



# DIEPPE



**B O B   B O W M A N**

## AN EYE-WITNESS ACCOUNT

*Bob Bowman of the CBC Overseas Staff was one of the correspondents permitted to accompany Allied Forces on the Combined Operations raid on the Occupied French port of Dieppe on August 19, 1942. Although Bowman's transport did not reach shore, his vivid eye-witness account of Canadians in action is a definite contribution to the records of Dieppe. Here is the text of Bob Bowman's talk as broadcast on the CBC National Network at 5.00 p.m. EDT, August 20. This talk was also rebroadcast at 8.05 p.m. EDT to the National Network, the same day.*

# DIEPPE



**I** AM broadcasting now about the Dieppe raid. At a time when details are just becoming available, I would like to say this to you in Canada. We have suffered heavy losses and I saw our men die—but never have I seen men die more bravely or fight with such great heart as our Canadian troops. The word Dieppe may rank with Vimy Ridge in our history and our hats are off to the Royal Canadian Engineers, and the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps, and the South Saskatchewan Regiment, and the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Winnipeg, and the Royal Regiment from Toronto, and the Essex Scottish from Windsor, and the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry, and the Fusiliers de Montreal.

A lot of these men will never return to Canada, and more will not return until after the war if the German announcement of 1,500 prisoners is correct. And added to the above are the officers and men of the Calgary Tanks whose story

is one of the greatest that can be told about our Canadian part in this action.

This was a combined operation, and I have spoken about the Army playing an equal part with our troops, with the Air Force, the Marines, the Commandos and the Navy. I am trying to find out now what percentage of the Air Force was Canadian because I feel sure it was a great percentage. At least nine aircraft fell to Canadian guns and many more were damaged. What a marvellous job they did in the face of intense fire from accurate and powerful German shore and ack-ack batteries.

### **OUR LOSSES WERE NOT IN VAIN ←←**

Our losses have not been sustained without reason. We have learned a most valuable lesson which may enable us to free the continent of Europe and end the war. We know now how the German system of coastal defences operates and how best to attack. We know the tremendous weight of artillery the enemy can bring to bear on the beaches. That was the purpose of the raid as set out officially and told to us before we set sail—to destroy defences and kill Germans and to obtain information. We did all these things—things which the Germans have never been able to do to us. We moved large forces across the Channel unnoticed by the enemy. We landed men on all six beaches and we landed tanks in our new tank-carrying vessels, on one of which I was a passenger. Costly as it has been to Canada the raid was definitely a success. Without this experience a second front would have been suicide.

Now let me start from the beginning. The plan, of course, was a closely-guarded secret and the men weren't briefed

until they were on board the ships. Although I did not travel with the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry I was present when their Colonel—a fine figure of a man, from London, Ontario—came on board and told them: "Men, we are going into action. We are going to do what we came over to do—get a crack at Jerry." And then he told them the nature of the operation and what was expected of each man. There were no heroics, no delighted yells of whoopee. The men were quiet and asked questions. It struck me that the questions were those that a general might ask when being told of an operation for the first time. What were the coast defences likely to be? What aircraft protection would they get? I liked the spirit.

### **THE PADRE'S PRAYER** ←←

We set sail in craft of all types under the cover of darkness. I was with the Calgary Tanks in one of the new tank-carrying craft. It was a lovely night and reminded me of home. Hardly had we set sail when our Padre collected all the men together in the bow of the ship standing in front of a new type of tank they were using, and he read from the sixth chapter of Ephesians with the aid of a flashlight.

"... Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness."

In a few words he told us that in a few hours we would be striking our first blow to bring a sign of deliverance to the people of Europe, and the reason for this service was because we would need God's help.

The men were quiet as we sailed out into the darkness under the lovely stars. I could read my watch in the light of the half moon, and soon we said goodbye to the shores of Britain. I had a chat with the officer commanding our particular troop of tanks, and he told me about the hard work that had been put in for weeks to get them ready for this action. He was confident in them and in his men to whom he said the credit must go.

And now I am just going to quote from the notes I took as we went along—some written in the darkness, and some written under heavy gun-fire so they are now smeared and dirty from the cordite. All the time I kept wishing I had a microphone in my hand, so taking notes in this way was my only substitute. On the way over I went to sleep for a while and then I went up on the open bridge with the young Captain, a sub-Lieutenant in the R.N.V.R. And now from my notes just as they were written.

### **OUR LADS ARE CALM <<**

"AA tracers, like red sparks, and there is a heavy red glow extending down the coast. Our bombers are at work . . . more heavy flashes of coastal guns and bombs. Our aircraft are flying in close to the water and over us, and now dawn is breaking, also like a heavy barrage to the east. There are puffs of smoke in the sky, evidently from heavy German ack-ack batteries, and the ships are weaving in. Our lads are calm and the tank men wearing black berets and sitting comfortably anywhere, are watching the action. The sky

is becoming full of aircraft and the bombardment is becoming intense. Heavy thuds are shaking us even this far out to sea.

The Captain is calmly steering us 'Port 10 . . . Midships.' One bright fire is burning on the port horizon. Our medical men have put on their steel helmets and the guns are quieter. Perhaps the Commandos have landed and are fixing them. The destroyers are holding their fire and are slinking along beside us. The ships are spread out behind us in long lines with gun crews mounted, each flying a black flag and a white ensign. There are fighter-patrols like flocks of geese high up and the bombers are scurrying home in the low haze over the water. The fighters look like swallows but in geese formation.

