



ONWARD: THE KING'S OWN CALGARY REGIMENT IN PEACE AND WAR, 1910-1960

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From Mobilization to Dieppe

Training and Disaster

The excitement of heading overseas could not mask the daunting task that lay ahead of the regiment. When they had been mobilized in February 1941, Lt. Dick Wallace had not been exaggerating when he recalled that “none of us knew anything about [tank warfare], not even the officers.”¹ The few weeks of training at Camp Borden had improved matters marginally at best. Once in England, the learning curve would be steep, with no guarantee they would have enough time to master armoured warfare before being sent into action.

Overseas

As the majority of the officers and men returned from their embarkation leaves, packing gear and cleaning up the camp for those coming to take their place absorbed most of their remaining time at Camp Borden. On June 16, an advance party of just over one hundred of all ranks left for what wartime newspapers discreetly referred to as “an Eastern Canadian port.” Two days later, after being served a fine lunch by the Perth Regiment, the remainder of the regiment set off on the great adventure.² Their troop train had hardly come to a stop in Halifax when the officers and men tumbled off, formed up in column, and marched away. Their destination was Pier 21 and the converted French liner, HMTS *Pasteur*. Necessary documentation and berthing cards checked and issued, up the gang plank they clambered.³ The 11th Tank Battalion (The Ontarios) had already boarded, and the rest of the day saw still more men and their gear loaded, including Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal, until the *Pasteur*, built to carry 750 first-class passengers on the South Atlantic run was crammed with 3,400 Canadian soldiers.⁴

At noon the following morning she steamed out of the harbour with the rest of her convoy—five converted liners plus a heavy escort of two capital ships to beat off any surface attack and three destroyers to provide an anti-submarine screen.⁵ Apart from a steady diet of PT and inspections and periodic lifeboat

drills, there would be little to do. Officers, warrant officers and NCOs, and enlisted men all had their segregated areas, with the officers having exclusive use of the shipboard tennis courts and elevators. Smoking was strictly restricted and gambling forbidden, the latter to keep the *Pasteur's* crew from fleecing the unwary.⁶ Five days into the crossing some men spotted an overturned lifeboat and debris drifting past, a grim reminder that they were in a war zone. Save for the powerful battlecruiser HMS *Renown*, the escort slipped away to Iceland at mid-crossing, and was replaced by five destroyers and a Dutch cruiser. As the convoy neared its goal, with the first of the Hebrides in sight, "all the boys [were] in good spirits," but as to be expected, "kind of bored,"⁷ and *mal de mer* had claimed plenty of victims. At 0815 on the 30th, the *Pasteur* dropped anchor in the Firth of Clyde off Gourock, just west of Glasgow.⁸ Unhappily for the many who would have gladly swum ashore, administrative snarls kept everyone stuck onboard for the rest of the day.

The First Steps

On Dominion Day morning tenders began ferrying the units ashore where they were welcomed by a pipe band and enthusiastic townsfolk. By evening the regiment, split between two trains, was England-bound. Until darkness fell, the young Canadians spent most of their time gazing at the countryside, driven by sheer curiosity.⁹ Whereas the great majority of the 50th's soldiers had been British immigrants, only a handful of these men weren't Canadian-born. England was a foreign country to them, albeit one for which most felt a deep attachment.

By late the following evening, bone weary but excited, they reached Lavington Camp on the Salisbury Plain, where they bivouacked under canvas close by their two sister tank battalions.¹⁰ Officers and men looked forward to their forthcoming six-day landing leave, especially those fortunate enough to be assigned billets with English and Scottish families. Brig. Worthington took this opportunity to hammer home the necessity of their behaving themselves.¹¹ Just as the men were temporarily absenting themselves, equipment began to trickle in, including trucks, tracked carriers, and the first Matilda IIA* tanks.¹² The Canadians had been rushed to England with that very factor in mind—British industry could do what Canada's could not, which was supply them with sufficient modern equipment to commence proper armoured training.

As the men began returning to camp, Worthington briefed all his officers about the training that was about to start. Four maxims would guide his brigade: discipline, fighting efficiency, maintenance efficiency, and care of the men.¹³ From July 15 onward, the regimen was intensive, interrupted only by inclement weather, which was not infrequent, England being England. Apart

from the opportunity to train with reasonably modern tanks—although by month’s end there were still only six Matildas on hand¹⁴—plenty of time was devoted to practical skills like camouflaging, and groups were continually sent to the appropriate British Army schools for specialized instruction or to observe the tactical demonstrations at nearby British camps. Even Lt.-Col. Bradbrooke was absent for nearly four weeks attending the Royal Armoured Corps Tactical School.¹⁵ On July 26, 250 other ranks and several officers were invited to a garden party at the vicarage in West Lavington. It served as a useful lesson in the culinary challenges of British wartime rationing, with the war diary lamenting that “those who attended in anticipation of a hearty meal were sadly disappointed.”¹⁶ By month’s end “all members of the unit [had] a much more up-to-date and ... much wider knowledge of the equipment and role of an Army Tank Battalion.”¹⁷ Events would show this to be a tad optimistic, for there was much more to learn, but the process that would transform them into a combat-ready unit had started.

By early August training was deemed sufficiently advanced for the battalion to participate in an infantry-tank scheme to root out German parachutists. Normally troops only had their proper allotment of tanks one day per week, but enough were scraped together to equip a full squadron, leaving the remaining crews to participate as infantry. Ironically, all the infantry training carried out in Calgary in 1939 and 1940—when there were no tanks to be had—now paid some dividends.¹⁸ The first brigade exercise, Operation Ajax, entailed eliminating still more of the ubiquitous German parachutists, played in this instance by the Ontario Regiment.¹⁹ Worthington’s assessment of the 14th’s performance was scathing, from Lt.-Col. Bradbrooke on down the chain of command. Among the umpire’s more telling criticisms:

Time factor almost entirely neglected Lack of tactical knowledge shown by *all leaders*. Even most elementary fundamentals such as protection, use of ground, etc., entirely neglected. Misuse of troops, i.e. ... men [unnecessarily] exposed to enemy fire General lack of imagination and knowledge of what was required [and] the importance of hitting hard and hitting fast seemed furthest from the minds of all concerned.²⁰

In fairness, Worthington acknowledged that when the 14th left Canada it had completed only the most basic training, and “it follows that [they] would be some distance behind the others.”²¹ There was a lot of catching up to do, and attitudes became noticeably more serious.²²

Anglo-Canadian Relations

The sense that they were finally making real progress in becoming a combat-capable armoured unit did wonders for morale, and the ambitious training program kept everyone busy and focused. But turning civilians into soldiers remained a work in progress, which was reflected in the disciplinary records for August. Most offences were minor, with failing to appear for parade or fatigues like kitchen duty the most common, but there were a few cases of insolence or in one case, calling a sergeant an “obscene name.” Some of the farm boys found the abundant rabbit population irresistible, though local landowners were less than amused.²³ Bradbrooke showed judgment, with most offences earning reprimands or short periods confined to base.²⁴ Because they involved civilians and tarnished the image of the whole Canadian Army, incidents in Lavington or other nearby towns were dealt with the most sternly.

Post-war nostalgia portrays relations between English civilians and Canadian soldiers during World War II as a mutual admiration society, and overall they were good, and became progressively better as time went on. But in the early stages of the war this was not always the case. Censorship of the other ranks’ letters revealed considerable tension. Everything was in short supply in England, and a group of soldiers, unused to pub culture and the very limited weekly supplies of beer, could drink an establishment dry in a single visit, not exactly endearing themselves to the locals. Nor did being boisterous help. As one weekly intelligence report put it, “the people of Devizes are still wondering whether they had another air raid the other night ... or whether it was just another night with the Canadians.”²⁵ When such complaints from local village officials occurred too often for the army’s taste, the Provost Corps would turn out in force. But of course contact with young women was *the* major source of friction. Even British soldiers, and there were many in the nearby training camps, resented the Canadians swanning around with their higher pay and a young lady on their arm. For their part, Canadians often mistook English reserve for standoffishness or worse. Soldiers’ complaints about the British way of life, a term covering a lot of ground, including the weather, were a constant theme in letters during the initial years.²⁶ The winter of 1941–42, the Calgary Regiment’s first in England, is taken as marking the low point of Anglo-Canadian relations, with boredom and discontent rife on the Canadian bases and depressing war news on every front. A British newspaper offered sympathetically that the Canadian Army’s inactivity had to be “a galling situation for men of high mettle and indomitable spirit.”²⁷ Being derisively referred to by some civilians as the “home guard” definitely didn’t help. Even Lord Haw-Haw’s propaganda broadcasts openly alluded to the festering problems. The mutual ill will never

disappeared entirely, but once the flood of GIs began arriving, the Canadians' sins didn't look quite so dark, and the outpouring of British hospitality eventually overwhelmed the Canadians.²⁸ It took time for Canadian soldiers and British civilians to appreciate one another, but the former would have lots of time—most of them would have argued rather too much.

