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Directorate of History  
National Defence Headquarters  
Ottawa, Canada  
K1A 0K2

July 1986

Reference : France and Belgium  
1:50,000, Sheet 49.

REPORT NO. 81

HISTORICAL OFFICER

CANADIAN MILITARY HEADQUARTERS

26 Aug 42

*Copied in Hist. Sec. Ottawa  
Aug '43*

Canadian Participation in Operation  
"ABERCROMBIE", 22 Apr 42.

1. This Report deals with the participation of a Canadian detachment in the combined operation known by the code name "ABERCROMBIE", a "small reconnaissance raid," which took place on the coast of Occupied France south of BOULOGNE on 22 Apr 42.
2. Although from the Canadian point of view this operation was decidedly unsatisfactory - since the Canadian party was not landed - and the operation as a whole, indeed, was not particularly successful, the episode will have an interest of its own for the Official Historian as being the first occasion on which Canadian troops actually participated in a raiding operation against German-occupied territory.
3. In previous Reports (see especially No. 70) the training of Canadian detachments, and more recently of formations, in Combined Operations has been mentioned. The programme sketched in Report No. 70 is still in operation, and has lately resulted in Canadian participation on a large scale in a very important operation, the raid on DIEPPE (19 Aug 42). This operation will be separately dealt with in a subsequent Report. The episode treated in the present Report was much less important, but it was the first such operation in which Canadian troops actually crossed the Channel. It could even be argued that the small detachment of the CARLETON AND YORK REGIMENT engaged in "ABERCROMBIE" was the first formed body of the Canadian Army Overseas to come under the fire of German land forces in this war.
4. It is scarcely necessary to point out that in present circumstances, with German forces in occupation of the European coast line from the North Cape to the Pyrenees, with enormous German and Russian Armies locked in conflict in Eastern Europe, and with a very large British and Allied Army in garrison in the British Isles, "Commando" operations (so-called) have acquired a special importance both in the public eye and in the mind of the Army. Such operations have been the only direct means by which units of the military force in this country have been able to come into contact with the enemy, and the only expedient by which they could directly contribute to easing the pressure upon their Russian allies.

PRELIMINARIES OF THE OPERATION

5. "ABERCROMBIE" was a minor operation, conceived with the objects of reconnoitering a stretch of the French coast, capturing a few prisoners, and doing such damage as circumstances permitted. Documents consulted at Combined Operations Headquarters indicate that the Chief of Combined Operations (Vice-Admiral Lord Louis MOUNTBATTEN) submitted the proposal for it to the Chiefs of Staff Committee on 31 Mar 42, and that the Committee approved. It was proposed to employ about 100

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all ranks of the Special Service Brigade (Commandos) and about 50 from Home Forces. Subsequently, it is evident, the Canadian forces were offered the opportunity of supplying the latter detachment; and it was decided that the unit favoured should be the CARLETON AND YORK REGIMENT of 3 Cdn Inf Bde. Lieut. (now Captain) J.P. ENSOR of this unit, the officer commanding the Canadian party which participated, told the writer that his impression was that when the operation was offered to 1 Cdn Div, it was allotted to a unit of 3 Cdn Inf Bde because whereas 1 Cdn Inf Bde had reached France in June 1940 (see Report No. 15) and units of 2 Cdn Inf Bde participated in the expedition to SPITSBERGEN (see Report No. 56), 3 Cdn Inf Bde had so far had no such opportunity.

Apr

6. On 3 Jul 42 Lieut. Ensor, having been selected to command the Canadian party, met Captain (temporary Major) Lord LOVAT (LOVAT SCOUTS) at the War Office, LONDON. Lord Lovat told Mr. Ensor that he was to participate in a raid (the details were not given at this time) and informed him how many men and what equipment would be required.

7. Lieut. Ensor proceeded to organize his detachment in accordance with these instructions. A total of eight officers (including a medical officer), one warrant officer and 60 other ranks were selected (nominal roll in War Diary of CARLETON AND YORK REGIMENT April 1942). On 8 Apr 42 Lieut. Ensor with this detachment met Major Lovat with a detachment of No. 4 Commando at PORTSMOUTH STATION. Thence the combined force moved by M.T. to HYTHE, on the west shore of SOUTHAMPTON WATER, whence they were embarked upon H.M.S. "PRINCE ALBERT", on which they lived while training during the next ten days.

8. The training, which was conducted in the SOLENT, is described in Lieut. Ensor's personal Report, 25 Apr 42 (file No. 8-3-3/Ops, Headquarters, First Canadian Army); see also Memorandum of interview with him, and statement of Lieut. A.D.C. SMITH, attached as Appendices to this Report.

9. Mr. Ensor's personal Report explains,

The practice landings were carried out from 2 A.L.C.'s, one which carried the Bridgehead party, and the other which carried two fighting patrols. We had also, one S.L.C. which supported our landings.

10. A.L.C. signifies "Assault Landing Craft". and S.L.C. (properly L.S.C.) "Light Support Craft". (Abbreviations, and a brief account of general organization, will be found in a pamphlet Combined Operations Organization - Reconstitution: The War Office, April 1942; Security B.565 (C.M.H.Q. file 3/COMB OPS/1).

11. The Bridgehead party consisted of 25 all ranks, armed with six Bren guns, five sub-machine guns, nine rifles, and fourteen .38 pistols. Officers carried rifles in addition to pistols. The two fighting patrols each consisted of one officer, one sergeant, and ten other ranks, armament comprising one Bren gun, five Tommy guns, five rifles (riflemen being equipped as bombers), and two pistols.

12. A very careful drill was carried out for crossing barbed wire obstacles and taking up a Bridgehead position.

After crossing the wire, the men were trained to go to their respective places in the Bridgehead without any word of command. These places were never changed, and the men got to know who was on their left and right without asking.



13. For security reasons, it was represented that there were objections to a senior officer visiting the detachment during training. On 18 Apr, Brigadier G.G. SIMONDS (B.G.S., 1 Cdn Corps) wrote to Major-General J.C. HAYDON, Vice-Chief of Combined Operations, stating that in these circumstances General CRERAR, commanding 1 Cdn Corps, felt "very strongly" that he should be kept informed of the detachment's activities "and in particular the place and time of its return". The letter continues:

He considers that having been unable to visit it during training; it is most important that some representative from Canadian Corps; even if only the C.O. of the Carlton and Yorks should meet Ensor.

(Copied from original in Brig. Simonds handwriting at Combined Operations Headquarters.)

In the event, the Officer Commanding CARLETON AND YORK REGIMENT (Lt.-Col. F.D. TWEEDIE) was called to DOVER to meet the returning detachment (information from unit War Diary).

14. On 18 Apr 42 the Canadian force moved by M.T. to DOVER, where, as noted in Appendix "A", they arrived by night and were locked up in DROP REDOUBT.

15. The Flag Officer commanding, DOVER, was in supreme command of the operation. On 19 Apr a conference was held with the Naval authorities, officers of the R.A.F. also being present, at which details were discussed. As noted in Appendix "A" (para. 7), very complete intelligence material had been assembled concerning the area to be attacked.

#### NATURE OF THE PROPOSED OPERATION

16. The objective of the operation was a section of the coast of France lying immediately south of BOULOGNE-SUR-MER, and including the village of HARDELOT, which lies roughly seven miles south of the entrance to BOULOGNE harbour (see map attached as Appendix "D"). The coast at this point runs almost exactly north and south, and the shore on either side of the village is comparatively low and accessible, though during the actual operation the sand dunes were found to be a fairly formidable obstacle.

17. Lord Lovat's Operation Order No. 1 for "ABERCROMBIE", which is attached to his Report on the operation (file 8-3-3/Ops), runs in part as follows :-

#### INTENTION.

3. To effect a landing on the French Coast under cover of darkness, reconnoitre Military Defences and beaches North and South of HARDELOT, attack and destroy Searchlight Post and return with prisoners and all available information.