It is now 5.50 in the morning. Fast troop-carrying ships are starting to pass us now. And there is a French Chasseur carrying French Commandos. The coast has suddenly loomed up in front of us with its white hills and its cliffs, and it looks like a race to see who will get into action first. The sky is streaked with 'flying fools' and so is the ocean. The destroyers are laying a smoke screen to windward and now they are turning broadside and are plastering the town with their guns. The smoke screen is lifting and I can see ships everywhere. The small troop-carrying landing craft are moving in lines under the artillery barrage. A Spitfire has just crashed off our starboard bow, and into the sea like a stone. We could see the pilot trying to get out but he couldn't.

The troops are heading for the beaches on either side of the town—the Royal Regiment to the left and the South Saskatchewan and the Queen's Own Camerons to the right. The Hamiltons and the Essex Scottish are going into the centre and we are following. Two Messerschmitts have just tried to attack us, and a ship behind us has just shot one of them into the sea.

Our tank troop captain has come up to the bridge to warn the captain, and it is only a few minutes until our zero time. He wants to get going, so we hoist our signal now meaning we're shore-bound, and in we go.

### **THE ATTACK IS ON <<<**

It is now 6.45. Planes are everywhere overhead, and the shore guns are firing at us and at the small troop-carrying craft ahead of us. I can see casualties—men are in the water. Our tanks are warming up and they are starting to climb the ramp which will go down like a drawbridge when we reach the beach. Machine-gun bullets are whining around us, but our guns are cracking too at the aircraft over us. A tank-landing craft is getting its tanks off behind the troops storming the beach, and heavy bombs have just dropped astern us. It is a heavy Junkers and he is trying to stagger into shore. He is full of lead from our guns. The tank-landing craft ahead of us got her tanks ashore but she is sinking now, trying to get out, and we are being stopped by orders from going in, with destroyers laying a smoke screen around us.

There is a heavy German gun-fire from a tobacco factory. I can see it sweeping the beach. Another Messerschmitt is down. The 'ack-ack' fire is wonderful and a heavy bomber has just been driven off. He was trying to sneak in our right; but a destroyer's guns got that Jerry. Our tank men are disappointed, but now comes an order to try and come in again and they are delighted. The German shore batteries are still active. They are firing at us. Four Focke-Wulf bombers have just dived on us and two of them disappeared in flames. Our barrage is unbelievable and I am covered in black soot. Shells are falling on all sides of us, but we cannot get into the beach, and we are ordered again to retire.



## FLAMES OVER DIEPPE <<

Three pilots are coming down by parachute. Another tank-landing craft has managed to get in but has been hit. Some casualties have just been brought out to our ship and the *Padré* of the Fusiliers de Montreal told me about trying to get on shore. Men were killed all around him and one lieutenant had a bullet in his arm while he was trying to push the *Padré* down.

It is now 9.25. The Germans on the cliffs are even throwing hand grenades on our ships below. Nine Heinkel bombers just passed overhead and I saw their bombs leave the aircraft; but I was too interested to watch the gun firing or where the bombs landed. They were aimed at the destroyers ahead of us, but they missed them. We were heavily attacked again and the convoy guns have just brought down two more Junkers. There was just a sort of flash of flame and the bombers came down like leaves in the wind. And now dive bombers are attacking us. One of them has just been shot into the sea.

Strong reinforcements of our fighters are arriving and they are flying low around us to protect us from the dive-bombers. We can't get in to the beach. We have tried again but bombs and gun-fire are driving us out. I have just been knocked down by a heavy bomb, in fact a stick of four bombs, a very near miss to starboard. Some of our men are wounded. One of them is dead. Our fighters are wonderful, and they are fearless and they are trying to protect our men on the beaches who are being re-embarked.

Our aircraft are suffering heavily, and I have seen several of them come down in flames over Dieppe. The wounded are being brought off, but we hear that we have landed on every beach. Evidently the engineers have suffered heavily,

and were unable to blast a way for the tanks for about an hour. The tanks formed a square on the beach and they are protecting our men while being re-embarked. The colonel of our tanks has attacked a machine-gun post on foot. The South Saskatchewan got in safely, but the Queen's Own Camerons following them have been hit by six-inch Howitzers, and there are casualties.

### **THE ORDER TO WITHDRAW** ←←

I am listening to our tank short-wave equipment and I know they are fighting like fools on shore. I can hear one of our tank captains saying 'Come on over, boys, we are killing lots of Heinrichs.' We are ordered to manoeuvre out of the harbour. It is afternoon now, but the destroyers are remaining behind just a few hundred yards off the shore, and they are sending in small boats to get out our men who can get away. They are wonderful. We have been here eight hours now, and small craft are streaming out under bombs and gun-fire."

Well, those are just quotations from my notes as I wrote them down. I wish I could continue but my time's up. I wish I could tell you of the journey home and of the hundreds of stories I know about personal acts of bravery.

I wish I could tell you now how we feel as we wait for final news; but I am going to broadcast later tonight, with several other war correspondents, who will be with me, and we may be able to give you the full picture then between us.

It seems reasonably certain that our losses were as heavy as they were at Hong Kong. I hope you in Canada despite those losses will feel very proud that our men have been able to play at last the part they have wanted to play. I do know

they have fought well and that everything—things that seem to have exceeded the limits of human courage and endurance—has been done to protect our troops during the fight and to get them off after it was over. Those of us who managed to get back, even wounded, feel very lucky indeed. It has been a bitter, hard fight.



Issued by Wartime Information Board, Ottawa.

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4125211

Issued by Wartime Information Board, Ottawa.

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