

First Full Exposition Of Dieppe Raid Given

Official Narrative by Hilary St George Saunders Explains Operation in Detail

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The first studied story of the "Reconnaissance in Force" at Dieppe last August which claimed 3,250 Canadian casualties in an eight-hour attack on the German-held French coast is published today in Combined Operations the official story of the Commandos.

More than one-fifth of the 155 page book by Hilary St George Saunders currently the world's best-selling author is devoted to a recital of the Dieppe operation. He outlines the military objectives of the attack in far greater detail than ever before made public.

Luke Battle of Britain Bomber Command and the rest of the war time booklets which have pushed Saunders sales record close to the 12,000,000 mark Combined Operations does not bear the name of the author. Still assistant librarian of the British House of Commons he is fully occupied these days with the duties of his official authorship.

For the first time Saunders lists the exact objectives which each component of the attacking force at Dieppe sought to achieve. Unfortunately only one of the 10 major units engaged—seven of them Canadian—was able to carry out its assignment with complete success. This was No 4 Commando.

Covers Other Operations

Saunders book is chapter after exciting chapter of the achievements of the Commandos—at Lofofen Vaagso Bruneval St Nazaire Diego Suarez. He fills it with maps and photographs which with his simple unheroic writing resolve stirring news stories of the war in to the calmer perspective of history. But Canadians will read his book because of what he says of Dieppe. Speaking of the results of the Dieppe operation the 45-year-old veteran of the First Great War says:

"Two (results) were outstanding. In the first place we learnt much about the German defenses in the West. In the second place and of still greater value was the first-hand experience we acquired of the conditions which may be met with in a large-scale assault on a strongly held channel port. The details of these experiences must not be revealed. The enemy will know in due course how we have profited by them."

While the Dieppe raid was an indispensable prelude for what was to take place later in a sense it was also the culminating point in the series of reconnaissances of which some account has now been given. Certain of the results achieved came visible later when a combined operation on a much larger scale was successfully launched others will appear in the major assaults to come.

Here is the manner in which Saunders lists the objectives of the three pronged Dieppe land attack, divided into two flanking operations and the main assault.

West Flank

Outer Attack—No 4 Commando to strike at Verengeville and the mouth of the River Saane and destroy the coast defense batteries of 59 guns.

Inner attack—South Saskatchewan Regiment to capture Pourville and a similar headland overlooking Dieppe on the west destroying on the way a radio location station and a battery of light anti-aircraft guns. Cameron Highlanders of Winnipeg then to pass through the town into the valley of the Scie River and capture the air field of St. Aubin four miles inland.

East Flank

Inner Attack—Royal Regiment of Canada to land at Puits seize a coast defense battery situated some distance inland and capture the headland overlooking Dieppe on the east.

Outer Attack—No 3 Commando to strike at Berneval and Belleville-Sur-Mer and destroy the coast defense batteries of 59 guns.

Main Assault

Royal Hamilton Light Infantry to land on western half of the long beach fronting the Esplanade. Essex Scottish Regiment to land on eastern half of beach.

Tanks of 14th Canadian Army Tank Battalion (Calgary Regiment) to be put ashore as soon as the beach had been cleared to enter the town and support the Infantry in seizing it and holding it while various objectives were being blown up. These objectives included works power station petrol dumps and a pharmaceutical factory.

Fusiliers Mont Royal to wait out at sea as a floating reserve backed by the Royal Marine Commando in small fast motorboats manned by the Fighting French.

These forces plus a detachment of American Rangers moved across the Channel to the French coast in the early morning of Aug 19 in a flotilla of more than 200 vessels. It included eight destroyers, motor gunboats and motor launches escorting the carrying and landing craft. H.M.S. Calpe was headquarters ship, H.M.S. Fernie reserve HQ.

Tells of Failures

After detailing the objectives Mr

Saunders describes each phase of the operation. For the first time he puts down on paper just what was not achieved despite the heroism of trained Canadian troops.

Of the outer flank attacks says Mr Saunders the one on the west was successful. All six of the coast defense guns were blown up and by 9 o'clock No 4 Commando was on his way back to England having suffered a loss of five officers and 41 other ranks.