18. The proposed method was to land "B" and "C" Troops of No. 4 Commando on "Red Beach" in the area 650450, north of HARDELOT, from four A.L.Cs. Simultaneously the detachment of the CARLETON AND YORK REGIMENT would land from two A.L.Cs. on "White Beach" in the area 650428, south of HARDELOT.

19. The following passage relating to the Canadian detachment is quoted further from Lord Lovat's Operation Order No. 1:

#### 15. Plan I for White Beach.

The Canadian Force will land at the discretion of Lieut. Ensor in area south of HARDELOT and after establishing a Beach Head will send out Fighting Patrols to investigate local defences and



capture prisoners. It is suggested that the secondary road into sand dunes (6641) from NEUFCHATEL (6941) offers the possibility for an ambush. There are two large warehouse buildings in the Southern outskirts of the village one of which appears in Air Photographs to be of strategic importance to the enemy defences. Both Warehouses will be investigated and if they contain enemy stores or personnel they will be set on fire.

A Detailed Plan and Operation Order - is required in writing from O.C. Carleton & York Detachment who is given a clear hand subject to time table and Signals arrangements which are identical on both Beaches.

O.C. White Beach will leave attack on HARDELOT village until Zero + 60'; Approaches and the general lay-out will be carefully investigated during this period and suitable plans made for ambushing enemy reinforcements brought up for fire fighting.

20. No copy of the Operation Order prepared by Lieut. Ensor has been seen by the writer; but a summary of it as given by himself will be found in para. 9 of Appendix "A". It will be noted that while Lieut. Ensor himself remained in the Bridgehead, his two fighting patrols were to move out to left and right, and the left one, commanded by Lieut. W.Y. SMITH, was to investigate and if necessary attack the large warehouses on the southern edge of the village.

#### FIRST ATTEMPT AT CARRYING OUT THE OPERATION

21. It should be noted that the number of nights in any one month on which an operation of this type can be carried out is severely limited by considerations of moon and tide. The Flag Officer Commanding, DOVER (Commodore R.L.B. CUNLIFFE) in his Report on "ABERCROMBIE" addressed to the Secretary of the Admiralty (11 May 42 : Copy at Combined Operations Headquarters) makes the following remarks:

3. The number of nights on which the operation could be carried out given suitable weather was restricted to three owing to the conditions required in respect of tide, moon and hours of darkness, and the first of these was ruled out, though weather was in fact favourable, by the late arrival of the craft at Dover....

22. On the night of 19/20 Apr it was considered that weather conditions were sufficiently favourable to justify attempting the operation. The attempt, however, proved abortive. "A South-westerly wind of force 3 ... during the early part of the night reduced the speed of the force so that it had to turn back, although not before one A.L.C. had been swamped and sunk..." (Commodore Cunliffe's Report). This accident caused the loss of two naval ratings by drowning.

23. On the succeeding night (20/21 Apr) weather conditions were such as to render the operation impossible. The three nights considered suitable for it had now passed. Nevertheless, it was decided to make an attempt on the following night (21/22 Apr), "provided that cloud conditions were such as to obscure the waxing and later-setting moon" (Commodore Cunliffe's Report). This evidently proved to be the case, and in addition the sea was "flat calm". The operation was accordingly carried out. The conditions are thus described in Commodore Cunliffe's Report:



6. In view of the experience gained on the 19th/20th it was .... decided not to allow for a towing speed of more than 9 knots. This meant leaving harbour at the same time as for the first night of the period, that is some two hours before dark, a condition of the outline plan prepared by the Chief of Combined Operations, which had to be accepted despite the risk of observance by enemy air reconnaissance. Adjustment was made to carry the troops of the Northern landing party in three instead of four A.L.Cs. and the landing was timed to take place between 0130 and 0200.

#### THE OPERATION : THE CHANNEL CROSSING

24. The Senior Naval Officer of the escort for the raiding force was Lt.-Commr. T.N. CARTWRIGHT, R.N.V.R., Senior Officer 14th M.G.B. Flotilla. The Senior Naval Officer with the South Beach (Canadian) party, until the day of the operation, had been Lieut. - QUICK, R.N.V.R., whom Lieut. Ensor had found a very efficient colleague; but on the morning of 21 Apr this officer fell ill and was replaced by the next senior, the officer commanding L.S.C.2, Lieut. G.B. EYRE, R.N.V.R. This last-moment substitution may have had an adverse influence upon the course of the operation. Lieut. Quick's place in his own boat, A.L.C.3, "was taken by Sub-Lieut. JEFFREY, R.N.V.R." (Report of Lieut. P.R. MACKINNON, R.N.V.R., Flotilla Officer, 8th A.L.C. Flotilla, 22 Apr 42: copy at Combined Operations Headquarters).

25. For the Channel crossing, the military force was embarked in motor gunboats which towed the A.L.Cs. Lt.-Commr. Cartwright Report to Commodore Commanding, DOVER, 23 Apr 42 (copy at Combined Operations Headquarters), states that the force cleared the entrance to DOVER harbour at 1956 hrs on 21 Apr. The passage across the Channel was uneventful and at 0100 hours the flotilla was two and a half miles off HARDELOT (Lord Lovat's Report; Lt. W.Y. Smith's personal Report, 25 Apr 42, in file 8-3-3/Ops, states, "we figured that we were at this time, between one and two miles off the coast of France"; and Captain Ensor believes that the distance may possibly have been a little less than two and a half miles). Here the troops were transferred without difficulty from the M.G.Bs. to the A.L.Cs. (Newspaper correspondents accompanying the force, including Mr. D. AMARON of the Canadian Press, remained on the M.G.Bs.) "The Flotilla sub-divided and proceeded as requisite for a landing which was scheduled for 0130 hours...." (Lord Lovat's Report).

26. Lt.-Commr. Cartwright's Report states, "At 0112 South Beach landing party had disembarked and moved off from M.G.B. 316 and at 0114 the North Beach party had done similarly...." These times are presumably more reliable than Lieut. W.Y. Smith's less categorical statement, "we entered our A.L.C's at approximately 0130 hrs, 22 April".

#### OPERATIONS OF LORD LOVAT'S PARTY

27. The experiences of the Commando party on "Red Beach" north of HARDELOT will be very briefly dealt with. Lord Lovat's Report indicates that this party disembarked without opposition at 0140 hours, crossed wire defences on the forward slope of the dunes with some little difficulty, and established a Bridgehead with perimeter defence. Apparently, however, the party had been put ashore some considerable distance to the north of the intended point of landing, and in the vicinity of the unnamed stream which flows into the Channel in square 6447.



28. While the perimeter defence was being taken up, firing opened from the direction of HARDELOT, much tracer being visible; and Lord Lovat, surmising that the Canadian party might have been opposed in landing, broke wireless silence and through his own L.S.C. made an enquiry to the L.S.C. with the Canadians. (These L.S.Cs. were equipped with No.18 wireless sets.) An immediate reply was received to the effect that the Canadian party had not yet landed, "and that the tracer was coming from M.G.Bs. in naval action with enemy forces" (Lord Lovat's Report).

29. Two fighting patrols were sent out to right and left, and a third patrol was directed against the searchlight post about half a mile inland. This patrol is stated by Lord Lovat to have been engaged from its left flank (perhaps from the high ground north of the stream?) throughout its advance. It reached the wire defences about the searchlight post, and had apparently cut its way through them, when the recall rocket was fired from the Bridgehead and the party was obliged to return without completing its task. It evidently suffered no casualties by enemy action. (Lord Lovat's Report; and see para. 14 of Appendix "A".)