Becoming Tank Men

In September the tank crews, using their own Matildas, were finally allotted an 8-day slot at the armoured fighting vehicle ranges near Castle Martin on the Welsh coast. For three days, gunners and spare gunners were able to fire their 2-pounder main armament and hull-mounted machine guns from both stationary and moving positions at fixed, moving, and surprise targets. It was their first experience with live-fire training. After a maintenance day, crews devoted the remainder of their stay to battle practice by complete troops.²⁹ Meanwhile, the rest of the battalion had completed the move to new winter quarters at Headley (near Aldershot). In what was a real perk to morale, the residents threw out the welcome mat to the newcomers, staging regular dances and opening their village hall to the 14th's enlisted men in the evenings for reading, writing, games, and free weekly movies.³⁰ Meanwhile, the regular training regimen quickly resumed, facilitated by generally fair weather. For the first time, a portion now focused on the vital skills of infantry-armour co-operation.³¹ And there continued to be plenty of opportunities to watch practical demonstrations at other camps, with a tank-hunting exercise staged by an infantry anti-tank platoon leaving an especially deep impression.³² On October 16, an inspection by the "top brass" filled the day, the visitors including J. L. Ralston, the minister of national defence; Lt.-Gen. Andrew McNaughton, the Corps commander; Maj.-Gen. Henry Crerar, the chief of the Canadian general staff; and Brig. Worthington. On the vehicle front, things continued to look up. With forty-seven Matilda Mk IIs in hand, the regiment was now only nine below war establishment, ensuring that each troop had at least one tank to train on full-time.³³ And matters were steadily improving when it came to trucks and universal carriers, too. Unfortunately, it was common for one-third of their vehicles, whether tracked or wheeled, to be out of service on any day.³⁴

On November 7, the battalion participated in its most demanding tank-infantry scheme to date. The crews had to assemble their machines on a pitch-black moonless night, which they completed in good order. The assault commenced the following morning, the squadrons advancing line abreast with the infantry of the Canadian Scottish in support. Their purpose was to get the Canscots onto their second objective, held by an anti-tank regiment and imaginary infantry,

then pull back. Lt.-Col. Bradbrooke was clearly pleased with the performance of both units.³⁵ Other more demanding exercises followed.

The 12th and 14th Tank Battalions soon had to start focusing on the arrival of their first Churchill Mk IVs, the newest British infantry tank.³⁶ This was going to necessitate a major reorganization of personnel to accommodate a fifth crewman. Otherwise, Bradbrooke had been told to expect the conversion to the new tank to proceed quickly. But until sufficient numbers arrived, the negative impact on training would be obvious.³⁷

Seaford Bound, and a Change of Command

Further changes were afoot. On November 20 Lt.-Col. Bradbrooke informed his officers that within ten days the battalion would decamp to the general area of Brighton on the Channel Coast. Two days later, he announced his own departure. Tabbed for higher command, he was to spend several months in the Middle East observing armoured operations close-up. He had been their commanding officer since mobilization, and as (then) Lt. C. A. "Stoney" Richardson summed it up, he "was certainly a wonderful CO to put everything together from the start."³⁸ His officers and men had come a long way, and he deserved a great deal of the credit. There was a going-away party at a Headley pub, and Bradbrooke took time from that to visit a sergeants' dance in order to break the news to them personally. It was an emotional evening.

A New Commanding Officer

On December 8, Lt.-Col. J. G. (Johnny) Andrews assumed command. The thirty-two-year-old was as close to a star as the Canadian Army's under-trained, -manned and -equipped armoured force possessed. After a brief stint in the militia, he had joined the PPCLI in 1930. When Worthington set up the Canadian Tank School in 1936, Andrews was one of five young officers he hand-picked to join him. In 1939, he followed his mentor to the Canadian Army Fighting Vehicles School at Camp Borden, and from 1940 onward served there as Worthington's principal staff officer. Andrews proved an inspired choice as the 14th's CO, and immediately threw himself into his new responsibilities, starting with getting to know his officers (and they him).³⁹

On December 12 an advance party set off for the new camp at Seaford where so many Canadians had trained during the Great War, with the remainder following soon after.⁴⁰ Seaford Camp offered a spectrum of accommodations, from former guest houses and cottages to the pre-war Seaford Ladies College (with some irony now the other ranks' quarters), several schools, and a large vehicle garage (converted into a workshop). The onerous tasks of unpacking gear and familiarizing themselves with their new surroundings

completed, there was a surge in pride among all ranks knowing they were now part of the front-line defences expected to hold southeastern England against a German invasion.

And a New Brigadier

Word came late in January that Brig. Worthington would be taking command of the 4th Armoured Division now forming in Canada. He had been the driving force behind the formation and subsequent training of the 1st Army Tank Brigade, and it would be hard to imagine the formation without him. Brig. R. A. Wyman, just shy of his thirty-eighth birthday and a gunner by background, who had most recently served in the 5th Armoured Division, would replace him. Richardson remembered him “[coming] with a great deal of ambition for things that had to be done and ... very well received by our regiment in particular.”⁴¹ Being an Albertan no doubt helped with the latter.

Exercises and More Exercises

In the first months after transferring to Seaford, much of the training focused on repelling a German invasion. Exercises usually involved individual squadron schemes intended to replicate tactics they would employ in action. As Lt.-Col. Andrews spelled out:

[As] near battle conditions as possible [will be] represented. [But] their success rests largely in the thoroughness of previous troop and squadron training and the training of headquarters personnel. Full value can be gained only if every commander is untiring in his efforts to keep his subordinates in the picture and maintain interest. [These] exercises ... should not be attempted until the lessons which it is intended to teach have been firmly established in troop and squadron training and in model and skeleton exercises for commands.⁴²

Apparently the CO's obsession with realism was enough to fool some of the locals. When A Squadron rumbled through the port of Newhaven on one such sortie, the nervous inhabitants feared an invasion was actually underway. Fortunately, when the chief constable phoned battalion headquarters, Andrews managed to reassure him that the forces were entirely friendly.⁴³

Intensifying training made plenty of sense, but the challenges of actually carrying it out in a country without the wide-open spaces of Canada were daunting. For instance, the battalion grounds lacked a thousand-yard range where gunners could acquire the rather useful skill of firing at moving targets.⁴⁴

And the Churchills' teething problems persisted. As of mid-March, a frustrated Wyman reported to his superiors in Canada that close to a third of his brigade's tanks were non-runners at any given time, and spare parts shortages were chronic.⁴⁵ Wyman had confidence in the Churchill as a design, but little at all in the tank's manufacturers, and let them know it.⁴⁶

Commencing in March, the battalion faced the prospect of participating in a trio of advanced tactical exercises which would see them in the field for days on end.⁴⁷ The participants in Beaver III, the first of these and set to commence of March 19, were the 1st Tank Brigade and 6th Infantry Brigade. For the first four days, the battalion practised navigating from harbour (encampment) to harbour, all the while maintaining tight convoy discipline, circumventing obstacles like imaginary blown bridges and roadblocks, and carrying out necessary maintenance on their temperamental Churchills.⁴⁸ But late in the afternoon of the 23rd, as the battalion was refuelling, Andrews was ordered to mount an attack against "enemy" armoured forces 11 kms away. Within ten minutes the lead tanks were underway. As the 14th's war diary enthused:

Much to the surprise of the umpires, the unit arrived on time and the "enemy" were taken completely by surprise. As a result, the Calgary Regiment was awarded the battle. This proved to be the highlight of the exercise for with the winning of the attack came the completion of the exercise [two days early].⁴⁹

It was a tired but happy group who returned to Seaford.⁵⁰ Overall, the CO was pleased with his battalion's performance. Indeed, his major criticisms focused on the lack of independence of action allowed by higher command.⁵¹ The chief umpire's overall verdict was especially cheering. Across the board, officers and men had showed initiative, a willingness to learn, and high morale, and "the way the tanks were driven, kept going, repaired and brought on was worthy of the highest praise."⁵² Indeed it was, given "the tendency of the Churchill to 'die' at the wrong moment."⁵³

