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The Dieppe Raid: Its Origins, Aims, and Results

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A seemingly isolated and costly operation when it occurred in 1942, the Allied amphibious raid on Dieppe made a significant contribution to the success of later landings, leading ultimately to victory over the Axis Powers. While the raid itself achieved few, if any, of the immediate political and strategic aims its planners had originally anticipated, the experience gained from its shortcomings spurred the rethinking of doctrine and redesign of equipment that proved to be the key to success for later and more decisive assaults on the beaches of Sicily, Italy and Normandy.

THE DIEPPE RAID

ITS ORIGINS, AIMS, AND RESULTS

A research paper prepared
by

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Introduction. On the morning of 19 August 1942, over 6,000 troops, most of whom were Canadian, landed by amphibious means on the French coast at Dieppe. When the raiding force withdrew 12 hours later, 60 percent of that force had been killed, wounded, or captured by the German defenders, whose losses were slight. Moreover, almost none of the tactical objectives had been achieved.

The Dieppe Raid, when viewed in terms of casualties suffered and its failure to achieve tactical success, was a severe defeat for the Allies. This much cannot be disputed, but the raid's long-range purposes and the degree of its achievements in terms of the further prosecution of the war have been the subject of continuing dispute. What, if any, were the long-range aims of Dieppe? Did it have a place in Anglo-

American strategy in 1942? Were there positive results achieved by the raid that made it worth the price in lives? Did it, in fact, contribute significantly to the successful prosecution of the war? Winston Churchill, reflecting on the Dieppe Raid, said:

Looking back, the casualties of this memorable action may seem out of proportion to the results. It would be wrong to judge the episode solely by such a standard. Dieppe occupies a place of its own in the story of the war, and the grim casualty figures must not class it as a failure . . . Tactically it was a mine of experience . . . Strategically the raid seemed to make the Germans more conscious of danger along the whole coast of Occupied France.¹

Did those words by Churchill evaluate

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properly the positive effects of the raid, or were they merely uttered after the fact to justify the casualty lists to history?

The Dieppe Raid, along with many others, was conceived by a unique British agency called the Combined Operations Headquarters. Because this was the organization that mounted the raid on Dieppe and dealt with the aftermath, an understanding of its function and its relationship to the British military command structure is essential to an analysis of the raid.

Combined Operations Headquarters (COHQ) grew out of a small organization that was formed by Churchill shortly after Dunkirk to conduct raids on enemy-held coasts. As Britain's raiding capability expanded, so did the COHQ, first under the direction of Admiral of the Fleet Sir Roger Keys and, after 27 October 1941, under Commodore (later Vice Admiral) Lord Louis Mountbatten.² COHQ, upon the assignment of Mountbatten, was directed to pursue as its primary function "the preparation for the apparatus and plans for the invasion of the Continent."³ As a secondary function, COHQ was to probe the enemy with raids at every opportunity and was to be the controlling agency for the Commandos.

Combined Operations (really amphibious operations) Headquarters was unique in that it was entirely independent of the Admiralty, the War Office, and the Air Ministry. Lord Mountbatten, in order to promote the inter-service nature of COHQ, was given equivalent ranks in the Army and Royal Air Force and was elevated to the level of Chief of Staff, sitting as a member of the Chiefs of Staff Committee on matters of combined operations.⁴ His organization became the recognized authority on the conduct of seaborne assault and throughout the remainder of the war contributed significantly to the success of amphibious operations in the European Theater.

Raids as an Element of Strategy. On the night of 23 June 1940, the day after Hitler signed an armistice with France, 120 Commandos conducted the first British raid against the coast of occupied France. A small effort, producing no results and memorable only for its amateurism, it marked the start of British raiding policy which represented one of Churchill's early attempts to take the offense against Germany. After American entry into the war, that raiding policy became an element in the Anglo-American strategy for the defeat of the Axis Powers. The relationship of British raiding policy to Anglo-American strategy is best seen as a function of the British concept of that strategy and as a function of British-American conflict in the development of a mutually acceptable strategic program.

The Allied position during the first half of 1942 was consistently teetering on the brink of disaster, reaching its worst point in midsummer. The Japanese appeared unstoppable in the Pacific area and were becoming more and more a threat to India. The Germans repulsed a Russian counteroffensive in the spring, inflicting enormous losses on the Russians and by summer had resumed the attack. By July the Soviet situation appeared desperate, and Stalin was pressing harder for a second front. In Africa the British surrendered Tobruk in June, and it seemed certain that Rommel would take Egypt. The Battle of the Atlantic was also going Germany's way. During the first half of 1942, sinking of Allied ships exceeded new construction by 3 million tons, and in July the gravity of the situation at sea prompted Churchill to state: "It might be true to say that the issue of war depends on whether Hitler's U-boat attack on Allied tonnage or the increase and application of Allied air power, reach their full fruition first."⁵ Moreover, bottlenecks in production, supply, and transport severely limited Allied offensive action.

