

***Making and Maintaining a Myth: Presenting the Dieppe Raid of 1942***  
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On 19 August 1942, the 2nd Canadian Division, along with the British Commandos, launched Operation Jubilee, a raid against the German-fortified French beaches surrounding Dieppe, which became a military disaster resulting in thousands of casualties. The Dieppe raid became one of Canada's darkest hours during the Second World War. However, the operation was (and to some extent still is) remembered by Canadians as a meaningful and necessary battle that characterised Canada's contribution to the Second World War. This rationale was birthed due to the immediate response after the operation from the press, the military and both the British and Canadian governments, as they each claimed that the Dieppe raid was not a total catastrophe and the casualties sustained were not in vain because essential lessons were learned that helped the Allies plan for future cross-channel invasions, especially the Normandy landings in 1944. The supposed lessons learned were inaccurate, and what was developed to aid in the success of coastal invasions after Dieppe came to fruition before Operation Jubilee or due to unrelated circumstances. Yet, these claims that lessons were supposedly learned were essential to sell Dieppe to the Canadians. With the help of the press, both the government and the military were able to champion the myths to the public. Although the controversy surrounding the raid still occurred, the D-Day landings on the Normandy beaches in 1944 ingrained Dieppe and its myths into Canada's national identity. They were implanted deep, and Dieppe remains a major controversy to this day as some scholars reveal the truth behind the raid, whereas others still try to find meaning in the lives that were lost during that fatal raid on 19 August 1942.

The disaster of the Dieppe Raid birthed numerous myths, the most prominent being that the Allies learned valuable lessons that were essential in the seaborne landings in the

Mediterranean and especially the Normandy invasion on 6 June 1944. Many of these lessons learned were myths themselves but were presented to the public to convince Canadians that the catastrophic operation was necessary to the war effort. The prime minister of the United Kingdom, Winston Churchill, wrote in his memoir of the Second World War that Dieppe “shed revealing light on many shortcomings in our outlook.”<sup>1</sup> Although the raid did demonstrate shortcomings in the mindsets of Allied command, there were no meaningful lessons that were learned, nor were there any lessons that justified the cost of 68% (3,367 casualties) of the Second Canadian Division forces engaged at Dieppe.<sup>2</sup>

The first of these lessons that were supposedly learned was the need for new equipment that could help land and support the ground forces during a coastal invasion. Churchill claims that Dieppe “taught us to build in good time various new craft and appliances for later use.”<sup>3</sup> He hints that technologies such as specialised landing craft, Hobart's Funnies (specialised armoured vehicles) and Mulberry harbours were developed because of Operation Jubilee. In reality, many of these innovations, such as Mulberry harbours and the specialised landing craft, were already being planned or in development before the raid occurred in August 1942. As the historian Robbin Neilland points out, Mulberry harbours were already being thought up before the Dieppe raid because military thinkers already knew that the German forces had heavily fortified the French ports, and it would be impossible to launch a successful assault on less defended beaches in Europe without portable harbours that could be transported with the landing forces.<sup>4</sup> Specialised landing craft were also being designed before Operation Jubilee as the multitude of raids that British

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<sup>1</sup> Winston Churchill, *Hinge of Fate* (Boston, U.S.A.: Houghton Mifflin, 1950), 511.

<sup>2</sup> Terence Robertson, *Dieppe: The Shame and the Glory* (Boston, U.S.A.: Little, Brown and Company, 1962), 386.

<sup>3</sup> Churchill, *Hinge of Fate*, 511.

<sup>4</sup> Robin Neillands, *The Dieppe Raid: The Story of the Disastrous 1942 Expedition* (Bloomington, U.S.A.: Indiana University Press, 2005), 270.

Commandos had completed since June 1940 had already demonstrated a need for better landing crafts.<sup>5</sup> Finally, Hobart's Funnies were developed as a response to requiring close tank support with the infantry to successfully take the beachheads at Normandy, the need to relieve landing craft of the burden of carrying tanks, and the multitude of jobs engineers would have to endure on the D-Day landings.<sup>6</sup> None of these technologies were developed because of what was experienced at Dieppe in 1942.

