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COMMANDO RAID ON DIEPPE
19 August 1942

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The Commando Raid on Dieppe, 19 August 1942

Introduction

Situated between two ranges of chalk hills at the mouth of the Arques river is located a small harbor city, Dieppe. Ecclesiastical students may know of the city because of the church of Saint Jacques erected there between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries, gamblers of France, England and other western European countries remember Dieppe because of the famed Casino located there, but, the World War II soldier of Canada, the Commandos of Great Britain, a few of the Fighting French, the Free Poles and the American Rangers will remember Dieppe because of nine hours of one day, 19 August 1942.

During the summer months of 1942 unconquered Britain was just beginning to recover from the paralyzing blows of the Nazi blitz on the continent of Europe and her armies were engaged in a fight for survival on the sands of the Sahara near El Alemain. England was rapidly becoming the storehouse of democracy, gathering strength for the things to come and sniping at the German Fortress Europe with the gallant RAF and daring commando raids all along the coast of Europe.

This monograph will deal with one of these raids, The Commando Raid on Dieppe, 19 August 1942.

The Big Picture

Before the Allied High Command could realize the objective of complete destruction of the Nazi war machine they realized that they had many things to learn. The many complexities of shore to shore movements of vast bodies of men and material had to be solved. What training was necessary to give the soldier the best chance to live? What

supplies were necessary to sustain the invading Armies?

What tools and how many would the soldier require?

Since the evacuation of Dunkirk the German Armies had been busily engaged in fortifying the western coast of Europe against the inevitable "second front." However, lest the German grow placid with his successes, the Combined Operations Command, better known as Commandos, was training and growing under the able leadership of Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten. This daring group had conducted raids on Spitzbergen, to destroy a radio and weather station; on the island of Guernsey off the French coast with the purpose of general destruction; up the coast of Norway above the Arctic Circle to Glonfjord to destroy a Hydro-electric Power station that was supplying power for one of the largest aluminum manufacturing plants in the country; to destroy the submarine pens at St. Nazaire; and other raids of a like nature. (1)

Most of these raids were small operations seldom involving the use of an assault force of over several hundred men. From these small raids many developments were realized toward the training of the Commandos and the Rangers. These developments soon were incorporated into the training of every man in every Army amongst the Allies.

Although the men and material for the opening of the second front was not yet available, the men, shipping, and equipment for a large scale raid was at hand. A means of testing the enemy defenses in the west, his methods of defense, and their quality at the point of a bayonet and the business end of ^arifle. Dieppe was to be a test tube invasion. (2) (See Map A)

" (HAZARDOUS) " The task was dangerous, but so is any operation in war, and yet the lessons that must be revealed were vital. Plans for a large scale raid were begun early in April, 1942. Dieppe was chosen from among the dozens of French coastal cities because it seemed to be a fair sample of what the attackers would have to meet at any harbor along the coast of France and a harbor was a must for sustaining any Army invading the German Empire of conquest and conquered. Dieppe was a harbor being used by the Germans in the coastal supply net, extensive supply dumps, gas works, a power station, a pharmaceutical factory and near by a radio detector station and an air field. All suitable targets. (3) (See Map C)

In addition it was felt that a raid by a large force being conducted during daylight hours would " provoke the Luftwaffe into giving battle on a large scale." Something the Germans had not felt quite up to for some time. If a large enough force of enemy air force could be decoyed into battle and they could be destroyed, it seemed likely that Herman Goering would have to switch some of his air strength from the Russian front to the western coast thereby relieving some of the pressure on our Allies. (4)

Coastal Defenses on the "Iron Coast"

" The coast line about Dieppe was known as the Iron Coast. " (IT IS MADE UP) " Nearly all of the seaboard in this area is composed of high cliffs, mostly unscalable, broken here and there by narrow rivers as they empty into the sea. " The chief of these is the Arques, on which the town and harbor of Dieppe had been built. " The mouth of the river forms a gap something over a mile wide. Stoney beaches lie at the base of rugged cliffs

guarding the approaches to the harbor. (5)

To this natural barrier the Germans have added coastal defense batteries, pill boxes, automatic weapons emplacements, every type of weapon at his disposal. Of all of these defenses the two heavy coastal defense batteries, one near Puits to the east of Dieppe and the other near Varengeville to the west of Dieppe, were the most dangerous. Unless these batteries could be put out of action, all naval vessels entering the harbor were in grave danger of being sunk immediately and the troops on the beaches and in the town of Dieppe would be subjected to their merciless fire. Fully aware of all of these dangers the planners worked on and in due course the outline of the plan for the assault was submitted to the Chief of the Combined Operation Command and was approved.

(5) (See Map C)

The Assault Force

The Canadians, supplemented by Commandos, were chosen for the main part of this hazardous and honorable task. Most of the force of all volunteer Canadians had been under arms for the best part of three years. They had left Canada with the expectation of fighting with the British Expeditionary Force in France but had arrived too late for that. They expected to fight over the fields and through the towns of England in a final last ditch stand and had ended up training and training and training, for three years. They were as eager a group of fighting men as could be found anywhere in the world. They were filled with an often expressed desire to come face to face with the enemy, get the job over and go home. They were to have their chance. The Royal Regiment of Canada, the Essex Scottish Regiment, the Queen's

Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada, the Fusiliers Mont-Royal, the Royal Marine Commando, and since the use of tanks was part of the plan, the 14th Canadian Army Tank Battalion had been chosen from the 1st Canadian Army and the Army Tank Brigade, to form by far the larger part of the force to attack Dieppe!! Other units completing the force were elements of the Fighting French, Free Poles, and fifty American Rangers, 6 officers and 44 enlisted men, and two units of Commandos later designated No. 3 and No. 4. The total strength of the assaulting force was approximately 6,000 men. (6)

too long sentence not clear and the main part of the force

Air elements, operating as a supporting unit, included aircraft from all operations? commands of the RAF, as well as Canadian, New Zealand, United States, Polish, Czech, Norwegian, Belgian and Fighting French. Naval support included no vessels larger than destroyers. (7)

