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CANADIAN MILITARY HEADQUARTERS

29 Nov 43

The Operation at DIEPPE, 19 Aug 42 : Further
Personal Stories of Participants.

1. This Report is additional to Nos. 89 and 90, which consisted basically of personal accounts of the DIEPPE operation written or given verbally by participants. A further group of personal stories is now presented.
2. One of these (Appendix "A") is a memorandum of an interview with Major (now Lt.-Col.) J.E. McRae, D.S.O., of the South Saskatchewan Regiment. The writer had found it difficult to reconstruct the action of this unit, and accordingly arranged to interview Major McRae, who as second-in-command and senior officer to return to England was a particularly useful witness. His evidence contributed materially to Report No. 101 (q.v.).
3. The remainder of the Appendices consist of memoranda of interviews with Canadian personnel repatriated to the United Kingdom from Germany in October, 1943. The evidence of these men, all of whom were captured at DIEPPE, materially increases our knowledge of the operation. This is particularly true of the evidence of Major C.E. Page (Appendices "B" and "C"), which considerably alters the picture of the action of the tanks as previously known. So far as is known, the only evidence formerly available from personnel who fought in tanks ashore was that of one trooper, who returned to England wounded. The evidence (Appendix "D") of one member of the very small group of Essex Scottish personnel who got across the promenade and into the buildings is also of interest.
4. The new material contained in this Report has necessitated a large revision of Part II, Section 2 of the historical record of the DIEPPE operation, which was virtually complete at the time when the exchange of prisoners took place. This section of the record is now again almost complete, as is also Part III. These documents will be forwarded as soon as final checking has been completed and G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army, has authorized distribution.
5. The Appendices to the present Report are as follows :
 - (a) Memorandum of Interview with Major J.E. McRae, D.S.O.
 - (b) Memorandum of Interviews with Major C.E. Page and other personnel repatriated from Germany.
 - (c) Memorandum of Additional Information provided by Major C.E. Page.
 - (d) Memorandum of Interviews with Personnel of Essex Scottish Regiment repatriated from Germany.

C.P. Stacey
(C.P. Stacey) Lt.-Col.,
Historical Officer,

MEMORANDUM OF INTERVIEW WITH
MAJOR J.E. McRAE, D.S.O., by CEC Aug 1986 for DHist NDHQ
SOUTH SASKATCHEWAN REGIMENT Date: _____
AT CANADIAN MILITARY HEADQUARTERS
25 Feb 43

Authority: DHD 3-3

by CEC Aug 1986 for DHist NDHQ

Date: _____

Subject: The Operation at DIEPPE, 19 Aug 42.

1. Major McRae, now on the permanent establishment of No. 1 Canadian Infantry Reinforcement Unit, was second in command of the S.Sask.R. at DIEPPE.
2. Major McRae crossed the Channel on H.M.S. "Princess Beatrice". He states that the whole of the S.Sask.R. landed in one wave. The order from right to left (i.e., from west to east) was "C" Coy, "B" Coy, Bn. H.Q., "D" Coy, "A" Coy and the Special Platoon. Major McRae believes that it is possible that the whole unit landed west of the river SCIE as suggested by Captain Carswell; but he thinks that "A" Coy and the Special Platoon may have moved to the left on the beach, crossing the river at its mouth below the dam, where it was shallow, and thereby avoiding crossing the bridge in the town.
3. Major McRae outlined the various company objectives as follows. "C" Coy was to move to the right (i.e. to the west and south of POURVILLE), its objectives being the M.T. shed and the machine-gun posts nearby, and another M.G. post on the edge of the cliff to the westward. Major McRae believes that "C" Coy took all these objectives with the probable exception of the position on the cliff edge.
4. "B" Coy was to clear the village of POURVILLE and deal with the wired position at 195668, some distance inland. "D" Coy was to capture the enemy position at LES 4 VENTS. "A" Coy was to capture the R.D.F. station, the searchlight position on the cliff edge to the west of it, the battery at 210678, and the Light A.A. guns at 212683. Major McRae states that certain detachments did get quite close to the R.D.F. station, but this was protected by very heavy wire obstacles and it was not possible to deliver any strong attack against it.
5. The Special Platoon had the task of capturing the strong point under the cliff at 193680, and with this in view the plan provided for them to land on the extreme left of the battalion. They were not in fact able to take this strong point and it was probably by fire from it that Lt.-Col. Gostling was killed when the Camerons subsequently landed. This position was however, Major McRae believes, cleared at a later stage, possibly by naval fire.
6. That the commanding positions overlooking POURVILLE from the east were not seized before the enemy was aroused may be due, Major McRae thinks, to the fact of the boats landing further to the west on the beach than had been intended. By the time "A" Coy and the Special Platoon had made their way along the beach to the vicinity of their objectives the enemy positions were manned and firing. Major McRae mentioned that the boats on the left of the unit were a little behind the rest as the S.Sask.R. approached the beach, and may have landed a minute or so later.