Early on the afternoon of May 9, the battalion once again departed Seaford Camp, heading for their assembly area and the launch of Beaver IV. It was an impressive sight—stretched out along the narrow English roads in combat formation, the column took an hour to pass. From midnight on May 10–11 Andrews' men were under orders to move on short notice. But while moving repeatedly over the next few days, they were only involved in a single mock infantry-tank attack, which they carried off successfully. That accomplished, their role in Beaver IV was over.⁵⁴

However, with the launch of Exercise Tiger, the largest war game involving Canadian troops yet attempted, looming, there would be little time to rest. But Tiger was not to be, at least not for the 14th Tank Battalion. Instead, they were abruptly ordered to an as yet unknown location where “advanced training with other arms of the service will be carried out.”⁵⁵

Simmer

Participation in Simmer, the code name given to this training, was restricted to the tank crews plus a few other specialists.⁵⁶ As their medical officer, Capt. “Doc” Alexander, noted in his diary, those selected could hardly contain their excitement and rumours abounded.⁵⁷ Why the 14th was chosen ahead of its two sister battalions has never been definitively answered. Their superior performance in Beaver III would have impressed, but not as much as Gen. Montgomery’s appraisal of Wyman’s command in early May where he’d rated Andrews’ battalion first class and the best of the lot.⁵⁸ One suspects that Worthington’s admiration for his protégé also played its part. Late on the evening of May 20 the Churchills and their crews had reached the temporary camp near Osborne Bay on the Isle of Wight, where most of the training would take place. Using specialized tank landing craft, Simmer commenced the next morning at dawn with the crews driving their now waterproofed tanks off and then back onto beached landing craft. The training continued without let-up, save for Sundays, which were devoted to maintenance and perfecting waterproofing techniques. The initial skills mastered, the squadrons shifted to landing tanks and infantry simultaneously “with the object of securing a beach head.”⁵⁹ On the 30th, Exercise Suvla, a practice landing employing three landing craft and subsequent advance inland by the nine tanks, was unsuccessful, but a reprise a week later met all objectives.⁶⁰ Finally, on June 12 Yukon, a full-scale mock attack with accompanying infantry, was carried out on the nearby Dorset coast. The exercise began shortly after dawn and by mid-afternoon, all tanks and infantry had safely re-embarked.⁶¹ Nonetheless, Yukon revealed serious flaws of execution—tank landing craft arriving over an hour late and some of the infantry being put ashore miles from their designated landing points.⁶² The following evening, Andrews briefed his officers on the purpose of their training—a major raid on the French coast. The reaction was electric. As Capt. Alexander scribbled in his diary that night—“We are all very enthusiastic and certain that we can carry it out.”⁶³

Rutter Is On!

Planners scheduled a virtual repetition of Yukon (called Yukon II) for June 22–23. One of the drivers, who had dismissed Yukon as “a schmozzle,” thought this

time “it was a helluva lot better.”⁶⁴ More to the point, the senior command considered it sufficiently successful to proceed with the real thing.⁶⁵ Preparations for what everyone was led to believe would be the final trial run—Exercise Klondike—were well underway at month’s end. By 0300 on July 3, all members of the unit assigned to Klondike and their tanks were aboard their landing craft in Newhaven harbour. With security assured, they were told what their commanding officer learned six days earlier—Klondike was Rutter, the real thing. After a year in England waiting for action, they were finally going to war.⁶⁶ But after poor weather forced a cancellation, delay followed delay. Apart from cleaning weapons, checking gear, and going over maps for the umpteenth time, there was nothing for the men to do but wait.⁶⁷

It’s Off

Finally, about mid-afternoon on the July 7, word filtered down that the operation had been cancelled. They were back at Osborne Bay the following morning, where they and their infantry comrades were addressed by Lt.-Col. Andrews and then Maj.-Gen. Hamilton Roberts, the 2nd Division’s CO. The disappointment was palpable, and both speeches were more pep talk than anything.⁶⁸ Within a week, everyone was back at Seaford. Anyone who’d participated in the aborted raid had been granted eight days’ leave.⁶⁹ With thousands of Canadian soldiers knowing full well they had trained to raid Dieppe, maintaining security was hopeless, a predicament that led Montgomery to wisely recommend “that the operation be off for all time.”⁷⁰

Rutter Revived: Operation Jubilee

The decision to resurrect Rutter emanated from Adm. Louis Mountbatten and his Combined Operations Headquarters but had the support of the Combined Chiefs of Staff who reapproved a raid on Dieppe, now code-named Jubilee, on July 10. Senior Canadian commanders were fully onside. While it was recognized the enemy might have caught wind of Rutter after its cancellation, commanders felt strict security around Jubilee and the last-minute movement of the force to their embarkation points would secure surprise. The soldiers themselves were told that preparations merely presaged another exercise. More than ever, the outcome of the raid would depend on surprise and sheer good luck. By the end of July, the battalion had resumed its regular routine of infantry-tank training, though tank crews continued practising beach landings alongside combat engineers from the 2nd Canadian Division.⁷¹

On August 12, Andrews received instructions that his unit would be taking part in a combined operations exercise within the next week, and preparations were soon in full swing. One of the officers temporarily attached to

the Calgary Regiment for the forthcoming raid, Lt. J. H. B. MacDonald of the Ontarios, later compiled a report on his experiences during those days. Having arrived at Seaford on August 13, he was present to hear Lt.-Col. Andrews reveal to his senior officers that the exercise would in fact be Rutter redux. As befit his role and the circumstances, the CO's presentation was upbeat.⁷² But as Lt. Ed Bennett recalled:

After the briefing we all had apprehension. But there were hardly any questions We were all in shock. I thought that we in the tanks might be ok, but remembering the film *Next of Kin*, when the troops on a raid were slaughtered, I thought it might happen to some of the infantry.⁷³

On August 16, Andrews addressed all participating personnel on the critical importance of secrecy, reminding them about two of their comrades who had recently been court-martialed and sentenced to two years' imprisonment for violating an order of secrecy. A visibly angry Andrews sternly reminded his audience that security breaches would cost lives, and that it was their duty as soldiers to turn such men in.⁷⁴

On Their Way

The fighting personnel and their vehicles departed for Newhaven (and some for Gosport) late on August 17. The loading of the tanks and other vehicles, ammunition, and other supplies, and of course the men aboard their allotted tank landing craft (TLC), an intricate and time-consuming ritual, went on through the night.⁷⁵ The following afternoon, all remaining personnel were informed they would be raiding Dieppe. In a way impossible for civilians to comprehend, and difficult for a historian to describe, once everyone knew the attack was on, they were keen to get going, doubts or not. Lt.-Col. Andrews was stoic and did his duty, visiting every one of his landing craft. But Maj. Allan Glenn, commanding C Squadron, remembered his CO staring him in the eye and clasping his hand: "Well, Al, this is it, I guess. Be seeing you, I hope.' But he was a sad boy. He didn't think the plan would work."⁷⁶

The hours dragged on intolerably, but at last the diesel engines of the transports rumbled to life in Newhaven and the several other ports of embarkation along the south Channel Coast used by the attacking force. By 2330, a mere two hours after the first TLCs sallied from Newhaven, the harbour was empty. The weather augured well—clear with only gentle swells. As the coast disappeared, "personnel, after adjusting their life belts, retired to their hammocks to await the coming of dawn."⁷⁷ Apart from stars and a first quarter moon,

all that could be made out were the faint red stern lights of the ship ahead of you. Lt. MacDonald, who had expected the men would spend a fitful night, instead remembered most sleeping soundly. But Tpr. Tom Pinder's recollections were quite the opposite and ring more true: "We tried to get some sleep, but we couldn't get any ... we were all so excited."⁷⁸ It didn't help that smoking was forbidden. The chaplain held a brief service aboard his landing craft, with those who chose to attend gathering under a tarpaulin overhanging the front of the lead tank. As a soldier held a small flashlight over his bible, the padre read from St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, then spoke briefly about their bringing a sign of deliverance to the captive peoples of Europe and ended with a short prayer.⁷⁹ It was not long before the various groups of ships, plus their naval escort, formed up in convoy, and set a course for Dieppe. All told, the landing force totalled about 6,100 men, of whom just under 5,000 were Canadian, including 417 officers and other ranks from the Calgary Regiment.

