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The German View of the Dieppe Raid

August 1942

David Ian Hall

Just before dawn on the morning of 19 August 1942, a force of some 6,000 soldiers and marines – mainly Canadians but also slightly more than a 1,000 British Commandos, 50 US Rangers, and some Fighting French troops – supported by 250 small naval craft and over 65 squadrons of RAF fighters and light bombers attacked the French fishing port and casino town of Dieppe on the Normandy coast. Their aim was to take and hold the German occupied port for a day and then conduct an orderly withdrawal. The amphibious assault was planned and conducted by Admiral Lord Mountbatten's Combined Operations Headquarters, and it was described as the largest raid ever attempted in history. It was also the most costly in losses suffered. The Canadians lost 68 percent of their assault forces and the British Commandos suffered 257 casualties whilst the RAF lost 106 aircraft (the most lost in action on a single day during the war) and the Royal Navy lost one destroyer and 33 landing craft of various types. The overall casualty rate exceeded 40 per cent, the highest in the war for any major offensive involving the three services.¹ The appalling nature of the debacle led immediately to searching questions and high level investigations in London and Ottawa to determine what went wrong, why the raid was such a costly failure,

Abstract: The ill-fated Dieppe Raid was a bitter and costly defeat for Canadian and Allied forces. Seventy years on the raid continues to command both academic and popular interest. Contemporary commentators and some historians have argued that the raid provided many useful lessons for the successful Normandy landings in June 1944. Very little, however, has been written about the German view of the raid. What did Hitler, the Wehrmacht, and the German people think of the raid and its outcome? How was it portrayed in the Nazi controlled media, and what impact did it have on German strategic thinking in the summer and autumn of 1942? Drawing extensively on contemporary German sources, this article demonstrates that the German view of the Dieppe raid differed greatly from the more familiar Anglo-Canadian narrative.

and who was responsible. Relations between Britain and her allies, most notably Canada but also the United States and the Soviet Union, were severely strained, and a historical controversy began which to this day continues to generate academic and public interest.

In an attempt to mitigate the immediate bitterness and humiliation of the disastrous undertaking, contemporary newspaper and radio commentators as well as military analysts, and subsequently historians, tried to see some good emerging from the raid. Captain Charles Perry

Stacey, an historian in uniform on the headquarters staff of Lieutenant-General Andrew McNaughton, the commander of First Canadian Army and the senior Canadian officer in the United Kingdom, drafted explanations of the Dieppe raid for the Canadian press. Within a fortnight of the raid Stacey also completed a lengthy official Canadian Army report justifying Dieppe as a vital learning experience.² Later, in July 1944, not long after the Normandy landings, General Eisenhower wrote to Mountbatten and in his letter credited Dieppe with having provided many useful lessons.³ The much lighter than expected Allied casualties on D-Day appear to validate Eisenhower's analysis. This theme was expanded on in detail by Captain Stephen W. Roskill, the author of the multi-volume official British history, *The War at Sea, 1939-1945*. Roskill states that the Germans drew all the wrong lessons from Dieppe. By concentrating their anti-invasion defences on the main ports along the Channel Coast, Roskill inferred, the Germans contributed greatly to the Allies' successful landings on the Normandy beaches.⁴

There is little if any evidence to support Roskill's hypothesis, particularly, in the German documents and records of the Second World War. In fact, very little has been written on the German view of the Dieppe raid.

What did Hitler, the German General Staff, and the German people think of the raid and its outcome? How was Dieppe portrayed in the Nazi controlled media, and what were the consequences of the raid on German strategy in the summer of 1942? These questions are the subject of this article.

Historiography and German sources

Brian Loring Villa, the author of *Unauthorized Action: Mountbatten and the Dieppe Raid*, lamented that “the literature on Dieppe is nearly as extensive as that on the Normandy invasion—completely out of proportion to Dieppe’s military importance.”⁵ He is certain that had Dieppe been a success then it would not have attracted the intense and enduring attention it has from generations of British and Canadian historians. The first book on Dieppe appeared less than five months after the raid and two more followed in quick succession in 1943. The three books were written by newspaper journalists from Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States.⁶ They were also privileged guests on the command ship during the raid, personally chosen by Mountbatten because they were “journalists who were likely to turn out instant books.”⁷ Perhaps, then, because Dieppe was a minor success for the Wehrmacht, and because Germany also lost the war, the raid has not featured prominently in the German historical narrative. Less understandable is why the English language historiography has neglected the German side of the story despite some 70 years of detailed historical examination. Until now the only publication in English that examined the German perspective was Hans J. Peterson’s article “The Dieppe Raid in Contemporary German View,” which appeared in the *American Review of Canadian Studies* in 1983.