This hardous assault to quote the official report was carried out strictly according to plan and may well become a model for future operations of this kind.

The outer flank attack on the east was marred by an unlucky encounter with armed German trawlers seven miles offshore meaning loss of surprise in that sector. Most of No 3 Commando was wiped out but one landing craft put ashore three officers and 17 men who fought their way to vantage points from which they sniped at the coast battery firing at the British ships.

The official report says the attack was not crowned with success but there is no doubt that the sniping tactics greatly interfered with the handling of the battery for upward of an hour and a half during the crucial period of the main landing.

The inner flank attacks like the main assault were assigned to the Canadians. None of the three regiments on the inner flanks concerned was able to achieve its objectives.

On the west the South Saskatchewan Regiment made a successful landing five minutes after zero and encountered little opposition until ashore.

Stopped by Road Block

"A" Company was to capture the height at the left, destroy an anti-aircraft battery and a nearby radio location station. The company scaled the seawall by ladder disposed of a couple of pillboxes and moved forward under a smoke-screen until they were stopped by a road block.

The job of "C" company was to seize Pourville and hold the high ground west of the village. While "A" Company was stopped in heavy fighting "C" Company reached the village captured La Maison Blanche took a number of prisoners and established a platoon on the high ground to the west.

Meanwhile "B" Company and "D" Company were to cross the river Scie and attack the position at Les Quatre Vents farm. At the bridge over the Scie they were held up by heavy fire. Spurred on by the heroism of Lt Col C. C. I. Merritt, who won the VC and now is a prisoner they pressed on over the bridge and eventually captured the pillboxes covering the farm. When the signal came to withdraw the farm was still uncaptured.

Throughout the seven hours during which they were heavily engaged" Mr Saunders says "the South Saskatchewan Regiment accounted for very many of the enemy."

Piper Led Highlanders

Forty minutes after the S.S.R.S. landed the Cameron Highlanders came ashore in broad daylight with a piper playing. The Hundred Pipers' Fire was not heavy but Lt-Col A. C. Gostling of Winnipeg the commanding officer was killed as he jumped onto the beach. The battalion pushed on toward their objective the airfield at St. Aubin.

By 8:45 o'clock they were engaged in forcing passage of the River Scie when they realized that everything had not gone according to plan because the expected Canadian tanks were nowhere to be seen. When the time came to withdraw they started back. But the German infantry had counter-attacked and dislodged "C" Company of the S.S.R.S. from the high ground west of Pourville which dominated the slopes and the beach from which withdrawal was necessary.

Heavy losses were incurred over the open stretch of sand and water to the landing craft. About 11:30 Col Merritt collected some men and attacked some machine guns to the west of the beach silencing their fire.

By noon most of the troops had been re-embarked. The remainder formed a rearguard and held a perimeter until they were forced to surrender about 3 o'clock when their ammunition was exhausted.

On the inner flank to the east the Royal Regiment was detailed to land at Puits and move inland to capture a coast defense battery then to take from the rear the eastern headland overlooking the main Dieppe beaches.

Royal Achieved Surprise

The Royals lost some precious time in forming up their landing craft but apparently had surprise in their favor as they took their course past the piers of Dieppe. Mr Saunders writes "The enemy evidently mistook it (the flotilla) for one of their own convoys for the harbor lights were turned on."

