

## **Dieppe and D-Day**

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The Dieppe raid was, in terms of success of objectives was a devastating failure. Thousands of men lost their lives, landing craft was destroyed and tanks were deserted during the evacuation and very few objectives were met. For all the planning that went into this raid it would seem it was rather poorly planned. The lessons learned from Dieppe are the saving grace for the justification of the raid. The allied commanders gained much knowledge of what would be required for a full scale invasion of the continent and this knowledge was applied to the planning of D-day 2 years later. This paper will prove, using such historians as Terry Copp and C. P. Stacy along with others that the Dieppe raid was an important, if not necessary, precursor for a full scale invasion of the European continent. As British General in the Combined Operations Headquarters Crerar said “the sobering influence of that operation on existing allied strategical conceptions, with the enforced realization by the allied governments of the lengthy and tremendous preparations necessary before invasion could be attempted.”<sup>1</sup>

There is much debate among historians regarding the outcomes of the Dieppe raid. What lessons were learned, what lessons were planned to be learned and what extra lessons and ideas came about due to the raid. There is also much debate about the usefulness of Dieppe in the planning of D-Day, whether or not it was actually a required operation. In October of 1942 a report incorporating the official lessons learned from Jubilee was released. This paper will start with that document.

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<sup>1</sup> C.P. Stacey, excerpts from *Six Years of War: The Army in Canada, Britain and the Pacific, Volume 1, Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War.* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1955) pp. 402.

“The lesson of greatest importance” the document reads “is the need for overwhelming fire support, including close support, during the initial stages of the attack.”<sup>2</sup> The report continued, recommending heavy and medium navel bombardment, bombers, assaulting troops on the run in using their fire power and special craft that had yet to be developed. Operation Jubilee had opened the eyes of the allied commanders:

“Until the evidence of Dieppe proved otherwise, it had been the opinion in highest command and staff circles in this country that an assault against a heavily defended coast could be carried out on the basis of securing tactical surprise and without dependence on overwhelming fire support...”<sup>3</sup>

To keep surprise, no major bombardment took place during Jubilee. On the main beach assault only four small Hunt-class destroyers with a total of sixteen 4 inch guns were used along with twelve fighter aircraft with canons and machine guns to soften the Germans up. The ‘bombardment’ lasted merely 10 minutes and took place 10 minutes before the landing craft were to land.<sup>4</sup> Some landing craft were also equipped with rockets and machine guns that fired on the run-in to the beach. This lesson was clearly learned for D-day as huge numbers of ships and planes along with new craft (such as the L.C.G. and L.C.T. (R)) came in to pound the German defenses well before, and during the landings for prolonged periods. As the Whitakers point out leading up to the D-day invasion “RAF bomber command had attacked with 1000 aircraft...at dawn 1300 flying fortresses of the 8<sup>th</sup> U.S. air force delivered a follow up massive bombing attack”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> C.P. Stacey, excerpts from Six Years of War: The Army in Canada, Britain and the Pacific, Volume 1, Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War. (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1955) pp. 399.

<sup>3</sup> C.P. Stacey, excerpts from Six Years of War: The Army in Canada, Britain and the Pacific, Volume 1, Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War. (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1955) pp. 401

<sup>4</sup> Denis and Shelagh Whitaker, Dieppe: Tragedy to Triumph (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1992), Part 7 Aftermath, pp. 295

<sup>5</sup> Denis and Shelagh Whitaker, Dieppe: Tragedy to Triumph (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1992), Part 7 Aftermath, pp. 295

In *Fields of Fire* Copp argues “surely, the overwhelming firepower developed for D-Day made a rapid breakthrough possible...air power alone must have had the capacity to overwhelm the defenders”<sup>6</sup> This statement is a clear reference to the aforementioned lesson learned. Campbell sees this differently, he notes that air and sea bombardment were to a part of the raid until they were scrapped for one reason or another and that Jubilee only reaffirmed the belief: “...whose validity Hughes-Hallet and Mountbatten claimed to have been fully aware of well before Jubilee – the need for ‘overwhelming’ fire support in a frontal assault on a well defended position, including full support in the final stage of a landing”<sup>7</sup> Finally the official Canadian historian C.P. Stacy noted that “There’s very good evidence that the Dieppe plan was essentially the sort of plan that the Allied high command entertained and were counting on using in a big invasion operation. It was going to be Dieppe on a larger scale...That plan was absolutely forgotten after Dieppe.”<sup>8</sup> These authors see this lesson in very different lights. A lesson learned however harsh or obvious is still important. Perhaps without the travesty that took place at Dieppe the D-Day landings would not have the bombardment that it ultimately had.