Jubilee—the Plan

Four flank attacks set for 0450, at first light to hinder the defenders, were intended to silence coastal batteries (British commandos) or seize the headlands (Canadian infantry) that dominated the main beach at Dieppe itself. At 0520 two battalions of the Canadian infantry, along with the first nine tanks, would come ashore in front of Dieppe, with about half of the other fifty-odd tanks following in short order. The remainder would be held back until Dieppe was secured. Simultaneously with the main assault, a second infantry battalion would land to the west of Dieppe and advance inland to meet up with a tank force that would have broken through the town, their joint objective being a *Luftwaffe* airfield and supposed divisional headquarters. That achieved, they would withdraw to the coast and evacuate. A reserve infantry battalion would hover offshore until landed to consolidate the main beach area and act as a rearguard during the subsequent evacuation of the main force. As much destruction as possible would be done to the harbour and other infrastructure, but intelligence gathering—including the evacuation of prisoners—was also a high priority.⁸⁰ To preserve surprise, there would be no preliminary bombardment from the sea or air, and relatively little fire support thereafter.⁸¹ Everything would depend on surprise, the élan of the attackers, and weak German defences. But as history has made clear, hope is not a strategy.

The responsibility for defending the Dieppe sector fell to the 302nd Infantry Division, which the Germans considered a second-rate formation because many of its men had not completed their training and large numbers were ethnically Polish and hence deemed "unreliable." The defenders confronted in the immediate area of Dieppe amounted to one of the 302nd's two regiments,

meaning the strength of the forces were roughly equal, though the Germans could bring additional reserves to bear. Overall, the defences of Dieppe were neither stronger nor weaker than those generally found along the French Channel Coast at the time. Nor were the defenders on heightened alert, apart from what was dictated by the weather and tides and a general conviction that the British were going to raid somewhere during the good summer weather. A firefight between patrolling *Kriesgmarine* vessels and part of the convoy that night did alert the Germans, but in no way affected their readiness at Dieppe. Finally, the intelligence available to the attacking forces, despite a few errors, was generally sound.⁸² The problem was more one of underrating potential difficulties, or not acting on the intelligence at all.

Jubilee—the Attack

This account will focus on the Calgary Regiment's role in the assault on Dieppe proper, and so provide only a brief overview of what befell the rest of the raiding force.⁸³ The British commandos' assaults on the major seaward-facing batteries produced mixed results, but nonetheless proved the most successful elements of the raid. The landing on the eastern flank (Puy) was late, losing the cover of darkness. A few dozen German soldiers atop the cliffs that hemmed in the landing area were sufficient to all but wipe out the Royal Regiment, leaving the critical eastern headlands overlooking Dieppe firmly in German hands.

On the western flank (Pourville), the South Saskatchewan managed to get ashore on schedule and unopposed, but landed some distance west of where they should have been, an error enabling the defenders to pin them down well short of their objective, the headlands overlooking the Dieppe beach from the west. The Cameron Highlanders, who landed an hour after the SSRs (and half an hour late), managed to press inland until stopped by stiffening resistance. Both battalions had to conduct fighting withdrawals to re-embark, with only about 60 percent of the men who'd landed making it back to England.

With the headlands and their ample defences remaining firmly in German hands, the main attack on Dieppe proper was doomed. Both the Essex Scottish and Royal Hamilton Light Infantry (RHLI) were put ashore almost exactly on time and in the midst of a short-lived attack by RAF fighter-bombers. Unfortunately, the first group of nine tanks were delayed a crucial 10 to 15 minutes, and as the army's official historian concluded, "the impetus of the [infantry] attack ebbed quickly away, and by the time the tanks arrived the psychological moment was past."⁸⁴ Withering German mortar, machine-gun and artillery fire resumed as soon as RAF departed. Although suffering very heavy losses, the RHLI managed to advance beyond the sea wall and clear the partially demolished casino perched on the promenade by shortly after

0700. But only a few scattered groups managed to get into the town proper. Meanwhile, hardly any of the Essex Scottish got beyond the sea wall, and within half an hour of landing, the battalion had ceased organized fighting. Poor communication led Maj.-Gen. Roberts, the force commander, to misjudge the progress ashore—of which there was effectively none. He tragically ordered the Fusiliers Mont-Royal into the cauldron around 0700, where they would meet the same fate as the others. By 1100 an evacuation from the main beach was underway, though under appalling conditions. Miraculously, perhaps 400 men, many of them wounded, were extricated. The courageous efforts by the RAF to cover the withdrawal were hardly noticed. Under unrelenting bombardment, few soldiers were inclined to stare skyward. Isolated groups scattered across the breadth of the beach and beyond the sea wall, including the Calgary Regiment's tankers who had displayed such heroism during the attack and then covered the re-embarkation, began surrendering in the early afternoon. By 1400 all the rescue efforts were terminated, and those hundreds still alive would spend the rest of their war as *kriegies*. The infantry losses in front of Dieppe were very heavy, less than a quarter of the force put ashore managing to get off.⁸⁵

The Calgary Regiment at Dieppe

The participation of Calgary Regiment in the raid marked the first time a unit of the Canadian Armoured Corps had gone into battle as well as the first employment of both the Churchill tank and the specialized tank landing craft. Sadly, it was memorable for little else save the painful lessons learned. The armour came shoreward in three waves. All of the landing craft were smothered by artillery, mortar, machine gun, and small arms fire as soon as they came within range, and being slow and all but unarmoured, suffered heavy damage and severe casualties among their naval crews. The TLCs basically had to beach or all but beach themselves to disgorge their cargo, leaving them sitting ducks, and several were soon blazing torches littering the shoreline or adrift offshore. Fewer than half of them managed to make their way back to England. The first wave arrived no more than 15 minutes late but nonetheless it represented a crucial breakdown in the raid's precise timing. The second arrived shortly after the first, or almost on time, and the third (made up of four TLCs instead of three, and the only group benefiting from a smokescreen) beached about half an hour later, again basically on schedule. TLC 8, part of this final grouping, carried the headquarters troop, which included Lt.-Col. Andrews' tank. Altogether two Churchills drowned as they debouched, but twenty-seven made it onto the beach. A dozen of the latter became immobilized there, but the remaining fifteen got over the seawall, mostly at either end of the beach where the climb was more manageable. Once onto the open promenade they engaged enemy

strong points in support of those groups of infantry who were still attacking. Getting off the promenade into Dieppe (and beyond) was impossible, as any potential exit had been blocked. Parties of combat engineers were supposed to blow up the barriers (along with parts of the seawall), but despite their gallantry in the face of murderous fire, none were.⁸⁶ As it became clear to the tank crews that there was no useful fighting to be done on the promenade, they, along with the infantry they were supporting, fell back to the beach area, the tanks specifically to cover the evacuation. There they manoeuvred as best they could, drawing disproportionate enemy fire and in so doing, saving many Canadian lives. Throughout the fighting, the robust armour of the Churchill served its crews well, as not a single tank was penetrated by a German anti-tank round. However, one by one they had either bellied, suffered immobilizing track damage from the beach stones, or lost a track to artillery fire, some suffering such a fate immediately after landing and others, hours later. And there were mechanical breakdowns, too. Regardless of how the Churchills became immobilized, they continued to fight on to the last as pill boxes, providing fire support with their cannons and machine guns until they exhausted their ammunition or their weapons jammed, and using their bulk to shelter the wounded on the exposed beach.⁸⁷

Baptism of Fire

One only really grasps the tankers' experience by relying on personal accounts—some given back in England, some provided by prisoners, and some recalled years later during interviews or in memoirs. Maj. C. E. Page, who commanded B Squadron, landed in the second echelon, his tank *Burns* coming ashore directly in front of their objective, the Tobacco Factory.⁸⁸ Crawling up the rather steep beach, they ran straight into an anti-tank ditch hidden in front of the central section of the sea wall. Steering hard right to avoid becoming stuck, a shell explosion shattered a track and wrecked the radio. Now unable to command, Page quickly passed control to C Squadron's Maj. Allan Glenn. That accomplished, he and his crew took their personal weapons, abandoned *Burns* and sought cover behind the sea wall. Astonishingly, they found themselves completely alone until a small party of Essex Scottish joined them. Both of the other Churchills in his troop, along with quite a few others that had landed toward the centre of the beach, were similarly disabled—feeling their way along the face of the ditch/sea wall to find a crossing point. Page and the others stayed put until around noon, when word somehow filtered through that they should withdraw.

