

INTO BATTLE:  
NORTHWEST EUROPE AND ITALY  
June 1944–May 1945

‘Drove through Deventer,’ wrote Lieutenant Donald Pearce of the North Nova Scotia Highlanders on April 4, 1945, ‘a good-sized modern city in the heart of the Netherlands, an hour after it was liberated. A freshly liberated city feels and gives off a strong emotion. There is absolutely nothing like it, nothing to which it can be compared, for it is something coming from the hearts of 30,000 people who are all touched by an irrational joy, animal and human. You can feel freedom. It exists. The smells and sounds of battle were still in the streets ...’ he said. ‘But the people knew it was really over, and poured into the streets in throngs, surging this way and that, demonstrating their freedom by a happy aimlessness.’ By night, ‘nearly all the soldiers had found girls, or were found by them; and Deventer spent its first day and night of liberation in a kind of mad Elysium.’<sup>1</sup>



The fight for freedom was what the Second World War was about, and the struggle was vicious in its intensity. The fighting in Italy was matched – and exceeded – in fury by the invasion of France, the liberation of the Low Countries, and the attack across the Rhine into Germany itself. Hitler’s armies had some three-quarters of their strength on the Eastern Front, but the Russians relentlessly pushed them westward in huge, costly struggles. At the same time,