30. Although there was considerable firing, there was no close contact with the enemy. It is believed that there had been enemy parties near the point of landing, but that they decamped without seeking contact with the Commando detachments. One small enemy patrol was encountered on or near the beach during the operation, but it escaped owing to a premature challenge by a sentry.

31. It appears that the only casualty suffered by Lord Lovat's party was one man shot through both ankles. This injury resulted from his failure to answer a challenge promptly enough, and was inflicted by British bullets (Statement by Lieut. A.D.C. SMITH, Appendix "C").

32. Lord Lovat's Report states that reembarkation of his party was completed at Zero plus 120 minutes. As Zero was the time at which the first man got ashore, this would be about 0340 hours. His flotilla of three A.L.Cs. and one L.S.C. reached DUNGENESS about 0830 hours, was subsequently "picked up by the shadowing force which had cruised all night in mid-Channel", and moved back to DOVER. Only when his party landed in England did Lord Lovat learn that the Canadian party had never got ashore.

33. Lord Lovat's party clearly acted with boldness and determination, and it was their misfortune that their operations were not more valuable in their results. They materially increased our knowledge of this section of the French coast; but the Germans' decided unwillingness to encounter the raiders prevented the capture of prisoners, and lack of time prevented the destruction of the searchlight post.

34. The Times of 8 Jul 42 announced that The King had "approved the following awards in recognition of gallant and distinguished services in the successful combined operations on the enemy-occupied coast in the Boulogne area":

M.C. - Capt. (T/Maj.) Lord Lovat, Lovat Scouts;  
Capt. G.G.H. Webb, R.A.  
D.S.C. - T/Sub-Lt. D.T. Kent, R.N.V.R.

Capt. WEBB commanded the patrol that moved against the searchlight post; Sub-Lt. KENT's name has not been noticed in the documents relating to "ABERCROMBIE", and this award doubtless has reference to another operation.



# EXPERIENCES OF THE CANADIAN PARTY

35. The Canadian party, as noted above (para. 9), was divided between two A.L.Cs., and was accompanied by an L.S.C. (L.S.C. 2) in which was the Senior Naval Officer with the party (Lieut. Eyre), accompanied by a military officer (Lieut. L.B. GROOM, CARLETON AND YORK REGIMENT) whose function was to direct the fire of the L.S.C. on to proper targets. An "R-boat" (R.154) was also attached to this group but was assigned to sounding duties and did not keep close company. In A.L.C. 3 was Lieut. Ensor with the Bridgehead party, including Lieut. E.H. SNELL, its commander; in A.L.C. 5 were the two patrols, Lieut. W.Y. Smith being the senior military officer.

36. In the beginning considerable time was lost in assembling the little flotilla, as L.S.C. 2 had been towed by a different M.G.B. and could not immediately locate the other craft (Lieut. Snell's personal Report, 25 Apr 42, file 8-3-3/Ops). Captain Ensor (see Appendix "B") considers that in all "about 15 minutes" may have been wasted in this manner. Finally all the craft of the party were assembled and set out for the shore. The reports of the Canadian officers, however, indicate that the naval officers in charge of the vessels had difficulty in setting and keeping a course.

37. Lieut. GROOM's personal Report, 25 Apr 42 (file 8-3-3/Ops), runs in part as follows:

The equipment of the S.L.C. is very poor. The compass on it always pointed South East regardless of the course and consequently the officer in charge was forced to use an army compass....On the second attempt, when we left the M.G.B., we were given a bearing South 69 degrees East. We lost some time at the start because the officer could not see the numbers on the ring of the compass to set it. This I did for him and we set out. I started checking with my compass from the stern of the boat and found that we were generally quite a few degrees out. The magnetic attraction of these boats makes a compass act very peculiar.

38. To make matters much worse, the craft after a time became separated. Mr. Groom's Report continues:

Soon after leaving the M.G.B., we heard gun-fire and very shortly after our stern seemed to be alight with tracers. At this point, the officer stopped the boat and tried to get the A.L.C. carrying the Bridgehead to pull along side and decide on a place to land. All the boats started going in a circle and it was then that we lost our other A.L.C.

The A.L.C. which became separated from the other craft was that carrying Lieut. Ensor and the Bridgehead party. A.L.C.5 and the L.S.C. succeeded in maintaining contact.

39. On discovering that they were separated from the force commander, the two craft remaining in company began to search for his A.L.C. This search was unsuccessful. The party, in fact, was finally reunited only on returning to DOVER.

40. Lieut. Ensor's craft similarly carried on a search for the other two vessels. Its experience is described in Lieut. Snell's Report as follows:



...We cruised about for some time searching for them but failed to locate them. Our motors were shut off while considering whether or not to make an independent landing. During this time, a rocket, which was to have been the signal to return to port, was fired from the Commando beach. Our craft then returned to port.

5. Had both parties decided to go ashore independently, it would probably have resulted in one party shooting up the other.

41. The experience of the two craft which remained together is graphically described in the Report of Lieut. W.Y. Smith, which should accordingly be quoted at some length:

...With the flotilla complete, there seemed to be some doubt in the minds of Naval personnel as to just where the beach lay, and at 0215 hrs, I was under the impression that we were moving about in an ever widening circle, going in no general direction.

At 0225 hours, there suddenly opened up a terrific amount of M.G. fire along with what seemed to be artillery fire from a direction about one mile to our South.

I saw a rocket go up which looked to me to be the re-call rocket. On endeavouring to locate our force commander, Lieut. Ensor, I found that his craft was no longer with us. We then proceeded to search for A.L.C. 3. During this period, I saw a second rocket go up which I definitely identified as the re-call rocket. The Flotilla Leader also agreed that it was the proper rocket. We decided that we would wait a while longer, hoping that the A.L.C. would turn up. During this time, the Germans were sending up a great many flares which illuminated the beaches, and were machine-gunning at random in our general direction. Searchlights were also quite active on the beach. By the light of the flares, I was able to discern that the portion of the coast which we were opposite, consisted of quite high chalk cliffs, and I estimated that we were about four miles north of our proper objective.

At one period, we were drifting close to the beach, and fouled one propeller on the bottom. This left us with one engine with which to return to England. The Naval Officer in charge of my A.L.C. said that he did not like to go ashore with one propeller. At approximately 0350 hours, deciding that as one-half hour had elapsed since the rocket had gone up and as we found by wireless that the Commandos had also left their beach, we decided that the other A.L.C. would not turn up, and we set course for England.

Returning, we were trailed for a short period by a German E-boat but he was unable to locate us in the mist and darkness. At one period, we were in the focus of two German Searchlights but for some reason, the Germans did not fire on us.

42. It is clear that, during the period when the Canadian party was offshore, there was fairly heavy enemy machine-gun fire, and some though not all of those present believed that German field artillery was also in action.



43. Although Major Lovat's Report makes no reference to the firing of the rocket which was the signal of recall (emergency rocket signals are referred to, though not in detail, in Lord Lovat's Operation Order No. 1, paras. 13-14; this one was presumably the "Emergency Recall for Plan I", though some references suggest that it was that for the adoption of Plan III, providing for withdrawal and return to port in case of heavy (opposition), the statement by his Adjutant, Lieut. A.DC. Smith (Appendix "C"), leaves no doubt that it was actually fired as reported by the Canadian officers. The craft which had remained together clearly did not leave the coast until the fact that the Commando detachment had withdrawn was confirmed by wireless. "We hung around the coast quite close to shore and did not start for home until we heard over the 18 set that the Commandos were homeward bound" (Lieut. Groom's Report). On the basis of Lieut. Snell's Report (above, para. 40) it seems likely that the single A.L.C. withdrew from the area somewhat before the two craft still in company.