Peterson is German, and he was a young boy living in Berlin when the Dieppe raid took place in August 1942. His article focuses on three days of intense coverage of the raid in the *Völkischer Beobachter*, the official national newspaper of the Nazi Party. It is particularly revealing on the importance the Nazi media attached to the personality of “the leader” in conducting the war, hence the paper’s biting criticisms of Churchill over the strategic purpose and tactical failure of the raid.⁸ This, however, is only a small part of the story, and it does not deal with the larger tensions that existed in Germany during the summer of 1942. Difficult decisions over the allotment of increasingly scarce resources, the perplexing military complications thrown up by multiple and simultaneously active theatres of operations, fears over wavering morale on the home front, and an increasingly fractious relationship between Hitler and his army generals (particularly

his Eastern Front generals) were all affected by the sudden and unexpected events of the Dieppe raid on 19 August 1942. Readily accessible German primary sources, including the *Völkischer Beobachter* (VB)⁹ and other contemporary German newspapers, the *Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht* (War Diary of the High Command of the Armed Forces OKW), *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels* (Joseph Goebbels Diaries), *Die Deutsche Wochenschau* (The German Weekly News – newsreels played in German cinemas), and Hitler’s speeches, directives, proclamations, and table talk, offer a rich history of the interplay of these tensions and the impact of the Dieppe raid on their resolution by the autumn of 1942. These sources also reveal that the German reaction to and analysis of the Dieppe raid is very different from the more familiar Anglo-Canadian narrative.

The threat of invasion and the Atlantic Wall, June 1941 – August 1942

Beginning in June 1941, with the invasion of the Soviet Union, Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, commander-in-chief Army Group South and from March 1942 commander-in-chief in the West, regularly voiced his concerns to Hitler over an Allied invasion in the West.¹⁰ His warnings took on added importance with the failure of Operation Barbarossa in December and led Hitler to order on 14 December the building of a new West Wall to defend the whole Atlantic coast. These orders were followed in March 1942 with Führer Directive No.40, which outlined the potential threat of an invasion and the benefits to be had from building strong defences to deter any “bold adventures.” Hitler did not fear any serious risk of losing Western Europe in 1942 but he was concerned about Churchill’s

Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, commander-in-chief in the West, regularly voiced his concerns to Hitler over an Allied invasion in the West.

rash unpredictability and the difficulty of dislodging an invasion force if it managed to secure a foothold. More than 75 percent of Germany's military power was committed to the war against the Soviet Union and Hitler wanted to minimise any serious diversions in the West that had the potential to delay victory in the East. Hitler's concerns seemed justified in early July 1942 when German intelligence warned that an Anglo-American decision on where and when the "Second Front" would be launched was imminent. This information reinforced Hitler's resolve to build an impregnable fortress line along the entire Atlantic coastline facing Britain. On 2 and 13 August, Hitler chaired two conferences on the Atlantic Wall at his advanced military headquarters, code named *Wehrwolf*, at Vinnitsa, in the Ukraine. Reich Minister Albert Speer, General Hermann Reinecke, and a number of other fortification and military experts were in attendance.¹¹

Immediate German reaction to the Dieppe Raid, 19 August 1942

Hitler and his staff were busy grappling with the day to day events of the Caucasus campaign when news of the Dieppe Raid reached *Führerhauptquartier* (FHQ) *Wehrwolf*. Vice-Admiral Theodore Krancke, who was at the FHQ, noted that the mood was calm and relaxed, and that the predominant attitude was one of confident satisfaction



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rather than jubilation. Hitler was visibly pleased with the response of the German garrison in Dieppe but also with the fact that the raid appeared to confirm his strategic view of the war in 1942. Churchill had tried an audacious attack and it had been thwarted with speed and conviction.¹²

The German people first learnt about the raid through the Norwegian German Radio Service on 19 August at 1200 hours central European time (CET). A short message stated that:

the British in the early hours of this morning made a landing on the French channel coast supported by considerable numbers of air and naval forces. The British who have landed infantry and tanks met hard and successful resistance of the German troops. Several British tanks

were destroyed by German artillery fire which started immediately. German counter-measures continue according to plan.¹³

Initial German news coverage

Not until 2030 hours on 19 August was the first official statement on the British cross-channel attack broadcast to the German people. The news was reported in a *Sondermeldung* (special bulletin) issued by the High Command of the Armed Forces (OKW). The OKW bulletin outlined the enemy forces that took part, their main objective to form a bridgehead around Dieppe, and the heavy casualties they suffered in their failed invasion attempt. The report was factual and reasonably accurate, and the casualty numbers reported were actually lower than those confirmed later. But

because it was a special report it differed slightly from the usual regular daily situation reports issued by OKW and included an assessment of the attack along with speculation on Churchill's motivation to mount it at the behest of a desperate Josef Stalin. The bulletin concluded with a comforting summary of the day's events for the German people: "The enemy has suffered a decisive defeat. His attempt at invasion served only political purposes and was contrary to all military common sense."¹⁴

The editorial comment offered by OKW was deliberate for two reasons: it was intended to heap more pressure on Churchill and the British with their allies, and it was good for public morale in Germany. Hitler and most of the generals viewed Dieppe as a hastily concocted raid to fulfil a promise to Stalin to open a second



Canadian Forces photo PMR 86-289

In the immediate aftermath of the failed raid German soldiers comb through the debris of the battle searching for intelligence.

front. Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, head of OKW, and General Kurt Zeitzler, chief of staff to Field Marshal Rundstedt, however, took a more serious view, that it was an invasion that had failed. Was it an invasion or a raid? Was it an invasion that took Combined Operations HQ nine or ten months to prepare (as reported in the British papers) and ended nine hours later with the enemy assault forces thrown back into the sea, or was it a raid hastily concocted four or five days after Churchill had visited Stalin in Moscow? Both lines were developed in the following days with each reinforcing the other as confirmation of Churchill's desperation and stupidity.¹⁵

Early in the morning on 20 August, Joseph Goebbels flew from Berlin to FHQ *Wehrwolf* to confer with Hitler on the media line to be taken in response to Dieppe. Goebbels recorded the day's events in his diary, noting first the excellent mood in the *Führerhauptquartier*. He shared the Führer's general assessment of the

raid, that it was a rash action by the British in response to severe pressure from Stalin to open a Second Front. Goebbels spent much of the afternoon with Hitler finalising the main themes for the press releases in the next day's papers, discussing a recent opera performance of *Turandot* in Munich, and walking in the forest around the FHQ with Hitler and his *Schäferhündin* "Blondi." His diary entry for the day numbered some 30 pages or roughly 15,000 words, drifting between his delight at once again being in the Führer's company and a scathing critique of Churchill's military and political leadership. He was certain that Churchill's decision to attack Dieppe was sheer madness and idiocy but it was the payment required from Stalin. He was equally certain that the calamity on the beaches at Dieppe had dealt a double blow to Churchill and the British, damaging the former's standing as a war leader and the latter's claim to be a capable and equal partner in the alliance with the US and the USSR.¹⁶

The successful German defence at Dieppe dominated the Friday edition of the *Völkischer Beobachter* and the front pages of all the other newspapers in Nazi Germany.¹⁷ It was also the first time that Germans were able to read about the raid in their local and national papers. The headline in the VB was *Die vernichtende Abfuhr von Dieppe!* (The Scathing Rebuff at Dieppe!) and the leading articles addressed the main themes that Hitler and Goebbels had decided on in Vinnitsa: Churchill's invasion catastrophe, Stalin's displeasure with his western allies, and the folly of the Second Front. The VB continued with much the same coverage over the weekend, deriding British military incompetence and praising the "excellent strategy of the Führer to block a two front war by winning the war with Russia while maintaining strong defences in the west."¹⁸ Dieppe was proof, if any was needed, that the cost of opening a Second Front was prohibitive and in 1942 well beyond the military

Canadian Forces photo PMR 86-277



Canadian Forces photo PMR 86-295



Canadian Forces photo PMR 86-298



Soon after the battle Goebbels's propaganda ministry released a packet of photographs which were widely distributed to media outlets. Top – “On the beach at Dieppe!”; Middle – “After the battle!”; Bottom – “They landed in German captivity! They fought in vain.”

capabilities of the Americans and the British. Goebbels was pleased with the newspaper reporting on the Dieppe raid and even more so by the public reaction. He noted in his diary that the “German people were filled with enthusiasm by the success achieved in halting the English attack at Dieppe,” and that “they feel secure that the defences in the west are strong.”¹⁹

The weekend ended with the first screening of a newsreel that showed the results of the Dieppe raid. Images of shattered tanks and landing craft shrouded in the smoke of battle filled the screen. The beaches were littered with the debris of beaten and demoralised soldiers: hundreds of discarded helmets, rifles and other weapons, and a few remaining bodies of the dead that had not yet been removed for burial. Goebbels further noted in his diary that the newsreel footage was “proof of the English plan of attack on Dieppe and the large plans of the British and Americans.”²⁰ Of equal importance, it was visual proof of the totality of the German victory. The propaganda value of the raid had been enormous but Goebbels was not content to let the story end with nothing more than triumphant boasting of a battle fought and won. He had read British and American newspaper reports of the raid and noticed that, in addition to prematurely and falsely declaring the invasion an overwhelming success, they ignored the significant contribution made by the Canadians. It was time, he thought, to shift the focus away from the military conduct to the political consequences of the raid.²¹

Dieppe and the German view of the strategic direction of the war in August 1942

The Monday edition of the *Völkischer Beobachter* began with an attack on Churchill's subservience to Stalin and the recklessness of his military strategy to appease his Soviet allies. Goebbels himself wrote a lengthy article that continued over two pages of the paper numerating the political rather than the military reasons behind Churchill's decision to attack Dieppe and "the idiocy of Churchill bowing and scraping before the Bolsheviks." Other articles amplified the dangerous game being played by the "Bolsheviks and the plutocrats" and the unseemly neglect of the Canadians who did the fighting and the dying but were ignored in the British and American reporting of the invasion. These themes continued to find column space in the *VB* for the rest of August but stories on the fighting on the Eastern Front grew in size and importance. On 23 August the advanced echelons of the Sixth Army reached the Volga just north of Stalingrad. Successful advances by German forces in the Caucasus and in Egypt were also reported and often included a photo collage on page three showing cheerful troops on the march to their next objective well supported by armour, artillery, and air power. The message was clear – the war in the East was being won and the defences in the West were formidable enough to prevent the British and the Americans from opening a Second Front.²²

