



The Origins and Planning of Operation Jubilee

by Colin Hook

Nothing in this paper should be construed as detracting from the bravery, perseverance and determination of all those that took part, but Dieppe was not the worst military disaster that befell British and Commonwealth Forces in WW2. It was, however, probably the highest single day's casualty total for the Canadian Army in that war.

But to understand Dieppe fully, we have to be aware of its position in the context of the War as a whole. The origins of this operation lie in the Arcadia Conference held in late December 1941 between the President of the US, the Prime Minister, Churchill and their respective Chiefs of Staff. This Conference agreed that the objectives in Europe for 1942 were:

*“ . . . through steadily increasing air operations and by **raids or forays** all along the coasts. This initial phase will be of some help to Russia and of immediate satisfaction to the public; but what is most important it will make experienced veterans of the air and ground units, and it will offset the tendency toward deterioration in morale which threaten the latter due to prolonged inactivity.*

*A special significance of the preparatory phase is that it presents opportunity for the intensive and specialised training of troops, without which the plan would have meagre prospects for success. This special training, beginning with fundamentals of technique in loading and unloading of boats, must advance progressively through logical steps until it comprises **constant raiding** by small task forces at selected points along the entire accessible coastline held by the enemy.*

*. . . The continuation of such raids over a long period may lead the enemy to believe that no all-out offensive is to be attempted or, conversely and equally valuable, may induce him to withhold from the Russian front air and ground units because of constant fear that the raids may develop at any moment into a major attack. **In this latter event the raiding process would, on a limited scale, serve the same purpose as the opening of a new front on the continent itself.**”*

There followed the successful operations at Bruneval in February and St. Nazaire in March. It is probable that the plan for a raid on the French port of Dieppe was conceived on a different level to the Anglo-American debate on grand strategy. The port of Dieppe was selected as a raid target by Combined Operations Headquarters (COHQ) mostly by a process of elimination.¹

“Dieppe” as a raid appears to surface officially in April 1942 as a product of COHQ. The Dieppe Raid outline plans were presented and approved by the COS on 13 May 1942 for execution in late June or early July. It was assigned the code-name RUTTER.² In seeking that approval from the COS Committee, Mountbatten on 11 May wrote “Apart from the military

¹ Other targets which had been considered by COHQ were Cherbourg, Caen, Le Havre, Fecamp, Boulogne and St. Malo. Of these Cherbourg and Le Havre were too large (in any event Cherbourg was one of the possible SLEDGEHAMMER targets) and Caen and St. Malo were not within range of RAF support. Boulogne was considered unapproachable because of its heavy coast defence batteries.

² It is worth noting that an airborne assault on the high ground south west of Dieppe featured in the initial plans for the Dieppe Raid.



objective given in the outline plan, this operation will be of great value as training for Operation SLEDGEHAMMER or any other major operation as far as the actual assault is concerned. “ On 1 June the COS confirmed that RUTTER should take place at the end of that month. These meetings, therefore, have significance since Anglo-American grand strategy of the War and British tactical raiding policy appear to merge here in the form of RUTTER.

For Admiral Pound, the First Sea Lord, the loss of H.M.S. Prince of Wales and H.M.S. Repulse on 10 December 1941, the U-boat offensive in the Atlantic together with the demands of the Russian convoys, meant that Britain’s naval resources were inadequate to meet her obligations. The loss of the U.S. battle line at Pearl Harbor meant that the Allies would be at a significant strategic disadvantage throughout 1942. The heavy losses sustained by convoy PQ 17 merely compounded the pressures on the First Sea Lord at this time and ensured that no capital ships would be available to support any such raids during 1942.³

For the RAF, it was hoped, however, that the Dieppe Raid would draw the Luftwaffe into a major air battle in which the RAF would win a significant victory. If enough German aircraft could be destroyed, the argument contended that, with the Germans under continuing pressure, they would have to draw on their air strength on the Russian front to replace the losses, thereby easing the pressures on the Russian army. The Dieppe Raid was to involve an air battle that the senior RAF commanders looked forward to with enthusiasm, optimism and mistaken confidence. More later! ...

It was the employment, however, of the Canadian ground forces in this Raid that has continued to capture the headlines and has ultimately resulted in Dieppe remaining at the forefront of the unresolved outstanding controversies of the Second World War. Initially, the forces allocated were British forces from South Eastern Command. Canadian political and military figures pressed for the operation to be allocated to Canadian forces. We must remember that the first Canadians had come to Britain in 1940 and apart from the air war and the unsuccessful defence of Hong Kong, Canadian forces, unlike their Dominion counterparts from Australia, New Zealand, India and South Africa, had not been involved in action. Both political and military leaders felt it imperative to be involved. The operation was re-allocated, therefore, to 2nd Canadian Infantry Division under Major-General J.H. (“Ham”) Roberts in late April 1942.

Successions of historians and writers, many of them Canadians, have confined their efforts to cataloguing the tactical failures and shortcomings of the Raid and in fuelling the search for the “villains” in this episode. And yet, apart from influencing a number of the tactical decisions and from failing to review thoroughly a number of others, there is no evidence to suggest that the employment of the Canadians, as against any other nationality, had any strategic relevance whatsoever.⁴

³ Following the lessons learned at Dieppe in 1942, when in September 1944 the Canadian 2nd Division, this time part of 21st Army Group, again attacked Dieppe they were supported by two battleships, a monitor and two cruisers. The weakest of these ships has a fire power nearly equivalent to that of the whole bombarding force on the original raid.