Nevertheless, after Dunkirk, the Prime Minister had been attempting to mount some sort of offensive operation. His strategic concept of gaining the offensive was to attack the Germans on the periphery, envisaging numerous weak landings in Europe as Britain drew an ever-narrowing ring around the Axis and striking a knockout blow "when the time was ripe."⁶ His emphasis on combined operations, his elevation of that command to chiefs of staff level, and his personal support and approval of raids mounted by Combined Operations Headquarters reflected, within the capacity of Britain's resources, his peripheral strategy.

With the entry of the United States into the war, the British concept of defeating Germany came into direct conflict with the U.S. notion of a cross-channel attack at Germany's strength as soon as possible. While it remains beyond the scope of this paper to trace the entire process through which this disagreement was finally resolved, its impact on raiding policy in general and Dieppe in particular merit further discussion. In April of 1942 the War Plans Division of the U.S. War Department developed a plan, known as the Marshall Memorandum, which proposed a large cross-channel attack in the spring or summer of 1943 (later assigned the code name *Roundup*). Additionally, a minor landing in 1942 was proposed, should it appear that the Russians were about to collapse or that Germany was weak enough to warrant seizing the initiative. The Memorandum further advocated smaller raids throughout 1942 along the enemy coastlines, reflecting General Marshall's view that such raids might cause the Germans to redeploy some of their troops from the east and thereby help Russia.⁷

The proposed 1943 landing gained British agreement without difficulty, but a 1942 landing was another matter. While British planners recognized the desirability of assisting Russia through

some sort of diversionary operation on the Continent (code named *Sledgehammer*), they felt the American notion to harass the Germans into redeploying a portion of their eastern armies along the French coast in 1942 impractical. Instead they proposed a series of medium-sized raids that might tempt the Germans into a major air battle in the west and thereby weaken Nazi airpower along the Russian front. To the British in 1942, an Allied beachhead in north-west Europe seemed beyond reality.⁸ Despite their best efforts, Marshall and Harry Hopkins were unable to gain British agreement to a 1942 emergency landing and that part of the Marshall Memorandum was tabled. There was, however, full agreement on raids for 1942. The Prime Minister cabled Mr. Roosevelt that the agreed program included "more frequent and large scale raids,"⁹ and the British Chiefs of Staff on 18 April approved a memorandum implementing the Anglo-American decisions which, in addressing the agreement on raiding, said: "We have already approved a policy of raids to be undertaken in the summer of 1942 on the largest scale that the available equipment will permit."¹⁰

Nevertheless, work continued on plans for a more substantial diversionary operation on the Continent. In fact, in a public statement issued on 11 June, on the occasion of Molotov's visit to Washington, the President alluded to a second front in Europe in 1942.¹¹ But the idea of a substantial landing on the Continent in 1942 was soon killed by Mr. Churchill, and by mid-July, the two Allies finally agreed on joint operations in North Africa, with *Roundup* still a goal for 1943. There was a growing recognition among planners, however, that there would be no invasion of the Continent before 1944. For the time being, the only agreed upon Anglo-American strategy for carrying the war to the European Continent was the concept of more frequent and large-

scale raids.

In summary, the idea of raids was very much a part of the Anglo-American strategy formulated in 1942 and was the one facet of that strategy that was agreed upon throughout. There was a need to do something, in the face of continuing pressure from the Russians and from public opinion for a second European front, and a policy of raiding seemed the only alternative that both Britain and the United States could agree upon in 1942. The landing at Dieppe was one such raid, and while it hardly could be called a major operation, there were no other alternatives at the time.

Origins and Aims of the Dieppe Raid.

The plan for a raid on Dieppe was conceived and developed on a different level than the Anglo-American debate over grand strategy that occurred in the spring and summer of 1942. While raids in general were a part of the strategic plan for the defeat of Germany, the Dieppe Raid itself was not. It was strictly a British project and was initially conceived by Combined Operations Headquarters in early April 1942, before the Marshall Memorandum was presented to the British. The operation was approved by the British Chiefs of Staff on 13 May 1942 and was set for execution in late June or early July with a code name of *Rutter*. The initial attempt, on 4 July, was frustrated by bad weather, and the operation was canceled. Subsequently revived, the landing was finally conducted on 19 August under the code name *Jubilee*.

There is little documentation of the higher aims which may have been responsible for initiation of the raid or for its later revival. Security considerations apparently mitigated against retention of records, and there is no documentation recorded before the raid which refers to any political aim and little referring to strategic aims.¹² Lord Mountbatten, in a letter of 11 May

1942 to the Chiefs of Staff Committee requesting approval for a raid on Dieppe, wrote: "Apart from the military objective given in the outline plan, this operation will be of great value as training for operation 'SLEDGE-HAMMER' or any other major operation as far as the actual assault is concerned."¹³ It was also hoped that a major air battle would result in which a substantial part of the German air forces would be engaged and destroyed—thereby alleviating, albeit in an indirect fashion, some of the pressure on the Russian front.