False Dawn

As the spring of May turned to the summer of June, elements of the Canadian 2nd Division found themselves on the move. This one seemed to have an under-current, and the fighting men could feel a new energy, a new drive and were introduced to a new type of training. Amphibious maneuvers, combined-operations landing practice with elements of the Royal Navy, the RAF overhead, British paratroops, Royal Marine Commandos, Signal troops, Ordnance men, and the Medics. Something new had been added in the opening days of June. Massive new Churchill tanks were rolling from the square noses of the LCT's, firing their guns, and clanking back into the box-like ships that were nuzzling the beaches.

redundant

(6) A-1 p. 112 A-10 p. 67 A-14 p. 147 (7) A-4 p. 256

The entire area rocked with the blast of huge demolition charges as whole building^s were tossed into the air. (8)

The infantry was out every day, practising street fighting, lobbing grenades and firing their sten guns. (9)

On the 11th of June the entire force was loaded into ships and sailed out into the channel with units of the Royal Navy hovering protectively about. Between two and three hundred ships were in the convoy, the largest invading armed force to sail the seas in modern history. For several hours they sailed toward the coast of France and for every revolution of the propeller these tense fighting men were spreading three rumors. We are attacking Cherbourg, Africa, Le Harve. By midnight the rumors had died and the seas risen. The big boats were rolling and tossing. The time had come to go over the side into the little landing craft. Within an hour every man in the assaulting force was seasick, but the Navy assembled their groups and headed for the beaches ten miles away. They were an hour late landing but once ashore the tanks and supplies were put on the beaches rapidly. For the initial practice run everything had gone fairly well. The force remained on the beach for eight hours and withdrew to the boats to return to the base port. In the training period that followed the emphasis was placed on the mistakes noted on the 'dry run'. (10)

On the 23rd of June the second big practice landing was held. There was a calm sea in the channel this night, but the Navy errored² in various groups of the landing craft in navigation and in addition to being late, one battalion of Infantry was transported to a beach six miles from the one designated. The entire Infantry assault was delayed and

(8) A-12 p. 286-297 (9) A-12 p. 299 (10) A-12 p. 299-301

the tanks landed ahead of the doughboys. All of these errors were but glimpses of things to come in the eyes of the commanders and they were apprehensive. (11)

The troops returned to the various vicious types of training allotted each unit. On the 27th of June, the Commanding Officer of the operation, Major-General J. H. Roberts, called all the officers in the force to a dramatic conference. Speaking to several hundred at a time in a stifling room which had its windows blacked out and was guarded by armed sentries, the general told them how the force was to be disposed on the coming raid and he specified the tasks of each battalion and unit. (12)

He gave them every detail but did not name the target as Dieppe. There were not many officers who could tell from the model used for the orientation what port it was. (13)

The German defense force in and around the port was estimated at about three thousand, ^{including} some who were labor troops. The 10th Panzer Division was believed to be at Amiens, sixty miles away, and it would probably be ordered to Dieppe after the attack developed. (14) (See Map A)

Charges of force
General Roberts stresses the air strength that will support the attackers to each groups of officers that he addresses. He said there would be an air bombardment of many of the targets and the Fighter Command would put up everything it had to give cover for the operation. (15)

By 2 July the troops were aboard their ships in the harbors of southern England. When they were told that they were going on a raid, they cheered wildly. Up to this point security had been ex^ecellent and there is now no need for

(11) A-12 p. 301 (12) A-12 p. 302 A-8 p. 29 (13) A-12 p. 302
(14) A-12 p. 302 (15) A-12p. 302,302

security measures as the troops have loaded for the last time. Maps and photographs were issued all around. (16)

On the 3rd of July the ships are scattered in the bays ^{and} inlets around the port. The attack has been planned for the 4th of July with H-hour at 0415, then came the message: "Operation postponed twenty-four hours due to weather conditions." That was the first of four such postponements before the heart breaking news was received on 7 July at 1030. "The operation had been cancelled because of unfavorable weather conditions." (17) what?
Part?

Back to training at the many camps and bitter disappointment over the "practice Dieppe", the raid that might have been. (18)

The Crossing

Then on the nights of the 16th and 17th of August the same troops which made up the original main attacking force were loaded into trucks and rushed secretly to various ports along the south coast. Only the senior officers knew that the raid was on again, with a few changes. British commando units were assigned to the tasks previously allotted to paratroopers. Some of the unforeseeable hazards of weather could this way be overcome. It was felt that because of the strong winds the paratroops would lose much of their effectiveness by being blown off the drop zones in landing. (19)

This time the weather was more kind and the two to three hundred vessels carrying the force cleared the ports and started crossing the channel under the cover of darkness. (20)

Guarding the convoy were eight destroyers, two of which served as headquarters and reserve headquarters, Sentence
not clear

(16) A-12 p. 305 (17) A-12 p. 305, 306 (18) A-12 p. 307
(19) A-12 p. 309 (20) A-2 p. 704

Motor and other gunboats, preceded by minesweepers. (21)

Passage through the minefield was considered one of the danger spots for the operation. Leading the convoy was the command destroyer with General Roberts aboard. (22)

The minesweepers preceding the convoy dropped lighted bouys every half mile in the slightly over four hundred yard lane that they had cleared. Air Commodore A. T. Cole, representing Air Marshal Leigh Mallory, who was in charge of the aerial part of the attack, had flown over the channel several nights before and had discovered the German mine layers dropping their eggs and later had observed German E boats bearing into Dieppe and had gotten an approximation of their path. Between his observations and the work of the minesweepers, the entire convoy passed through without incident. (23)

} not clear

After the passage through the mine field the various groups of ships started for their particular beaches. At about 0347 the groups of Commando who were to attack the coast-defense battery near Berneval ran into a small enemy force of armed trawlers. The trawlers immediately opened fire on the hapless landing craft and the gunboat leading them in. The gunboat was soon a shambles, the landing craft scattered, and, the all important element of surprise lost for the attacking party in the vicinity of Berneval, if not for the entire enterprise. (24) (See Map C)