Due to the ineffectiveness of the waterproofed Churchill tanks during Jubilee the allies had to engineer a tank that could float. The duplex drive (DD) tanks were created prior to D-Day and these tanks had the ability to swim to shore with no need of a craft to deliver them. Also created after Dieppe, and due to the great loss of lives of engineers, was the Armored Vehicle Royal Engineers (AVRE). This tank carried the engineers and charges to destroy strong points or concrete obstacles such as beach walls. These two

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<sup>6</sup> Terry Copp, *Fields of Fire: The Canadians in Normandy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), pp. 35.

<sup>7</sup> John P. Campbell, "Dieppe and D-Day" contained in *Dieppe Revisited: A Documentary Investigation* (London: Frank Cass, 1993), pp 217.

<sup>8</sup> Denis and Shelagh Whitaker, *Dieppe: Tragedy to Triumph* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1992), Part 7 Aftermath, pp. 300

advances in equipment were created as a direct result of operation Jubilee. Other advances in craft were the Priests (105mm artillery on Sherman tank chassis), and the L.C.R.s (landing craft rocket) which could both fire in at the defenses during the final run in to the beach and continue firing until the landing groups had their own artillery set up. As Brigadier Todd, CRA third division Artillery in 1944 was quoted as saying “Dieppe made D-Day easier. The generals were all keen to supply whatever I wanted.”<sup>9</sup> Once again it can be said that Dieppe was an important precursor to D-Day and as Copp wrote “The planners were determined to avoid a repetition of the slaughter that took place in 1092, and they tried to think of every contingency.”<sup>10</sup>

Another clear lesson learned from the Jubilee operation was the need for an upgrade in communication; both for directing attacks and receiving support. At Dieppe there were only five forward observation officers (FOOs) directing the fire from the destroyers’ guns and they had no direct observation of the targets on the headlands. When a call went in for bomber support, it had to be relayed back to England before anything could happen; this created a hole of 86 minutes before bombs were dropped at the requested location.<sup>11</sup> Copp raises a point when he is conducting tours of the area he asks what else could have been done with the RAF. His answer seems simple and was taken into account in the D-Day planning “We agree that heavy bombers would not have helped, but maybe some system of air support in which the troops could communicate directly with the Hurricanes would have made some difference.”<sup>12</sup> For D-day there were

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<sup>9</sup> Denis and Shelagh Whitaker, *Dieppe: Tragedy to Triumph* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1992), Part 7 Aftermath, pp. 296

<sup>10</sup> Terry Copp, *Fields of Fire: The Canadians in Normandy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), pp. 35.

<sup>11</sup> Denis and Shelagh Whitaker, *Dieppe: Tragedy to Triumph* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1992), Part 7 Aftermath, pp. 295

<sup>12</sup> Terry Copp, "The Air Over Dieppe," *Legion* July 1996. pp. 8.

an additional 39 FOOs (on top of the FOOs assigned to forward infantry companies) directing the attacks from the gunboats and a FOO party of 100 went ashore to direct fire of the battleships and cruisers. The results of this more directed fire, as Whitaker states is that “As a result of the massive fire support, enemy opposition was effectively neutralized for a vital period that allowed...troops to successfully break through the beach defenses...And the defenders were left in shock by the weight of our fire”<sup>13</sup>

The lesson had been learned at Dieppe and it was clear by looking at the advancement in communication and coordination for D-Day. As Stacy says “The casualties sustained in the Dieppe raid were part of the price paid for knowledge that enabled the great enterprise of 1944 to be carried out for the knowledge that enabled the great enterprise of 1944 to be carried out at a cost in blood smaller than its planners ventured to hope for.”<sup>14</sup> Campbell argues the opposite. He says “*post hoc ergo propter hoc* reasoning is no substitute for historical analysis... This particular leap of faith has characterized the justification of other Jubilee lessons”<sup>15</sup> Campbell does not believe that Dieppe was the necessary precursor for a D-Day to happen. He points to the battles in North Africa, Italy and the Mediterranean as more viable comparisons and gained knowledge than Dieppe had when dealing with D-Day. He also notes the large gap between the two operations and the change in defenses for that time. It still seems that without Dieppe many of the advancements in technology and techniques would not have