8. Major McRae believes that the road-block frequently referred to in S.Sask.R. accounts was near the curve of the road at 195680. Here Lieut. England, commanding the Special Platoon, was wounded.

9. Major McRae described the successive locations of Bn H.Q. as follows. The first was a garage at 195679, near the pill-box shown on the Intelligence map and about 100 yards from the beach. The second position was an open space at 195678, 100 yards or so to the south-east. Here a mortar bomb caused several casualties among personnel of Bn H.Q., one of the wounded being the R.S.M. Major McRae then moved the headquarters to a position just south of the buildings on the south side of the main road near the edge of the flooded land behind the village (i.e. at about 195678). The next position was in the town near the street intersection immediately south of the pill-box already referred to (194679). The final position, during the evacuation, was an empty hotel near the beach, probably the building shown on the Intelligence map immediately south-west of the same pill-box.

10. Major McRae states that communications with Brigade H.Q., while difficult, were adequate, and touch was never lost for a long period. As the Brigade 46 set was not working, all communications were carried on by means of 18 sets. Communications to the companies were fairly good. The C.O., Lt.-Col. Merritt, had an 18 set with him, but his signaller was frequently unable to keep up with him and the C.O., in consequence, was often out of touch with Bn H.Q.

11. Major McRae confirms that the S.Sask.R. never received any message fixing the time of withdrawal as 1000 hrs. The message first received gave the time as 1030 hrs, but this was immediately changed to 1100 hrs.

12. Major McRae has no knowledge of how the false report of the capture of the R.D.F. station originated. It was certainly not passed by Bn H.Q.

13. With reference to the operations on the high ground east of the village, Major McRae states that Sgt. K. Williams actually reached the edge of the 4 WATS position with one section, attacking straight uphill from the low ground of the SCIF valley. The section was forced out by converging fire but withdrew in safety.

14. Major McRae believes that Lieut. Stiles got fairly close to the R.D.F. station with part of his platoon. It was however hopeless to attempt any assault without plenty of Bangalore torpedoes to breach the wire.

15. With reference to the south-western sector, Major McRae states that "C" Coy withdrew from the high ground here, in the face of an attack by an enemy force of about one battalion, on orders sent by himself from Bn H.Q. over his 18 set. Major McRae arranged for Major Orme, commanding "C" Coy, to fall back to a defensive position on the edge of the village, and for Major Thompson of the Camerons to send what men he had to support him. Major Thompson sent about 30 men, who came under Major Orme's command. Major Orme and Major Thompson both arrived subsequently at Bn H.Q. and reported the situation stabilized. The enemy however had re-occupied the high ground south-west of the village, and was also on the cliff edge to the west, from which he was able to sweep the beach with fire.

15. During the re-embarkation, the craft chiefly came in near the rock appearing on the Intelligence map directly off the mouth of the SCIE. The men who had been sheltering under the sea-wall were directed to make their way eastward along the wall and then to go out to the rock which afforded some cover from fire coming from the west. In the early part of the evacuation the fire from the east was probably heaviest, but that from the west increased as time passed.