The Plan of Attack

"The assault by the Army was to be made by landing at eight places on the coast at or near Dieppe. There was to be two outer flank attacks, one at Berneval by the No. 3 Commando and the other at Varengeville and a point near the

(21) A-2 p. 704 (22) A-11 p. 67 (23) A-11 p. 102-106
(24) A-2 p. 704

mouth of the River Saane to the west by the No. 4 Commando. In the sectors assigned each of the last two mentioned units were two coast-defense batteries. As has already been explained, the fire from these two batteries would make it impossible for the ships to remain within their range during daylight. The objective of the No. 3 and 4 Commandos was to destroy these batteries. In addition to the two outer flank attacks, there ^{were} was to be two inner attacks delivered at Puits to the east and Pourville to the west of Dieppe. //

(25) (See Map C)

"The Royal Regiment of Canada was to land at Puits, destroy a heavy dual-purpose anti-aircraft battery, situated some distance inland, and capture the headland overlooking Dieppe to the east. "The South Saskatchewan Regiment was to capture Pourville and a similar headland overlooking Dieppe on the west, destroying, on their way, a radio-detector station and a battery of light anti-aircraft guns." "When this regiment had seized the village of Pourville, the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada were to pass through them, move down the valley of the Scie river and capture the airfield at St. Aubin." "The main assault was to be delivered on the town of Dieppe itself, the Essex Scottish Regiment being detailed to land on the eastern half of the long beach-and the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry on the western half." "Out at sea, ready in their landing craft, the Fusiliers Mont-Royal were to wait as a floating reserve. Behind the Fusiliers were the Royal Marine Commando." (26) (See Map C)

"The landings were to be preceded by a short and intense naval bombardment" of the beach. 1780 rounds or approximately

(25) A-9 p. 260 (26) A-10 p. 260 A-1 p. 115

A-1 P 113-114

one round for every yard of beach. At the moment the landing craft were touching down on the beach a concentrated attack of cannon-firing Spitfires and Hurricanes was to be delivered on the main defenses behind the beach at Dieppe. A curtain of fire and smoke laid by aircraft was to spread between the headlands and special attention was to be placed on the east headland where the heaviest enemy fires were expected. As soon as the two regiments had landed and cleared the beach, the tanks were to be put ashore from the LCT's, enter the town and support the infantry in seizing and holding it while the various objectives already mentioned were being blown up! (27)

No. 3 Commando at Berneval

Two beaches had been selected for the landings of No. 3 Commando before Berneval. (28)

As has already been mentioned the landing craft bearing the commandos for the assault on the battery at Berneval had blundered into armed German trawlers. The gunboat leading the landing craft in, had been so severely damaged that it had been forced to retire and had set course for the ports of England at a speed of six knots, all she was capable of. One of the landing craft had been so severely damaged that it too had been forced to return. The Army Officer on this landing craft had been killed as well as all of ^{the} naval force, with the exception of the Naval commander, who had been gravely wounded. Command was assumed by a Sergeant. Using a prismatic compass, the boats compass being damaged, he swung her about and reached port six hours later. (29)

(27) A-1 p. 115 (28) A-1 p. 118 (29) A-1 p. 118

Six landing craft made a landing at the east beach at Berneval in broad daylight, twenty-five minutes after their scheduled landing time. The enemy was aroused and ready. Under withering fire, the Commando advanced and stormed into the fray. It was here that Lieutenant E. D. Loustalot, of the U. S. Rangers assumed command of the force after several other officers had been killed. The same fate was soon his. Within a short time a large percentage of the unit had been wounded or killed. They eventually surrendered. (30)

Though No. 3 Commando fared so ill on this beach, it had a larger measure of success at the other chosen landing place. One landing craft, under the command of Lieutenant H. T. Buckee, RNVR, had on board it Major P. Young, with two officers and 17 men, who formed the headquarters party of part of the attacking force. Throughout the action at sea, Lt. Buckee had maintained a steady course, and had not been seen by the enemy. At ten minutes past four, he and those with him found themselves alone, and nearing the beach at the correct position. Five minutes before zero hour, the craft touched down, and the party jumped to the stoney beach. (31) (See Map C)

They had with them ten rifles, a Bren gun, six tommy guns, three pistols and two mortars with only a few rounds. (Bombs) With these they set out to attack a battery held, as they knew, by some 200 of the enemy. The only way to the top of the cliff was a steep gully which, when they reached it, was found to be choked with wire. They had neither Bangalore torpedoes or cutters, with which to get through. However, many of the strands of wire were stretched taut (30) A-1 p. 118 (31) A-1 p. 119

and firmly attached to the sides of the gully. "Up this barbed, uncertain rope they climbed." It took them three-quarters of an hour. On reaching the top, they ^(went) moved through the woods and orchards until they were in position to attack the enemy. The battery was already firing at our ships at sea. The gallant little band was able to advance to within 200 yards of the battery. (32) (See Map C)

"The fire (of the battery) soon became very ragged as the Commando soldiers began to snipe the gunners. It was impossible to rush the battery, for the garrison outnumbered them by ten to one, but, they were determined to prevent the enemy from shelling the ships at sea. Every time a gun was re-loaded or a man moved they opened up with their ^{//(rifles)} weapons. " Under this goad the Germans presently turned one of their guns around, and opened fire at point-blank range on the persistent attackers. " It was impossible, however, to depress the muzzle sufficiently and the shells whistled harmlessly over the heads of the courageous little band. " Nearly two hours passed and ammunition began to run low. It was time to go home. Withdrawing in the manner they had so often practiced, followed at a respectful distance by some of the enemy, " they eventually reached the beach. Lt. Buckee had lain off shore under constant heavy fire for three hours. The Commando waded out to the little vessel, clambered aboard, and set sail for home. (33)

The Landing At Puits

Deflected from its course by the encounter with the German trawlers, the companies of the Royal Regiment of Canada arrived at Puits at 0450. They were 20 minutes late (32) A-1 p. 119 (33) A-1 p. 119

and in broad daylight. The Royal Regiment of Canada was doomed as their landing craft touched down on the beach.

