

Canadians Traversed Inferno At Dieppe, Witness Reveals

By **ROSS MUNRO**

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WITH THE CANADIAN RAIDING FORCE, Returning From Dieppe, Aug. 19 (Delayed)—For eight raging hours under intense Nazi fire from dawn until a sweltering afternoon, I watched Canadian troops fight the blazing bloody battle of Dieppe. I saw them

go through this biggest of the war's raiding operations in wild scenes that crowded helter-skelter one upon another in crazy sequence.

There was the furious attack by German E-boats, while the Canadians moved in on Dieppe's beaches, landing by the dawn's half-light. As the Canadian battalions stormed through the flashing inferno of Nazi defenses, there was the belching of fire from huge tanks that rolled into the fight.

I spent the grimmest twenty minutes of my life with one unit when a rain of German machine-gun fire wounded half the men in our boat. Only a miracle saved us from annihilation.

A few hours later there was the spine-chilling experience of a dive-bombing attack by seven Stukas, the dread Nazi aircraft that spotted our landing craft waiting offshore to re-embark the fighting men. Our boat was thrown about like a cork by their seven screeching bombs that plunged into the water around us and exploded in gigantic cascades.

There was the lashing of machine-gun fire from other Nazi

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CANADIANS BRAVED INFERNO AT DIEPPE

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aircraft and the thunder of the anti-aircraft fire that sent them hustling off.

Over our heads in the blue, cloud-flecked French sky were fought the greatest air engagements since the Battle of Britain, dogfights carried on to a dizzy accompaniment of planes exploding in the air, diving down in flames or plummeting into the sea from thousands of feet.

Hour after hour the guns of the supporting warships growled salvos at targets ashore, where by now our tanks also were in violent action. Unearthly noises rumbled up and down the French Coast, shrouded for miles in smoke screens covering the fleet.

There was heroism at sea and in the skies in those hours, but the hell-spot was ashore, where the Canadians fought at close quarters with the Nazis. They fought to the end with courage and daring.

When they approached Dieppe it was an arsenal of coastal defense. When they left Dieppe it was afire, its ruins and its dead lying under a smoky shroud.

The operation against Dieppe started from a British port Tuesday evening. I boarded a ship which also carried a Royal Regiment from Toronto. It was 7 P. M. Only then were we told that Dieppe was our destination. The Royals took it coolly enough. They had been trained with the rest of the force for several months on combined operations for just such a job.

Guided by Maps and Photos

Maps, mosaics and photographs of Dieppe were issued, and as the boats put to sea with other ships of the raiding fleet the troops were "briefed" in their tasks.

It was a muggy night, but the sky was clear and the sea calm. It was combined-operations weather.

Below deck the men sat around, cleaning weapons, fusing grenades and loading magazines of Sten, Bren and tommy guns. In the darkness the flotilla formed—shadowy tank-landing craft that looked like oil tankers, a score of small assault boats, destroyers, gunboats, motor launches and torpedo boats.

A few officers in the raiding party drank some beer with the ship captain and chatted about everything except the operation. We had a snack of bully beef, bread and butter with tea and then went over the side into an assault craft.

After leaving the mother ships, our flotilla of little craft took positions in a line astern. The Canadians were to land at Puys, one mile east of Dieppe and establish themselves in that flanking area.

It was pleasant enough in the open assault boats. Nobody seemed particularly nervous about the coming business, although it was to be the Canadians' first time in action.

I made myself think in terms of manoeuvres, the exercises in which I had taken part with these men in preparation for this night. I had about convinced myself that this was only another of those familiar exercises when at 4:10 A. M., about fifty minutes before we were due to hit the beach, a flare arched over the Channel. Tracer bullets followed quickly, long green and red streaks marking their paths. They were too close for comfort. "E-boats," announced a sailor.

The atmosphere suddenly grew tense and wide-awake. Men tightened their grips on weapons. A sailor hoisted a Lewis gun into place and cocked it. Our boats slipped steadily on through the quiet waters. Our motor was hardly audible.