The mood in FHQ *Wehrwolf* was excellent throughout the rest of August. Hitler entertained a number

of guests from Berlin including leading members of the party and senior military officers. On the evening of 26 August, Grand Admiral Raeder was his special dinner guest. Raeder was at the FHQ for one of the few Führer's Naval Conferences that were held in the spring and summer of 1942. Hitler and Raeder discussed "the urgent necessity to defeat Russia" and how this would give Germany strategic depth to fight, if necessary, a lengthy naval war against the Anglo-Saxon sea powers until England and America could be brought to the point of discussing peace terms. The successful summer U-boat campaign in the North Atlantic, the navy's crucial support for the war in Russia, and its future ship building objectives were also main items on the agenda.²³ The day's conference was productive and good natured and the evening dinner was relaxed and sociable. Hitler was in a talkative mood. He held forth on a range of subjects including Stalin and the industrialisation of Russia, remedies for high blood pressure, the Peace of Westphalia and modern Germany, fidgety bureaucrats, and the Dieppe raid. "The most important result of the Dieppe raid from our point of view," he said, "is the immense fillip it has given to our

sense of defensive security; it has shown us, above all, that the danger exists, but that we are in a position to counter it."²⁴ Hitler and his guests ended the evening by watching *Die Deutsche Wochenschau* (the German weekly newsreel). Earlier, Hitler telephoned Goebbels in Berlin to congratulate him on the "good success" this weekly news conveyed and he also noted how the images of Dieppe were so devastating for the prestige of the English. Goebbels told the Führer that the recent newsreels were in high demand in neutral countries because of their accuracy and objectivity, which was lacking in Allied press releases.²⁵ Hitler was very satisfied.

The weekly newsreel of 26 August 1942 was 19 minutes long. It began with an eight minute feature on the Dieppe raid, using a map taken from a captured officer to explain the British plan and execution of the raid, the successful defence by the German coastal garrison, and ended with large columns of Canadian prisoners being marched off the beach and through Dieppe into captivity. Throughout the film report the cameras provided a panorama view of the beach front revealing a large number of destroyed tanks and landing craft, and hundreds of

Piles of helmets, ammunition and grenades collected after the raid are displayed by the Germans for propaganda purposes.



Canadian Forces photo PMR 86-257

discarded helmets, weapons, and other equipment. Regardless of whether it was a raid or an invasion the film images could not be denied; it was an unmitigated disaster for the British and their Canadian allies who provided the main body of troops for the attack. The next two features were very short scenes of the concrete fortifications and large coastal guns that were part of the Atlantic Wall and were followed by scenes of workmen from the German Labour Front and Hitler Youth busy building bigger and better defences on the Channel coast. The newsreel ended with the longest and most important story of the week, the summer offensive in southern Russia. This was the key to winning the war and the film showed happy and well fed German soldiers advancing deep into the Caucasus – the *Schwerpunkt* of the campaign – routing the remaining forces of the Red Army. There was very little narration throughout the newsreel. The viewer was left to make his or her own judgements on these extraordinary events based on the images viewed and the rousing score of martial and patriotic music that accompanied the film. It was truly Wagnerian in scale and scope, and the uplifting images of the film attested to the imminent prospect of a great German victory.²⁶

Not surprisingly, Goebbels too was pleased with the newsreel, especially the music.²⁷ The shift from the success at Dieppe to an impending victory in Russia was also picked up by the newspapers. Leading articles in the *Völkischer Beobachter* reported on the large number of Soviet aircraft and tanks that had been destroyed and the thousands of prisoners who were taken from an army that had lost its will to fight. The *VB* reported 261 Soviet tanks destroyed in ten days of fighting and over 2,500 Soviet aircraft destroyed since the end of July. There were numerous photo spreads, presented as always on page three, visual proof of German success and sacrifice in Russia and North Africa. In an article recounting in detail the great tank battle and victory over the Red Army at Kalatsch at the end of July, it was noted that the Russians were using women as infantry. This surely was a sign that the end was near.²⁸

Dieppe was a feature story for the last time in the Sunday, 30 August edition of the *Völkischer Beobachter*. The *VB* headline read: *Das war Churchills Invasionskatastrophe!* (This was Churchill's invasion catastrophe!) Churchill's failings and his personal responsibility for earlier military misadventures, such as the Gallipoli campaign in the First World War and

the Dunkirk evacuation in 1940, were cited as portents of the catastrophe that befell the British and Canadians at Dieppe. In two substantive articles all the main themes of the *VB*'s previous coverage on Dieppe were revisited: Churchill's military naivety and strategic subservience to Stalin, the poor planning and tactical incompetence evinced in the execution of the invasion attempt, and English willingness to let Canadians die in a fiasco. The British and American press brazenly and falsely claimed this raid was a successful invasion of France whilst contemptuously ignoring the significant Canadian contribution and sacrifice. Very little new information was provided in the Dieppe articles but there was accurate and substantial detail on the full plan of the operation, the order of battle, intercepted radio reports made by the landing forces throughout the day, and the enemy's losses. Extensive excerpts from OKW's official and final report on Dieppe were also published, citing the main reasons for the attack's failure – insufficient fire support, failure to deploy airborne troops to "hold the ring," an overly detailed plan and inflexible execution, and the amateurish way the British waged war. Other than the details provided, OKW's final report was not dissimilar to the special bulletin issued on 19 August, although it did caution that any future Anglo Saxon invasion, if one was attempted, would be "better and more robust and not necessarily at a port."²⁹