" Led ashore by their officers, most of whom became casualties in the first few minutes, the men rushed for the shelter of the sea wall where they were presently joined by others coming from the second wave landing shortly after the first. ^(afterwards) "

(but) " The sea wall afforded no protection, enfilade fire swept it from the left flank and the casualties began swiftly to mount. " (34) (See Map C)

^(C & D) " Two companies of the Royals, with the Commanding Officer of the Battalion, Lt. Col. D. E. Catto, had landed on the extreme right of the beach to the west of the sea wall under the cliffs of the headlands. " They were met by heavy fire and immediately began to suffer losses. " After considerable delay, they had lost their Bangalore torpedoes, ^(and some lost) a small number cut their way through the wire, scaled the cliff, and cleared the enemy out of the houses at the top. " This party consisted of six officers and fifteen enlisted men. They were cut off by fire from the rest of the unit. Hoping to contact other groups attacking the center of Dieppe, they set out only to run into a strong enemy patrol. They sought shelter in a wood and did not surrender until 1620 hours.

It presently became apparent the landing at Puits was a complete failure. " A succession of efforts was made to withdraw the troops. A number of landing craft went in under very heavy fire. One of them, loaded with men, received a direct hit as she was moving out, and capsized. " Some of these men were picked up by light naval craft a few hours later, but the beach was khaki-colored with the bodies of

(34) A-1 p. 124 (35) A-3 p. 422

gallant Canadian fighters. (36)

No. 4 Commando at Varengueville

At daybreak, 19 August 1942, No. 4 Commando, consisting of 252 officers and men, including seven allied personnel, assaulted the 6-gun battery at Varengueville. The position was defended by an equal number of Germans, with all the advantages of concrete, wire, mines, concealed machine guns, dual-purpose flak guns and knowledge of the ground. They had two years to perfect these defenses, and when the time came they fought with the greatest determination. (37)

Sighted so as to fire at any ship approaching within 9,000 yards, the 6-gun battery at Varengueville had to be overcome. It was to be subjected to a double assault similar to the plan of attack at Berneval. ["] No. 4 Commando, under the command of Lt. Col. Lord Lovat, was to land at two points, one close to the little village Vasterival, the other nearly a mile away, about 600 yards from the mouth of the Saane river. (38) (See Map B)

["] As has already been said, the assault was to be made by two parties. What befell those who landed at Vasterival must first be described. Under the command of Major D. Mills-Roberts, ^(who landed three minutes late) the group landed just three minutes behind schedule. The cleft of the cliff chosen to advance through was choked with wire but their Bangalore torpedoes eliminated that. The Bangalore torpedoes exploded just as a squadron came in to attack the enemy and the noise of their attack blended with the explosion of the torpedoes. The enemy still did not realize their immediate proximity.

They were able to advance so close to the enemy that they

(36) A-1 p. ¹²⁶ ~~115~~ A-12 p. 328 (37) A-5 p. 38 (38) A-1 p. 120

could hear the commands given to the enemy gunners. This ^{which} fire was rendered ineffective by a small party that detached itself from the main portion of Group One upon reaching the top of the cliff. Their mission was to cut the wires leading from the lighthouse that was being used as an OP for the battery. (39) (See Map B)

Group One was able to advance through the woods to positions within 150 to 200 yards of the German battery. They immediately opened fire and on the second or third round of the accompanying mortar section, a fire was started in the cordite charges and shells stacked alongside the guns. The explosion put the battery out of action. As the enemy gunners were trying to put out the fire, snipers were taking a terrific toll of the harried defenders. At this time the prescribed signal of the second group of No. 4 Commando was seen, smoke bombs were released and firing ceased so that the second group would not be endangered by their comrades; coordinated training was paying off. (40)

The second group of No. 4 Commando was by far the largest. After landing on the beach near the mouth of the River Saane, they subdued a pill box near the beach, pushed inland following the marshy banks of the river. At a particular bend in the river, identified from carefully studied aerial photo's, they turned left into the woods and were soon directly behind the German battery. Two of the scouts of the group came across some 35 German assault troops, part of the batteries garrison, who were forming up behind a farmhouse to form a force to counter-attack Major Mills-Roberts and his sniping riflemen, and galling mortars. The Germans (39) A-1 p. 121 A-5 p. 47 (40) A-1 p. 121 A-5 p. 48

strong anti-aircraft batteries and a radio-detector station that were to be knocked out. (45) (See Map C)

Through the South Saskatchewan bridgehead, the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada were to pass through and strike inland, marry up with some of the Calgary Regiments Churchill tanks on the high ground southwest of the port, and advance on the airfield at St. Aubin, some three and one half miles from Pourville. In the final phase they were to move out via the main beaches. (46) (See Map C)

The actual landing of the South Saskatchewan Regiment encountered little opposition until the men were ashore, and as at Puits, a sea wall divided the beach. This sea wall was scaled with a ladder, a couple of pillboxes were knocked out, and they started to move inland under the cover of a smoke screen. (47)

At about 0600 hours a road block was encountered and was overcome only after a fierce fire fight. While this was going on other elements of the Regiment moved on into Pourville, wiping out the anti-aircraft batteries and the radio-detector station on the way. (48) (See Map C)

" Two companies then attacked on through Pourville until they reached the bridge over the Scie river. Here they were held up by heavy mortar and machine-gun fire. Gallantly lead by their Commander, Lt. Col. C. C. I. Merritt, they forced their way across the bridge and began their assault on the pillboxes guarding the Four-Winds Farm. The pillboxes were eventually captured, but only after many casualties had been suffered and the entire morning had passed. The Four-Winds Farm itself was never taken, and it's garrison was