There were other extremely important higher aims that were not mentioned in the plans for Dieppe but which were understood to be desired by products of the raiding policy. There had not been an opposed amphibious landing by the British since Gallipoli in 1915, and the Americans had not conducted an opposed landing since the Civil War. While there was no lack of modern doctrine, it had not been tested under fire. Problems associated with assaulting and seizing a port had to be explored; techniques for handling a sizable assault fleet had to be tested under actual conditions; new types of assault craft and equipment needed to be tested, and the strength of German defenses should be probed.¹⁴ A summation of these military aims is reflected in General Brooke's conviction that the Dieppe operation was "indispensable to the Allied offensive programme."¹⁵

While no political aims were recorded before the fact, there has been considerable speculation since that political considerations played a major role, if not in the conception of the raid, at least in pushing for the execution of *Rutter* and in the revival of the raid as *Jubilee*. Churchill's statements and actions concerning the raid, when considered in the broader context of wartime strategy, suggest that Churchill used the Dieppe Raid to further his own political ends and to strengthen his position within

the coalition.

As mentioned, the decisions resulting in the Dieppe Raid were taken during a period when the military situation for the Allies was grave. The British and American had yet to reconcile their differences in strategy, and it appeared that, without a great deal of help from the West, the Russians might be knocked out of the war—either by defeat or through a separate deal with the Germans. The cry for a second front, repeatedly sounded by Stalin, was taken up in the press and on the streets of London. In his diary entry of 30 March 1942, General Brooke spoke of the “universal cry” to open a second front, stating that public pressure would be hard to contend with.¹⁶ The pressure was to continue into the summer, and in such an atmosphere it would seem impossible to remain idle. Yet British planners were in the process of destroying any chance of action on the Continent that year as they fought the American plan for a landing in 1942.

Events, however, soon persuaded London that some direct action against Nazi-held territory in Europe had to be taken. While the Prime Minister was visiting Washington in June, attempting to sell a landing in North Africa and to discredit the notion of a lodgement on the Continent in 1942, he received news of the British surrender of Tobruk. This disaster resulted in considerable loss of British prestige in American eyes and reduced Mr. Churchill's influence at a time when he was vigorously lobbying for American support of his African project.¹⁷ Furthermore, it left him in a precarious political position at home as he faced a vote of censure in the House of Commons on 26 June. Perhaps in the hope of achieving some sort of success on the battlefield which could shore up his political position with the Americans as well as with the British voters, Mr. Churchill asked General Mountbatten whether he could “guarantee the success of the operation planned on Dieppe.”¹⁸

As further evidence of Churchill's now determined support for immediate raids on German-held territory as opposed to a larger *Sledgehammer*-type operation, a second Dieppe Raid (*Jubilee*) was launched over the objections of some British officers after an earlier attempt (*Rutter*) had been frustrated by bad weather. After the abortive *Rutter* operation, General Montgomery, who was then responsible for the Army side of the operation as Commander, South Eastern Army, considered the affair at an end and wrote to General Paget, CINC, Home Forces, that for security reasons the raid should be canceled “for all time.”¹⁹ He was not alone in that opinion. Troops had been briefed on the objective after embarkation and then released on leave after the operation was canceled. There was ample reason to believe that security had been compromised. Nevertheless, for considerations that are not well documented, the operation was revived. A number of reasons bore on that decision. First, Combined Operations Headquarters considered the failure to execute *Rutter* a reflection on its competence and pushed for revival. Also, Mr. Churchill was prodding the Chiefs of Staff Committee for action, and with his knowledge and concurrence the Chiefs of Staff approved *Jubilee* on 12 July.²⁰ It is significant that only 4 days before the Prime Minister stated in a message to President Roosevelt the absolute opposition of the British to *Sledgehammer*.²¹ It must have been at least helpful to the Prime Minister and his Chiefs of Staff to have a large-scale raid on the books when Hopkins, Marshall, and King arrived a few days later. None of the decisionmakers ever suggested that *Jubilee* would replace *Sledgehammer*. Nevertheless, the raid may have provided some consolation to the Americans, and it may have served, to some degree, as a partial substitute for *Sledgehammer*.

The Operation. In addition to about

3,500 naval personnel engaged on combat ships and landing craft, approximately 5,000 Canadian Army personnel, 1,200 British Commandos, and 60 U.S. Rangers participated in the Dieppe Raid. Canadian troops made up the largest part of the landing force for several reasons, the paramount one being that the Canadians had nothing else to do. Since early 1941 the Canadian Prime Minister had been insisting that Canadian troops be put into action in some theater of the war; Canadian defense officials suggested employment in the Middle East or on raids to France.²² Elements of the 1st Canadian Army arrived in Britain in November of 1939, initially to join British forces in France, but after Dunkirk their primary mission was to assist in defending England against German invasion. By the spring of 1942 the Canadian 1st Army had been training for 2½ years without seeing action while forces from the United Kingdom and other parts of the Empire fought in Africa and elsewhere. Recruiting and public opinion became problems at home, while morale and discipline became problems for the units in Britain.²³ Employment of Canadians in the Middle East was out of the question as far as Mr. Churchill was concerned. Commonwealth troops far outnumbered British troops in that area—a fact which was politically embarrassing. The Prime Minister wrote to General Auchinleck, the Middle East Commander, that: "For a long time I have dreaded troubles with the Australians and with world opinion, of appearing to wage all our battles in the Middle East with Dominion troops alone."²⁴

The 1st Canadian Corps was under operational control of South Eastern Command, from which troops required were to be selected for the raid. General Montgomery, Commander, South Eastern Command, offered the mission to the Canadians because he wanted to avoid the problems of a mixed force and

because he felt the Canadian troops were best suited for the task. General McNaughton, commanding the Canadian 1st Army, after consultation with his government, accepted the mission. At last the Canadians were going to fight.