Dieppe was important to Hitler and the German people because it was proof that the "west wall" guaranteed the safety of Europe from an Anglo-American attack coming from the sea. The Wehrmacht was therefore free to concentrate its

Canadian prisoners are escorted away from the beach, Dieppe, 19 August 1942.



Canadian Forces photo PMR 86-320

maximum effort on defeating the Red Army and ending the war in the East. This was the theme that the *Völkischer Beobachter* as well as other German newspapers emphasised in a growing number of articles at the end of August and into September 1942. On 30 August, the VB reported that two Soviet attacks at Rzhev and Kaluga had collapsed with the Red Army suffering heavy losses. The war was just days away from reaching its third anniversary and despite a few challenges and testing moments the Wehrmacht had achieved a series of outstanding successes as two contrasting maps of Europe in 1939 and 1942 published in the VB clearly demonstrated. Again, the message to the VB's German readers was clear – stay focused, continue to work diligently towards victory, and have faith in the Führer – this was the formula for protecting Germany from a two-front war and completing a historic victory.³⁰ In addition to the newspapers, Goebbels also ensured that the weekly newsreels played their part in maintaining public morale and confidence in both the Führer and the German war effort. After re-watching on 31 August the 26 August newsreel that covered the Dieppe raid and the offensive in southern Russia, the minister for propaganda expressed his unreserved joy that it conveyed the perfect sense of destiny of a German victory, just like in the film *“Der Große König.”*³¹

Optimism about a bright future was also conveyed in less serious ways in the pages of the *Völkischer Beobachter*. On both 30 and 31 August there were a number of articles covering the third round of the football cup final. The favourites to win the cup were Schalke 04 but it was München 1860 that stole the headlines with a thumping 15:1 victory over SS-Straßburg. August was also the season for the Richard Wagner festival in Bayreuth and the annual gala music festival in Salzburg, both of which received



extensive coverage from the culture and music writers at the VB and in all the other national and regional newspapers.³²

August ended, however, with Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, newly promoted after his triumph at Tobruk in June, and the Afrika Korps resuming the offensive in Egypt. From the start of the battle everything went wrong. Rommel's forces lacked ammunition and fuel, the RAF maintained control of the air throughout the battle, and lacking any element of surprise the combined German-Italian offensive quickly ground to a halt on 2 September. Rommel informed the OKW that he was breaking off the attack and withdrawing from Alam el Halfa. By 5 September the battle was over and the Axis forces were back at their starting positions.³³

September winds of change

August had been a wretched month for the Allies but the fortunes of war turned against Hitler and the Wehrmacht in September. On the Eastern Front the combined German-Finnish attack to cut the Murmansk railway and prepare for the capture of Leningrad had failed and by early September the Russians had seized the initiative in the north. Army Group Centre was having a difficult summer, too, suffering serious disturbance from heavy partisan activity in its rear areas.³⁴ The summer offensive in the south was also not proceeding according to plan. On 20 August two Soviet armies launched a major counterattack against the Italian Eighth Army near Serfimovich on the Don River, delaying the German Sixth Army's assault on Stalingrad.³⁵ In the Caucasus, Field Marshal Wilhelm List's Army Group A fell considerably short of Hitler's

expectations. Maikop was taken in mid-August but the retreating Soviet forces destroyed the oil refineries. Chronic shortages in ammunition and fuel, a common problem for all German armies in the summer and autumn of 1942, slowed Army Group A's advance to a crawl and left the rich oil fields of Grozny and Baku agonizingly out of reach. On 1 September, List was summoned to FHQ *Wehrwolf* to report in person on his lack of progress. List's meeting with Hitler went reasonably well considering the circumstances. Hitler restated Army Group A's objectives and expressed his willingness, "if necessary to postpone the offensive to next year if Baku was captured." List flew back to his headquarters at Stalino with renewed purpose and vigour. A few days later advanced forces of Army Group A entered Novorossisk, a key Black Sea port, but they could not hold it against fanatical Soviet resistance. Hitler's patience was at an end and on 7 September he despatched General Alfred Jodl, chief of operations at OKW, to List's headquarters "to press once more for the advance to be speeded up." Jodl returned to FHQ *Wehrwolf* the same night and made his report. He told Hitler that List was adhering strictly to his instructions and that he (Jodl) agreed with the field marshal's course of action. Hitler was furious and accused Jodl of siding with List and the army against him. Tensions between Hitler and his generals had escalated throughout August but they reached boiling point in September. General Walter Warlimont, deputy chief of operations at OKW, recorded in his memoir that Hitler's rage with Jodl "produced a crisis which shook Supreme Headquarters to its foundations, the like of which was not to be seen [again] until the last months of the war."³⁶