(45) A-1 p. 126 (46) A-3 p. 422-423 (47) A-1 p. 126
(48) A-1 p. 126

still fighting vigorously when the signal to withdraw was received. (49) (See Map C)

Some forty minutes after the South Saskatchewan Regiment had landed, the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada landed and advanced rapidly through the area previously secured. One company was left behind to reenforce the South Saskatchewan's east of Pourville. The remainder headed for the St. Aubin airport, following the Scie River to avoid enemy fire. Nowhere in this area had the Canadians met any tanks. By all plans, the tanks should have been encountered. (50) (see Map C)

There was a good reason. One Company of the South Saskatchewan Regiment had captured the headland overlooking the Dieppe beach according to plan, but then the Germans had counter-attacked. The enemy far outnumbered the Canadians and had soon recaptured the all important headland overlooking the Dieppe beaches and the beaches from which the attackers of Pourville would have to reembark. Wounded men were already being carried back to the beach by this time. At 1045 hours, when the landing craft came back to take them away, the boats met heavy fire. Only one was sunk. The rest had to lie fairly well offshore while those men who could do so swam out across 150 to 200 yards of open water, after crossing an equal stretch of unprotected beach. (51)

By this time the South Saskatchewan Regiment had received the signal to withdraw, and had started back to the beach under heavy attack by the enemy forces. During the re-embarkation, which took more than three hours, Lt. Col. Merritt and his remaining men from the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders (49) A-1 p. 127 A-7 p. 94 (50) A-1 p. 128 (51) A-3 p. 423

of Canada, attacked the machine-gun post scourging their beach from the west, and silenced it. They formed an improvised rear guard to defend a perimeter behind which all the wounded and other survivors of the South Saskatchewan Regiment and the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada could safely embark. Their defense continued until the last man embarked. They surrendered about 1500 hours, when all of their ammunition was gone. (52)

Throughout the assault and the evacuation, covering fire had been provided at frequent intervals by the Royal Navy, and many attacks were made by our air squadrons. Even though the protective cover of the R.A.F. was seemingly impenetrable, a few German planes did manage to slip through and discharge their bombs at the tiny landing craft. (53)

The Main Effort

Meanwhile, the main effort was being made on the beach at Dieppe. Landing on the eastern beach, was the Essex Scottish Regiment and on the right, was the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry. The site chosen for their landing stretched westward from the breakwater and ended near the cliffs topped by the Casino. Beyond the beach, from which it was divided by a sea wall, ran the Boulevard Marshal Foch on one side of a park stretching inland to the Boulevard Verdun. The boulevards were lined with houses and hotels that the Germans had strongly fortified. The infantry's task was to seize the beach, neutralize the enemy defenses, and clear the way for the Churchill tanks, (this was the first time that these tanks had been used in any action) ^{which} ~~who~~ were to come into town and support the infantry. Some of the

sentence involved

(52) A-1 p. 129 (53) A-1 p. 129

elements were to pass through the town and join the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada in their attack on St. Aubin airfield. The infantry was to hold Dieppe while other forces carried out important demolitions. (54) (See Map C)

As the Essex Scottish and the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry came into their beaches together, the destroyers at sea opened up with a short but intense bombardment of the beaches; and as their fire ceased, some sixty cannon-firing Spitfires and Hurricanes shot up the houses along the front. While this was going on, the eastern headland above Dieppe Harbor was being screened by smoke dropped by three squadrons of Boston and Blenheims bombers. Immediate fire support was given by special craft which went in very close. They were all hit by the enemies batteries and one vessel was sunk. (55)

On reaching the beaches, the Essex Scottish Regiment and the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry rushed forward, but, as with the Royal Regiment at Puits, they came at once under fierce frontal and enfilade fire. The defenses in the houses behind the promenade had been subdued but not silenced, by the naval and air bombings, and the guns were still in action. As the smoke screen began to drift away from the eastern headlands, many guns, some of larger calibers, mounted in the caves of the headlands, began taking their toll of the attackers. (56) (See Map C)

On the eastern side of the beach, the Essex Scottish Regiment had been stopped by the sea-wall at the esplanade and was taking severe casualties from the guns of the defenders. However, a small party eventually made their way into town. They were presently joined by a party of Royal

(54) A-1 p. 132 A-3 p. 424 (55) A-1 p. 132 (56) A-1 p. 133

Canadian Engineers. Bangalore torpedoes of the Infantry joined with the demolition charges of the Engineers to blow up near by pillboxes, killing the defenders in the Casino itself, and destroying a 4 inch gun. The group¹ eventually were able to work their way^(see here) to a church a short distance away, but, being unsupported could go no further. (57)

While the foot soldiers were fighting their way through the stubborn enemy defenses, tank-landing craft were approaching the beach. Aboard the six LCT's were the engineers and some members of the beach parties. The Engineers were ordered to destroy the tank obstacles² that might be blocking the streets of Dieppe that the tanks were to advance through. As they approached the beach they were brought under heavy fire and ^{each} every craft bearing the tanks was hit, one sunk, and another ran aground flaming, and remained beached. Despite this, all but two of the tanks were successfully landed. (58)

The second wave of LCT's came under even heavier fire a half hour later. Another LCT was sunk and all remaining craft received many hits that caused casualties amongst the crews. In all, 28 tanks were landed. (59)

A number of the tanks succeeded in getting over the wall, but were not able to proceed further because of the blocks in the streets leading into town. One tank, however, smashed through a house and got into town³, with perhaps one or two others following. (60)

⁴ By 0630 hours, Major-General Roberts, aboard his command destroyer, the H.M.S. Calpe, was well aware the situation was not developing as planned. No word had been⁵ received