16. Major McRae explained that the operation plan provided that after DIEPPE had been occupied and the Camerons had passed through POURVILLE to undertake their own task, the S.Sask.F. were to withdraw from the latter village and establish the western sector of an outer perimeter covering DIEPPE, beginning at the cliff edge just east of the R.D.F. station and running along the high ground to the south-east. Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal were to establish an inner perimeter in DIEPPE and to cover the withdrawal of the remainder of the force. The general plan was to establish a perimeter covering DIEPPE itself, outside of which the Camerons and the tank battalion would carry on their special tasks.

(C.P. Stacey) Major,
Historical Officer,
Canadian Military Headquarters.

MEMORANDUM OF INTERVIEWS WITH MAJOR C.E. PAGE, C.A.G.,
AND OTHER PERSONNEL REPATRIATED FROM GERMANY,
AT TAPLOW HOSPITAL, BUCKS, 29 Oct 43.

Subject: The Operation at Dieppe, 19 Aug 42,
And Subsequent Treatment of Canadian Prisoners of War.

1. During the Dieppe operation, Major Page was in command of "B" Sqn, 14 Cdn Army Tk Bn. He was the senior officer of this unit to land in a tank, although it appears that the C.O., Lt.-Col. J.G. Andrews, may have reached the shore after his tank was "drowned".
2. Major Page's tank "Burns" landed from L.C.T.4, he believes "a few minutes late" but on the exact spot intended, directly in front of the Tobacco Factory, which was already ablaze at this time. His tank left the L.C.T. and moved across the beach, when Major Page found progress obstructed by a "tank trap" consisting of a trench dug along the front of the Esplanade wall. Major Page states that there was no doubt that this was intended as a tank obstacle, and that the mechanical digger used for excavating it was still on the beach. The tank swung to the right to avoid the trench, and was almost immediately stopped by a shell hit which broke one track and destroyed all the tank's communications. As he had now no means of keeping in touch with the rest of his squadron, Major Page ordered his crew to evacuate the tank. They did so, and lined the Esplanade wall with their automatic weapons.
3. At this time there were no infantrymen along the Esplanade wall at the point where Major Page found himself and it was his impression that the main body of the infantry had not yet landed. His party was subsequently joined by men of the Essex Scottish. Major Page's impression also was that his was the first tank to land; he looked up and down the beach through his periscopes after landing and saw no other tank.
4. The second tank on L.C.T.4 turned as it came off the craft, to avoid Major Page's tank, and got about ten yards past it, when it too was stopped by a hit on a track. The third tank did not get as far as either of the other two before it was stopped in the same manner.
5. Although Major Page confirms that some tanks were certainly knocked out on the central part of the beach, where the Esplanade wall was high, while moving laterally and searching for a way across the wall, he is quite certain that from 12 to 15 tanks crossed the wall in the end sectors where it was low. The majority of these tanks had returned to the beach by about 0900 hrs. The reason for this return was the fact that the tanks could get some cover there from the guns sited in the East Cliff, while moreover they could get "better shooting from there". This accounts for the large concentration of tanks on the beach north-east of the Casino, an area which seemed especially favourable.
6. Major Page states that the tanks which crossed the wall were from the troops commanded by Lieuts. Cornett, Patterson, Bennett, Breithaupt, and Dunlap, and Capt. Valentine.
7. Major Page does not know of any tanks having actually penetrated into the town, and does not believe that this took place.
8. With reference to the tank "Bert", which was stopped on the Esplanade, Major Page states that Lieut. Dunlap, to whose troop this tank belonged, brought his two remaining

tanks alongside it after it had been disabled, and successfully evacuated the crew, three men in one tank and two in the other.

9. Major Page states that 18 tanks had tracks broken by gunfire, and four had tracks broken by the shingle of the beach.

10. Not a single tank was pierced by enemy fire, and not a single man was wounded inside a tank. Lieut. Wallace's tank was struck on the turret by a shot which made the turret-wall bulge on the inside; it was believed that this might have been a shot from an 88-mm. gun. As a result of the performance of the Churchill tank at DIEPPE, Major Page states that every individual in the unit without exception was "absolutely sold on" this tank. He particularly emphasized the fact that not a single tank was set on fire, and remarked that such information as had reached him about the Sherman suggested that that tank was not so satisfactory in this respect.