Tpr. Roy Johnston served as co-driver/ hull machine gunner in *Confident*, part of a C Squadron troop. During the last few hundred metres of their run

into the beach, a forest of geysers from shell explosions surrounded their TLC. Having run that gauntlet for what seemed like forever, the order was finally given to warm up the engines and when the ramp fell, out rumbled the lead Churchill. As *Confident* quickly moved forward onto the ramp, the explosion of a mortar round stalled the engine, though driver Pat Patterson was able to restart it. Amid the deafening noise, the crew could hardly make out one another on the intercom, but he did hear Cpl. Ralph Dowling, who had a better view from the commander's position, tell Patterson to try to avoid driving over the wounded soldiers strewn in their path. As *Confident* lurched forward, Johnston's first views of the beach gave him "a sick, helpless feeling," with dead and wounded lying everywhere, and burning landing craft on both sides of their own TLC.⁸⁹ Even the rolling surf was tinged bright crimson. They immediately made for a low section of the sea wall that had already crumbled under the 40-ton weight of a few earlier Churchills, but as they crested it, *Confident* was shaken by an ear-shattering explosion, reared up and then crashed down, wrecking the steering. Having then reversed back to the water's edge, Patterson clambered out to inspect the damage, which was obviously bad. After a brief conference back inside *Confident*, they crept back up to the sea wall and succeeded in taking out the gun that had gotten them. From then on, they spent the battle methodically obliterating machine-gun nests lurking in the upper storeys of buildings beyond the promenade.

Lt. Bryce Douglas' *Calgary* had been the last to exit Maj. Glenn's TLC 1. The sappers who were supposed to blow a gap in the sea wall for the three Churchills were cut down by a burst of machine-gun fire as they disembarked, and *Calgary* threw a track on the shingle before even reaching the obstacle. With German machine gunners raking the tank, Douglas refused the request of his driver, Cpl. Hank McCann, to climb outside and try to fix it. Although they were hit many times by large calibre rounds, nothing penetrated, and the tanks' electrical system continued to work, meaning they could traverse the turret and communicate. Douglas kept gunner Ken Smethurst firing at anything they could draw a bead on.⁹⁰ Smethurst hesitated only once—when they saw horse-drawn artillery moving up behind the casino. He could not bear killing horses. Conditions inside immobilized tanks like *Calgary* were appalling. Men suffered concussions and burns and were badly cut by spalling—the tiny shards of metal launched off the interior plating when a shell hit. Ventilation in any tank is poor, and crews were soon suffocating from the cordite fumes and, in the runners, extreme heat from the engine. Al Wagstaff passed out more than once in *Calgary*, and everyone was vomiting at some point. With their intact radio link, Douglas and his crew knew full well the raid was falling apart. Those with periscopes could see their TLC had been sunk behind them, as had

several others nearby. A few of them burned furiously. Dead dotted the beach in every direction, with wounded sheltering behind the sea wall or beside tanks or any beached landing craft not yet afire.⁹¹ Had the infantry and tankers been better able to communicate, the tanks would have been much more effective. But short of hand signals or an aimed Bren gun burst, the crews had no way of knowing what the soldiers pinned down all around them needed. During his debriefing in England, a grateful Maj. Denis Whitaker, the highest ranking RHLI officer to get off the beach, attested to numerous occasions when the tanks had responded to just such prompts.⁹²

Part of the third wave, TLC 8 carried Lt.-Col. Andrews and his staff, including Maj. John Begg, the second-in-command. As soon as they had grounded on Red Beach near the jetty, Capt. A. G. Stanton's lead tank *Ringer* exited, bellying on the loose shingle and blocking the ramp. TLC 8 managed to pull away and stood offshore for about 90 minutes while Maj. Glenn directed all the tanks ashore. Glenn opposed landing any more Churchills until beach congestion cleared, and Andrews, who could follow it all on the radio net, agreed. But when it became clear that many tanks were being held up at the sea wall, it was decided to make another attempt to land TLC 8 with its considerable store of demolition charges and the combat engineers to do the blasting. Witnesses' accounts also confirm that the worse the situation ashore became, the more the CO wanted to be with his men. As Lieut. Dick Wallace, already ashore in *Backer*, put it:

He was so full of vim and vigour. I can understand his attitude of "I am coming in to help you fellas out." Johnny was that kind of man. He wanted to get into the fight and get in with the tanks he had sent. He knew we were in trouble and he was going to come in to help.⁹³

Around 0800, TLC 8 made its second landing attempt, this time on White Beach in front of the casino. To speed the exit of the remaining pair of Churchills, the crewmen left the ramp partially down, but as they closed on the shore the ramp's supporting chains were blown away, causing it to plunge into the water where it dug into the mud. Almost immediately, a second explosion blew the ramp itself askew. In the confusion, a sailor signalled Andrews' tank *Regiment* to drive off and it promptly drowned in over two metres of water. The crew scrambled out and were pulled into a small boat, only to have it hit and burst into flames, forcing rescuers and rescued alike to swim for their lives. All made it, save Andrews. Cpl. T. L. Carnie, who was *Regiment's* co-driver, thought he saw him reach the shoreline, while fellow crewman Sgt. C. Reinhart was certain

he had seen his CO's body washing back and forth in the surf just short of it. Lt.-Col. Andrews' remains were never recovered.⁹⁴

Under the most unpromising circumstances imaginable, Begg immediately had to take overall command. The ship was raked by German fire of every calibre, and soon floated helplessly broadside to the beach. The carnage on TLC 8 was horrific, and conditions got a lot worse as wounded from the beach were brought aboard. Over the next few hours, Capt. "Doc" Alexander tended to the wounded, many grotesquely mutilated or burned, with other members of the headquarters staff like L/Cpl. Calvin Helmer assisting as best they could.⁹⁵ In a letter to his father, which appeared on the front page of the *Herald* in early September, Sgt. A. H. Rutledge credited their medical officer for getting him and his comrades through the ordeal: "He is a master psychologist and can buck you up with just a smile or a wink ... With shells dropping all around us, he kept going without any thought of his own safety, bandaging his wounded and spreading cheering remarks to each of them."⁹⁶

Aboard TLC 10, which was lingering far enough offshore to be out of range of German guns, Capt. Waldo Smith, the chaplain, was listening in on the communications from the tanks, astonished at the calmness of the radio operators as they called out targets to their comrades.⁹⁷ Large, slab-sided, and virtually unarmoured, TLCs were too vulnerable to close on the beach and participate in the rescue effort. This fell to infantry landing craft, which were faster and more nimble and presented a smaller target. Finally, at 1045, TLC 10 received orders to head for home. For the next 90 minutes the padre listened to the fading communications from Maj. Glenn and the other officers he knew so well. "I cannot find words for the pathos of it," he later recalled.⁹⁸ About 1130 he heard reports of infantry stampeding toward rescue boats, and just before noon another that the incoming launches were being picked off one by one as they tried to reach the beach. Thinking it might be important, he had scribbled an informal log of these communications, but in French so as not to alarm the soldiers peering over his shoulder, desperate for any news of their friends' fate.

Evacuation

About 1100, acting on Begg's order, Glenn radioed the tanks that were still mobile to fall back to the beach and cover the evacuation as best they could—six radios responded in the affirmative. About an hour later, he ordered crews to abandon their tanks if further infantry landing craft approached. And at 1225 he gave the terse order "unload crews from tanks," though by then the evacuation was all but finished. Only the final gasps of resistance remained to play out.

