

The 1942 Dieppe Raid

Remembrance Series



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The 1942 Dieppe Raid

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Generations of Canadians have served our country and the world during times of war, military conflict and peace. Through their courage and sacrifice, these men and women have helped to ensure that we live in freedom and peace, while also fostering freedom and peace around the world. The Canada Remembers Program promotes a greater understanding of these Canadians' efforts and honours the sacrifices and achievements of those who have served and those who supported our country on the home front.

The program engages Canadians through the following elements: national and international ceremonies and events including Veterans' Week activities, youth learning opportunities, educational and public information materials (including online learning), the maintenance of international and national Government of Canada memorials and cemeteries (including 13 First World War battlefield memorials in France and Belgium), and the provision of funeral and burial services.

Canada's involvement in the First and Second World Wars, the Korean War, and Canada's efforts during military operations and peace efforts has always been fuelled by a commitment to protect the rights of others and to foster peace and freedom. Many Canadians have died for these beliefs, and many others have dedicated their lives to these pursuits. This willingness to stand up to protect human rights, freedom and justice remains one of Canada's defining characteristics in the eyes of the world.

Veterans Affairs Canada encourages all Canadians to learn more about the sacrifices and achievements made by those who served our country, and to help preserve their legacy by passing the torch of Remembrance to future generations of Canadians.

*...To you from failing hands we throw
The torch, be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.*

From "In Flanders Fields" by John McCrae

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THE RAID ON DIEPPE

INTRODUCTION



THE CLIFFS AT PUY BEACH. (NATIONAL FILM BOARD PHOTO BY J. OUGH, 1972)

The raid on Dieppe, France, on August 19, 1942, was a pivotal moment in the Second World War. With virtually all of continental Europe under German occupation, the Allied forces faced a well-entrenched enemy. Some method had to be found to create a foothold on the continent, and the Raid on Dieppe offered invaluable lessons for the successful D-Day invasion in 1944, saving countless lives in that momentous offensive.

Canadians made up the great majority of the attackers in the raid. Nearly 5,000 of the 6,100 troops were Canadians. The remaining troops consisted of approximately 1,000 British Commandos and 50 American Rangers. The raid was supported by eight Allied destroyers and 74 Allied air squadrons, eight belonging to the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF). Major-General J.H. Roberts, Commander of the 2nd Canadian Division, was Military Force Commander, with Captain J. Hughes-Hallett, Royal Navy (RN) as Naval Force Commander and Air Vice-Marshal T.L. Leigh-Mallory as Air Force Commander.

Although extremely valuable lessons were learned in the Raid on Dieppe, a steep price was paid. Of the 4,963 Canadians who embarked for the operation, only 2,210 returned to England, and many of these were wounded. There were 3,367 casualties, including 1,946 prisoners of war; 913 Canadians lost their lives.

Looking for solutions

The Allied situation in the spring of 1942 was grim. The Germans had penetrated deep into Russia, the British Eighth Army in North Africa had been forced back into Egypt, and, in Western Europe, the Allied forces had been pushed across the English Channel to Britain.

At this point the Allied forces weren't strong enough to mount "Operation Overlord", the full-scale invasion of Western Europe. Instead, the Allies decided to mount a major raid on the French port of Dieppe. It was designed to test new equipment, and gain the experience and knowledge necessary for planning a great amphibious assault that would one day be necessary to defeat Germany. Also, after years of training in



SHIP THAT TOOK PART IN THE RAID ON DIEPPE. (NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF CANADA 08239)

Britain, some Canadian politicians and generals were anxious for Canadian troops to experience battle.

To achieve these goals, plans were made for a large-scale raid to take place in July 1942, called “Operation Rutter”. Canadians would provide the main assault force, and, by May 20, troops of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division were on the Isle of Wight, in the English Channel, training intensively in amphibious operations. Poor weather in July, however, prevented them from launching Operation Rutter. Many involved in the planning wanted to abandon the raid. Despite the debate, the operation was revived and given the new code name “Jubilee”. The port of Dieppe on the French coast remained the objective.

The Raid on Dieppe took place on the morning of August 19, 1942. The forces attacked at five different points on a front roughly 16 kilometres long. Four simultaneous flank attacks

were to go in just before dawn, followed half an hour later by the main attack on the town of Dieppe itself. Canadians were the force for the frontal attack on Dieppe, and also went in at gaps in the cliffs at Pourville, four kilometres to the west, and at Puys to the east. British commandos were assigned to destroy the coastal batteries at Berneval on the eastern flank, and at Varengeville in the west.