11. Major Page described how the withdrawal order "filtered through" among the men in the trench in front of the Esplanade wall. He ordered the men with him to fall back, and was himself the last person to leave the trench. This was about 1200 hrs. Near the water's edge he saw Lieut. Drysdale and his crew leaving their tank. Subsequently Lieut. Drysdale and his gunner re-entered the tank in order to silence a gun in a cave in the West Cliff which was proving troublesome. Several shots were put into the embrasure of this gun's position, and it was temporarily silenced. Subsequently it resumed firing and "plastered" Mr. Drysdale's tank heavily. Major Page, while not certain, thought that this gun might possibly have been of 75-mm. calibre.

12. Major Page's position on the beach at this time was somewhat to the east of L.O.F.3, which was aground. No boats came in to evacuate personnel from the portion of the beach where he found himself, though he saw four come in further to the west.

13. Major Page states that not all the tanks were destroyed by their crews, although some were certainly smashed up at the time of evacuation by the sticky bombs provided for the purpose. The destruction of tanks in some cases was hindered by the fact that large parties of infantry were sheltering behind them.

14. After Major Page and the men with him had been captured, the R.A.F. laid "a lovely smoke screen" across the front of the town. This would have greatly facilitated evacuation had it been put down earlier.

15. Major Page says that the men of his unit actually "enjoyed" the operation, and were in good spirits after they were captured. Their main complaint was that the circumstances of the operation had prevented free action by the tanks.

16. The Germans had many casualties at DIEPPE. The hospitals in the area were full of German wounded. At VERNEUIL, one German said the total casualties were about one thousand.

17. The prisoners were told by the Germans that they had "four battalions" of machine gunners in the town, and had been awaiting our attack for four days.

18. With reference to the treatment of prisoners in Germany, Major Page remarked that DIEPPE prisoners remaining there are still shackled, but the shackling is now largely

"a farce", as the handcuffs are ordinarily worn only twice a day, on check parades. For a time in the beginning the prisoners were tied with ropes. Subsequently ordinary handcuffs were used, later still long chains with padlocks and finally handcuffs with long chains. The prisoners pick the locks of these without difficulty.

19. Major Page was confined in Oflag VII B, at EICHSTATT, near MUNICH. There had been many escapes from this camp, but none of them had been permanently successful. The most notable case was the temporary escape of 67 officers (including about eight Canadians) through a tunnel on the King's Birthday this year. Lt.-Col. C.G.I. Merritt, V.C., was one of this group. Major G. Rolfe, R.G.C.S., has made three escapes.

20. Although Major Page spoke of the DIEPPE prisoners being tied with ropes for a few days only, L.12192, Sgt. Jordan, D.H., 3 Sask R, whom I also interviewed, spoke of this phase as lasting several weeks, and remarked it was the worst period of their confinement. In general, he said, the treatment of prisoners was not brutal, and there was little if any "manhandling".

21. I also interviewed K.53670, Cpl. Carnie, T.L., 14 Cdn Army Tk Regt, who was in Lt.-Col. Andrews' tank "Regiment" at DIEPPE. Cpl. Carnie confirms that when this tank was "drowned" the entire crew succeeded in getting out of it in safety. He saw Lt.-Col. Andrews reaching the shore, the C.O. being about waist-deep in the water when he last saw him. The Sergeant from the same tank told Cpl. Carnie that he later saw Lt.-Col. Andrews' body washing back and forth in the waves at the edge of the beach; the C.O. had apparently been hit, and may have fallen before he reached the shore.

22. Cpl. Carnie states that it was common talk in the camp after the operation that some tanks had got into the town of DIEPPE. One was reported to have "cleaned out a pill box". Cpl. Carnie had heard that three tanks in all got in, but he had been sceptical of this report. Cpl. Carnie himself was wounded in the eye shortly after landing and is unable to offer any first-hand evidence.