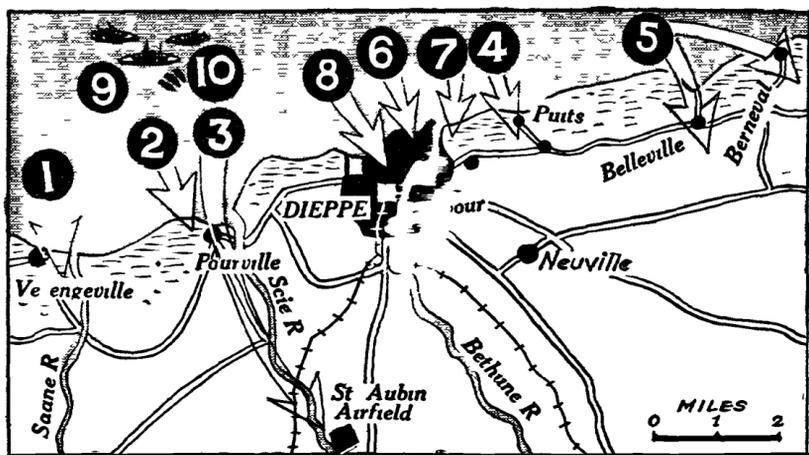
Day had dawned when the first wave touched down on the beach 300 yards wide and 250 feet deep with a 12-foot seawall about 50 feet from the water's edge. A withering fire opened cutting down most of the officers as the troops raced for the shelter of the wall. But it afforded no protection as it was swept by enfilade fire from the left flank.

Meantime the Royals "C" Company and "D" Company with Lt-Col D. E. Catto of Toronto had landed to the west of the seawall under the cliffs. After considerable delay due to heavy fire they scaled the cliff and cleared the enemy out of the houses at the top. But they were cut off—six officers and 15 other ranks—for the Germans covered with machine-gun fire the cap up which they came. They did not surrender until 4:20 o'clock.

The main assault on Dieppe entrusted to the Essex Scottish and the R.H.L.I. was made on a sea front where the beach stretches from the west breakwater for 1,700 yards and ends at the cliffs in the shadow of the Casino. It was the task of the two regiments to seize the beaches enable the tanks to land and then to push on and hold the town while extensive demolitions were carried out.

Encountered Enfilade Fire

The Essex Scottish went in on the left, the R.H.L.I. on the right, their landing covered by a short intense bombardment from the destroyers



DIEPPE OBJECTIVES listed by Mr Saunders were (1) Coast defense batteries (2) Radiolocation station and anti-aircraft guns (3) Airfield of St. Aubin (4) Coastal defense battery (5) Coastal defence batteries (6) West half of esplanade beach (7) Eastern half of beach (8) Harbor, marshalling yards gas works power station, gasoline dumps and drug factory (9) Floating reserve (10) stood offshore

at sea followed by some 60 cannon firing Spitfires and Hurricanes shooting up the fortified houses along the beach. At the same time three squadrons of Bostons and Blenheims dropped smoke to smother the eastern headland.

The two regiments rushed forward but—like the Royal Regiment at Puits—came under fierce frontal and enfilade fire. The defenses in the houses beyond the promenade had been subdued but not silenced. As the smoke drifted away many guns—some of considerable calibre—opened fire from the caves in the face of the headland to the east.

Nearer the headland the Essex Scottish were held up by wire at the seawall separating the beach from the promenade. "though a small party subsequently penetrated into the town" Mr Saunders writes.

To their right some of the R.H.L.I. stormed the Casino. Pillboxes were blown up. The demolition charges of Sgt G. A. Hickson sapper from Kitchener Ont. quelled all resistance in the Casino and destroyed among other defenses a four inch gun. Sgt. Hickson was awarded the D.C.M.

Three small parties pressed on in to the town including one led by Sgt. Hickson. They eventually reached the Church of St. Remy but, being unsupported, could go no further.

All Craft Were Hit

Meanwhile the first wave of the Calgary Regiment's tanks had arrived at the beach carried in six tank landing craft with sappers and beach parties. The sappers were to demolish the tank obstacles in Dieppe's narrow streets. Because the defenses had not been mastered the craft were fired on. All were hit. One sank. One remained aground on fire.

But all but two of the tanks were successfully landed. One did not succeed in beaching until the fourth attempt losing three helmets in its efforts.

Half an hour later the second wave of tanks came in under even heavier fire. One landing craft was sunk just off the beach. Altogether 28 tanks were landed. A number got over the seawall to the Esplanade. Some turned west to attack the defenses on the western headland. Others made for the town itself.

But the casualties among the engineers were so heavy that none was available to demolish the tank blocks at the foot of the streets leading into the town. One tank smashed through a house and got into the town followed by probably two more. Other tanks moved up and down the Esplanade firing until

their ammunition was exhausted. Because the anti-tank defenses had not been overcome they were unable to give adequate support.