(57) A-1 p. 133 A-3 p. 424 (58) A-1 p. 133 A-3 p. 425

(59) A-1 p. 133 (60) A-1 p. 135

from the beaches at Puits or from Berneval. However, the situation seemed to be encouraging in the area about Pourville. The report of the success of the mission at Vasterival had been received. Although the reports from the main beach were spotty, the report had been received that the tanks had gotten ashore, but not that they had been able to achieve so little. Intent on accomplishing as much as possible, the commander decided to throw in one element of the reserve. The Fusiliers Mont-Royal were to be used in an attempt to secure the eastern headlands. (61)

The Reserves Are Committed

The Fusiliers landed shortly after 0700 hours. The fires of the German defenders was as fierce as ever, and forced the attackers to seek cover. Some gained protection from the wrecked tanks and others dropped into the few hollows of the beach that they could find. Part of the force had been swept by a strong westerly tide to the western half of the beach near the Casino. By this time the Casino was in the hands of the Canadians. The groups that landed on the extreme western flank of the beach found themselves beneath high unscalable cliffs. They were cut off without room to maneuver and were being fired on by machine gun and mortar fire that they could not engage. After taking heavy casualties for almost five hours, with over a hundred wounded, they were forced to surrender about noon. (62)

The men who had landed near the Casino were able to organize in the Casino and push into the town. One group of eleven men, under the command of a Sgt. Dubuc, pushed into the town, destroyed an enemy machine gun nest and eventually

(61) A-1 p. 136 (62) A-1 p. 136 A-3 p. 425

arrived at the inner harbor. Here they killed or wounded^{//} all the Germans seen on the barges and small craft lying there. Shortly afterwards, they met^{//} superior German forces, and being out of ammunition, were forced to surrender.^{//} (63) (See Map C)

^{//} The Germans made them take off their clothes, lined them up against a wall, and left a single German soldier to guard them. Sgt. Dubuc distracted the sentry's attention, and as soon as he had turned his head the Canadians fell on him, killing him with their bare hands. On attempting to return to the beach, some of the men became lost, but others made their escape.^{//} (64)

^{//} The efforts of the Fusiliers to capture the eastern headlands were futile, but General Roberts did not know this. Shortly after 0700 he decided to reinforce again, this time with the Royal Marine Commando. By this time he knew that the heavy battery at Varengeville had been destroyed, that the Camerons were through Pourville, which was in the hands of the South Saskatchewan Regiment, that the Casino in front of Dieppe was captured, and, that the tobacco factory, together with other buildings in the center of the German defenses behind the promenade was on fire.^{//} (65)

^{//} There seemed to be a reasonable prospect that the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry, if reinforced, would be able to capture the western headland. The Royal Marine Commando^{//} went in to try. (66)

The Royal Marine Commando was composed of Fighting French selected and trained for this operation. (67)

By the time sufficient landing craft ^{were} available to

(63) A-1 p. 137 (64) A-1 p. 137 (65) A-1 p. 137
(66) A-1 p. 137 (67) A-1 p. 137

land the force, it was after 0830. As the landing boats sailed in, a smoke screen was laid down to cover their landing. As the first landing craft came through on the shore edge of the screen, every enemy gun within range, from the lightest anti-aircraft to the heavy guns on the headlands, opened up at full blast. Few from the first landing craft arrived at the shore unhurt. The officer in charge of the landing forces, Lt. Col. J. P. Phillips, decided to halt the landing if at all possible. As his own craft approached the beach, he pulled white gloves over his hands to make them more visible, jumped up on the exposed foredeck, and began signaling the other boats to turn back. As the boats turned in obedience to his command, Lt. Col. Phillips fell mortally wounded. His life had saved two hundred. (68)

By now it was obvious that the headlands to the east and west of Dieppe would not be captured in time to permit an entry into the town. It was decided to withdraw those who had been assaulting them and the town so intrepidly." (69)

The Withdrawal

Flying through a hail of anti-aircraft fire, R.A.F. Bostons dropped smoke that soon covered the entire area between the two headlands. (70)

Under this protective cover, the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry slowly fought their way back to the shore. With them were some units of the Fusiliers Mont-Royal. These men held the Casino until the last moment, withdrawing only when imperative orders were issued. (71)

Covering the withdrawal were the Calgary tankers. Shortly after 1100 the senior officer present calls to his

(68) A-1 p. 139 A-3 p. 427 (69) A-1 p. 140 (70) A-3 p. 427
(71) A-3 p. 427

tanks; "Take positions to cover the beach as much as possible."
(72)

So the tanks come waddling out of the town onto the esplanade, covering each exit to the park and the flanks of the beach, completing their final move by noon. (73)

The enemy fire, particularly from the heavy mortars and light mobile artillery, is increasing. Motorboats and destroyers are foaming into the Dieppe beaches--the supporting flank operations at Puits and Varengeville have already been withdrawn. Detachment by detachment, the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry and the Essex Scottish--what is left of them--scurry to the boats. The Mont-Royal are covering the withdrawal as best they can, receding inch by inch, hanging on from house to house, holding the fringe of town until the wounded on the beaches can be gotten off. And the tanks from their last stand bellow defiance and belch covering smoke as grey-green uniforms flit through the rubble, as Nazi artillery and mortars hail death. (74)

The Mont-Royals are breaking contact now. Let's listen in again to the tanks as the last of the infantry get away.
(75)

"Any ALC's coming in?" asks squadron.

purpose
"Yes, one. There's an ALC sinking right of the promontory." It's the beach commander answering. "Our aircraft will try to keep support constant. They say they'll do their best. Use smoke."

"Good. If they make one good effort we'll be all right. Keep cool and we'll get off all right." He adds to his tanks: "Keep up the sniping, next is to get off. Acknowledge."

(72) A-13 p. 49 (73) A-13 p. 49 (74) A-13 p. 49
(75) A-13 p. 49

All troops acknowledge.

"Do we leave and destroy all vehicles?" asks one tanker.

"Yes. Abandon tanks when the boats touch down."

From Squadron B comes another query. "Does that apply to us as well as you?"

"Definitely. I forgot I was in command."

Beach breaks in with the admonition: "If you abandon tanks you must bring Besa and tommy guns with you."

