the barnyards and barns up to the main road. Small groups under two corporals were organized, therefore, to go down the hedgerows leading to the main road and clean out the weapon slits which lined the hedges. The platoon which was to clear SOUTH of the road was also to do the buildings to the NORTH. Actually there were only a very few men in any of the buildings and these were probably men who had drifted in on our attacking the hedges. 7 Platoon then continued down to the hedgerow and barns on the WEST of the town and consolidated in the area of the X rds after taking out four additional MG posts. The platoon took three or four PW but most of them moved WEST down the road towards MAY-SUR ORNE. While 7 Platoon cleared and consolidated, 8 Platoon cleared hedgerows SOUTH of the town, and finally consolidated as planned on the SOUTH part of VERRIERES. 9 Platoon had few men left and consolidated to the NORTH of the main EAST-WEST road.

After consolidation the counter attack came through the grain fields from the SW. There were two the first day and artillery and rocket firing planes in both cases drove off the tanks and infantry before they got to our positions. During the night all the snipers in the grain fields seemed to push forward into the hedgerows. They would walk up to the final ridge and then crawl down into the hedges. The first night 18 men got into the hedgerows. Patrols were sent down which killed quite a few and took 5 PW who told us that 18 had penetrated on orders to retake the town. Later a similar small group was sent back to get a mortar which had been slightly damaged evidently under the misapprehension that there were very few Canadians in the town.

All the time we were in VERRIERES we came under small counter attacks. They were nothing serious, merely harassing attacks and we had no trouble driving them off. Their main object seemed to be to draw our fire so that we might be more accurately subjected to mortar fire. During our first day the tank support was not too good but soon 7 Armoured Division [Desert Rats] came forward and helped us immensely. This support from tanks impressed the company very much. They took on targets out in the fields which they could see because they were a little higher up than our men in the fields.

The platoon on the right flank lost its officers and all its NCOs but one corporal, who did excellent work. With three other men he cleared out four MG positions along this hedge though wounded. The company, out of 95 all ranks, lost 11 killed, and 35 wounded, during the seizing and holding of VERRIERES. The enemy did not hold the town at all but rather occupied the hedgerows and fields with an enormous amount of MGs. He also had two 75mm anti-tank guns in the first EAST-WEST hedgerow. The MGs in this hedge held their fire till the leading platoon was within 100 yards. Once our men reached the hedgerows they gave up easily. There were snipers on the flanks and in the fields in all directions. In the barns and buildings in VERRIERES itself there seemed to be only men who had retreated from the hedges and fields as the slits and dug-outs appeared to be only in the hedgerows. His counter attacks came almost at once. The first within three to five minutes, comprised of about two tanks and 30 infantry, and the second in similar strength came about two hours later. His mortar fire seemed to be concentrated on three points, the northern hedgerows where he had put his slit trenches, the centre of the SOUTH half of the town, and the main X-rds in the town itself.