23. Major Page feels that the presence of the tanks on the beach, and their continued fire, prevented the enemy from rushing the beach and perhaps capturing many more of our troops than was finally the case.

24. Major Page read this memorandum in draft on 1 Nov 43, and confirmed its accuracy.

(C.P. Stacey) Lt.-Col.,
Historical Officer,
Canadian Military Headquarters.

MEMORANDUM OF ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

PROVIDED BY MAJOR C.E. PAGE, C.A.C.,

AT CANADIAN MILITARY HEADQUARTERS, 6 NOVEMBER 43.

Subject : The Operation at DIEPPE, 19 Aug 42.

1. With respect to tanks landed from L.C.T.1, Major Page states that "COMPANY" crossed the Esplanade wall; "CALGARY" made "a couple of trips up and down the beach"; while "CHIEF" moved to a position near the Casino, and Major Glenn took over command of the portion of the unit ashore (Major Page's tank having been put out of action) and operated from his position there.

2. Of the tanks landed from L.C.T.4, "BACKER" was hit and lost a track just on the edge of the anti-tank ditch in front of the wall, in line with the Tobacco Factory. This tank then received another hit on the turret ring which put the turret out of action to the extent that it could engage targets from one position only. "BOLSTER" lost a track after going about 50 yards, but its guns were in action all morning.

3. Of the tanks landed from L.C.T.6, ("BOB", "BERT" and "BILL") all three crossed the sea wall close to the Casino. "BERT" was put out of action on the Promenade, but Lieut. Dunlap took "BOB" and "BILL" alongside of "BERT" and evacuated the crew, after which Lieut. Dunlap took up a position on the beach near the Casino.

4. On the basis of information gathered from officers at Oflag VII B, Major Page is sure that the following tanks crossed the Esplanade wall:

"BOB"	"BELLICOSE"
"BERT"	"COUGAR"
"BILL"	"CAT"
"BETTY"	"CHEETA"
"BLONDIE"	"CAUSTIC"
"BRENDA"	"COMPANY"
"BLUEBELL"	

In addition to these, "BEEFY" and "BLOODY" probably crossed the wall.

5. Lieut. Bennett, who, in Major Page's view, himself did an excellent job during the operation, wished to mention the fine work of two of his crew, Tprs. Cornelissen and Anderson. Tpr. Cornelissen was killed after the crew had been evacuated from Lieut. Bennett's tank, while assisting wounded men in the water. Tpr. Anderson distinguished himself in the same work, but was not killed.

6. Major Page states that Brigadier Southam was very active on the beach, exposing himself constantly in directing

and encouraging the men. He was slightly wounded in the leg.

7. Major Page read this memorandum in draft and confirmed its accuracy.

6 Nov 43

(C.P. Stacey) Lt.-Col.,
Historical Officer.

MEMORANDUM OF INTERVIEWS WITH

PERSONNEL OF ESSEX SCOTTISH REGIMENT

REPATRIATED FROM GERMANY,

AT CANADIAN MILITARY HEADQUARTERS, 4 NOVEMBER 43.

Subject: The Operation at DIEPPE, 19 Aug 42

1. A.21355, Pte. Fleming, J.T., Essex Scot, landed at DIEPPE with the first wave, at the east end of RED BEACH near the jetty. Pte. Fleming was a member of "C" Coy. He saw the attack delivered by cannon fighters against the German defences. He states that the first mortar bomb burst when his L.C.A. was perhaps 100 yards from shore. Machine-gun fire opened as soon as the troops landed.

2. Pte. Fleming reached the Esplanade wall and fired at a pillbox for three or four minutes, during which heavy mortar-fire was coming down. He saw no organized attack across the wall. Perhaps five minutes after landing Pte. Fleming crossed the wall with Cpl. Grondin. He thinks that about nine men rushed forward at this time, but seven were hit while crossing the Promenade.