The next major lessons that were allegedly learned concerned tactics. Churchill outlines that the Dieppe raid taught "again" the importance of ground support provided by the navy and the air force, and the need for combined training and thorough organisation of the invasion forces.<sup>7</sup> Lyman B. Kirkpatrick Jr, a former American intelligence officer who had served during the Second World War, adds to Churchill's list of lessons. He argues that Dieppe taught the Allies that it was impossible to launch a direct assault against a port, that surprise was necessary, and that commanders needed proper intelligence and must lead their forces from the battlefield, not from afar.<sup>8</sup> However, these lessons and tactics were not learned at Dieppe as they had existed long before Operation Jubilee. These lessons have been taught at officer schools, and any good commander would know that these tactics can be found in Carl von Clausewitz's *On War*.<sup>9</sup> Colonel John Hughes-Wilson argues "that if only Mountbatten and his dupes on his staff had been honest and asked for help," the problems that occurred during the raid that the Allies supposedly learned from would not have happened.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, Dieppe did not teach lessons but revealed incompetency in

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<sup>5</sup> Neillands, *The Dieppe Raid*, 269.

<sup>6</sup> Neillands, *The Dieppe Raid*, 269.

<sup>7</sup> Churchill, *Hinge of Fate*, 511.

<sup>8</sup> Kirkpatrick, Lyman B. Jr., "Dieppe: Prelude to D-Day," in *Captains Without Eyes: Intelligence Failures in World War II* (New York; Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, (1969) 2018), 194-6.

<sup>9</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), 198-201, 530-531.

<sup>10</sup> John Hughes-Wilson, *Military Intelligence Blunders* (New York, NY: Carroll & Graff, 1999), 163.

the Combined Operations Headquarters (COHQ). The claims that lessons were learned from Operation Jubilee in 1942 were merely fabrications to convince Canadians that the loss at Dieppe had meaning.

The press had a crucial role in selling the Dieppe raid and ingraining the myths in Canada's society. Unlike previous wars, news of the war came faster to the homefront thanks to radio broadcasts and the abundance of newspapers. The pace of spreading information was also quickened with government-appointed war correspondents who were sent overseas to accompany the soldiers and broadcast the fighting as it occurred. This was the case for Bob Bowman, a CBC war correspondent who broadcasted on the radio his eyewitness account of the Dieppe raid a day after the operation on 20 August 1942.<sup>11</sup> However, the speed at which newspapers and radio broadcasts reported the raid made it difficult to relay accurate information. This was the case for many Canadian newspapers, such as *The Calgary Herald*, which inaccurately reported on the day of the raid, 19 August 1942, that Canadians succeeded in destroying Dieppe guns and that "the chief objectives of the raid had been achieved."<sup>12</sup> As more information became available to the public, Canadians became concerned and shocked as casualties grew. The press now had to convince the Canadians that the raid was a military success despite the large sacrifice it required.

Propaganda was essential, and the press attempted to use myths to convince the public that the Dieppe operation was worth the costs. Radio broadcasts and newspapers exaggerated the accomplishments of the Canadians at Dieppe while also understating the failures and casualties

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<sup>11</sup> Bob Bowman, "Dieppe," 20 August 1942, Ottawa: Wartime Information Board, ID: McGillLibrary-rbrc\_004125211-18304, Internet Archive, McGill University Library - Rare Books and Special Collections, [https://archive.org/details/McGillLibrary-rbrc\\_004125211-18304/page/n1/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/McGillLibrary-rbrc_004125211-18304/page/n1/mode/2up) (Accessed 15 November 2023), 2-3.

<sup>12</sup> "Canadians in Commando Raid: Destroy Nazi Dieppe Guns; Withdrawal Complete," 19 August 1942, *The Calgary Herald*, Document ID: 2252857419, Proquest Historical Newspapers: Calgary Herald, <https://ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fhistorical-newspapers%2Faugust-19-1942-page-1-16%2Fdocview%2F2252859323%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D9838> (Accessed 15 November 2023).

that took place during the raid. Research by Béatrice Richard finds that the press heavily emphasised certain words to address Canadians concerns and convince them of the necessity of the raid, such as “strategic” to justify the operation, “heroic” to “celebrate the “exploits” of the soldiers,” and “revelatory” as increasing information about the casualties and failures became known.<sup>13</sup> The propaganda that the press spread also introduced Canadians to the myths that arose from the Dieppe catastrophe. In his broadcast, Bob Bowman says, “Our losses have not been sustained without reason. We have learned a most valuable lesson which may enable us to free the continent of Europe and end the war.”<sup>14</sup> After listing what was supposedly learned, Bowman acknowledges that the casualty figures “were as heavy as they were in Hong Kong,” and hopes that “despite the losses [Canada] will feel very proud that our men have been able to play at last the part they wanted to play.”<sup>15</sup> The press exposed Canadians to the myths by exploiting their pride in their soldiers and the nation’s desire to be an essential part of the war effort.