The port of Dieppe was selected as a raid target mostly by a process of comparison, other possible objectives being eliminated. Among those considered by Combined Operations Headquarters were Cherbourg, Caen, Le-Havre, Fécamp, Boulogne, and St. Malo.²⁵ Of these, Cherbourg and Le-Havre were too large for the size operation envisaged, Caen and St. Malo were too far away for R.A.F. support, Boulogne was considered unapproachable because of its large coast defense batteries, and Fécamp was too small.

Dieppe had a lot to offer. In early 1942 it was generally agreed that when the time came to launch an invasion of Western Europe, a good port, in working order, would have to be seized immediately. Planners for *Sledgehammer* and *Roundup* took that approach. This raid would accordingly provide an opportunity to test theoretical doctrine for seizing a port. Dieppe was a good, average-sized port with good rail and road connections and an airfield nearby. Additionally, it provided targets worthy to be named as specific objectives of the raid force. German defenses were thought to be strong enough to provide an adequate test but not too strong to be overcome. Finally, it was close enough to England for supporting aircraft to remain on station a reasonable length of time and for the passage of the raiding force to be made from ports in England to Dieppe almost entirely under the cover of darkness.²⁶

Nevertheless, Dieppe had its disadvantages as well. The beach before Dieppe is overlooked by high cliffs on either side which provide strong defensive positions. Breaks in the cliffs on

either side of the town are small and also well suited to defense. Moreover, German defenses were much better developed than was anticipated. Everything considered, however, Dieppe seemed a reasonable target for the forces assigned and was clearly superior to other possible objectives.

Initially there were two competing plans. One proposed a flanking attack on Dieppe with troops, supported by tanks, landing at Quiberville (see figure 1) as the main effort. That plan was attacked on the grounds that there would be too much delay in seizing Dieppe. Besides, the tanks would be required to cross two rivers, and their ability to accomplish this was doubtful. Furthermore, if the port were not seized quickly, it would not be taken intact and the raid would not be a satisfactory test. The final factor mitigating against the flank attack was the speed with which the Germans would be able to reinforce their defenses. A second plan, calling for a frontal attack across the beaches at Dieppe with tanks and infantry, was therefore adopted.²⁷

Two other significant issues, and the decision on each, had a major impact on the operation. Up to the time *Rutter* was canceled, plans called for a drop of airborne troops, primarily to seize the commanding ground west of Dieppe beach. Since that part of the operation was dependent on the weather, it was eliminated for *Jubilee*—and the west headland was never taken. The other issue of major importance concerned the debate over the relative value of preliminary bombardment as opposed to surprise. Initially, Dieppe was to be heavily bombed on the night preceding the raid. That was canceled because it was felt by Air Vice Marshal Leigh Mallory, R.A.F. representative for the raid, that the bombing probably would not be very accurate, and the element of surprise would be lost. The Commanding General, 2d Canadian Division, General Roberts, approved the cancella-

tion of the bombing attack, but for other reasons. He felt the rubble produced would prevent his tanks from moving through the town of Dieppe. As it turned out, they were never able to enter the town. So the main attack was entirely frontal and without heavy bombardment.

The plan would have Commando landings at 0450 at points 6 miles east and 6 miles west of the harbor to seize batteries of 5.9-inch coast defense guns. This phase of the operation was deemed essential because the heaviest guns on supporting destroyers were 4 inch. Also at 0450, Canadian battalions would land 1 mile east and 1 mile west of Dieppe at small beaches to seal off the town, capture the high ground overlooking it, and in the west, capture the airfield. Under cover of fighter attacks and naval bombardment by destroyers, the infantry battalions, supported by tanks, would commence the main attack over the Dieppe beaches at 0520.²⁸ It is interesting to note that while the aerial bombardment had been canceled to enhance the element of surprise, the timing of the landings was never changed to insure surprise for the main assault. It was scheduled to take place a full 30 minutes after the initial Commando landing—plenty of time for the Germans to come to a full alert.

Specific objectives of the raid were as follows:²⁹

- (1) Destroy enemy defenses in vicinity.
- (2) Destroy nearby airport.
- (3) Destroy radar and power stations, dock and rail facilities, and petrol dumps.
- (4) Remove invasion barges stored in Dieppe harbor.
- (5) Capture documents.
- (6) Capture prisoners.