44. It will be observed, on the basis of Lt. W.Y Smith's Report (above, para. 41), that there is little doubt that the Canadian craft were brought to a position some miles north of the intended point of landing. The high ground referred to by Mr. Smith is presumably that in the area NOCQUET-EQUIHEN-EGCAULT. The fact that Captain Ensor did not see this high ground suggests that his A.L.C. was actually separated from the other craft by a very considerable distance during the period when the two portions of the party were mutually searching for each other.

45. The German fire was evidently blind, and there were no Canadian casualties. Officers of both Canadian parties mention having seen enemy "E" boats (motor torpedo boats), but it seems probable that none of these vessels sighted the Canadian craft, and that no enemy fire was actually aimed at the latter.

#### THE RETURN TO PORT

46. The naval force which had escorted the expedition across the Channel, and which had anchored at the dispersal point, came into contact with German light craft of 0200 hrs, and, cutting anchor lines, engaged them (Report of Lt.-Commdr. Cartwright). During the action which followed, our forces inflicted heavy damage on German vessels, probably sinking one, and themselves lost three men killed. The action carried the British M.G.Bs. out of the HARDELOT area (it was obviously desirable to draw the German vessels away from the vicinity of our landing craft) and there was no further contact between these M.G.Bs. and Major Lovat's or Lieut. Ensor's forces. The three craft carrying the Canadian party drew off from the French coast under their own power, and after covering a considerable distance encountered other British naval vessels off DUNGENESS in the early morning. As noted in para. 15 of Appendix "A", Lieut. Ensor's own A.L.C., after being towed for a time by an M.G.B., entered DOVER harbour under its own power about 1000 hrs on 22 Apr. The other two craft, having similarly encountered British motor gunboats (Lieut. Groom's Report) were towed into DOVER not long afterwards. Lieut. Eyre's Report states that L.S.C.2 reached DOVER at 1115 hrs. During the final period of the operation, after daylight, the R.A.F. provided fighter cover over the Straits, and there were no attacks by enemy aircraft.

#### RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE CANADIAN PARTY'S FAILURE TO LAND

47. It is important to note the explanation of the White Beach party's failure to land as given by Lieut. Eyre in his Report to Flotilla Officer, 8th A.L.C. Flotilla, dated 22 Apr 42 (Copy at Combined Operations Headquarters). The relevant portions of this report run as follows:



Southern section of Flotilla comprising L.S.C. 2, A.L.C. 3 and 5 and R. 154, broke tow with M.G.B's, formed up and proceeded in to beach at 0130 hrs. on a course S. 65 E. (Mag.)

At 0200 hrs. section was off beach, but owing to heavy gunfire going on to seawards, between M.G.B's and enemy forces, the O.C. Canadian Unit decided not to land until the issue of the action made itself manifest.

During this waiting period section cruised up and down beach from which desultory L.M.G. fire was coming and from which three searchlights were active. After 20 minutes it was noticed from L.S.C. 2 that A.L.C. 3 and R. 154 had become detached from section and from that time onwards they were not located although a thorough search was made in the area....

48. This attribution of the failure to land at once to a decision of Lieut. Ensor is not supported by any other document seen. It is at variance with the reports of the Canadian officers, including that of Lieut. Groom, who was with Lieut. Eyre in the L.S.C. (paras. 37 and 38, above). No reference is made by Mr. Eyre to any difficulties with compasses. It is not clear how Mr. Eyre could have obtained the views of Mr. Ensor (who was in A.L.C. 3) except perhaps at the moment when, as described by Mr. Groom, Mr. Eyre "tried to get the A.L.C. carrying the Bridgehead to pull along side and decide on a place to land", immediately after which A.L.C. 3 became separated from the rest of the flotilla.

49. This conflict in evidence is authoritatively dealt with in an Appendix to the Report on the operation sent by Flag Officer Commanding, DOVER, to the Admiralty (para. 21, above) :

Lieutenant Eyre, Senior Naval Officer of Southern Landing Force reports that owing to the engagement to seaward the Officer Commanding Canadian Unit decided not to land until the issue of the action made itself manifest.

The reports of Lieutenant Ensor, Officer Commanding and his officers do not entirely bear out this statement although they mention enemy action soon after leaving the dispersal point and in one report there is mention of an endeavour to get alongside the craft carrying the Bridgehead party and "decide on a place to land".

2. At this stage the enemy action being to seaward the decision was a Naval one vide paragraph 35 of the Operation Orders and there is no reason to suppose that a landing could not have been effected had the craft proceeded without delay to the shore.

3. The Commanding Officer of R.154, however, states that he met L.S.C. 2 off the Southern Beach reporting a faulty compass and asking direction although the beach could be seen from R.154. Military reports are confirmatory and that there should have been any trouble with compasses is a matter for serious concern. It is a point to which attention has been drawn on previous occasions when similar operations have been carried out in this Command.



4. A.L.C. 3 lost touch en route to the beach, Station keeping should have been so close that this could not have occurred and the visibility was not particularly low.

5. The Military reports suggest that the beach off which the Southern Party arrived was some distance from that intended. There is, however, no evidence that there was any appreciable error in the position from which landing craft were despatched although the craft may well have lost position in the strong tide during the hour in which they manoeuvred indeterminately.

6. It is observed in connection with the previous paragraphs that Lieutenant Eyre had to take the position of Senior Officer in place of Lieutenant Quick who unfortunately was placed on the sick list on the morning of the operation.....

50. The evidence of the officer commanding R.154 (Sub-Lieut. L.K. SCOTT, R.N.V.R.), which as noted by the Commodore affords naval confirmation of the military reports, should be quoted. After describing a white light, possibly that of a torch, noticed on the beach, Sub-Lieut. Scott continues (Report (to Lt.-Commr. Cartwright?), 22 Apr 42 : Copy at Combined Operations Headquarters):

Immediately after, I came up to one S.L.C. and one A.L.C. who had stopped, the former reporting that their compass was faulty, and that she did not know in which direction the beach lay, and asked if I could lie alongside and lead them in.

Lieutenant Berncastle (R.N.; Hydrographic Officer in R.154) replied that he could see the beach, and that if they steered anywhere near S. 80° E., they could not miss it. He also asked where the other A.L.C. was and they replied that she had parted company. Later on, this A.L.C. in question was thought to have been seen by the light of star shells which commenced about this time to the Northward.

51. One additional naval opinion may be noted. It is expressed in a minute written at Combined Operations Headquarters by the Rear Admiral in Charge of Landing Craft and Bases, in connection with the reports of Canadian military officers on the operation : "I see no excuse except incompetence for the L.S.C. missing the beach." (15 May 42.)

52. In consequence of the unsatisfactory result of the operation, the G.O.C.-in-C., First Cdn Army, requested a special report on the matter from Brigadier (now Major-General) H.N. GANONG, commanding 3 Cdn Inf Bde. Brigadier Ganong talked with Lieut. Ensor, several of his officers and two other ranks of the party, and reported on 23 Apr 42 (file 8-3-3/Ops),

All of the personnel interviewed were unanimous that failure of raid was due entirely to inefficiency of naval personnel, and particularly their weakness in navigation.

53. In the light of all the evidence, and in particular the opinions of senior naval officers quoted above, there seems little doubt that the failure of the Canadian party to carry out its share of the operation as planned was no fault of its own. The explanation of the miscarriage must be sought to some extent, perhaps, in the inefficiency of the compasses



with which the small naval craft were equipped, and still more, it would seem, in the inexperience of the junior officers of the R.N.V.R. who were in charge of these craft and responsible for navigating them. It would appear that in these circumstances the party had from the beginning comparatively little chance of actually being put ashore at the point specified in the orders for the operation; timing as indicated in paras. 26, 27, 36 and 41, above, seems to suggest that the craft were lost for some time before they became separated; and once they were separated it was out of the question to carry out the orders. The two parties, it is true, might have landed separately and at random, but they could not possibly have performed the tasks originally assigned to them.