Throughout the morning, three troops of C Squadron and the entirety of A Squadron, including Lt. MacDonald's TLC, lay offshore waiting for orders to

land that never came. The “men of A Squadron were badly depressed at having been helpless to assist their comrades,” he recorded in his notes. “One of the last radio calls, in which a member of a tank crew asked if there was any sign of barges coming in to take them off at about 1430 hours when the convoy was well under way [for home], affected everyone rather badly.”⁹⁹

By the time Maj. Begg was authorized to withdraw, TLC 8 was barely afloat and the dead and dying lay everywhere. An improvised crew of the two unwounded naval ratings and some willing tankers manned the wheel and managed to get the engine started, and after a false start, got her turned seaward and pulling away, ever so slowly, all the while attracting the attention of what seemed like every German gun in France. Before long she was dead in the water, but miraculously, a distress message had been picked up by a Royal Navy gunboat, which managed to come alongside, lash herself to the crippled landing craft, and slowly crawl out of range of German fire. By late evening, they were safely back in Newhaven harbour.¹⁰⁰

Surrender

“I don’t think the average guy who went on [the] Dieppe [raid] had any conception of having to face surrender,” recalled Sgt. Tommy Cunningham, who commanded *Bolster*, and with the rest of his crew was taken prisoner. “You’re too young. You think you’re well trained. You’re going to do this thing and do it well, and it was an adventure. And all of a sudden, the balloon bursts.”¹⁰¹ For compassionate reasons, Lt. Dick Wallace, who commanded *Backer*, made a personal decision to cease firing:

Corporal [J. O.] Cote, who was my wireless operator, when I gave the orders to stop firing, he said what are you doing that for sir? I said we’ve got all sorts of infantrymen trying to crawl under our tank for protection ... [and] I [couldn’t] see any reason why we should kill innocent soldiers anymore.¹⁰²

Tpr. Tom Pinder, who had escaped drowning in *Ringer*, never forgot the sound of surrender after enduring “seven hours of hell”¹⁰³ on the beach:

All the firing seemed to ... stop at once. Just this great silence fell and we could hear some shouting and through our periscopes we could see the Germans coming and a white flag here or there. And very shortly after there was a German outside the tank saying “Raus.” So I opened the escape hatch and Johnny Mayhew and I

got out and there was this Jerry there with his rifle. The wrong end of a rifle sure looks big.¹⁰⁴

For Tpr. Denis Scott in *Calgary*, the end came quickly after they'd received Glenn's order to get out of their tanks and destroy them. As he stood up and looked around the view was surreal: "The carnage was worse than I thought. We were stunned, without emotion. We were alive standing amidst dozens of dead and wounded comrades."¹⁰⁵

Tpr. Roy Johnston and his crewmates had received the order to evacuate somewhat earlier. Abandoning *Confident* where she lay at the sea wall, they crawled away to find some better protection, but not before arming a demolition charge inside her, a sad moment for any tanker. The five of them spent the final part of the battle huddled with several dozen Essex Scottish and some engineers against one of the wave breakers extending toward the shore from the sea wall. The beach reminded those who had seen one back home of an abattoir. As close as they were to the water, any thoughts of making a dash for it and then wading or swimming out to a rescue launch evaporated as soon as they saw the bursts of machine-gun fire slicing through the ranks of those desperate enough to try. Around 1330, Johnston remembered the few remaining boats hovering offshore out of range of the mortars turning and then disappearing over the horizon. Many in his group burst into tears. As the firing began to die down, a few talked about somehow holding out till nightfall before trying to slip away. But as other parties scattered across the beach began struggling to their feet with hands raised, and it became clear how many wounded needed medical help, Johnston's group, without a word being said, stood up and surrendered, too.¹⁰⁶

Together they walked toward the promenade where, meeting their first armed Germans, they were roughly searched.¹⁰⁷ Then, in a ragged line, they were marched through largely empty streets, burning buildings lining the route. Upon reaching the hospital grounds, everyone was searched a second time, Johnston losing everything that might have remotely qualified as a souvenir from the vanquished Tommy, though a German NCO at least retrieved the pictures of his wife and son.¹⁰⁸ Eventually everyone who could walk had been assembled at the hospital grounds, including those who had stayed behind on the beach to help the medics—Canadian and German—treat the casualties or carry the badly wounded up to the sea wall so they wouldn't drown. It was a broiling summer day and as the men waited, they received a single ladle of water but nothing to eat. The lucky among the walking wounded received some treatment, but in fairness there were far worse cases to attend to. Finally, late in the afternoon, the prisoners formed up in a long column, three abreast, a sorry

looking lot, many only half dressed and a few, who had presumably stripped down to swim out to a rescue boat, wearing only underpants, and marched out of Dieppe, “to where, no one knew.”¹⁰⁹ The prisoners barely spoke to one another, “our minds dim and throbbing from the catastrophe of it all.”¹¹⁰ It was a gravel road, and it tore up the feet of any who had discarded or otherwise lost their boots.¹¹¹ Several accounts mention passing a wedding party where the best man, who took off his own shoes and threw them to a passing Canadian, was roughed up to make an example.¹¹² The German guards could be cruel or not, as the mood suited. Some of the wounded men were soon struggling to keep up and were roughly pummelled with rifle butts. And as Tpr. Harry Ganshirt recalled, “food [was] knocked out of our hands or of the hands that tried to give it to us along the way (and) water knocked or poured away in [the] same manner.”¹¹³

At Envermeu, about 15 kms east of Dieppe, the officers were separated from the men, permanently as it turned out, with the latter trudging on a while longer until they reached the hamlet of St. Nicholas d’Aiermont around 2130. Utterly exhausted, dehydrated and ravenous, they were herded inside the walls of a brickyard and cement works.¹¹⁴ For supper, the Germans poured water into their helmets and handed out some rock-hard *schwarzbrot*,¹¹⁵ though most of the men simply collapsed from fatigue and were soon asleep on the concrete floor. The next morning they were roused early and given ersatz coffee or tea and more *schwarzbrot* with a thin glaze of dubious-looking jam.¹¹⁶ French civilians gathered outside the compound and tried to hurl food inside but were chased away by the guards.

The next day they marched to a rail siding where they were packed into boxcars stencilled with the notional capacity—*Quarante Hommes ou Huit Chevaux*. By now they were constantly hungry and the smokers dying for a cigarette. Vern Richardson remembered seeing men fight for water.¹¹⁷ The train took them to a transit camp at Verneulles, about 30 kms west of Paris, where sleeping arrangements and hygiene were rudimentary.¹¹⁸ Here they were sorted by unit and camp destination, as well as interrogated—the other ranks rather casually but the NCOs more vigorously. After about a week, the guards crammed them into another train, so tightly that they had to sleep head to foot on the straw-covered floors. Bathroom facilities consisted of a couple of buckets emptied when the Germans felt like it, and all save one of the ventilation ports were locked shut. In the suffocating heat, conditions were intolerable, with the worst-off being the “lightly” injured who lay in agony while their wounds festered. Thirst was constant, and the daily ration for fifty-odd men was a single loaf. For the tank crewmen, the trip took five days, during which they were never allowed off the train, though the doors were opened at every stop so German

soldiers could poke fun at the *kriegsgefangene*. To add to their misery, dysentery broke out. When the POWs finally arrived at Lamsdorf (now Łambinowice) in Silesia, the men clambered out “dirty, unshaven and foul-smelling,” but still relieved they were there—wherever there was.¹¹⁹ A final march brought them to the gates of their home for the foreseeable future—Stalag VIII-B.

Aftermath

The damaged ships as well as any others carrying wounded had begun arriving at Newhaven by early evening, while the rest sailed on to Gosport, which they reached the following morning. Throughout the 20th, vehicles arrived at Seaford, singly and in small groups, returning members of the battalion until by early evening everyone but the tank crews and wounded were home. Apart from medical treatment for the wounded, the priority was confirming the losses, which in the confusion took time. Maj. Begg issued an order of the day reminding everyone that “by the magnificent stand made by those who met the enemy, we have a high place to maintain.”¹²⁰ It was heartfelt, and what else could he say. Padre Smith had immediately set off to visit the B Squadron area of the camp where he found only a handful of cooks and truck drivers “sitting around benumbed—the billets were empty—it was eerie.”¹²¹ It was only two days before the first replacements arrived from the armoured reinforcement units, seven officers and fifty-eight other ranks.

The 23rd was a Sunday and everyone assembled at Seaford Parish Church for a service. They were all still in a state of shock. Their ranks had been filled with men who had been together for almost two-and-a-half years, only to have a third of them disappear in a matter of hours. That there would be no confirmation for weeks on the fates of the “missing” made it all the harder.¹²² The padre rose to the moment. His congregation sang Psalm 23, even the shy men joining in. Smith’s sermon—it was more a sharing of feelings than instruction—focused on reminding the assembly why they were there. “We give ... our grateful thanks for those fine men, who we have known as comrades. In the presence of their sacrifice we can only bow our heads in reverence.” After praying for the wounded, he turned to the prisoners of war—“In what for them is defeat wilt Thou give to them confidence and hope [and] deliver them from bitterness.” Then, thinking not just of the officers and men in front of him but the many loved ones back home, “give to those who mourn ... the comfort God has promised [and] may anxious hearts soon be set at rest.” He concluded with the hope that God would “keep in us that hunger and thirst after righteousness.”¹²³

When he’d got back to Seaford, a despairing “Doc” Alexander had scribbled in his diary—“Terrible here today—all these men gone, for what purpose?”¹²⁴ Yet within a few days he could see some positives. While not denying that “the

days following the return were full of gloom,” he was relieved “the spirit of the men was not dampened.”¹²⁵ In fact, army censorship reports, gleaned from the letters written to Canada by men from all of the participating units, were reassuringly positive, in spite of the losses.¹²⁶ There was also a notably more realistic view of what it would take to win the war. As Brig. Wyman put it in a report to Lt.-Gen. Crerar, “the war has now become a very personal matter to every officer and man in [the Calgary Regiment].”¹²⁷ Even British civilians took note that almost overnight the Canadians were a far more serious lot.