In the early morning hours of 19 August 1942, a fleet composed of four destroyers, seven landing ship infantry (LSI), 24 landing craft tank (LCT), and 100 minor craft approached the French

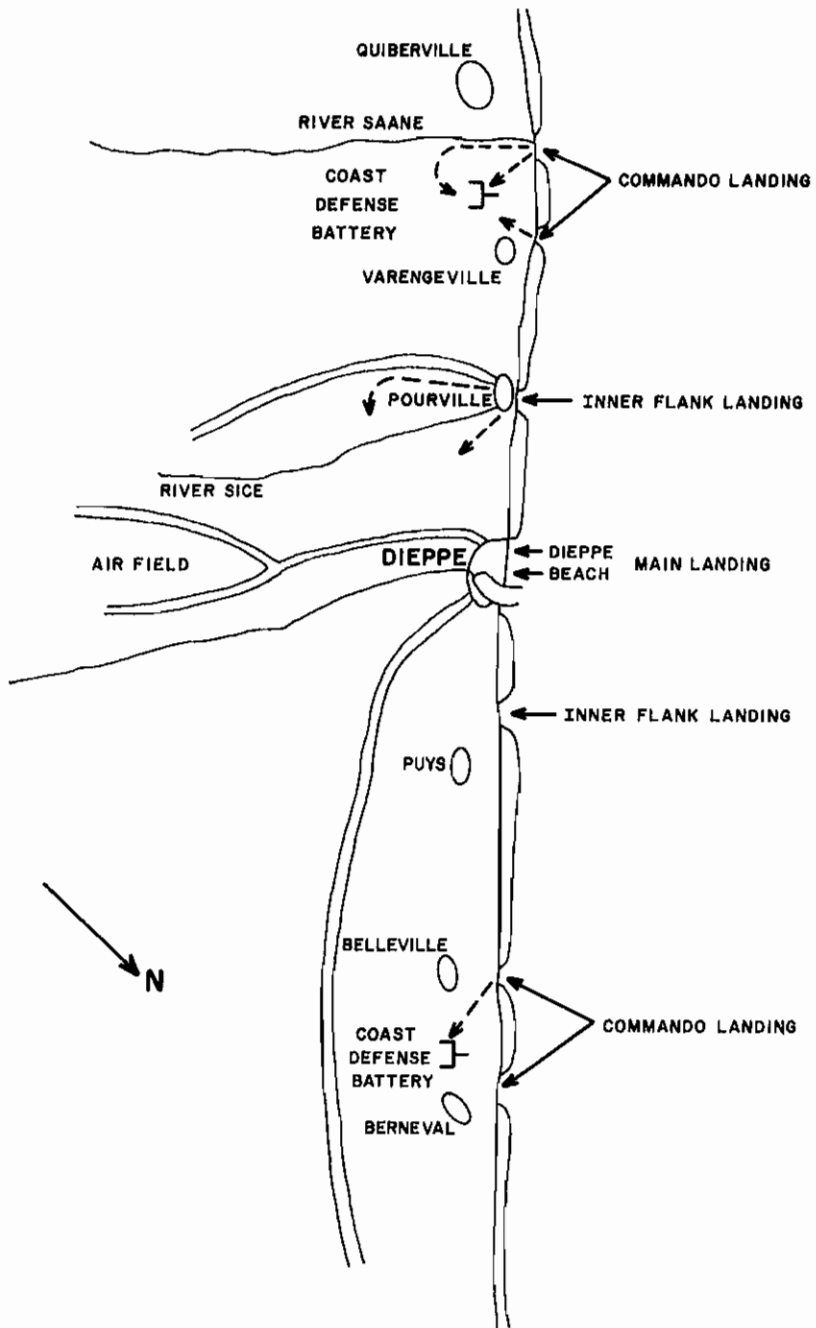


Fig. 1—Landings at Dieppe

coast carrying the Dieppe raiders.³⁰ As the leading elements moved toward the beaches, the craft carrying Commandos destined for the east flank, landing accidentally, made contact with a small German convoy. A short engagement followed which resulted in confusion among the landing craft, and, although the Germans did not connect the engagement at sea with a landing, it served in varying degrees to alert German defenders along the coast.³¹ Of the 23 landing craft carrying the Commandos, only six reached shore. Five boat teams, immediately engaged in heavy fighting, never got off the beach, and all personnel were either killed or captured. The remaining boat team, landing somewhat apart from the others, managed to reach its objective—a coastal defense gun—and succeeded in preventing it from coming into action for over 2 hours. The team then withdrew across the beach with all hands. The left flank had been partially successful, but at enormous cost.³²

The Commando landing on the west flank, with the mission of knocking out a coastal defense battery, was the most successful action of the day. The battery was captured and permanently put out of action, and the Commandos reembarked by 0830. Casualties were in an acceptable range—12 killed, 13 captured, and 21 wounded. The Germans suffered 30 killed and 30 wounded with four captured by the British. The Commandos had done their job.³³

Both inner flank landings failed to accomplish their missions—to seize the headlands overlooking Dieppe and destroy the field battery located on each. On the east the landing at Puys was 15 minutes late, a significant delay. If the landing had been made as scheduled, at 0450, it would have beaten a German alert, sounded along the coast, by 8 minutes. In any event, the German defenders held the assault force on the beach. Poor communications, which were to plague the entire operation, prevented the situation from being re-

ported, and the initial landing was reinforced, adding to the disaster. Of the 500 plus men who landed at Puys, only 60 were to return unwounded. Nothing was accomplished.