"When are they coming?"

"They're doing all they can to get them in, but it may take some time. Suggest you stay in tanks."

At 1211, after some querying on availability of boats, squadron reports to his tanks: "There are a couple (of motorboats) waiting to come in. Use more smoke and we can go aboard. When the opportunity presents, you may leave and get off."

"Do we wait for an order?"

"No, do it on your power."

"Do we leave tanks?" A bit wistful, this question, as any tanker will understand.

"We've got to leave tanks."

Beach breaks in: "Do we close down?"

"Where are you? Counters squadron."

"By the motorboat with the wounded."

"You are in a covered spot. Prefer you stay open a little longer."

"Is there much you can see?"

"I'll be seeing you in the Starboard Club again. We're going to take cover in the smoke."

It is now 1219. A troop commander of Squadron B calls:

"Do we hold on?"

Squadron comes back: "Yes. Hold on and decide for yourself when to close down. My guns and ammunition are gone. I can do no more good on the beach. Load by crews on the craft.

One tank to another: "Number Seven Ack! The rear of your tank is on fire."

One tank to another, at 1226: "Yes, we can give you cover. Are you going to evacuate right now?"

The troop commander to his troops: "Are you all out of action? The answer is unanimous: "Yes."

Squadron to beach, at 1227: "Can you see me?"

"Yes. I can see you, too."

"Be sure your party bring the rest of the ammunition," reminds beach at 1231. "We need it."

At 1235 a noise like a laboring starter is heard by the monitoring station. Then silence. The 14th Calgary Tank Battalion had accomplished it's mission of covering the withdrawal. (76)

There were still others on the beach that were not destined to join the convoy and steam back to Briton under the protective cover of the RAF. Among these were many doctors and orderlies of the medical corps, who had done perhaps the most heroic job of all. Unarmed, defenseless, and unprotected, they labored throughout the battle to ease the wounded and comfort the dying. One by one they saw other units taken off the beach, and out to sea and England; yet they stuck uncomplainingly to their tasks until there were no more wounded to tend or boats to carry them away. (77)

(76) A-13 p. 49-50 (77) A-3 p. 428

The smoke screen that had a few moments before been a help now proved a hindrance. Landing craft were unable to locate the small groups of survivors, and finally had to withdraw because of the terrific curtain of fire that the Germans were maintaining. (78)

The last ship to leave the area was the destroyer with General Roberts on board. His destroyer went in to the beach in a final attempt to pick up any men who might be in the water. This lone destroyer was the sole target of every weapon the enemy could bring to bear. Machine-gun bullets ricocheted crazily from the steel plates around the bridge. Now and then men were spotted clinging to rafts and wreckage, and hoisted aboard. As the destroyer was moving out of the harbor a Folk-Wulf 190 penetrated the fighter screen, raked the ship from stem to stern with its eight machine-guns, and dropped a bomb. That was the first time that a Folk-Wulf had ever been used as a dive bomber, and one of the few times that day that the Luftwaffe had been successful in penetrating the fighter screen. (79)

Accompanying Air Action

In the original planning, it was hoped that the raid would provoke the German aircraft into rising and giving battle. The Luftwaffe met the challenge. With the coming of dawn the German fighters began appearing, until 50 to 100 were at the scene. By 1000 hours the bombers made their appearance. At this time the RAF was over the area in great strength and they maintained their strength over the area until nightfall. ¹¹In addition to the shooting-up of the houses behind the promenade of Dieppe and the laying of smoke over the eastern headlands, (78) A-3 p. 428 (79) A-1 p. 144

and for the withdrawal, a constant and very efficient air umbrella was being maintained above the Naval Forces.// Not many of the enemy aircraft were able to penetrate this curtain. (80)

// Though damage was caused by near misses to several craft, the only major ship sunk of the force was the destroyer Berkeley. Shortly after 1300 hours a Junkers 88 had jettisoned it's load after being attacked by a Spitfire. By ill luck, the Berkeley happened to be underneath when the bombs fell. Her bridge was destroyed and she received a fatal blow.// (81)

At 1030 hours, the American Army Air Force sent 24 Flying Fortresses, escorted by four squadrons of Spitfires, to bomb the airfield at Abbeville. This airfield, the nearest the enemy had, was hit with such good effect that 16 aircraft, at least, were destroyed or damaged at the dispersal points, and the airfield itself put out of action for a vital two hours. In addition, the controllers for the whole of that fighter area appear to have been killed or wounded, for the control remained out of action until the evening, when a new and unfamiliar voice came on the air.// (82)

// Throughout the action, up to the hour of withdrawal, the Air Force received frequent requests for curtains of smoke to be laid, mainly on the eastern headland, for batteries to be bombed. These requests were met to the limit. Many had been anticipated, for Vice-Marshal Leigh Mallory, in his headquarters at No. 11 Group, could see with great clarity every move of the battle as it took place before him on the map. Throughout the operation he knew exactly what was happening and was able to anticipate every move of the enemy in the air.//

(80) A-1 p. 141 (81) A-1 p. 141 (82) A-1 p. 142

^ Altogether, his aircraft made over 2,000 sorties. Among them, special mention must be made of the reconnaissance aircraft of Army Co-operation Command, two squadrons of which came from the R.C.A.F. These American-built Mustangs ranged far and wide over Northern France. It was among them that the heaviest casualties were sustained, for they were flying alone, outside and far beyond the main area of air cover.// In addition to this, they were subjected to intense anti-aircraft fire from friendly units, the Mustangs closely resembled the Messerschmidt 109. (83)

* Between dawn and nightfall, 93 German aircraft were known to have been destroyed--43 of them bombers, a further 44 probably destroyed, and 148 damaged. The evidence seemed to indicate that the German loss in aircraft destroyed may have been as high as 170.// This represented between a quarter and one third of the enemys front line strength at that time. The Royal Airforce losses were 98 machines and 68 pilots. (84)