THE EASTERN FLANK

As the assault force approached the coast of France in the early hours of August 19, the landing craft of the eastern sector unexpectedly encountered a small German convoy. There was a sharp, violent, sea fight, and that noise alerted the German coastal defences, particularly at Berneval and Puys. With the Germans ready to man their defences, the element of surprise was lost. The crafts carrying No. 3 Commando were scattered, and most of the unit never reached shore. Those who did were quickly overwhelmed. One small party of 20 commandos managed to get within 180 metres of the German battery. Their accurate sniping prevented the German guns from firing on the assault ships for two-and-a-half vital hours before they were safely evacuated.

At Puys, the Royal Regiment of Canada also suffered unexpected difficulties. The beach was extremely narrow, and was commanded by lofty cliffs where German soldiers were strategically placed. To be successful, the attackers needed surprise and darkness; they got neither. The naval landing was delayed, and as the Royal Regiment of Canada leapt ashore in the dawning light, they met violent machine-gun fire from the fully-alerted German soldiers. Only a few men were able to get over the heavily-wired seawall at the head of the beach; those who did were unable to get back. The rest of the troops,

together with three platoons of reinforcements from the Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada, were pinned on the beach by mortar and machine-gun fire, and were later forced to surrender. It was impossible to evacuate them because of the German fire. Of those who landed, 200 were killed and 20 died later of their wounds; the rest were taken prisoner. It was the heaviest toll suffered by a Canadian battalion in a single day during the entire war. Also, the failure to clear the eastern headland allowed the Germans to defend the Dieppe beaches with firepower from both sides, and nullify the main frontal attack.

THE WESTERN FLANK

The forces in the western sector attacked with some degree of surprise. In contrast to the misfortune encountered by the No. 3 Commandos on the east flank, the No. 4 Commando operation was completely successful. The units landed as planned and successfully destroyed the guns in the battery near Varengeville, and then withdrew safely.



CONVOY CARRYING CANADIAN TROOPS EN ROUTE TO DIEPPE.
(NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF CANADA 08240)

At Pourville the Canadians surprised the enemy. Initial opposition was light, as the South Saskatchewan Regiment and Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada assaulted the beaches. Resistance intensified as the Saskatchewans, supported by Camerons, crossed the River Scie. After heavy fighting, they were stopped well short of the town of Dieppe. The main force of the Camerons, meanwhile, pushed on towards their objective, an inland airfield, and advanced three kilometres before they were forced to halt as well. Both regiments then attempted to withdraw.



WOUNDED CANADIAN OFFICER ON HIS RETURN TO ENGLAND AFTER THE RAID ON DIEPPE. (*NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF CANADA 8225*)

The South Saskatchewan Regiment and Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada suffered heavy losses during the withdrawal. The enemy fired fiercely upon the beach from dominating positions east of Pourville, and also from the high ground to the west. The landing craft, however, came in

through the storm of fire with self-sacrificing bravery and, supported by a courageous rearguard, the majority of both units successfully re-embarked, though many of the men were wounded. The rearguard itself could not be evacuated. They surrendered after they ran out of ammunition and further evacuation was impossible.

THE MAIN ATTACK

The main attack was made across the pebble beach in front of Dieppe. It was timed to take place a half-hour later than the assault on its flanks. The German troops, concealed in cliff-top positions and in buildings overlooking the promenade, were well prepared for the Canadians. As the men of the Essex Scottish Regiment assaulted the open eastern section, the enemy swept the beach with machine-gun fire. All attempts to breach the seawall were beaten back with terrible casualties. When one small platoon managed to infiltrate the town, a message was sent back to Headquarters offshore which misleadingly led General Roberts to believe that the Essex Scottish had established themselves in the town. To support them, the reserve battalion Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal was sent in. Like their comrades who had landed earlier, they found themselves pinned down on the beach and exposed to intense enemy fire.

The Royal Hamilton Light Infantry landed at the west end of the promenade opposite a large isolated casino. They were able to clear this strongly-held building and the nearby pillboxes and enter the town. Some men of the battalion crossed the bullet-swept boulevard and moved into the town, where they engaged in vicious street fighting.

The Calgary Regiment also encountered unexpected obstacles. Although they were supposed to land immediately after an intense air and naval bombardment, they were put ashore ten to fifteen minutes late. This left the infantry without support during the first critical minutes of the attack. Then, as the tanks came ashore, they met an inferno of fire and were brought to a halt. They were stopped not just by enemy guns, but also by the pebble beach and a seawall. The tanks which managed to overcome the seawall found their way blocked by concrete obstacles that sealed off the narrow streets. Still, the immobilized tanks continued to fight, supporting the infantry and contributing greatly to the withdrawal of many of the soldiers. The tank crews themselves became prisoners of war (POWs) or died in battle.



A CHURCHILL TANK OF THE CALGARY REGIMENT IN DIEPPE.
(NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF CANADA C-29872)

The last troops to land were part of the Royal Marine “A” Commando, which shared the terrible fate of the Canadians. They suffered heavy losses without being able to accomplish their mission.