The inner flank landing at Pourville met with some initial success. Although touchdown was 30 minutes late, there were few German defenders waiting, and the assault forces were able to move off the beaches. One battalion moved inland toward the airfield while another advanced on the headland overlooking Dieppe. Both were stopped short of their objectives, and German reinforcements pushed both units back toward the beach. Although plans called for both units to move into Dieppe, aided by tanks coming off the beaches, it became apparent early that they would have to be withdrawn over the Pourville beach. The decision was made at 0900 and evacuation commenced at 1100. Withdrawal was successful, although German fire produced heavy casualties, and the rear guard ultimately surrendered when further evacuation became impossible. Although the depth of penetration at Pourville was the greatest of the operation, its success was problematical in that no major objectives were attained. Canadian casualties included 160 killed.³⁴

Scheduling compromised the element of surprise as far as the main landing at Dieppe was concerned. Commenced a full 30 minutes after the flank attacks, the main landing might have been successful if the earlier assaults had accomplished their missions, but as it was, the main attack had to face the undistracted German defenders supported only by fighter aircraft and fire from the 4-inch guns of four destroyers. Air and naval gunfire support went off as scheduled shortly before the landing commenced and bothered the Germans to the extent that the first landing craft were able to touch down without receiving much enemy fire. However, the bombardment lacked sufficient weight and caused the

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Germans little permanent damage.

The initial landing went off almost exactly on time with two battalions landing abreast. The first tanks, however, were 10 to 15 minutes late arriving, and the infantry was left with that interval between the lifting of the bombardment and the arrival of the tanks without any fire support other than organic weapons. During that interval the first momentum of the assault was lost, never again to be regained.

Between the seawall at the edge of the beach and the town of Dieppe proper is an open promenade, about 100 yards wide, broken only at that time by a casino on the western end. The Canadians were never able, in significant numbers, to penetrate flanking German fire aimed at the promenade and enter the town. Of the 27 tanks that were ultimately landed, only about half crossed the seawall and operated on the promenade. None penetrated into the town because of concrete tank barriers in the streets.³⁵ The main attack stalled, the troops never could move beyond the beach and were subjected to the concentrated fire of the German defenders until the last man was finally evacuated about 1300. The main landing was a total disaster.

Consistently poor communications with the beaches prevented the Naval Commander, Captain Hughes-Hallett, and the Troop Commander, Canadian Major General Roberts, from ever gaining a clear picture of what was happening. As a result, General Roberts, at one point, committed his reserve battalion to a situation that was already hopelessly lost. Nevertheless, by 0900 it was apparent that the raid had failed, and evacuation was started at 1100 under cover of smoke. At 1250 a destroyer closed the beach for a last look. There was nothing to be seen—the Dieppe Raid was over.

Of the specific military objectives assigned the raiders, none were achieved other than the destruction of a coastal

battery and the capture of a few prisoners. The cost was extremely high. Of approximately 5,000 Canadians engaged, about 3,300 were killed, wounded, or captured. Only 2,087 returned to England.³⁶ Additional casualties among Commandos, U.S. Rangers, Naval personnel, and R.A.F. personnel totaled about 1,200 in all categories.³⁷ Material losses included 27 tanks (100 percent of those landed), one destroyer, 33 landing craft, and 106 aircraft.³⁸ The Germans lost about 600 men, 48 aircraft, and one coast defense battery.³⁹

Results from a Broad Perspective. Whatever political aims Churchill might have had in mind for the Dieppe Raid, the results were few. In England it did quell the cry for a "Second Front Now" among those who wavered over whether an early invasion was possible. The magnitude and difficulty of continental landings were brought home by the events at Dieppe, but among the more fervent advocates of efforts at all costs to aid Russia, Dieppe had little lasting impact. A *London Times* editorial of 27 August 1942 commented that: "Neither the dress rehearsal of Dieppe nor the air offensive directed against the nerve centres of German industry can dispel the impression that the British war effort is inadequate at a moment when Russia is facing her gravest crisis."⁴⁰

In the face of continuing criticism, Mr. Churchill felt compelled to defend the Dieppe Raid before the House of Commons on 8 September. In his statement he said that he had personally authorized the raid because he felt it was absolutely necessary to gain information essential to the success of full-scale operations in the future. While this may have been true, no such goal was ever clearly stated in the record before the raid.

If the Dieppe Raid eased the American desire for an early invasion of northwest Europe, no one of promi-

nence has said so. The extent of the casualty lists, however, may have made it easier for some American planners and decisionmakers to accept 1944 over 1943 as the year for the invasion of northwest Europe. If so, the raid, in sort of a negative way, may have eased British-American discord over the future conduct of the war. For Russia, however, the raid may have been a blow to her hopes for an early invasion. Nonetheless, Stalin's persistent demands for a second front continued unabated.

For the Canadians, the first significant bloodying of the Canadian Army brought pride to the army and dismay at home. A report by censors of the attitudes expressed in letters written home by soldiers said that: "The morale of all appears very good. Regrets are not shown, but just enthusiasm, satisfaction and pride in achievement, and the Canadians' share in the raid. . . ." ⁴¹ The Canadian public, aware only of the losses, tended to blame its own military leadership, but the raid had no measurable impact on the degree of public support for the war.