By 6:30 in the morning" Mr Saunders writes the force commanders of H.M.S. Calpe were well aware the situation was not developing as well as had been hoped. No word had come from the Royal Regiment at Puits or from No 3 Commando at Berneval. On the other hand the situation at Pourville appeared not unfavorable. It was known too that No 4 Commando had landed successfully at Vasterival. The military force commander decided that the time had come to make use of his reserves.

Compelled to Surrender

At that time fire slackened somewhat on the eastern half of the Dieppe beach. It seemed to Maj. Gen. Roberts (who commanded the operation jointly with Capt. J. Hughes Hallett for the navy and Air Vice-Marshal T. Leigh Mallory for the air force) that if the Essex Scottish could be reinforced they would be able to capture the vital eastern headland especially with tanks to help them.

At 7 o'clock Les Fusiliers Mont Royal were sent in. But the fire on the beaches as soon as they landed proved to be as fierce as ever. More than half of them were carried by the strong tide to a stretch of shingle and rock facing high cliffs west of the main beach. Met with machine-gun and mortar fire from the cliff top they surrendered about noon after more than 100 had been wounded.

Two other parties of the F.M.R.S. landed almost opposite the casino and pushed on. One party under Capt. G. Vandelaar of Montreal attacked some of the houses on the Boulevard de Verdun. With 11 men Sgt. Pierre Dubuc of Montreal turned east and reached the Bassin du Canada part of Dieppe's inner harbor. His party destroyed a German machine-gun post, killed or wounded all the Germans on craft in the dock basin and pressed on until they encountered superior German forces. Out of ammunition they were forced to surrender.

By a ruse Sgt. Dubuc effected an escape for his men and reached the beach by 11 o'clock to find the evacuation had begun. He helped his wounded commanding officer Lt. Col. Dollard-Mnard to a landing craft and carried a badly wounded corporal to another. He was awarded the Military Medal.

Despite the efforts of the F.M.R.S. the eastern headland remained un- taken and Major-Gen. Roberts about 8:30 a.m. sent in the Royal

Marine Commando. Quoting the official report "With a courage terrible to see the marines went in to land determined if fortune so willed to repeat at Dieppe what their fathers had accomplished at Zeebrugge. Few who reached the beach survived unhurt."

Decided to Withdraw

By now Mr Saunders says "it was obvious that the headlands to the east and west of Dieppe would not be captured in time to permit an entry into the town. The doors were in fact still closed. It was decided to withdraw those who had been assaulting them and the town so intrepidly."

Mr Saunders devotes a chapter to the triumph in the air saying "The enemy were not prepared and at the beginning brought no more than 25 to 30 fighters on the scene. These presently increased to between 50 and 100 including fighter-bombers. But it was not until 11 o'clock in the morning that the first German bombers appeared. By that time our aircraft had been flying in great strength over a part of the enemy's occupied territory for five hours. They were to continue to do so until nightfall."

He says the only major success the German air force could claim was the sinking of the Berkeley which happened to catch a pack of bombs jettisoned from a Junkers 88 attacked by a Spitfire. There was evidence to show that German loss in aircraft destroyed was to be 93—may have been as high as 170. British losses were 98 aircraft.

Withdrawal Was Difficult

The withdrawal from the main beaches was timed to begin at 11 a.m. under a curtain of Boston-laid smoke. It was carried out with great difficulty in the face of the heaviest fire. By 12:20 most of the men who had fought their way back to the beaches had been taken away. Crews of the landing craft and Canadian medical officers and orderlies showed the greatest heroism.

Shortly before one o'clock H.M.S. Calpe had closed to within nine cables of the beach and was under machine-gun fire. No sign of troops or landing craft save derelicts could be seen. The headquarters ship returned to the cover of smoke just as a last signal came from shore at 1:08 p.m. It was the headquarters of Brigadier W. W. Southam saying he was compelled to surrender.

The expedition returned to the ports from which it had sailed some of the ships not berthing until past midnight.