At issue was the conflicting opinions between Hitler and his army generals over the course and direction of the war. Hitler was

concerned with the wider strategic aspects of the war whilst the army high command increasingly focused on the tactical problems on the Eastern Front. Disagreements on the deployment of reserve forces and overstretched military resources had soured relations between Hitler and General Halder, chief of staff of the Army, in August. The unexpected and furious argument with Jodl, perhaps his most loyal and trusted general, changed Hitler's relationship with the army for good. He no longer trusted the generals to carry out his orders and his interaction with them became more distant, painfully formal, and as brief as possible. From September to the end of the war Hitler's military briefing conferences were recorded to prevent any further misinterpretation of his orders. Hitler also never appeared in the mess or ate with his generals again. Hitler's displeasure with his generals did not end with his mere cessation of social interaction. On 9 September, List was dismissed and Hitler took over command of Army Group A himself. Rumours of other senior command changes spread like fire through the FHQ. Purportedly, Keitel was to be relieved by Kesselring and Jodl by Paulus, commander of the Sixth Army. Halder too was told by Keitel on 9 September that he also would shortly be replaced. In the end only Halder was relieved of his command. On 24 September Hitler dismissed him without further promotion or any other form of recognition. The next day General Kurt Zeidler was appointed chief of staff of the Army.³⁷

After 7 September, Hitler accepted the fact that the Eastern army needed a rest and it would spend a second winter in the east before resuming the decisive attack the following spring.³⁸ What exasperated Hitler was a growing certainty that his generals were not telling him the truth and that they were failing to conduct the campaign as he had ordered.³⁹ Not surprisingly neither the newspapers

nor the weekly newsreels covered the high command crisis in early September opting instead to publish glowing accounts of victories in the west and on the Eastern Front. Goebbels was pleased with their efforts in raising German morale but he was equally uneasy with the unrealistic expectations they created of an impending victory. It was important, he noted in his diary on 11 September, that "we must keep everything into perspective so as not to fall into a trap."⁴⁰ Worrying signs of disillusionment with the war and with Hitler's leadership were already apparent, the most serious being the Weiße Rose student resistance group in Munich. Munich was the capital of the Nazi movement, and the spiritual centre of Hitler's power. Nonetheless, between June and October 1942, the Weiße Rose published and distributed four highly critical leaflets in Munich and other German cities, calling on fellow Germans to resist the Nazis and work towards helping the Reich's enemies win the war. Their activities were serious enough to warrant the attention of the Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler.⁴¹

Hitler flew to Berlin on 27 September for a busy week of political and public engagements.⁴² On 28 September he spoke to 12,000 officer candidates and newly commissioned officers in the army, navy, Luftwaffe, and Waffen SS. The German News Bureau broadcast a brief summary of his speech at the Berliner Sportpalast:

In rousing words, the Führer afforded the young men an insight into the great history of Germany, which is being crowned in the mighty fateful struggle of our days. After referring to the high duties that are imparted to an officer as the head of the soldiers entrusted to him in the struggle, the Führer concluded his address by expressing his absolute certainty of victory and his unshakable trust in the superior fighting qualities of the German soldiers.⁴³

Hitler was still ruminating over his show down with Halder and the generals in his headquarters at Vinnitsa in the Ukraine. He was certain that the army's tactical and technical skills were not enough to complete the difficult task of vanquishing the Russians. The army, and in particular the General Staff, he believed, "must be inspired by the fervour of belief in National Socialism."⁴⁴ The following day Hitler met in secret with his western commanders, telling them that the next invasion attempt in the West would rely far more on air power. He cautioned them not to be complacent: "We must realise that we are not alone in learning a lesson from Dieppe. The British have also learned. We must reckon with a totally different mode of attack and at quite a different place." Their continued vigilance and the Atlantic Wall now had a vital role. He reassured them: "If nothing happens in the next year, we have won the war."⁴⁵

On 30 September, Hitler was back at the Berliner Sportpalast giving a major speech at the Volk rally opening the third *Kriegswinterhilfswerk* (Winter Relief Appeal).⁴⁶ It was a long speech covering the entire course of the war from the beginning to the ongoing operations in the west and the east. Hitler combined a glorification of Germany's military achievements with a mocking, sarcastic attack on Churchill and Roosevelt, emphasising the idiocy of the recent invasion attempt at Dieppe, and the unpredictability of the western allies, stating "you never know with these lunatics and constant drunks what they will do next."⁴⁷ Then he reassured his audience that the German army would take Stalingrad and that no matter when and where Churchill decided to invade next "he can consider himself fortunate if he stays on land for nine hours!" – a direct reference to the Wehrmacht's recent success defending Dieppe.⁴⁸ Hitler bolstered the morale of his