As has been noted, the R.A.F. had hoped that the Dieppe Raid would draw the Luftwaffe into a large battle in which the former would win a significant victory. If enough German aircraft could be destroyed, the Germans, under continuing pressure, would have to draw down their air strength on the Russian Front to replace their losses in the west, thereby easing the burden of the Red army. In terms of size, the battle was enormous. The British assigned over 50 fighter squadrons to support the raid—more than was available to fight and win the Battle of Britain. Tactically, the effort was a success. The Luftwaffe was not to bother the assault force to any significant degree throughout the day, but strategically the R.A.F. was unable to destroy enough German planes to help the Russians. In his report to the House of Commons on 8 September, Mr. Churchill said that the air battle was

extremely satisfactory and Fighter Command wished that one like it could be repeated every week. ⁴² That statement, however, was based on overly optimistic reports that at least 135 German aircraft had been destroyed at a cost of 106 British. More realistic figures disclosed after the war reduced German losses at Dieppe to only 48 aircraft. ⁴³ The British lost twice as many as they destroyed—hardly a successful battle of attrition. The Dieppe Raid marked the end of the attempt by the R.A.F. to draw off German airpower from the Russian front by that method.

There was an unexpected and long-term strategic advantage gained from the Dieppe Raid, one that none of its instigators even considered. Hitler was greatly impressed by the Dieppe Raid and referred to it on several occasions as a model that should be used in the development of the Atlantic defenses. ⁴⁴ Even though it was known positively by the German high command that the Dieppe affair was only intended as a raid of less than a day, Hitler had apparently convinced himself that an actual invasion attempt had been repulsed. ⁴⁵ From the raid on Dieppe, and the earlier raid on St. Nazaire, Hitler concluded that the eventual Allied invasion attempt would be launched initially against a major port and directed that ports receive a high priority in the construction of defenses and that the lowest priority be assigned to open beaches. ⁴⁶ The Allies had drawn the opposite conclusion from Dieppe, that it was impractical to open an invasion by initially assaulting a major port. ⁴⁷

Although not responsible for its conception, Dieppe also strengthened Hitler's conviction that a string of concrete and steel along the coast of France—the Atlantic Wall—was the best way to defend against invasion and that an invasion could best be stopped on or near beaches. The concept was reflected in the kind of defense the Allies met in Normandy in 1944.

On the day after the raid, Lord Mountbatten, at a meeting of the War Cabinet, stressed in his report the value of the lessons learned at Dieppe and the impact they would have in planning for the invasion of Europe. The lessons were those of tactics, technique, and technology, and while some were simply old lessons learned anew, they focused attention on the many current shortcomings in those areas.

Within a short time after the raid, Combined Operations Headquarters published an extensive report, devoting a great deal of space to lessons learned. According to that report, the most important lesson learned was the "need for overwhelming fire support, including close support, during the initial stages of the attack."⁴⁸ Reliance on surprise, to the detriment of fire support, was a mistake. Medium and heavy naval bombardment, as well as continuous air support, was considered essential. Additionally, the development of special close-support naval craft was recommended. Heavy air bombardment, the presence of a capital ship, and close and continuous fire as the troops approached the beaches might have made the difference at Dieppe. The most important lesson, from a strictly naval point of view, the report pointed out, was "the necessity for the formation of permanent naval assault forces with a coherence comparable to that of any other first line fighting formations."⁴⁹ Amphibious operations are complex and successful execution requires precise teamwork and constant practice.

Several other requirements were listed, including specially designed tanks to penetrate beach defenses, better protection for demolitions teams employed to destroy emplacements, the need for highly trained beach parties to maintain organization on the beaches, more reliable ship-to-shore communications, and, to that end, specially designed and equipped command ships.⁵⁰

After Dieppe, Allied planners con-

sistently favored intensive bombardment over reliance on surprise. Similarly, the tactic of seizing a port in the initial assault by frontal attack received little further consideration. The cost of the Dieppe Raid had been too high. Thus, earlier planning was significantly revised in light of lessons learned at Dieppe.

The recommendations of the Combined Operations Headquarters moved the British Admiralty to organize a special naval assault force called Force J. In existence through the end of the war, it was used to develop and perfect naval techniques for amphibious assault and as a training vehicle for Allied troops. One product of Force J was the *Force J Fighting Instructions* which promulgated recommended naval techniques for the management of an amphibious assault. It was used not only by the Channel Assault Force, which later invaded France, but also by American Amphibious Forces in the Pacific.⁵¹ Force J was organized and commanded by the former naval commander for the Dieppe Raid, Captain Hughes-Hallett.

The lessons of the Dieppe Raid must have influenced tactical doctrines for a number of future landings. That they did so for the 1944 Normandy landings there can be no doubt. The official history of the U.S. Army in World War II makes several references to the Combined Operations report on the Dieppe Raid as influencing specific decisions. As an example, the report's conclusion that overwhelming fire support was imperative led to significant additions of naval gunfire support for *Overlord* as planning progressed.⁵²

The recommendations of Combined Operations Headquarters produced ultimately a number of technical innovations that were to prove useful in future landings. Landing craft, already developed to the form in which they were used throughout the remainder of the war, were given armament capable of providing effective close-fire support.