#### GENERAL

54. The result of the operation was a bitter disappointment to the Canadian officers and men concerned, and may be said to have been one more of a series of similar disappointments suffered by units of the Canadian Army Overseas in the present war. There seems no doubt that the morale of the Canadian detachment involved in "ABERCROMBIE" was very high (see the comment of Captain Ensor on the spirit of his men, Appendix "A", para. 18); and with better fortune the detachment should have given a good account of itself.

55. In this connection, the comments of Lord Lovat have some interest. On 27 Apr 42, Major Lovat wrote from BEAUFORT CASTLE, BEAULY, a personal letter to General McNAUGHTON which runs in part as follows (file 8-3-3/Ops):

Dear General

Just a line to say how very sorry I was that the very fine detachment of Canadians from the Carlton and York Regiment who trained with me for the Commando raid on Boulogne were unable to get ashore and take part in the action; I am afraid that a junior naval officer let them down with a faulty compass; certainly it was no fault of their own and a keener and finer lot of men I have yet to see. I hope I may be allowed to go tiger shooting with them again some time. Please ask for me if I can be of any assistance in training or in any other way.

I am sending you a copy of my official report. The raid incidentally was nothing like the kind of show that the press cracked it up to be! ....

56. Lord Lovat expressed himself in similar terms in his official Report:

In conclusion I should like to say how very much the troops under my command sympathised with the Canadian party who were unable to effect a landing. The detachment of the Carleton and York Canadians showed tremendous enthusiasm in their training and I am sure would have more than distinguished themselves if they had been given the opportunity.

57. The Canadian officers themselves have recorded un-animously the urgent desire of themselves and their men to be given another opportunity of action. For example, Lieut. Snell's Report contains the following remarks:

6. Although the men were disappointed in not making a landing they enjoyed the whole show very



much, and remained calm throughout. Even though the failure was beyond our control, we cannot feel satisfied until we are given another opportunity.

Similarly the concluding section of Lieut. W.Y. Smith's Report may be quoted:

In conclusion, I would like to say that it is the one wish and desire of the whole party that we be given another opportunity to raid the French Coast, and be given a chance, properly ashore, to show our mettle against the Germans, whom we consider incredibly poor shots.

#### PARTICIPATION OF CANADIAN MILITARY FORCES IN RAIDING OPERATIONS

58. It is convenient in this Report to make reference to the general question of the participation of Canadian detachments in combined operations. The Canadian military authorities have naturally welcomed opportunities for Canadian detachments to see action and gain experience in such operations; but the responsibility of choosing troops (apart from Commando units) for such operations rests upon G.H.Q. Home Forces, which presumably has many other claims to consider. This matter was discussed on 19 Apr 42 in a meeting at Combined Operations Headquarters attended by Major-General Haydon, Brigadier Simonds, and Lt.-Col. G.P. HENDERSON. Brigadier Simonds inquired whether it would be possible to make any operational use of the detachment of 2 Cdn Div which was about to return from a training cruise (see Report No.70); and General Haydon replied that "at the moment they had no suitable objectives". He then explained the general situation:

He said that he was perfectly prepared to use a wholly Cdn raiding party but that the selection of personnel rested with G.H.Q. Home Forces, and that he could not specify the tps to take part. He suggested that the best method of approach was direct to GHQ Home Forces, stating that a Cdn det was ready and trained and asking for them to be given priority on the next suitable party. If GHQ Home Forces agreed he (Maj Gen Haydon) would be in a posn to ask for them.  
(Notes of meeting by Lt.-Col. Henderson,  
file 8-3-3/Ops, H.Q. First Cdn Army).

#### SOURCES OF INFORMATION

59. It will be noted that in the present Report the writer has followed the same procedure as in previous Reports on similar topics; that is to say, he has attached as Appendices copies of those documents only which are unlikely to be available from Canadian sources. In the course of the narrative, however, he has incorporated extensive quotations from the most relevant documents from such sources, with a view to ensuring that, even in the event of the loss or destruction of such a collection of material as file 8-3-3/Ops at Headquarters, First Canadian Army, the Canadian Official Historian would still have before him the most essential items of original evidence.

60. The writer discovered in the course of investigating this subject that there are almost no references to "ABER-CROMBIE" in the War Diaries of the formations and units concerned. The Diary of the CARLETON AND YORK REGIMENT refers to the matter only indirectly, and throws no light on the experiences of the unit's party which was involved. This Report accordingly has been built up from the file at Army



Headquarters just referred to, and from documents kindly made available by the office of the Combined Operations Recorder (with whom the Historical Section, C.M.H.Q., is now in official contact); supplemented by a personal interview of the writer with Capt. J.P. Ensor, of which a memorandum is attached as Appendix "A".

61. The unwillingness of formations and units to include in their Diaries material relating to this operation was probably the result of an exaggerated regard for security. The importance of security is impressed with special emphasis upon all concerned in the conduct of Combined Operations; and in the present instance the fact that no reference to Canadian participation was permitted in the press may have influenced the writers of War Diaries. Nevertheless, continuance of this practice would clearly defeat the purposes for which War Diaries are kept. A draft Canadian Army Overseas Routine Order designed to impress upon Commanding Officers the fact that War Diaries are themselves SECRET, and the desirability of making a full record of past operations in them, has been prepared at C.M.H.Q. and submitted to Headquarters, First Canadian Army, for consideration.

62. The official communique on the operation will be found in The Times (LONDON), 23 Apr 42.

(Sgd.) C.P. Stacey.

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

#### Appendices.

- "A" Memorandum of Interview with Capt. J.P. Ensor, 22 Jul 42.
- "B" Personal Account given by Lieut. J.P. Ensor to Combined Operations Recorder.
- "C" Personal Account given by Lieut. A.D.C. Smith to Combined Operations Recorder.
- "D" Map of HARDELOT area (1:50,000).

#### Distribution.

- Copies 1-2 N.D.H.Q.
- 3 H.Q. First Cdn Army (P.A. to G.O.C.-in-C.)
- 4-7 C.O.H.Q. (C.O.R.)
- 8-9 C.M.H.Q.
- 10 Spare.



S E C R E T

MEMORANDUM OF INTERVIEW WITH CAPTAIN J.P. ENSOR,  
CARLETON AND YORK REGIMENT,  
Canadian Military Headquarters,  
22 Jul 42

.....

Subject : Operation "ABERCROMBIE", 22 Apr 42, and accompanying circumstances.