Autopsy

The autopsy of Jubilee began almost immediately, and one might add by both sides. The German command was shocked by the scale of the raid, which they had neither expected nor detected forming up. And they were impressed by the depth of the intelligence on the area’s defences. On the other hand, they were well satisfied with their own defensive preparations and the fighting prowess of their garrison. As for the plan and execution of the attack, the assessment of the 15th Army Headquarters was blunt. Among its most telling points, that “the Englishman [sic] had underestimated the strength of the defences, and therefore, at most of his landing places ... found himself in a hopeless position as soon as he came ashore.”¹²⁸ Beyond this, they questioned numerous elements of the plan, not least the sacrifice of dozens of the most modern British tanks when both topography and the character of the anti-tank defences ensured they could not be used to advantage.¹²⁹ None of their post-raid analysis dwelt much on the actual operation of the tanks, but given the impossibility of the task, they took pains to note “the tank crews did not lack spirit.”¹³⁰ The speedy dismissal of Maj.-Gen. Roberts from his 2nd Division command was unfair, designed mostly to cover up the deficiencies of Canadians farther up the chain of command. But the post-mortem conducted by British and Canadian staffs acknowledged the raid had failed utterly, and consequently learned much that proved useful.¹³¹

As for the tanks’ role, the analysis spent little time discussing this. Tanks were used at Dieppe mostly because they were available, but only in “an enthusiastic plan based on too much faith” would they have been deployed in a “theater of operations ... considered ... most unsuitable for tank warfare.”¹³² A clear appreciation of how the Calgary Regiment had performed only became available when the senior officer captured, Maj. C. E. Page, B Squadron’s CO, was medically repatriated fourteen months later. Having interviewed every other officer POW while they were ensconced at Oflag VII-B, he returned with detailed information on what the tanks had achieved. Both RAF reconnaissance and German propaganda films showed virtually all of the Churchills

somewhere on the beach or partially submerged by the rising tide, which reinforced the view that the great majority had only advanced a short distance before being immobilized—in other words they'd made a minimal contribution to the fighting. Page knew that at least a dozen and maybe as many as fifteen had gotten over the seawall and onto the promenade where they had manoeuvred about and furiously engaged the enemy, in some cases for hours.¹³³ The concentration of tanks on the beach at the end of the fighting—only five remained on the promenade, all disabled—was a consequence of all the “runners” being recalled to reinforce a defensive perimeter for the evacuation. Page also reported that enemy fire had eventually immobilized eighteen tanks and another four had lost a track to the infamous shingle. Moreover, no crewman had suffered more than minor wounds while inside his tank, no tank had had its armour penetrated, and none had caught fire and burned out, a tribute to the Churchill's robust protection. With good reason, Page and the other officer prisoners felt strongly that the presence of tanks, including the disabled ones, and their continual firing until they ran out of ammunition or joined in the general surrender, dissuaded the Germans from rushing the beach during the evacuation.¹³⁴

It is hard to talk about any “good fortune” at Dieppe but ironically the tank crews that landed, while trapped on the promenade by the anti-tank obstacles blocking street exits, were also probably saved by them. A battery of 75-mm anti-tank guns—lethal for a Churchill's side armour—had been brought up by mid-morning only to find their view of what would have otherwise been open-sight targets blocked by the massive slabs of concrete.¹³⁵ And as frustrating as milling around was, crews knew they were far better off inside their Churchills than huddled in the open like most of their countrymen. Overall, only a dozen members were killed, with another dying of his wounds in captivity, and a further twenty-three were wounded, four of whom were evacuated.¹³⁶ Conversely, their role as an improvised rearguard that fought till the bitter end to make possible the evacuation of many others made them part of Roberts' “abandoned,” ensuring most of the men who landed were taken prisoner, 157 all told, or about 90 percent.¹³⁷ Nor should it be forgotten that the decision to continue fighting their tanks, rather than abandon them as soon as the evacuation was authorized *for all troops*, was a decision made by tank commanders. The Calgary Regiment had fought valiantly and maintained a remarkable level of cohesion throughout the raid. When the need for individual initiative was thrust on them, they seized it. But they had had little opportunity to show the capabilities of armour.

As the Canadian Army's chief historian Charles Stacey concluded a quarter century later, “an assault operation of this type [was] obviously not a suitable

introduction to battle for troops who [had] never fought.”¹³⁸ That said, more experience or even more training—and by the standards of 1944 neither the armour nor infantry were close to being adequately trained—would have made little and probably no difference because the plan was so terribly flawed. Jubilee represented the best in Allied thinking about landing on the French coast in mid-1942. That it did not in 1943 and 1944, when the detailed planning for D-Day was carried out, speaks tellingly about the Dieppe raid’s legacy. Finally, when lamenting the awful losses we must remember that there would have been no Dieppe in 1942 without Canadians playing the largest role, such was the determination of Canadian soldiers and their commanders to test their mettle, and of the Canadian government and people to have them try.

Home and Heartache

“Canadian civilians, particularly those who had lost relatives, saw only the casualty lists and the failure,” wrote army historian C. P. Stacey in the official history, “[and] the public mind continued to dwell upon it for months, and comment, frequently very ill-informed, continued in the press and elsewhere.”¹³⁹ His assessment was certainly insensitive to the feelings of Albertans or the home communities of the other units sacrificed in the raid. Glancing through the *Calgary Herald* in the months preceding Dieppe, one sees plenty of death notices, usually accompanied by the smiling picture of a young airman. But it was the sheer scale of the Dieppe losses—over 900 Canadians killed in a single day—that shocked the nation. For days, and in some cases weeks, the fate of those from the 14th Army Tank Battalion taken prisoner—even whether they were prisoners, and not dead—remained unknown. Moreover, because of the geographical pattern of the unit’s recruitment in February 1941, the anxiety in some smaller Alberta communities was especially acute.

As one would expect, the first news of Jubilee was vague—the *Herald* simply reporting that unnamed Canadian units had been involved in a successful commando raid on Dieppe, but that losses were expected to be heavy.¹⁴⁰ The following day a banner headline proclaimed “Calgary Tanks at Dieppe Carry Brunt of Attack,” with the story again alluding to apparent success but “severe” casualties.¹⁴¹ On August 21, the newspaper carried a British report about flag-waving crowds cheering the returning members of the Calgary Regiment as they drove into Seaford, offering them beer, meat pies, and cigarettes. Apparently, so the rosy account claimed, smiling troopers had reassured the locals they had given the Germans “something to think about.”¹⁴² But the tone changed abruptly once Ottawa began to release casualty lists, although the first two included only a lone member of the Calgary Regiment—Lt.-Col. Andrews—as missing in action. Five days after the raid, the *Herald* headlined

"More Alberta Soldiers Missing After Dieppe—Calgary Regiment Loss Mounts in New List."¹⁴³ Knowing their neighbours were desperate for solid information, next of kin had begun contacting the newspaper with their private news as personal telegrams from England began reaching the city and surrounding communities. Cpts. George Valentine and T. A. Turney and Tpr. Jim Horne were now officially missing in action. But the families of Lt. Dave Clapperton and Capt. "Doc" Alexander had been similarly notified, yet both had sent off personal cables confirming they were back in England and unwounded.¹⁴⁴ Capt. Bill Payne's wife shared word she'd received from another wife that both her husband and Maj. Robert Taylor were safe. Dr. Alexander's wife permitted his first letter to be published, containing as it did mostly stories about brother officers now missing and their state of mind before the attack, the sort of thing that would reassure loved ones. Other families just shared what they knew from official sources—well-known Olds baseball player L/Cpl. Frank Howe had been reported badly wounded, according to his family there, and Tpr. Michael McIntyre, his Drumheller parents advised the *Herald*, was officially missing.¹⁴⁵ So while official releases continued to push the heroism-but-heavy-losses version, mostly thanks to a steady flow of information volunteered by families and friends, the *Herald's* focus was plainly on the fate of individuals.

