

# Gently Graze the Cattle

## *Gently Graze the Cattle*

By K.J. West, Fus (Ret'd),

11th Bn Royal Scots Fusiliers

In 1984, to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the landings, I returned to Normandy with my trusty old bike and spent two weeks cycling around the battle areas. Starting at Cherbourg, I visited the American beaches and went on to the British sector, eventually reaching the village of Fontenay-le-Pesnil, where, in a matter of a few days, more than a quarter of the 49th Infantry Division (The Polar Bears) were killed or wounded in the bloody battle.

I found the orchard where I'd joined the 11th Royal Scots Fusiliers on that June evening. Memories came flooding back of the blasted apple trees and the dead cattle, lying with their legs at grotesque angles, their innards heaving with maggots and the stench of cordite and death permeating all.

Now 40 years later, cattle were back in the orchard and stood quietly chewing. The hedges had re-grown and some new trees had been planted, but older ones grew in odd, twisted shapes. Many old stumps remained, and here and there, cows rubbed themselves against a broken stump, a scene of quiet solitude and contentment which I be a most emotional moment and one of the most memorable of the whole two weeks trip. One which in some way, made all the former hardships and efforts seem so worthwhile.

As I cycled on, I couldn't shake this scene from my mind and I found myself putting my thoughts into verse, which were as follows:

### *Return to Fontenay*

Gently graze the cattle now,

Beneath the shady apple bough,

In quiet contentment they scratch their rumps

Against the twisted, gnarled old stumps.

Blasted by shell whilst in their prime,

Part of man's inhuman crime.

They remain a memorial, still today,

To those who fell at Fontenay

And died beneath the apple bough,

Where gently graze the cattle now.