The failure of the Dieppe operation was also a major catastrophe for the Canadian and British wartime governments. Both governments did their best to convince the Canadians that the raid was necessary and that it provided vital lessons that would save lives in future coastal invasions. The British understood that Operation Jubilee was Canada’s first offensive in the war and its failure, along with the high casualty, could negatively affect Canadians’ overall war effort. *The Washington Post* claims that Winston Churchill “was well advised... to give the Canadians credit for their part in the raid on Dieppe.”<sup>16</sup> Although Churchill never acknowledged that he

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<sup>13</sup> Béatrice Richard, “Dieppe: The Making of a Myth,” *Canadian Military History* 21, no.4 (2015): 2.

<sup>14</sup> Bowman, “Dieppe,” 4.

<sup>15</sup> Bowman, “Dieppe,” 10.

<sup>16</sup> “Canadians at Dieppe,” 17 September 1942, *The Washington Post*, Document ID:151538262, Proquest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post, <https://ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fhistorical-newspapers%2Fcanadians-at-dieppe%2Fdocview%2F151538262%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D9838> (Accessed 19 November 2023).

received this advice, he nonetheless hailed the raid as a strategic victory as it panicked German high command and supplied the Allies with vital lessons.<sup>17</sup> Under Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King, the Canadian Government took specific measures to sell the Dieppe raid to Canadians. Along with official statements and speeches within the Canadian parliament, the government heavily censored the press and hired Ross Munro, a war correspondent who survived Dieppe, to tour Canada to recount the “heroics” of the catastrophic raid.<sup>18</sup> Both the British and Canadian governments spent immense time and resources to convince Canadians of the supposed achievements of the Dieppe raid.

The military was also heavily involved in the propagandising of the Dieppe operation. As much of a disaster the raid was for the Canadian and British governments, the failure of Operation Jubilee fell predominantly on the military and its planners. If they were unable to convince the homefront that the raid was successful in at least one aspect, the military risked an overhaul in their command, yet the COHQ was prepared. Before the raid began, they outlined a plan in case the operation failed its objectives. The COHQ appealed that any failure of the operation was to be portrayed as a success, and that the raid was an “essential test” that provided valuable “lessons learned” before anything could actually be learned. They also outlined that the media was to put heavy emphasis “on stories of personal heroism... in order to focus public attention on bravery rather than objectives not attained.”<sup>19</sup> The military was prepared to brainwash the public by exploiting civilians' pride in their soldiers and their lust for heroic acts on the battlefield.

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<sup>17</sup> Mark Zuehlke, *Tragedy at Dieppe: Operation Jubilee, August 19, 1942*, ed. Kathy Vanderlinden (Vancouver, B.C.: Douglas and McIntyre, 2012), 370.

<sup>18</sup> Mark Bourrie, *Fog of War: Censorship of Canada's Media in World War Two* (Vancouver, B.C.: Douglas & McIntyre, 2011), 160.

<sup>19</sup> Timothy Balzer, *Information Front: The Canadian Army and News Management During the Second World War* (Vancouver, B.C.: UBC Press, 2011), 93.

Similar to the government, the military was advised to tread carefully when it came to selling Dieppe to the Canadians. “Jock” Lawrence, a personal relations officer, warned Lord Mountbatten, the mastermind behind Operation Jubilee, about the Canadians touchiness, telling him to “handle the Canadians with velvet gloves.”<sup>20</sup> As a result, Mountbatten became a chief spokesman for the military regarding Dieppe, who tried to silence any critics of the operation. He claimed that the raid provided vital lessons and that the Canadians should be proud of their participation in the operation. Furthermore, Mountbatten was also responsible for the censoring and manipulation of official military reports on Operation Jubilee, such as Major C.P. Stacey’s white paper, which was revised to demonstrate “the good fighting spirit displayed by the Canadians.”<sup>21</sup> Canadian generals, too, mimicked the calls that the Dieppe raid was meaningful due to the lessons learned. This was especially true for both generals Crerar and Simonds, the two Canadians who were primarily responsible for Canada’s participation in the operation.<sup>22</sup> Once again the publicity and propaganda of Dieppe was structured towards Canadians in an attempt to condition the nation into adopting the Dieppe myths.

Despite efforts from the press, government and military, not all Canadians succumbed to the propaganda and easily adopted the Dieppe myths. Many worried about the number of casualties and if the cost justified the lessons that were learned. A South Saskatchewan Lieutenant, John Edmondson, later wrote that Operation Jubilee was “a strategic success [that] remains a cold comfort when measured against the suffering of the men at Dieppe, and the suffering of their families,” in response to Churchill’s opinion on the battle.<sup>23</sup> Many also simply did not believe what

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<sup>20</sup> Balzer, *Information Front*, 91-2.