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Hitler cautioned his generals in September: "We must realise that we are not alone in learning a lesson from Dieppe. The British have also learned. We must reckon with a totally different mode of attack and at quite a different place."

listeners by telling them that they could look back and be content with the last three years. He recounted the long list of substantial achievements and even the difficulties of the previous winter, which had been overcome with calm determination and led to reorganised and renewed efforts to complete a historic victory. He concluded his speech by restating current and future objectives. First, Stalingrad would be taken, completing the isolation of Moscow by cutting the Russian capital off from the Volga, the last arterial route of strategic importance, and thereby denying the Russians grain from the Ukraine and oil from the Caucasus. The armed forces would then hold what they had attained in the west and the Mediterranean until the following spring when the offensive in the east would be resumed. Russia, he asserted, was the key to either victory or defeat. A strong defence in the west was essential to safeguarding the main

effort in the east and concomitantly a victorious campaign in Russia was the best way of preventing an invasion in the west.

Hitler returned to his FHQ in Vinnitsa on 4 October to oversee the capture of Stalingrad and the final phase of operations in the Caucasus before the winter break.⁴⁹ Germany's autumn operations, however, did not proceed according to Hitler's grand predictions so confidently made at the end of September in the Berliner Sportpalast. Instead, matters became progressively worse. On 23 October the British resumed the offensive in North Africa at El Alamein. Then on 8 November the British and Americans invaded French North Africa, landing in Morocco and Algeria in the first major combined Anglo-American operation of the war. Eleven days later the Soviets initiated Operation Uranus, a strategic counter offensive aimed at destroying German forces in and around Stalingrad. The tide, as Sir Arthur Bryant so eloquently concluded at the end of the first volume of his history of the Second World War, had turned.⁵⁰

Conclusion

There are many misconceptions about what the Germans knew about an invasion attempt in the west before the Dieppe raid and how they reacted to it afterwards. Most do not stand up to rigorous examination of the documentary evidence. Well before August 1942, Hitler and the German High Command were aware of the increasing threat of an invasion and they undertook specific measures to address it from December 1941. As this article has demonstrated, the Dieppe raid was a tactical, not an operational or a strategic, surprise. It did not cause either Hitler or the German High Command any undo panic. Russia was their main effort, both before and after the raid, throughout 1942. For clear political and strategic reasons the raid was

portrayed in the German media as a failed attempt at opening the Second Front. Hitler encouraged this approach even though he knew that Dieppe was little more than a badly executed raid at a time when the Allies were going through a severe military and political crisis. The propaganda value of the raid was immense and it was embraced wholeheartedly. Goebbels used every facet of his state controlled media empire to heap ridicule on the Western Allies for their military incompetence and their abysmal failure to end the isolation of the Soviet Union as German forces continued their advance in southern Russia. The Dieppe Raid also proved useful to Hitler and the Nazis in their efforts to bolster public support for the war and strengthen morale on the home front. German newspapers, specifically the *Völkischer Beobachter*, and newsreels hailed the Führer's strategic brilliance in avoiding a two-front war whilst the bulk of the German armed forces strained every sinu to complete their historic mission in Russia. Less obvious at first was how the raid and the Nazi interpretation of it exacerbated the differences between Hitler and some of his Eastern Front generals, most notably Halder, over the course and direction of the war. The ongoing pressures in concluding the campaign at Stalingrad and in the Caucasus led eventually to a complete breakdown between Hitler and his generals in September 1942. The generals demanded more men and more resources at a time when resources were limited and strategic pressure on a number of fronts – the Battle of the Atlantic, the air war, the Mediterranean, and the defence of the West – all demanded Hitler's attention and more of the Nazi war machine's severely stretched resources. Most importantly, the Dieppe raid did not alter German strategic thinking about the conduct of the war or defence against an

invasion in the west. Russia was the key to both – victory and preventing a successful invasion. When D-Day finally came on 6 June 1944, Hitler and the Germans had already, by their own logic, lost the war.