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1. Captain ENSOR called on the writer by request, with a view to clearing up certain points concerning "ABERCROMBIE" not fully dealt with in the documents.
2. Captain Ensor explained that on Friday, 3 Apr 42 (date from memory, assisted by consulting calendar) he met Major Lord LOVAT at the War Office, LONDON, and was told that he was going "on a raid" (locality not mentioned). The number of men and the type of equipment required was specified.
3. Captain Ensor believes that when this operation was offered to 1 Cdn Div, a unit of 3 Cdn Inf Bde was selected for it because 1 Cdn Inf Bde had been to France in June 1940, and troops of 2 Cdn Inf Bde had participated in the expedition to SPITZBERGEN.
4. On Tuesday, 7 Apr 42, Captain Ensor received his final instructions from Lord Lovat by telephone. In accordance with these, he and his detachment met Lord Lovat and his Commando party at PORTSMOUTH Station the following day, 8 Apr 42. Thence the combined force moved by M.T. to HYTHE, on the west shore of SOUTHAMPTON WATER, whence they were embarked upon H.M.S. "Prince Albert", on which they lived during the training period that followed.
5. This training was as realistic as it could be made, landings being carried out precisely as they would be in face of the enemy. Landings were made in the vicinities of NEEDS OAR POINT, STONE POINT and CALSHOT CASTLE on the NEW FOREST side of the SOLENT, and also on the ISLE OF WIGHT.
6. On Saturday, 18 Apr 42, the force moved to DOVER by M.T., arriving about midnight. Here they were quartered in DROP REDOUBT, an old (and dirty) moated work on the WESTERN HEIGHTS. The whole force, including Captain (then Lieutenant) Ensor himself, was locked up here and not permitted to go out. There was, however, one possible loophole in the system of security, as there was an Observer Corps post on the roof of the Redoubt, and its personnel were allowed to come and go. It was reported that people in DOVER were heard talking about Canadians having arrived to take part in a raid; and Captain Ensor believes that this was the only possible source of the information.
7. On Sunday, 19 Apr, there was a conference with the Naval authorities (the R.A.F. also being represented) at Naval Headquarters, DOVER, at which the details of the operation were discussed for the benefit of all concerned. Captain Ensor mentioned that a very fine large-scale model of the area to be



raided had been prepared, and that in general very complete Intelligence material - including both air photographs, and photographs of the village taken before the war - was provided. Both Lord Lovat and Captain Ensor attended this conference.

8. Before embarking for the operation, the CARLETON AND YORK detachment removed from their battle-dress blouses not only their 1 Cdn Div patches and their regimental flashes, but also their "CANADA" badges - which, Captain Ensor said, his men were very unwilling to "take down".

9. Captain Ensor said that he had turned in one copy of his own Operation Order for his unit's War Diary. This, however, was not placed upon the War Diary. He will try to trace it. In the meantime, he summarized it briefly to the following effect:

(a) While he himself remained in the bridgehead near the beach with a small reserve, Lieut. CROOK was to take a patrol out to the RIGHT (i.e., SOUTH) with a view to establishing a "flank block" and ambushing any enemy party approaching the shore by the secondary road from NEUFCHATEL. At Zero plus 60' he would attack and clear a wired enemy position which had been located near the shore on this flank.

(b) Simultaneously Lieut. SMITH with the other patrol would operate on the other flank. He would move inland to a small wood (not shown on map) near HARDELOT, reconnoitring the dunes (for passage by A.F.Vs., etc.) en route. He would after reconnaissance plan an attack on a large warehouse on the outskirts of the village near the shore, air photographs showed a pillbox on the roof of this building. He was also to investigate another warehouse near the station. This attack was to be made at Zero plus 60'. His party was equipped with 12 incendiary bombs and 100 incendiary bullets for firing the buildings. After delivering his attack, he was to ambush any enemy parties arriving to fight the fires, and to retire to the bridgehead by way of the shore, shooting up any opposition encountered.

10. Captain Ensor confirms that the actual strength of the CARLETON AND YORK detachment engaged in the operation was 50 all ranks. This included eight officers (Lieuts. ENSOR, FARTHING (with bridgehead), SNELL (commanding bridgehead), SMITH (No. 1 Patrol), CROOK (No. 2 Patrol), THORNTON (Beach-master), and GROOM (in L.S.C. with Navy; not to land), and Capt. Ian S. MacLEAN, R.C.A.M.C. (Medical Officer). The remainder of his party (which as detailed in nominal roll in unit War Diary amounted to seven officers - M.O. not shown - one W.O.1, and 60 other ranks) was left behind in DROP REDOUBT. Three of the men detailed to remain behind fell in with the raiding party with full equipment, but were detected and sent back; there was simply no room for more than the prescribed number.

11. As described in documents, the first attempt at carrying out the operation (night 19/20 Apr) was abandoned after an A.L.C. sank in tow. The operation itself was carried out on the night of 21/22 Apr, the sea being calm but visibility reduced by mist. The naval officer who had worked with Captain Ensor during training was not present for the operation, and those naval officers who were present with the Canadian party were junior and inexperienced officers of the R.N.V.R.



To this, and to the inefficiency of the compasses with which the light craft were equipped, Captain Ensor attributed the blame for the craft carrying the Canadian party being brought to the wrong part of the coast and becoming separated. In consequence of these misfortunes, none of the Canadians got ashore.

12. Captain Ensor stated that the raiding party was accompanied by, in all, four motor gunboats. Of these only one was with his own party. The transfer into A.L.Cs. took place possibly 2½ miles from the French coast, possibly a little less.

13. The naval forces suffered some casualties in personnel during their action with enemy craft. The only military casualty was a Commando soldier wounded as the result of not answering a British challenge.

14. Captain Gordon WEBB, commanding the Commando patrol charged with the duty of destroying the seachlight post, told Captain Ensor that his party had cut through the wire surrounding this post at the time when the recall rocket was fired. He also said that as a result of the action of the sand on automatic weapons, at this time the only weapon in his patrol able to fire was an automatic pistol.

15. On the return voyage to England, Captain Ensor said, no further contact was made with the M.G.Bs. which had taken the party across the Channel, but it was picked up by British vessels of a similar but somewhat larger type on patrol in the Straits. Captain Ensor's own craft, after being in tow for a short time, was cast off and entered DOVER harbour about 1000 hrs on 22 Apr under its own power. The other two Canadian craft were towed in together between 1000 and 1030 hrs.

16. Captain Ensor stated that relations between his detachment and the men of the Commando detachment were excellent, and he got on very well with Lord Lovat, who, he thinks, well deserved the M.C. which he has since received. Relations with the Naval personnel were also satisfactory during training, but the operation itself, in the circumstances, left the Canadians feeling that the Navy were responsible for their disappointment.

17. Captain Ensor made the remark that his men would welcome the opportunity to participate in an "all-Canadian" operation, involving Canadian Naval as well as military forces.

18. He spoke with satisfaction of the morale of his men during the operation, mentioning in particular that when firing began he instructed his Bren gunners to mount their guns on the gunwale of the A.L.C., and that thereupon every man in the craft immediately rose up, forsaking cover, in the hope of exchanging shots with the enemy. An enemy E-boat did come close enough to be fired upon, but Captain Ensor did not allow his men to open fire for fear of disclosing their position. He believes their craft was not seen.

19. Captain Ensor himself did not hear or see artillery firing from the shore during the operation, though some witnesses believe that enemy field guns were in action.

C.P.S.

(C.P.Stacey) Major,  
Historical Officer.

22 Jul 42.



MOST SECRET

(Exact copy of memorandum of interview of Lieut. Ensor with Mr. Saunders, Combined Operations Recorder.)

OPERATION "ABERCROMBIE"

Personal Account of Lieutenant J.P. Ensor - Carleton & York Regt.

8 Officers and 44 other ranks took part in the expedition. We started out on Tuesday night, 24th April, all of us being on board one M.G.B. with two A.L.C.'s in tow. We were to land on the South or White beach. I was in command of the party. There was no incident of any kind until we got to point X. We were all in very high spirits.

We were transhipped from the M.G.B. to the A.L.C. We were then about 2 miles off shore. Another M.G.B. was towing an S.L.C. and we lost a lot of time trying to find it. We had to use a megaphone. In all I suppose we wasted about 15 minutes. This was partly due to bad visibility because the S.L.C. was being towed behind another M.G.B. and this was hard to find in the darkness. On reaching Point X, it had stopped its engines and we therefore had drifted. Those in the S.L.C. were responsible for the direction and navigation of the A.L.C.s. On board the S.L.C. was a Naval Officer, a Military Officer whose duty it was to advise us if fire support should be given, and a number of signallers.