Given that the enemy knew full well what had happened, the only people being kept in the dark by the official media coverage were Canadians. It didn't help that the Canadian Army had given over control of media publicity to Combined Operations Headquarters—the British command that master-minded raiding operations. Their plan was to portray Dieppe as a successful dress rehearsal for bigger things, and in the event of a setback, there would just be extra emphasis on the soldiers' heroism. The result was that:

The Canadian public ... faced a smokescreen when it was told about Dieppe. Stories of heroism, claims of success, and the lack of a timely overview of the raid obscured the reality of the disaster For weeks they had to guess at what had transpired Those who had lost family, who had to suffer for months waiting to hear the fate of the missing, certainly deserved a more open and honest explanation of what had happened and why.¹⁴⁶

The willingness of the *Herald*, and no doubt other newspapers across the country, to accept and publish uncensored information from friends and relatives, helped counterbalance this to some degree.

By early September, more detailed accounts from soldiers who had survived the operation began to reach Albertans. One of the first was forwarded

from RSM. Norman Kirkham's family in Red Deer, a grim account of how strong the defences had been and how the men had fought until they ran out of ammunition or were forced to abandon disabled tanks. Kirkham, who had not landed himself, did not mince words:

Wednesday, August 19, will be a very sadly remembered day in Central Alberta ... We who are left are very sick about the grand boys whom we left in France, but we are very, very proud of them and they were magnificent. They fought to the very last shell. The best that we can hope for is that many of them are prisoners of war, but we know that there are many who died fighting for their King and Country.¹⁴⁷

In a letter to his aunt, a Stettler boy, Tpr. Dick Freeman, glumly acknowledged that he had "just been looking at the nominal roll of those listed as missing in 'B' Squadron and I don't feel particularly cheered." Only twenty-two out of 117 had gotten back to England, and neither the Sgt.-Maj. nor any of the officers were among them. "Things were not what they were supposed to be on the beach," he added, "there being a great deal more opposition than was expected."¹⁴⁸ By mid-month the full casualty story was finally public, at least the raw totals, and while very few from the Calgary Regiment had been confirmed as killed in action, nine officers and 136 other ranks were still listed as missing. Tpr. Roy Gilbert, the loader/radio operator in *Beefy* (and a POW), remembered being told after the war that "the worst feeling [in Stettler] was ... when they found out that we were missing and presumed dead."¹⁴⁹ To deal with her own anguish, his mother had thrown herself into the work of the local "good cheer club" set up to help maintain the spirits of the families of other soldiers serving overseas. It was only toward the end of the year that Gilbert's status could be clarified and officially changed to prisoner of war, thus relieving—though not eliminating—the worry at home.¹⁵⁰

The painfully slow process by which next of kin learned the fate of their loved ones is best illustrated with specific examples. In the case of the Calgary Regiment, hardly anyone who knew anything made it back to England, while those who did were prisoners of war. Correspondence from the latter only began to arrive in late 1942 and early 1943 and was heavily self-censored so the German authorities would not restrict mailing privileges, while communication between the German and Canadian governments was shunted through the International Red Cross, a time-consuming process. Tpr. V. F. Olliffe went ashore as driver of one of the regiment's scout cars. On August 24 his mother was notified by telegram that he was missing in action. Some weeks later, she

and her husband were visited by Cpl. Helmer, who had been awarded the MM for his selfless actions assisting Dr. Alexander and was home on leave. He told them their son was dead. She heard nothing more until November when a letter arrived from Padre Smith:

I am very sorry to have to inform you that your lad, Freddie, died in the action at Dieppe. We have been forbidden to send word about lads being killed except where official notice has come to the regiment. In this case I wrote to [L/Cpl.] Frank Howe, who was with Freddie in the scout car. Frank himself was at death's door for a considerable time and when I saw him it would have been criminal to have harrowed him by questions about the other lads. Frank has just written to me as best he could. A shell pierced their scout car and struck your lad so that he died instantly. He never knew what happened to him It will be a sad Christmas for you, to have this word. There are many empty hearts this Christmas.¹⁵¹

After four months with no news from the army, an understandably upset Hilda Olliffe wrote to the Office of Records, inquiring why her son was still listed as missing despite the fact that "we have received proof of his death from members of his regiment ... Why does it take so long for parents to be informed of the truth?"¹⁵² In fact, unbeknownst to her, the process to declare him deceased was already underway. Given that she knew her son had died, the telegram that arrived on April 15 likely brought relief instead of the usual heartache: "Regret deeply M60232 Trooper Victor Frederick Olliffe previously reported missing now officially reported killed in action nineteenth August 1942 authority German official death list."¹⁵³

A fuller text of official condolences was mailed a week later, soon followed by the standard royal condolences. On 3 June 1943 Ottawa issued the death certificate necessary for accessing veterans' benefits and the life insurance policy soldiers frequently purchased for their next of kin. Later that month she was further notified that the Canadian Army had received word through the veterans department of the Vichy government that her son's remains had been interred in the village cemetery at Hautot-sur-Mer, just west of Dieppe.¹⁵⁴ Olliffe's mother continued to receive correspondence from the various bureaucracies responsible for assisting the next of kin. Though always considerate and informative, they were also a constant reminder of loss. The last came on 4 September 1945, a list of personal effects recovered by the Red Cross from Victor's body—one photo and a burnt pay book. After the war, his remains

were reinterred in the Dieppe Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery, also in Hautot-sur-Mer.

L/Cpl. Dwight Welch, a twenty-three-year-old from Erskine, Alberta, who had been assigned to one of the beach parties from B Squadron, was severely wounded by machine-gun fire. Transported to the Reserve Hospital for Prisoners of War in Obermassfeld, he was twice operated on but died on the 31st. With a British padre conducting the service, Welch was buried in the nearby Meiningen town cemetery. A German firing party attended, along with three British officers, including his surgeon, Maj. G. M. Hadley, and an honour guard of POW orderlies and patients. Dr. Hadley wrote a report to the Swiss legation in Berlin hoping it could be forwarded to the British Red Cross, with portions of it intended to assure the next of kin in Canada that “everything that could be done for him [was] and that he was not allowed to suffer.”¹⁵⁵ A summary reached Welch’s father in November, a couple of weeks after Ottawa had issued the formal death certificate. The telegram changing his son’s status from “missing” to “died of wounds” had arrived on September 21.¹⁵⁶

Thirty-one-years-old and unmarried, Tpr. Bobby Cornelssen had lived in Stettler his whole life before enlisting in the regiment during the recruiting wave of February 1941. At Dieppe he was serving as the driver of *Bellicose*. Like so many, he was initially declared missing in action. His mother Rose learned of his fate from letters sent by prisoners of war to other residents in the town. The first news came in the early autumn from Lt. Ed Bennett, who had commanded *Bellicose* and was now a POW. “My driver Bobby Cornelssen was killed after we returned to the beach when he went out into the water to rescue a chap who was floundering around,” Bennett wrote, “I was blind from my burns ... but my radio operator (Tpr. A. F. Anderson) told me.”¹⁵⁷ Tpr. Al Johnson, a crewman in *Bob*, wrote his mother in late September from Stalag VIII-B, and as with so many of the early letters, he mentioned the fate of everyone he could think of from his home area, knowing his parents would circulate the news. Johnson ended his enumeration with “Bobby Cornelssen is the only one from home I know for sure that got it.”¹⁵⁸ Tpr. Michael McIntyre (*Beefy*), also imprisoned in the camp, wrote a Stettler friend around the same time, confiding to her “I found out this morning that ... poor Bobby Cornelssen got it too.”¹⁵⁹ By December the army was able to confirm Cornelssen’s fate and so informed his mother a week before Christmas, painful timing that could not be avoided.

Conclusions

All elements of the 14th Army Tank Battalion's first action save one—the men themselves—had been found wanting. The unit had lost the better part of half of its fighting strength in a matter of hours, and with that, much of the thirteen months' work to transform the men into an effective armoured force was thrown away. Losing the intimate bonds of trust and the teamwork that only sustained training can forge, and which underpin any successful combat unit, was especially devastating. The missing ranks could—and were—swiftly replaced. But the challenge would be rebuilding the regiment *as a regiment*. The war would not allow much time to carry out these tasks, one requiring leadership of the first order, not just at the command level but throughout the ranks. In this, the survival of a sizable cadre of experienced men would prove a huge asset. And rebuilt the regiment would be—to play its full part in achieving the final victory.