THE BEACH AFTER THE RAID ON DIEPPE.

The raid also produced a tremendous air battle. While the Allied air forces were able to provide protection for the ships off Dieppe from the Luftwaffe (the German air force), the cost was high. The Royal Air Force lost 106 aircraft, the highest single-day total of the war. The Royal Canadian Air Force lost 13 aircraft.

LESSONS LEARNED

By early afternoon, August 19, 1942, Operation Jubilee was over. Debate over the merits of the raid continues to the present day. Some believe that it was a useless slaughter, others maintain that it was necessary for the success of the invasion of the continent two years later on D-Day. Without question, the Raid on Dieppe was studied carefully in planning later attacks against the enemy-held coast of France. There were improvements in technique, fire support and tactics, which reduced D-Day casualties to an unexpected minimum. The lessons learned at Dieppe were instrumental in saving countless lives on the 6th of June, 1944.



THE DIEPPE-CANADA MONUMENT.

VICTORIA CROSS WINNERS

While individual acts of courage occur frequently during war, only a few are seen and recorded. They stand out as examples for all to admire and respect.

Two Canadians were awarded the Victoria Cross, the British

Commonwealth's highest military decoration for bravery, for their actions during the Raid on Dieppe:

CHARLES CECIL INGERSOLL MERRITT

Following the landing at Pourville, the South Saskatchewan Regiment made their way towards the town of Dieppe. As they struggled to cross the bridge over the River Scie, Lieutenant-Colonel Cecil Merritt came forward and took charge himself. Walking calmly into the storm of fire on the bridge, he led party after party across by the sheer force of his example. Other men forded or swam the river. In spite of their valiant efforts, the advance was halted and they were forced to withdraw. Again, Lt.-Col. Merritt displayed outstanding courage. Although twice wounded, he commanded a vigorous rearguard action that permitted the majority of the units to successfully re-embark. The rearguard itself could not be rescued, and Lt.-Col. Merritt and his men became prisoners of war.

JOHN WEIR FOOTE

The Reverend John W. Foote was the first member of the Canadian Chaplain Services to be awarded the Victoria Cross. Calmly, through eight hours of gruelling battle, Reverend Foote, Chaplain of the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry, continually exposed himself to very intense fire to help move the injured to an aid post, saving many lives through his brave efforts. Then, at the end of this ordeal, he jumped from the landing craft that would have taken him to safety. He walked courageously into the German positions to be taken prisoner, so he could minister to his fellow Canadians who were now POWs.



COMMEMORATIVE PLAQUE AT SQUARE DU CANADA. (PHOTO J. OUGH, NFB, 1972)

WE REMEMBER

The Dieppe Canadian War Cemetery is located approximately five kilometres south of Dieppe, in the town of Hautôt-sur-Mer. The hillside cemetery is unique in that its headstones have been placed back to back in long double rows. The Germans buried these war dead, the same way they buried their own. After they liberated the region, the Allies chose not to disturb the graves. Today, the cemetery is maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.



DIEPPE CANADIAN WAR CEMETERY. (PHOTO BY GEORGE HUNTER)

Of the 944 members of the British and Allied Armed Forces buried at Dieppe, 707 are Canadian, most victims of the Raid on Dieppe. Some of the captured, wounded raiders died in hospital in Rouen, 58 kilometres away, and 37 are buried in

that city. Casualties of the raid who later died in Britain are buried mainly in Brookwood Military Cemetery in Surrey, England.

The cemetery also contains the remains of one woman, Mary Janet Climpson, a British Salvation Army, Auxiliary Service Officer, who was killed two years earlier in May 1940.

Canadians “missing in action” in the Dieppe operation are commemorated on two memorials in England: members of the Army on the Brookwood Memorial and members of the RCAF on the Runnymede Memorial.

Regimental memorials erected by the survivors and their comrades stand today at all the landing places. On the beaches of Dieppe, Puys and Pourville, memorials pay tribute to members of the Essex Scottish Regiment, the Royal Regiment of Canada, the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry, Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal, the Calgary Regiment, the South Saskatchewan Regiment and the Queen’s Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada, who gave their lives in the raid.