When the party moved towards shore, one A.L.C. was to Port the other to Starboard. I was in the Port A.L.C. with Headquarters and the beach head party. The Starboard A.L.C. contained my two patrols. My intention was to land on White beach, make a reconnaissance of the defences, capture some prisoners and destroy a warehouse S.W. of HARDELOT. We had noticed from the photographs that a pill-box was on the roof and we therefore knew that the enemy was in occupation of the warehouse.

When the three Assault craft, the two A.L.C.s and the S.L.C., got under way, the S.L.C. was moving on a bearing of I think S69E. As far as I could make out they were using a prismatic oil compass. So were we. We couldn't see the figures on the dial and the Military Officer started checking them and found we were a few degrees out. I do not think that the boat compass on the A.L.C.s were working properly. Not long after getting under way fire was opened about 0210 hrs. I noticed tracers coming from the sea behind us a mile or so away. At that moment my A.L.C. became separated from the other A.L.C. and from the S.L.C. The boats then began to travel in a circle. Fire opened from the shore I should judge a single machine gun and then three searchlights were turned on. They were not strong and I don't think they picked us up although their beams struck us.

We worked from N. to S. in a One A.L.C. to Port and one to Starboard and the S.L.C. ahead. I ordered the Bren gunners to mount their guns on the gun-whales. There were two mountings in the bow. By then we were alone. All the men stood up although unprotected because they were eager to have a crack at the huns.



After we had been going for a short time an 'E' boat I think it was passed close to our stern about 150 yards away. It was firing tracer but not at us. The Naval Officer with me, Sub. Lt. Jeffrey I think his name was, (The Sub. Lt. on board the other A.L.C. was named Sub. Lt. Sharp) had not practiced the operation with me when we had been training for it. In training I had been working with Lt. Quick.

I began a consultation with Sub. Lt. Jeffrey. By now as I have said we were alone and though I had my beach head party with me I had lost touch with the A.L.C. containing my two patrols. We agreed that we must first find the other A.L.C. and then make a landing. By that time I am sure we were not going towards the right beach. We were by then 3/400 yds. from the shore. We tried to find the other A.L.C. and cruised about but presently we began to get worried about the amount of petrol we had on board. We had, of course, to keep enough to take us back to England. Then we saw a rocket fired from on shore, the lights being Green over Red. It was right ahead of us and it was the signal that the operation was washed out. Immediately on seeing the rocket we turned about and set craft for England sailing on a bearing of 280°. Once again we had trouble with the prismatic oil compass. The Naval Officer took a bearing but could not see the figures on the dials very clearly. I used my own compass. We sent straight for England because we didn't want to use any more petrol looking for the M.G.B.s. I kept checking the bearing from time to time. At daylight we mounted the Bren guns as a protection against aircraft. Nothing was seen however and we were eventually picked up about 7 miles off Dungeness at approximately 0645 hrs.

I consider the failure to effect a landing was due to faulty equipment. When we got near the coast of France we were in fact off the North beach instead of off the South. Men from the other A.L.C. and S.L.C. which got separated from us saw cliffs in the light of the searchlights and Verrey lights. They evidently thought they were north of the unnamed river marked on the map. This was true but they were outside the boundary set for the operation.

I should like to emphasise that the spirit of the men was very high and that they are all longing for another chance.



MOST SECRET

(Exact copy of memorandum of interview of Lieut. Smith with Mr. Saunders, Combined Operations Recorder.)

ABERCROMBIE

Lt. A.D.C. Smith, Adjutant to Major Lord Lovat, commanding Operation.

Lieutenant A.D.C. Smith.

"We left Troon on 7th April, and reached Portsmouth at 12.0. noon, the party consisting of 100 men from the Commandos, and a small Canadian force from the Carleton and York Regiments.

The Commandos carried out a number of training exercises for the next few days, these being a rehearsal for the operation. They were conducted mostly from H.M.S. "Prince Albert." Everyone remained on board this vessel until about 18 hours in the evening, and during 10 days of rehearsal only 2 full nights' sleep were obtained.

The scheme was for the assault landing craft to act as flotilla, being towed until over the beaches by M.L.s. The first exercise was to make a landing on the Beaulieu River Bank. It was not very successful, for the M.T.B. towing A.L.C. ran aground.

The next exercise, on the following night, was more satisfactory, and a landing was about to be effected, and indeed had been partially carried out, on the beach opposite NETLEY HOSPITAL, when it was discovered that this part of the beach was kept very secret, and that the Commandos had had no business to practice on it. We were accordingly withdrawn in a hurry.

The next day we landed in the daylight at Cowes and carried out a series of exercises, the object being to cut still further the time it took to transfer from M.T.B. or M.G.B. to A.L.C. The practices were designed to teach how to establish a beach head perimeter, and thus to have a base from which to send out patrols.

A day or two later another landing was attempted at the Mouth of the Beaulieu. On this occasion the troops got ashore, but discovered that Beaulieu Spit was a bog, into which they sank up to their thighs. Much bad language was used.

In all these practices, not all of which were by any means successful, the object was to carry out as far as possible the movements which would be required during the operation.

Another exercise of the same kind was brought to naught by one of the M.G.Bs running aground.

During these days of practice it was usual to finish at about 3 a.m., and then to go to bed, breakfast being about 9.0. By the time these exercises had been in progress for about a week the Commandos were getting somewhat 'browned off' because they did not know why they were being kept there or what they were supposed to do, since no inkling of the proposed operation had yet reached them.

On the 18th April the Commandos left Southampton in a transport ship, reaching Dover that night at about 2300 hours. They were housed in Drop Redout - a filthy place - for it did not appear to have been cleaned for a long while. It was, however, ideal for the purpose of concealing the Commandos, for



no one could get in or out except across the moat, and the only persons to do so were those supplied with special passes. In this redout the Commandos waited for orders. It was for the Vice-Admiral at Dover to decide just when the operation was to take place. The Commando Troops occupied their time priming grenades and collecting escaping gear. Everyone was in crack-ing good form.

At 1900 hrs the Commandos were taken in lorries to the submarine base at Dover Harbour, and embarked in some M.G.Bs. These numbered 4. There were 6 Assault Landing Craft and 2 S.L.C. The leader of the destroyer flotilla towed 2 D.L.Cs, one commanded by Lt. Cdr. M.G.B. The embarkation was completed about 1600 hrs BST, the troops being put on board 2 S.L.Cs (Support landing Craft) and 6 A.L.Cs (Assault Landing Craft). One of the two last A.L.Cs had a particularly brave leader, Mr. Mackinnon, R.N.V.R., who went into the battle in the company of Lord Lovat. There were 50 men in each M.G.B., and they reached the outer defences about 1930 hrs.

Before leaving Dover a regular Regatta took place, and there was no attempt at security. They embarked in the far part of Dover harbour, in full view of the town, and then frolicked about for hours.

About 2030 hrs the flotilla sailed, in broad daylight. The sea was really choppy, and the A.L.C. with Lt. Smith on board shipped a certain amount of water. The flotilla headed towards Dungeness, but at 2300 hours, when it was dark, the commanders noticed that the ships were constantly stopping because one A.L.C. frequently buried her whole nose in the water. Eventually one of the A.L.Cs went right under - perhaps because it got into the wash of the A.L.C. being towed in front of it. As Lt. Smith expressed it "It took a bite at a wave, and then went down and became full of water." Very soon the run ways were level with the sea. When this happened a cry went up "We are sinking". This A.L.C. was directly behind the M.G.B. towing it. The second A.L.C., astern of the first, and attached to it by a tow, at once slipped its tow and came up alongside the sinking A.L.C. By this time 4 naval ratings and 2 soldiers had climbed onto the engine house in the stern. In the confusion 2 naval ratings jumped overboard and were not seen again. The whole convoy stopped and there was a good deal of shouting. Lights had to be turned on. At this time the convoy was about 15 miles from the French coast. The A.L.C. remained afloat for about an hour. The convoy circled during this time, trying to find the 2 men, who had gone overboard, but without success. The decision was then made to return to port, and the flotilla made Dover again about 0300 hours. Everyone was feeling very 'browned off', and did not welcome Drop Redout, to which they repaired.