Landing craft tanks (LCT) were converted to bombardment vessels by the addition of 4.7-inch guns (LCG), others were made into rocket-firing vessels (LCTR) through the addition of 800 to 1,100 5-inch rocket launchers. These and other similar craft were successfully used in Sicily, Italy, and Normandy.

Specialized tanks, much in evidence at Normandy, resulted from the experience gained at Dieppe under the supervision of Combined Operations Headquarters. At Dieppe the tanks, as well as the engineers whose mission it was to clear the way for them, operated separately and unsuccessfully. By the time of Normandy, innovation had brought the two functions together. Examples included tanks designed especially to scale seawalls, flail tanks used for mine clearing, armored engineer vehicles, tanks designed to carry and place demolitions on concrete fortifications and obstacles, amphibious tanks, and tanks that acted as ramps for other tanks.⁵³

The list of lessons that were adopted could go on, but the point is simply that the Dieppe Raid had lifted the consideration of an invasion of northwest Europe from the theoretical to the practical. The value of negative learning is clear.

Conclusions. From the standpoint of lessons learned, the Dieppe Raid made a valuable contribution to the further prosecution of the war. From the experience gained there, new tactics, techniques, and equipment for amphibious assault were developed. Viewed as a model for the future full-scale invasion of Europe, the results of the Dieppe operation were thoroughly analyzed, widely published, and acted upon. On 10 June 1944, the three American Chiefs of Staff visited Normandy in company with Mr. Churchill, General Brooke, and General Smuts. During their return to London, General Marshall composed the following message to

Admiral Mountbatten (by then Supreme Allied Commander, South East Asia) which, at Marshall's suggestion, was sent over the signature of each member of the party.

Today we visited the British and American armies on the sod of France. We sailed through vast fleets of ships, with landing-craft of many types pouring more and more men, vehicles, and stores ashore. We saw clearly the manoeuvre in process of rapid development. We have shared our secrets in common and helped each other all we could. We wish to tell you at this moment in your arduous campaign that we realize that much of this remarkable technique, and therefore the success of the venture, has its origin in developments effected by you and your staff of Combined Operations

S/Arnold, Brooke, Churchill,
King, Marshall, Smuts⁵⁴

The raid on Dieppe was the primary source from which the achievements of Combined Operations stemmed.

Looked at from the political and strategic sides, the raid made little sense. Whether it was really conceived in response to the demands of either politics

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



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or strategy, or both, remain unclear because no one responsible for Dieppe ever said that the raid was a product of those considerations. If, in the mind of Churchill, it was aimed at calming public clamor for a second front, it seems that the landings in North Africa would have served as well. If he thought it might help his relationship with the Americans, he had no need to do so, for they had already accepted a landing in North Africa. As far as the raid's possible influence on Russian demands, in retrospect, it would appear unlikely that such a relatively small operation of a day's duration could have been conceived by such a man as Churchill as having any impact whatsoever on the Russian front.

If the raid at Dieppe was of dubious political and strategic value, were the losses at Dieppe worth the information the raid produced? Certainly there was a price that had to be paid sometime for that knowledge, and most all the chroniclers of Dieppe have stated positively that the raid was necessary in terms of lessons learned. Perhaps they were moved to do so, at least partially, out of

respect for the sacrifices made. Perhaps they are right, but it is a subjective issue that defies proof. How many lives were saved at Normandy as a result of the lessons learned at Dieppe? It is impossible to say. There were many landings in World War II, and each contributed to the general store of expertise. But in 1942, future landings and their results could not be anticipated. Eventually the Allies would have to land on the Continent, and practical knowledge of how to do so was significantly lacking. If the price had not been paid at Dieppe, a much higher price might have been paid in Italy, for example, to learn the same lessons. The raid on Dieppe was not necessary to the successful prosecution of the war, but it made a valuable contribution. Whether, on balance, more lives were saved later than were lost on the beaches of Dieppe—the only true test of whether the raid was worth the cost—can never really be known. One can only hope that Mr. Churchill was right when, speaking of the Dieppe casualties, he said: "Honor to the brave who fell. Their sacrifice was not in vain."⁵

FOOTNOTES

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29. Stacey, p. 330.
30. L.E.H. Maund, *Assault from the Sea* (London: Methuen, 1949), p. 114.
31. Stacey, p. 359.
32. Mordal, p. 175-184.
33. Fergusson, p. 176.
34. Mordal, p. 191-198.
35. Fergusson, p. 171.
36. Stacey, p. 389.
37. Robertson, p. 386.
38. Fergusson, p. 181.
39. Robertson, p. 388.
40. *London Times*, quoted in Mordal, p. 256.
41. Canadian Censor Report, quoted in Stacey, p. 395.
42. Robertson, p. 389.
43. Bryant, p. 488.
44. Hans A. Jacobsen, *Decisive Battles of World War Two—the German View* (New York: Putnam, 1965), p. 228.
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46. Higgins, p. 167.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
48. Stacey, p. 399.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 400.
50. Fergusson, p. 182.
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55. Churchill, *Hinge of Fate*, p. 511.



A landing against organized and highly trained opposition is probably the most difficult undertaking which military forces are called upon to face.

*George C. Marshall: during planning
for the Sicilian landings, 1943.*