Following the war, the town of Dieppe created a small park at the western end of the esplanade, where it has a memorial of its own. Standing in the centre of Square du Canada (Canada Square), the Dieppe-Canada Monument is a testimony to the long and warm association between Canadians and the people of the region, the Normans, which has existed since Samuel de Champlain sailed to found New France. The names of people and events which have linked Canada and Normandy over the centuries have been recorded on the monument. Mounted on the wall behind it is a plaque that commemorates the Raid on Dieppe:

*On the 19th of August 1942
on the beaches of Dieppe
our Canadian cousins
marked with their blood
the road to our final liberation
foretelling thus their victorious return
on September 1, 1944. (translation)*



AIRMEN WHO TOOK PART IN THE RAID ON DIEPPE.
(NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF CANADA 08252)

CASUALTIES

Canadian Units Participating in the Raid on Dieppe

Canadian Army	Fatal Casualties
Headquarters and Miscellaneous Detachments.....	5
14 th Army Tank Regiment (The Calgary Regiment (Tank))....	13
Royal Canadian Artillery	13
Corps of Royal Canadian Engineers	27
Royal Canadian Corps of Signals.....	9
The Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada....	4
The Royal Regiment of Canada.....	227
The Royal Hamilton Light Infantry (Wentworth Regiment).....	197
Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal	119
The Essex Scottish Regiment.....	121
The South Saskatchewan Regiment.....	84
The Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada.....	76
The Calgary Highlanders.....	0
The Toronto Scottish Regiment (MG)	1
Royal Canadian Army Service Corps.....	1
Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps	4
Royal Canadian Ordnance Corps	2
Canadian Provost Corps.....	1
Canadian Intelligence Corps.....	3

907

Royal Canadian Navy.....1

Royal Canadian Air Force

400 Army Cooperation Squadron0
401 Fighter Squadron.....1
402 Fighter Squadron.....0
403 Fighter Squadron.....3
411 Fighter Squadron.....0
412 Fighter Squadron.....1
414 Army Cooperation Squadron0
416 Fighter Squadron.....0
418 Intruder Squadron (two aircraft)0
5

913

OTHER FORCES

In addition to the 4,963 Canadian troops taking part in the raid, there were 1,075 British troops (52 fatalities), 50 of the 1st U.S. Ranger Battalion (one fatality) and 20 of No. 10 (Inter-Allied) Commando.

Air and sea support was provided mainly by British forces. Their casualties were: Royal Navy – 75 killed or died of wounds and 269 missing or prisoners, and Royal Air Force – 62 fatalities.

REMEMBERING THEIR SACRIFICE

The Canadians who fought in the Raid on Dieppe achieved and sacrificed much in their efforts to help bring peace and freedom to the people of Europe. Their task was a difficult and costly one, but their effort was not in vain. These combattants were among the more than one million men and women who served in Canada's armed forces during the Second World War. More than 42,000 Canadians gave their lives in the war. Canada and the world recognize the sacrifices and achievements of all Canadians, like those who fought in the Raid on Dieppe, who accomplished so much and left a lasting legacy of peace.

Dieppe Raid

Embarkation Strength – Casualties – Disembarkation Strength (Canadian Army Units)

Units	Number Embarked	Fatal Casualties				Non-Fatal Casualties				Total Fatal and Non-Fatal Casualties	Number Returning UK on completion of Operation
		Killed in action	Died of Wounds	While POW	Total Fatal Casualties	Wounded	Prisoners of War		Total Casualties		
							Wounded	Unwounded			
Headquarters, Miscellaneous Small Units and Detachments	90	5	-	-	5	14	7	8	29	34	70
Royal Regiment of Canada	554	207	2	18	227	33	103	161	297	524	65
Royal Hamilton Light Infantry	582	179	7	11	197	108	78	97	283	480	217
Essex Scottish Regiment	553	105	2	14	121	27	122	260	409	530	52
Fusiliers Mont-Royal	584	105	4	10	119	50	111	233	394	513	125
Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada	503	60	8	8	76	103	36	131	270	346	268
South Saskatchewan Regiment	523	78	3	3	84	166	24	65	255	339	353
14 Cdn. Army Tk. Regt. (Calgary R)	417	12	-	1	13	4	19	138	161	174	247
Toronto Scottish Regiment (MG)	125	1	-	-	1	8	3	1	12	13	120
Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada	111	1	-	3	4	6	2	61	69	73	44
Calgary Highlanders	22	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	22
RCA Units and Detachments	270	13	-	-	13	4	8	22	34	47	227
RCE Detachments	316	23	1	3	27	36	37	88	161	188	165
RC Sigs. Detachments	78	8	1	-	9	9	3	15	27	36	52
RCASC Detachments	38	1	-	-	1	6	3	1	10	11	33
RCAMC Detachments	126	4	-	-	4	3	2	10	15	19	110
RCOC Detachments	15	1	-	1	2	2	2	-	4	6	11
Cdn. Provost Corps Detachment	41	1	-	-	1	7	7	11	25	26	22
Cdn. Int. Corps Detachments	15	3	-	-	3	-	1	4	5	8	7
Total	4,963	807	28	72	907	586	568	1,306	2,460	3,367	2,210

NOTE : – The number returning to the UK upon completion of the operation is obtained by subtracting the figures appearing under "Killed in Action", "Died while POW" and "Wounded and Unwounded Prisoners of War" from the number that embarked.