Sudden Attack by E-Boats

Then the German E-boats appeared close by, off to one side. They opened up with shots that bounced bright red off one or two of our boats. The fire now came from several angles. It was the first time most of us had ever been under direct enemy fire. We flattened against the armor plating of our craft. The E-boats kept up a running attack for twenty minutes. The night was alive with streaking tracers.

It occurred to me that it was awkward to be traveling toward Germans with other Germans hanging on our heels. But the Royal Navy took care of our unwanted traveling companions. The destroyers popped up with a barrage that sent the E-boats scurrying off like sea rats.

Aircraft drummed overhead, by this time heading south. They were the first of the bombers heading for Dieppe, and in a few minutes great crumps shook the French Channel shore as they unloaded bombs on the port.

Nazi anti-aircraft defenses barked at the skies, and the haphazard patterns of tracer flak crisscrossed the horizon that showed the first streaks of dawn. They made a brilliant chandelier over Dieppe. Two searchlights probed for bombers dodging the anti-aircraft fire. Other bombers went in, squadron after squadron.

The flashes of bomb explosions in the town, within two miles of which we now had crept, revealed a concrete jetty at the harbor entrance. The anti-aircraft fire was heaviest from the cliff tops on both sides of the town.

On our right I could see another fleet of raiding craft bearing men of the Essex, Scottish Royal, Hamilton Light Infantry and the Calgary Tank Regiment to the main beach in front of Dieppe.

Screened by Smoke Pall

There was a great roar as a concentration of high explosive and smoke bombs landed on the east of the headland near the harbor with a blinding flash that seemed half a mile long. Black smoke billowed out and turned white as

it curled along just above the sea to conceal our landing from the shore defenses.

Crouching low, the Canadians got ready. Their faces were taut and their jaws were firm. We knew this wouldn't be any party.

We could see destroyers and gunboats creeping up behind the attack flotillas racing for the main shore. The flame and roar of the artillery told us that the naval bombardment of the town had started. The Navy kept its torrent of shells pouring in to Dieppe as we sped for the shore.

Already some of the Canadians were landing at Puys as we headed for the beach at the base of the slope leading to the shore in a break between the chalk cliffs. To one side, fighter planes hopped in at sea level to blast with cannon and machine-guns the hotels and buildings full of Germans on the Dieppe esplanade.

Dawn was breaking. The Battle of Dieppe got hotter.

We were to land in a matter of minutes. Through the smoke layers I looked up at the white cliffs growing higher before us. Anti-aircraft guns up there clattered unceasingly. Machine-guns drilled down bullets that clanged against the armor of our boat. By the time our boat touched the beach the din was at a crescendo.

I peered out at a slope lying just in front of us and it was startling to discover that it was covered with the fallen forms of men in battle dress. The Royals ahead of us had been cut down as they stormed the slope. It came home to me only then that every one of these men had gone down under the bullets of the enemy at the top of the incline.

The vicious bursts of the yellow tracers from the German machine guns made a veritable curtain about our boat. The Royals beside me fired back with everything they had. One Canadian blazed away with an anti-tank rifle.

The Germans held a couple of houses near the top of the slope and occupied some strong pill-boxes. At the top of their level they were able to pour fire into some of the boats, including ours.

Several bursts from machine guns struck men in the middle of our craft. The boat's ramp was lowered to permit the men with me to get ashore, but the German fire caught those who tried to make it. The remainder crouched inside, protected by armor and pouring a return fire at the Nazis.

The Canadian shooting was dead-on, and half a dozen men in steel helmets and field gray uniforms toppled from the windows to the ground. Other Germans made the mistake of trying to change their positions, only to be caught when sighted by the Royal sharpshooters armed with Bren guns.

Caught by the unexpectedly intense Nazi fire, the Canadians fought a heroic battle from those craft that were still nosed up on the beach. I lay behind a masonry

bit of plating as heavy bullets cut through it a couple of feet above my head.

An officer sitting next to me was firing his Sten gun. He got off a magazine and a half, killed at least one Nazi, and then was hit in the head. He fell forward, bleeding profusely. A sailor next to him was wounded in the neck. Another got a bullet through the shoulder. Those around the injured tied them up with field dressings.