⁴ It might be considered misleading, if not offensive, to state quite simply that the use of the Canadians had no influence of significance on the decision to undertake the operation, but it nevertheless probably remains true. Any other attitude can only be made out of deference to the courage displayed by those involved and to the grievous losses sustained by them.



Tactically the military aims and objectives were dealt with in detail in the voluminous Operation Order. The specific ground objectives were:

- Destroy the enemy defences in the vicinity.
- Destroy the nearby airfield.
- Destroy the radar and power stations, dock and rail facilities, and petrol dumps.
- Remove the invasion barges stored in Dieppe harbour.
- Capture any documents.
- Capture any prisoners.
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In any event, the tactical aims of JUBILEE overall can be summarised best by Churchill's accurate, if not inelegant, turn of phrase describing it as a "*butcher-and-bolt raid*". Other descriptions, such as "reconnaissance in force", which was used after the Raid, are merely misleading.

RUTTER was scheduled to take place on 4 July. It was eventually cancelled on 8 July due to bad weather.

Controversially, RUTTER was reinstated as Operation JUBILEE for 19 August 1942 with a new naval Commander, Captain J. Hughes-Hallett vice Rear Admiral Baillie-Grohman.

Dieppe was in the area of responsibility of 302nd Infantry Division. The garrison of the Dieppe group of strongholds was controlled by the HQ of the 571st Infantry Regiment on the western headland. It consisted of two battalions both with HQs on the east and west headlands (approximately 1,500 men). There were also three coastal batteries, Varengeville, Berneval and Arques-la-Bataille. In addition, there were sixteen field howitzers, sited either side of Dieppe, as well as eight French 75-millimetre guns with a nine small calibre anti-tank guns defending the main beach. Anti-aircraft guns were numerous in the Dieppe area. The whole Dieppe Defended Area was girded by a continuous barbed wire obstacle. Pourville, for example, was outside the area but the heights to the east of Pourville were inside the protected area.

The Germans had large reserves in the area. 302nd Division's reserves of two battalions was just up the coast near Le Tréport. In Army Group Reserve 10th Panzer Division was about 50 miles away in Amiens. Four Rifle Battalions constituted the Army Reserve and were 40 miles away. The Corps Reserve of an Infantry Regiment was at St Valery 20 miles away.

Myths vs Facts

It is difficult to find any medium sized action of WW2 which has engendered so many firmly held but inaccurate beliefs about the operation. As was said of a successful Glaswegian broker friend of mine: "*seldom right, but never in doubt*".



Here are a selection:

Myth	Fact
<p>Did Operation Jubilee proceed without being properly authorised? (Brian Loring Villa - Mountbatten and the Dieppe Raid 1942)</p>	<p>12/13 Jul: COHQ discuss Jubilee; Jubilee was probably authorised by COS between 27 Jul and 12 Aug (oblique references in COS Minutes on 12 and 18 Aug, neither of which I have physically seen). No written endorsement has been found in the Chief of Staffs' minutes and other documentation which explicitly authorises this operation. General Sir William Jackson, himself familiar with the workings of Whitehall, writing in the Times in 1990 described this assertion as "academic hogwash".</p>
<p>The Germans were forewarned that the Operation was going to take place. (Soldiers returning from the Operation)</p>	<p>Strategically, the Germans were aware and alert to the possibility that amphibious operations could take place along the Channel coastline during 1942. Many rumours of raids appear in German war diaries at this time helped greatly by Berneval and St. Nazaire. German defences were also strengthened greatly during 1942. Locally, 302nd Division ordered a state of 'threatening danger' from 10/11 Aug to 19/20 Aug. The convoy collision, which occurred at 0347 hrs alerted the Berneval and Puy's Batteries but no others. German records indicate with certainty that the enemy had no prior knowledge of the raid.</p>
<p>The Shingle on the Central Beach was not suitable for the Churchill Tanks (Goronwy Rees - A Bundle of Sensations)</p>	<p>Hugh Henry in his Doctoral thesis tracked the movements of all the Calgary Regiment's tanks and scout cars. 15 of the 29 tanks that landed had made it off the beach. There is, however, evidence that the shingle, or hard chert as it was more accurately called, did cause some difficulty. Perhaps as many as eight or nine tanks, in due course, shed their tracks due to the chert; about the same number as knocked out by anti-tank or mortar fire.</p>
<p>Dieppe was the inspiration for 79th Armoured Division - ie Hobart's Funnies</p>	<p>Not true. Three of the first tanks of the Calgary Regiment carried rolls of chespalping to assist them to gain traction before getting over the sea wall. Three others carried flame throwers and others had howitzers. Dieppe did, however, confirm the crucial need for a variety of assault engineering equipment.</p>
<p>Dieppe was the inspiration behind Mulberry, the artificial harbours at Normandy</p>	<p>Not true. Mulberry was apparently conceived around April 1942. Once again, Dieppe did confirm the importance of artificial harbours as the difficulty of capturing a port intact was fully appreciated.</p>
<p>And finally, Dieppe was a conspiracy</p>	<p>In answering this, we have to try to decide what the conspiracy was and who was involved. I find it difficult</p>



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	<p>to define what the conspiracy is supposed to be. Loring Villa would argue that Mountbatten was certainly involved in it. What we can say:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Mountbatten had a substantial ego and tried extremely hard after WW2 to protect his involvement and reputation. Well, as Mandy Rice-Davies might say “he would, wouldn’t he”.2. Was there a political agenda and/or strategic dimension - almost certainly.3. Would Churchill, Brooke and the COS have known about Jubilee - it is inconceivable that they wouldn’t have. <p>But none of this constitutes a conspiracy.</p>
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