<sup>21</sup> Balzer, *Information Front*, 106-7.

<sup>22</sup> J.L. Granatstein, *The Generals: The Canadian Army’s Senior Commanders in the Second World War* (Calgary, Alberta: University of Calgary Press, 2005), 102.

<sup>23</sup> Zuehlke, *Tragedy at Dieppe*, 370-1.

was reported by the government and military. The historian Ralph Allen wrote: “As for the much discussed “lessons” of Dieppe, the politicians and generals made so much of them in the first aftermath of shock that many people felt they were simply trying to cover up a senseless blunder with a retroactive excuse.”<sup>24</sup> Although there were no clear polls to determine the public opinion of Dieppe, a poll on Canadians' trust of war news on 19 September 1942 showed that 56% of Canadians trusted war news, whereas 36% did not.<sup>25</sup> From this poll, it can be inferred that only a small majority believed the Dieppe myths that were presented in 1942. The myths of the Dieppe raid were not yet ingrained into Canadian society. The majority was not enough to deter debates and the controversy that followed the raid during and after 1942.

The Dieppe controversy remained throughout the war until the Normandy landings on 6 June 1944. Although the Allied forces executed numerous coastal raids since Dieppe in 1942, such as the Sicily invasion (Operation Husky) and the landings in North Africa (Operation Torch), the D-Day landings provided the military and governments with the best propaganda to firmly establish the Dieppe myths. According to both the military and governments, Normandy's success and its importance to the liberation of France and Europe was the perfect example of the lessons learned from the Dieppe Raid. General Crerar's message to Canadian forces destined to land on Juno Beach said that the “plans, preparations, methods and technique which will be employed are based on knowledge and experience, bought and paid for by the Second Canadian Division at Dieppe. The contribution of that hazardous operation cannot be overestimated.”<sup>26</sup> Winston Churchill also later claimed that many of the developments in equipment and tactics that made the

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<sup>24</sup> Ralph Allen, *Ordeal by Fire: Canada, 1910-1945* (New York, U.S.A.: Doubleday & Company, 1961), 406.

<sup>25</sup> Balzer, *Information Front*, 110.

<sup>26</sup> “Crerar's Message to Forces,” 7 June 1944, *The Gazette: Montreal*, Document ID: 2158918948, Proquest Historical Newspapers: Montreal Gazette, <https://ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fhistorical-newspapers%2Fjune-7-1944-page-20%2Fdocview%2F2158918948%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D9838> (Accessed 22 November 2023).

D-Day landings successful were learned from Operation Jubilee.<sup>27</sup> The press, reporting on the Normandy landings, also described how the invasion was successful because of what was learned through the sacrifices of Canadian forces at Dieppe in 1942. *The Windsor Daily Star* reported that “The Allied High Command took Dieppe as the basis from which to work and built on the experience of that raid... to find the answer to Germany’s Atlantic wall defences.”<sup>28</sup> The Dieppe raid may have occurred two years before D-Day, but the successful landings on Normandy birthed Operation Jubilee in a new light.

D-Day was a major event during the Second World War and every participating country found their civilians exaggerating their participation to inspire nationalism. For the Canadians, they adopted the myth that important lessons were learned at Dieppe in 1942 and that they were crucial to the success of the invasion and saved many lives. Civilians, soldiers and politicians all embraced the myths as it portrayed Canadian soldiers as the forefathers of the Normandy invasions, and without them, the invasion would not have occurred. The Canadian prime minister’s viewpoint of the Dieppe raid also shifted after D-Day. Prime Minister Mackenzie King wrote in his diary on 13 September 1944: “Clearly the martyrdom of the men at Dieppe has helped to save Britain and the countries of Europe. Has made possible the quick invasion and the sweep that has since taken place.”<sup>29</sup> Even C.P. Stacey, who had condemned Mountbatten’s manipulation of the white paper, now portrayed the Dieppe raid as a tactical failure that provided vital lessons and

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<sup>27</sup> Churchill, *Hinge of Fate*, 510-1.

<sup>28</sup> Ross Munro, “Canadians Avenge Dieppe in Magnificent D-Day Action,” 10 June 1944, *The Windsor Daily Star*, Document ID: 2238784997, Proquest Historical Newspapers: Windsor Star, <https://ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fhistorical-newspapers%2Fjune-10-1944-page-6-44%2Fdocview%2F2238784997%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D9838> (Accessed 22 November 2023).