Firing Reduced by Casualties

The fire was murderous now, and the Canadian fire power was being reduced by casualties. There were eight or ten in our boat who had been hit by now, and landing here seemed impossible.

A naval officer with us decided to try to get the boat off the beach. On manoeuvres there were times when it was a difficult task to do this quickly, but by a miracle the boat slid off and we eased away out of the hellish fire with a nerve-racking slowness. The Nazis pegged away at us for a half mile out.

That attempted landing was one of the fiercest and grimmest events in the whole raid and was the only spot where the landing was temporarily repulsed.

I'll remember forever the scene in that craft—wounded men lying about, being attended by medical orderlies, oblivious to the fire; the heroism of the Royals as they fought back and strove as desperately as any men could to get on the beach and relieve their comrades fighting ashore; the contempt of these men for danger and their fortitude when hit. I never heard one man even cry out. During the whole raid there were no stancher fighters than these Toronto soldiers.

Off Dieppe the raid flotilla remanned after putting troops ashore. Our wounded were sent to a hospital ship and I transferred to another assault landing craft and then another and another. They were floating about, doing jobs at different beaches.

At one stage fifteen soldiers and I tried to get onto one beach near Dieppe but the German cliffside machine-gun posts, which later were wiped out, plastered us without hitting anyone and we turned back out of range.

Finally we got ashore for a few minutes in front of the Dieppe Esplanade. The smoke screen was so thick, though, that one could not see much of the town and we took off again.

The area in front of the town looked like a battleground of the first great war, broken buildings gutted or burning in all sections.

By 10 A. M. the Canadians, many of their actions led by tanks, seemed to have the town well under control and to have stabilized the situation on the beaches. Then, fifty minutes later, the Nazis sprang their one heavy attack by air. For forty-five minutes Stukas, Dorniers, Heinkels and fighters swooped from the south and at-

tacked the fleet, whose terrific bombardment I had been watching from an assault craft just off the main Dieppe beach.

Earlier the enemy had sent over aircraft in fours and fives, but they had been unable to cope with the British air forces and had resorted only to minor machine-gunning and inaccurate bombing.

But the big attack was the real one. The German pilots were flying anywhere from 200 to 2,000 feet high and they showered bombs over the British ships and swept them with machine-gun fire. The sky was spotted with hundreds of black and white puffs of exploding shells and the thunder of the ships' guns was deafening.

Sometimes the Nazis picked peculiar targets. One time their Stukas dive-bombed our little craft, which by that time carried only one naval officer, four sailors and a lone war correspondent. Their bombs came crashing down on either side of our bouncing craft, making the sea look as if it had been churned by a tornado. Once we almost capsized but we ended up with only a bashed stern and a shattered bow.

We had just picked ourselves up from the deck when a fighter zoomed in and gave us a hail of gun-fire. But they added only more scars to our unsteady but still seaworthy craft.

The plane was one which succeeded in avoiding squadrons of British planes which hovered overhead throughout the operation, picking off German machines attempting to get in close. Seven Nazi machines crashed into the sea within the short view we had of the complete scene.

One Dornier attempting to attack a destroyer was raked by fire before it could release its bombs. It exploded at about 300 feet. Small bits of debris were all we saw fall into the sea.

Every once in a while a lone German would swoop on an isolated assault craft, whose crew would reply with everything aboard. Sailors would pop off with tommy guns and Lewis guns from hip level and some even used rifles. And they succeeded in bringing down some of these diving Nazis.

At noon the final embarkation of troops was under way and the force was taken off the main beach.

With another smoke screen blanketing the raided town, the fleet turned for England. No German aircraft marred the departure, and the Navy gave some coastal installations another bump with heavy guns for good measure.

Through the afternoon I sailed north in a craft to which the Stukas had taken such a liking. It was just an ordinary assault landing craft, thirty feet long and looking like a floating packing box.

I lay in the sun and slept. I woke to see the White Cliffs of England in the mist ahead. British planes—fighters and bombers—were swarming south to France again in a steady stream with more packages for the Germans.