Home Port

Lead by the H.M.S. Calpe back through the mine fields, the return trip to England was mostly uneventful, due to the cover given by the Royal Air Force. Despite the overcast weather, the Luftwaffe made several determined attempts to bomb the weary men on the ships, but all were successfully beaten off. Shortly after midnight the ships had all returned to the ports from which they had sailed. (85)

The following day, newspapers in the United States were prone to exaggerate the participation of United States troops in the raid. Many carried splash headlines saying, "U.S. Troops Land with Commandos in Biggest Raid!", "U.S. and

(83) A-4 p. 274 (84) A-4 p. 274 (85) A-1 p. 145

A-1 P34 142

British Invade France!", "Tanks and U.S. Troops Smash at French Coast!" This certainly had a very poor effect on our allies who had carried the brunt of the losses on the raid, and who were informed that only 50 U.S. troops had participated. English newspapers carried the headlines, mentioned above, in their own newspapers, with the statement that they expressed the sentiment of the American newspapers. (86)

(86) A-11 p. 66

Analysis and Criticism

In studying the 26 different volumes of books, magazines and newspaper articles, both official and unofficial, the first thing that struck me was the tremendous losses incurred in the operation.

After the operation¹¹ the Canadian government announced from Ottawa that of the 5,000 Canadian troops engaged a total of 3,350^{were} killed, wounded or missing. Subsequent announcement raised the total to 3,372.¹¹ Remember this report covered only the Canadian losses and did not include the losses of the RAF, the Royal Navy, the Commandos, the U. S. Rangers, the Fighting French or the Free Poles.

After considering the losses incurred, consider the objectives that were accomplished: 1. The destruction of one heavy coastal defense battery at Varengeville. 2. Destruction of the Radio-detector station at Pourville. 3. Only minor damage on the city of Dieppe and the surrounding areas. In view of the concrete objectives gained the raid can only be classed as a failure.

Let us examine the reasons for this failure.

At Berneval the vessels carrying the assault troops were scattered by the clash with the German armed trawlers

and the enemy was alerted in that sector. The assault on the position was delayed and disorganized. However, one landing craft was successful in carrying out its mission, to a limited extent. The Commander of this small group did not have the means available, or did not use them, to request reinforcements, and the reinforcements could have been available from the floating reserve, to capitalize on the defenders weakness in the area.

At Puits, the Royal Regiment of Canada landed 25 minutes behind the planned schedule. Yet no attempt was made to change their landing to another point other than directly into the guns of the defender yet the concealment afforded by darkness had vanished with the rising sun.

I feel that paratroops could have been used much more efficiently in that particular area. Then, even though the time table had been interrupted, a force would have been available to attack the enemy batteries in the area and to assist the main force in their landing.

At Pourville, the vital terrain feature was the western headlands. This fact was not recognized in the planning and when the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders passed through the area, a company was left to reinforce around the Pourville area. This unit could have been put to a better use in reinforcing the South Saskatchewan's on the headlands.

On the main beaches the basic plan of attack was a frontal assault on a fortified position. Military history has proven time and time again that this is the most expensive method of attack used in warfare. Here too, the Calgary tankers followed the infantry onto the beaches before the infantry had had an opportunity to knock out the enemy

anti-tank defenses. Had the tanks been successful in getting off the beaches they would undoubtedly have been restricted in their movements within the city because of the street blocks constructed by the Germans. I believe that the tanks should have been held in a reserve status until a successful landing had been established, and then committed. This could have been accomplished at Pourville. Here the tanks would have been free to maneuver and better employ their weapons in support of the infantry in a flanking assault on Dieppe.

Smoke was used very effectively in screening the movements of our forces from the enemy both by the ground troops and by aircraft.

In the matter of defense of a fortified position, we may learn several things from the German failures at Varengeville. The German failed to provide parallel lines of communication. When the commandos cut the wire lines to the battery positions the observation post lost its effectiveness and the battery could not fire effectively. Radio should and could have been used. Also the German did not provide any security detachments for this battery position.

Many of the P-51's or Mustangs used by the RAF were subjected to anti-aircraft fire from their own forces. This clearly demonstrated the need for a better program of aircraft recognition.

On the level of (high) theater command an attempt should have been made to properly orient the newspapermen of smaller units that are participating in any combined operation. The impression that any one member of the team is trying to gain all of the glory of any operation must be avoided. American

newspapers created a very poor impression on our Canadian neighbors and our English Allies with their policy of over emphasis on the American participation in the raid.

Lessons Learned

1. Surprise against a hostile shore is usually impossible to attain.

2. Each landing craft should carry some means of radio communications to the headquarters ship.

3. Coastal defense guns must have adequate protection within its own position when placed on a shore subject to the attack of an enemy.

4. In the attack of a well defended position in daylight hours, heavy casualties must be expected and planned for.

5. Key terrain features must be siezed to prevent fire and observation of the enemy.

6. After seizing key terrain features it must be expected that the enemy will counterattack immediately and vigorously.

7. Key terrain features must be reinforced to withstand and repel any counterattack the enemy can bring to bear.

8. Smoke can be used effectively to screen movement and prevent observation by the enemy.

9. The attack on an enemy position that is well fortified must be preceeded by a saturation bombing attack.

10. Large caliber naval guns can be used to give close support to the infantry in the attack of a fortified position.

11. The main attack on a fortified position should be from the flanks and not a frontal attack whenever possible.

12. The plan for any operation must be flexible and the

commander must remember that the plan is flexible.

13. Self-propelled artillery should follow the infantry to give close support after the beaches have been cleared.

14. Tanks should not land until anti-tank positions have been knocked out and the beach cleared of obstacles.

15. Every man engaged in the operation must have a clear understanding and complete knowledge of the entire plan.

16. In establishing a beach-head the minimum force necessary should be used to force the landing and then successes may be exploited with a mobile reserve.

17. Adverse public opinion may be created in the minds of Allies by glorifying the participation of one element or unit of a combined operation.

18. In releasing casualty figures it is well to issue one set of correct figures only.