<sup>29</sup> Terry Reardon, *Winston Churchill and Mackenzie King: So Similar, so Different* (Toronto, Ontario: Dundurn Press, 2012), 216.

brought success at Normandy.<sup>30</sup> Canadians were now accepting the significance that the Dieppe raid had on the war and their nation. Pierre Berton perhaps wrote it best: “How ironic it is that for Canadians the defining battle of the Great War was a glorious victory [Vimy], while its counterpart, twenty-five years later, was a bitter defeat [Dieppe].”<sup>31</sup> The disastrous failure of the Dieppe raid was now a defining event that defined Canada’s national identity and continued to be so since the Second World War.

After over 80 years since the conclusion of the Second World War, the Dieppe raid and its myths still linger in Canadian society despite thorough investigation and arguments from scholars that demonstrate its inaccuracy. This was because, after the war, there were still many people who wanted to ensure that Dieppe was associated with victory, not defeat, and give meaning to the lives that were lost. One major culprit was Lord Mountbatten, who said in 1973 that “from the lessons we learnt at Dieppe all subsequent landings in the Mediterranean and elsewhere benefited directly... The successful landing in Normandy was won on the beaches of Dieppe.”<sup>32</sup> It was people like him who kept the myths alive, and as a result, for much of the 1980s and 1990s, a majority of Canadians were taught that the Dieppe raid was an essential operation that characterised Canada’s contribution to the war. Tim Cook’s research demonstrates that Dieppe remains special for Canadians because in the 1980s, many people lacked an adequate understanding of the war, and those who were taught about Canada’s war efforts, were taught in a way that “weaponised” the fight for Canada’s “new sovereignty battles.”<sup>33</sup> The myths continued

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<sup>30</sup> Timothy Balzer, “‘In Case the Raid is Unsuccessful...’: Selling Dieppe to Canadians,” *The Canadian Historical Review* 87, no. 3 (2006): 430.

<sup>31</sup> Pierre Berton, *Marching as to War: Canada’s Turbulent Years, 1899-1953* (Toronto, Ontario: Anchor Canada, 2002), 371.

<sup>32</sup> Zuehlke, *Tragedy at Dieppe*, 369.

<sup>33</sup> Tim Cook, *The Fight for History: 75 Years of Forgetting, Remembering, and Remaking Second World War* (Toronto, Canada: Allen Lane, 2020), 217-36.

after the war as Canadians were subject to improper information about Canada's efforts during the Second World War.

The Dieppe raid also persists today because of continuing research by scholars. Although it is widely accepted that the Dieppe raid was a disaster, some scholars still try to uncover new evidence to give meaning to the casualties that were inflicted during the operation. This is the case for the historian David O'Keefe, who uncovered intelligence documents on Dieppe. He claims that the new evidence demonstrates that Operation Jubilee was a cover operation to land a British Commando unit with orders to capture the new German 4-rotor Enigma machine.<sup>34</sup> O'Keefe's argument has caused the Dieppe controversy to persist as his uncovered evidence has created a new wave of claims that the casualties experienced by the Canadian forces were not in vain because if the raid was successful, the capturing of the Enigma machine would have shortened the war. However, it was not successful, and so it does not excuse the poor planning, high casualty rates, or the blatant lying and censoring of the media that solidified the Dieppe myths into Canada's national identity.

Operation Jubilee was and still is one of Canada's most controversial battles from the Second World War. The portrayal of the Dieppe raid by the press, the military and both the Canadian and British governments which began immediately after the operation, was responsible for ingraining Dieppe in Canadian society. The claims that lessons were learned from the raid, such as the need for new developments in equipment, were false but were used to sell Dieppe to Canadians. The press was an essential participant as the speed it could produce propaganda and information was essential to spreading the myths to Canadians. The government also played their part by sanctioning war correspondents and censoring the media. Yet, the military was the

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<sup>34</sup> David O'Keefe, *One Day in August: The Untold Story Behind Canada's Tragedy in Dieppe* (Toronto, Canada: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 2013), 9.

mastermind behind the plot to lie to Canadians about the Dieppe raid, as demonstrated by COHQ's appeal before the raid even began. What was important to note was that the myths spread by these organisations were not quickly accepted by all Canadians until the Normandy invasion in 1944, as the coastal landings provided a semblance of the lies that the military and government constantly repeated. Finally, the Dieppe raid's importance to Canadians continues at present because of a multitude of factors. The reiteration of the myths by people, such as Mountbatten, and improper education in the 1980s kept Dieppe alive in the minds of Canadians. Research by scholars, such as David O'Keefe, also revived much of the debates surrounding the Dieppe raid. The maintenance of the Dieppe myths has indeed placed Dieppe at a similar stature to Canadians as had Vimy Ridge during the First World War.

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