3. Pte. Fleming got into one of the houses facing the Promenade without difficulty, as the front doors were open. He lost sight of Cpl. Grondin, but met Cpl. Stevenson and Pte. Hood. This party now operated against snipers in the front row of buildings and killed four or five with Bren and tommy-gun fire. They were unable for a time to find a way out to the rear of the buildings towards "C" Coy's objective.

4. Pte. Fleming and Pte. Hood, entering another house, met C.S.M. Stapleton and Pte. Richards and about two other men, and Cpl. Grondin now also joined the group. The whole party passed through the houses and found themselves in "a sort of courtyard". From there the party passed down a street which Pte. Fleming indicated on the map as being probably the RUE THEOPHILE GELEE. As they went they continued to fire on snipers in the buildings and disposed of several. Half-way down the street Pte. Richards was hit by a ricochet, and C.S.M. Stapleton ordered him back to the beach. The party pushed on down the street to "C" Coy's first objective, the houses on the QUAI DU HABLE overlooking the Harbour. Here a sniper on the cliffs across the Harbour wounded Pte. Fleming in the right arm, and he too was ordered back to the beach.

5. Pte. Fleming now returned up the street by which the party had advanced. En route he entered a building (one of the hotels near the beach) which appeared to be a German billet, and which contained what might have been a Company store of ammunition and grenades. He blew this up with a

grenade. While re-crossing the Promenade towards the beach, he was wounded again, this time in the left arm.

6. At a small A.A. post on the Promenade, about 25 yards from the edge of the beach, he met Pte. Richards. He stayed here for some hours, until the time of evacuation. At this time he saw an L.C.T. coming in, and went to the beach in the hope of getting aboard. The L.C.T., however, blew up and sank; Pte. Fleming states that there appeared to be an explosion in the centre of it. Pte. Fleming was again wounded, this time in the leg, and the Germans over-ran the beach some minutes later.

7. Asked his opinion as to why so few men of the Essex Scottish were withdrawn, Pte. Fleming said that he believed it was because so few boats were available.

8. Pte. Fleming has no knowledge of what happened to C.S.M. Stapleton and his party after he left them, but has been given to understand that they "did a good job".

9. A.21675, Cpl. Gilchrist, J.R., Essex Scot, landed with Rear B.H.Q. in the first wave. He saw no actual fire directed at the boats, but one shell passed overhead. His party landed near the jetty at the east end of RED BEACH, and remained on the beach at that point, with B.H.Q. in position just in front.

10. Cpl. Gilchrist was wounded about one hour after landing; he explains that an L.C.T. came in somewhat to the right of his position and caught fire. Cpl. Gilchrist was wounded by a ricochet from a shot that hit a tank which landed from this L.C.T. His impression is that the tanks landed half or three-quarters of an hour after the infantry.

11. Having been wounded in the face, Cpl. Gilchrist can give no further information about the action.

12. Cpl. Gilchrist lay on the beach until the evening of the day following the attack, without any medical attention other than a "shot of morphine" given him by one of our own stretcher bearers. He was finally picked up at dusk on 20 Aug. The probable reason for his not being picked up earlier is, he thinks, that he was unconscious most of the time and was believed to be dead. He remarked that when he came to he found his watch missing, but it was returned to him six months later. After he was finally picked up he received good medical attention from the Germans.

13. Cpl. Gilchrist remained in ROUEN Hospital until November 1942 and was subsequently confined in Stalag VIII B. He himself was never shackled, but states that the evidence of other men is that they were tied with ropes for about two months before handcuffs were used.

14. The enemy fire directed at the beach was, in Cpl. Gilchrist's opinion, mainly mortar bombs. He states also

that considerable damage was done by enemy guns on the east cliff; he believes that guns on this cliff, probably the battery shown on the Intelligence map at 235687, were responsible for much of the damage to tanks. He remarked also that considerable damage was done to our forces by a pillbox on the Esplanade wall which was subsequently cleared by a tank.

15. On the basis of talk which he heard in camp, Cpl. Gilchrist does not believe that any tanks penetrated into DIEPPE proper.

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Historical Officer,
Canadian Military Headquarters.

4 Nov 43