On Monday morning, 20th April, the Commando troops were informed that the decision whether or not the operation would take place that night, would be made known at 1500 hours. When that time came the operation was cancelled, but the period of the attack was extended by one day. Eventually, on Tuesday 21st, after a conference at Dover Castle, it was decided to carry on whatever the weather. Everyone was very keen, and the same procedure as on the first occasion was followed, without the ostentatious, regatta-like manoeuvres in the outer harbour. It was a perfect night, calm, but dark, for the moon was only a day or two old. There was a very slight mist over the water. The Commando was due to land on the French coast at 0130 hrs. This time everything at first went without a hitch. At 0115 hrs the A.L.Cs came alongside the M.G.Bs, and the troops embarked on board them. Since, however, one A.L.C. had been sunk during the first attempt, the troops were very crowded.



The operation was a reconnaissance, the object being to find out the possibilities of landing on this particular stretch of coast. There was very little accurate information available. The plan was for the Commando troops to land on Red beach, to the North, while the Canadian troops landed on White beach to the South.

The A.L.C.s proceeded towards the shore running aboard the leading boat. Lt. Smith was with Major Lord Lovat in the support landing craft.

In point of fact direction was lost almost at once and the Commando troops landed about a mile too far North of Red beach - some 300 yards from an unnamed stream. As we neared the land we could see high ground, and we knew, therefore, that we were too far North and veered South, eventually landing, as I have said, about a mile from the position aimed at. The Canadians, who were supposed to go to White Beach tried to land still further North, and were therefore several miles from where they should have been. These mistakes were due either to a defect in the compasses, or to miscalculations. The Canadians were fired on, and did not eventually land. The Commandos landed at 0152 hrs, slightly late on schedule. The landing was carried out very quietly. The men were wearing gym shoes with very little equipment to hamper them. A great many were carrying Tommy guns, and carried 8 magazines with them. The first man of the S.L.C. to land was Major Lord Lovat, who tested the depth of the water. He was out of his depth, and therefore hung on to the edge of the landing craft till he could walk. He then told the rest in a normal voice to get out. By this time the other troops had disembarked. We all got very wet. Major Lord Lovat was a very tall man and could walk in places where it was still out of the depth of the others. The signallers carried their wireless sets on their heads like African porters. Some of us when we got out found ourselves waist deep, and then thigh deep, and then shoulder deep, for the bottom of the sea was undulating. There was no sign of the enemy. We advanced in a very dignified way to the bottom of the dunes, crossing a fore shore about 200 yards wide.

The Commandos had been divided into 4 groups. 3 of them were to form a beach head, with H.Q. in the middle, and 4 group was to take a patrol towards the high ground. Half an hour after landing some of 3 group were to send out a patrol to the South, and some of 1 group to the North. On landing, however, things went wrong. 4 group went out on its patrol intact, but the other 3 groups, instead of forming one beach head formed 3 all in line. This was probably due to the fact that the groups had been somewhat mixed up in embarkation, due to the loss of one of the A.L.C.s. The mistake, I consider, was almost unavoidable, for it was impossible to reform in the darkness, and it was therefore particularly difficult for the leader of Group 2 to collect his men, so as to form part of one beach head. H.Q. found themselves behind 1 group - it was in fact group number 1 and was on the extreme south of the party.

During all the landing and forming up on the beach no shots were fired. A few Verrey lights went up and the Boche seemed suspicious. Then, however, fire broke out behind us to the South West, out to sea. We saw tracer bullets and Verrey lights. They seemed quite close, and we got the impression that the Germans had discovered the Canadians and were opening fire upon them as they attempted to land on White beach. In actual fact what was happening was that the Navy had encountered the German Flak ship. There were a few casualties, I understand, in one of the M.G.Bs. This affair out to sea led to a certain amount of confusion.



The plan was:

- A. If the landing were unopposed then troops were to stay on shore for a maximum period of 2 hours.
- B. If the landing were opposed, but not heavily, then troops were to spend 30 minutes ashore.
- C. If the landing were heavily opposed then no attempt at landing was to be made.

It was understood that in the absence of orders to the contrary A. was to be put into operation. The signal to put B. into operation was to be the firing of a special rocket showing a red light over green. These signals could be sent up either from Red beach or White beach, and it was understood that both beaches were to follow the same plan, whatever was happening on their own immediate fronts. We on Red beach thought the naval battle was a signal to put plan B into operation, and were therefore in a difficulty because our patrol, consisting of number 4 group, was already out, and had been absent some 20 minutes. It consisted of about 25 men. It, therefore appears to me that at one time half the force thought plan A. to be in operation, the other half plan B. We definitely adopted plan B, and eventually got through on the wireless, but not direct to the Canadians. We were told that the battle was a naval one, that the Canadians were not involved. There was therefore no reason to adopt plan B.

The naval battle died down in about 10 minutes, and we were left wondering whether the ships which had brought us there, and which were to take us off, had been sunk. At that moment a small German patrol of about 7 men came along the fore-shore from the direction of Hardelot. When they were about 30 yards away we both saw and heard them. Either they challenged us or we them, I am not sure which, I heard some one say "Let 'em have it", and fire was opened, lasting for about 3 minutes. The Huns all flocked to the ground in a bunch. I thought we made a mistake in remaining on the fore-shore and not going right up into the dunes. The Huns then ran, and I do not think any of them were hit. They never came back, and as far as I know there were no casualties on either side.

All this happened about half an hour after landing - i.e. about 0220 hrs. There was then a complete lull, and there was no talking except for the issue of necessary orders. Presently a searchlight pointed from the high ground to our left. It shone on one of our A.L.C.s but no fire was opened by the enemy. Our A.L.C. fired at it with a Bren gun.

We then received a wireless message from the flotilla leader saying that he was in rather a hot spot and asking to take us off before the pre-arranged hour. It was then about 0250 hrs. We replied that he could come in 10 minutes - i.e. at 0300 hrs. He was, however somewhat late, and at 0310 hrs we fired a rocket - red over green -, and the troops on either side came in towards us so that we eventually formed a single beach head. They were ordered to re-embark immediately, for it was decided to use them as cover in order to strengthen the perimeter, for there was still no sign of our patrol.

A little later we began to re-embark, wading in the sea up to our arm pits. The patrol, having seen the rocket returned in about 20 minutes, and re-embarked among the last to go aboard. I formed the impression that the Germans were very very thin on the ground. We all re-embarked, however, with one casualty, a man who was shot through both ankles through failing to answer a challenge, another who also failed to do so was lucky, because the Tommy gun pointed at him did not go



of, as it was clogged with sand.

On the return journey the plan was to go helter skelter to Dungeness under our own power. It was slightly muddled. Everyone was wet through, but we jogged gaily towards England. Only one of the A.L.C.s could get both her engines going.

It grew light about 0630. Then many aircraft appeared, and we were picked up by an M.L. about 0930. We got aboard the M.L., and we were all by that time wet and cold and were given tea, but the Captain of the M.L. said he would have to tow us to Dover. While we were making arrangements to do so an M.G.B. turned up. It took us on board and towed the A.L.C.s on to Dover, where we arrived about 1230.

Vice Admiral commanding at Dover came out to meet us in his barge. I gave him a preliminary report and we then all went back to the redout.

The story of the carpet slippers was that they were ordinary bedroom slippers, kept on the feet by strong elastic bands. Ennis, who wore them did so because he had no gym shoes.



REPORT NO. 81 APPENDIX "D" - Map of FRANCE AND BELGIUM