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<sup>13</sup> Denis and Shelagh Whitaker, *Dieppe: Tragedy to Triumph* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1992), Part 7 Aftermath, pp. 297

<sup>14</sup> C.P. Stacey, excerpts from *Six Years of War: The Army in Canada, Britain and the Pacific*, Volume 1, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War*. (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1955), pp. 404

<sup>15</sup> John P. Campbell, "Dieppe and D-Day" contained in *Dieppe Revisited: A Documentary Investigation* (London: Frank Cass, 1993), pp 226.

happened. As Whitaker notes “These assault skills and technical innovations were bought and paid for by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division at Dieppe.”<sup>16</sup>

The final lessons that were learned that this paper will discuss was the need for more flexibility in the assault plans. Landing crafts at Dieppe were to land at precise times at exact locations. The drivers were rather green and winds blew many ships off course. At Pourville for example though the Saskatchewanans did land at the right time navigational problems blew them to the west bank of the river where they were to land on the east bank. Because of the inflexibility of the objectives the Saskatchewanans were forced to carry on while a pillbox was not cleared. When the Camerons came into Green beach, 30 minutes late they had to subdue the pillbox before they could get into town. The pillbox claimed the life of the commanding officer as soon as the door dropped.<sup>17</sup>

As Whitaker points out:

“The inept intelligence created insurmountable difficulties: the erroneous assessment of the topography crippled the tanks, and the stubborn refusal to consider the possibility that machine-gun posts might be hidden in the caves resulted in many of the troops being killed or maimed before they had any chance at all to fight. The planners had worried about the inexperience of the Canadian infantry and laid on specialized training; they should have concerned themselves with the inexperienced Canadian and British commanders, whose inflexible operational plan denied any possibility of improvisation.”<sup>18</sup>

Stacy reports that “the necessity for flexibility in the military plan and its execution was essential in order to enable the Commander to apply force where force has already

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<sup>16</sup> Denis and Shelagh Whitaker, *Dieppe: Tragedy to Triumph* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1992), Part 7 Aftermath, pp. 304

<sup>17</sup> T. Murray Hunter, *Canada at Dieppe* (Ottawa: Canadian War Museum, 1982), pp. 25

<sup>18</sup> Denis and Shelagh Whitaker, *Dieppe: Tragedy to Triumph* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1992), Part 7 Aftermath, pp. 307

succeeded”<sup>19</sup> Both these authors agree with the COHQ lessons learned from Dieppe. The both believe that without Dieppe that these lessons would not have been learned.

It can be seen in the above arguments that many historians (including the official Canadian historian) believed that Dieppe (or a similar operation) was necessary before a full scale invasion could take place. Intelligence had to be gathered, and German defenses had to be tested. Hunter’s rebuttal to Lord Mountbatten’s statement that “the battle of Normandy was won on the beaches of Dieppe” was “This considerable exaggeration ignored the cumulative experience of all the assault landing which took place, after Jubilee and before D-Day.”<sup>20</sup> He goes on to point out all the other assaults in other theatres of the war but fails to recognize the true importance of Jubilee. C.P, Stacy wrote: “The raid on Dieppe was one of the most hotly-discussed operations of the war. Tactically, it was an almost complete failure, for we suffered extremely heavy losses and attained few of our objectives. After Normandy landings of 6 June 1944, however, it appeared in a new perspective.”<sup>21</sup> Clearly this must be the case as the D-Day mission was planned using information gained at Dieppe. Denis Whitaker Sums it up best “I am appalled when people with little or no operational experience attempt to dismiss the lessons learned at Dieppe as inconsequential. These lessons, both strategic and tactical, saved countless lives as a result of their far reaching influence of future operations”<sup>22</sup> Many other lessons could be discussed and more evidence could be presented yet it is clearly seen that Dieppe had overwhelming influence on the plan at D-Day.

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<sup>19</sup> C.P. Stacey, excerpts from *Six Years of War: The Army in Canada, Britain and the Pacific*, Volume 1, Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War. (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1955), pp. 400

<sup>20</sup> T. Murray Hunter, *Canada at Dieppe* (Ottawa: Canadian War Museum, 1982), pp. 49

<sup>21</sup> C.P. Stacey, excerpts from *Six Years of War: The Army in Canada, Britain and the Pacific*, Volume 1, Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War. (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1955), pp. 397

<sup>22</sup> Denis and Shelagh Whitaker, *Dieppe: Tragedy to Triumph* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1992), Part 7 Aftermath, pp. 304