Notes

1. T. Murray Hunter, *Canada at Dieppe* (Ottawa: Canadian War Museum, 1982), pp.39-41; and Brian Loring Villa, *Unauthorized Action. Mountbatten and the Dieppe Raid* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp.1 and 7. For a detailed and personal account of the Dieppe Raid see Denis and Shelagh Whitaker, *Dieppe. Tragedy to Triumph* (London: Leo Cooper, 1992). Air operations are examined in detail in Norman L.R. Franks, *The Greatest Air Battle: Dieppe, 19th August 1942* (London: Kimber, 1979) and the role of intelligence is expertly addressed in John P. Campbell, *Dieppe Revisited. A Documentary Investigation* (London: Frank Cass, 1993).
2. The National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom [TNA], PREM 3/256 Prime Minister's Private Office Operations Papers, Jubilee Operation, August 1942-January 1943; TNA, DEFE 2/551 Combined Report on the Dieppe Raid, 1942; Villa, *Unauthorized Action*, pp.17-18; C.P. Stacey, *The Canadian Army, 1939-1945. An Official Historical Summary* (Ottawa: The King's Printer, 1948), p.86. For a scholarly assessment of contemporary coverage of the Dieppe raid in the Canadian Press see Timothy Balzer, "'In Case the Raid Is Unsuccessful ...' Selling Dieppe to Canadians," *The Canadian Historical Review* 87, no.3 (September 2006), pp.409-430.
3. Villa, *Unauthorized Action*, p.17.
4. Captain S.W. Roskill, *The War at Sea 1939-1945*, vol.II. *The Period of Balance* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1956) p.250.
5. Villa, *Unauthorized Action*, p.18.
6. Mountbatten's "three chosen journalists" were A.B. Austin, British correspondent of the *London Daily Herald*; Wallace Reyburn, Canadian correspondent of the *Montreal Standard*; and Quentin Reynolds, American war correspondent. See: A.B. Austin, *We Landed at Dawn* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1943); Wallace Reyburn, *Rehearsal for Invasion: an eyewitness story of the Dieppe Raid* (London: Harrap, 1943); and Quentin Reynolds, *Dress Rehearsal: the Story of Dieppe* (London: Angus & Robertson, 1943).
7. Villa, *Unauthorized Action*, p.23.
8. Hans J. Peterson, "The Dieppe Raid in Contemporary German View," *American Review of Canadian Studies* 13, no.1, pp.65-78.
9. The *Völkischer Beobachter* (VB) was the official national newspaper of the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP), the National Socialist German Workers' Party, before 1933, and the major daily newspaper of the Nazi regime until the collapse of the Third Reich in May 1945. Many contemporary German newspapers published during the Second World War have been digitised and are freely available online through the digital newspaper archive provided by the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. See also *Berliner Börsen Zeitung*, *Das Reich*, *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Hamburger Anzeiger*, and the *Königsberger Allgemeine Zeitung* for regional coverage of the Dieppe Raid and its wider strategic importance.
10. Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt responding to questions on the time and place of an Allied invasion in the West asked by Sir Basil Liddell Hart. See B.H. Liddell Hart, *The German Generals Talk* (New York: Harper-Collins Publishers Inc., Perennial edition 2002. First published in 1948), p.229.
11. See H.R. Trevor-Roper, *Hitler's War Directives 1939-1945* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1964), pp.110-116; David M. Glantz and Jonathan House, *When Titans Clashed. How the Red Army Stopped Hitler* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1995), p.148; Adolf Hitler, *Hitler's Table Talk 1941-1944. His Private Conversations*. Introduction and Preface by H.R. Trevor-Roper, translated by Norman Cameron and R.H. Stevens (New York: Enigma Books, 2000), pp.624-626; and David Irving, *Hitler's War* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Limited, 1977), pp.407-8.
12. Horst Boog, Werner Rahn, Reinhard Stumpf, and Bernd Wegner, *Germany and the Second World War Vol.VI. The Global War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), pp.439-441; and David Irving, *Hitler's War*, fn, p.409—Dieppe debacle, p.860.
13. TNA, DEFE 2/329 Jubilee Operation, Part IV—German Propaganda 1942-1943, German Broadcast Reports on the Dieppe Raid, 19 August–12.00 hrs.
14. *Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht* (Wehrmachtführungsstab) Band II: 1. Januar 1942-31. Dezember 1942. Erster Halbband und Zweiter Halbband, Zusammengefasst und erläutert von Andreas Hillgruber (Frankfurt am Main: Bernard & Graefe Verlag für Wehrwesen, 1963), 1 Vol., A, pp.127-128. All German translations have been made by the author unless otherwise noted.
15. General Günther Blumentritt responding to questions on the German reaction to the Dieppe Raid asked by Basil Liddell Hart. See Liddell Hart, *The German Generals Talk*, p.229; TNA, DEFE 2/329 Jubilee Operation, Part IV—German Propaganda 1942-1943, Main themes of German broadcasts and print media, 20-30 August

- 1942; and Horst Boog, et al., *Germany and the Second World War*, vol.VI, p.441.
16. Joseph Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, edited by Elke Fröhlich and published on behalf of the Institute für Zeitgeschichte (München: K G Saur, 1993-2008). Tiel II: Diktate 1941-1945 Band 5: Juli-September 1942, edited by Angela Stüber (1995), Entry for 20 August 1942, pp.344-373.
17. *Völkischer Beobachter*, Norddeutsche Ausgabe, Berlin [VB], Freitag, 21 August 1942, pp.1-2. In addition to the VB see the *Berliner Börsen Zeitung*, *Das Reich*, *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Hamburger Anzeiger*, and the *Königsberger Allgemeine Zeitung*, 21 August 1942.
18. VB, Sonntag, 23 August 1942, leading article by von Wilhelm Weiß, Zum Kapitel "Zwei-Fronten-Kreig," pp.1-2.
19. Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, 21 August 1942, pp.376-377; 22 August 1942, pp.381-382; and 27 August 1942, pp.407-408.
20. Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, 23 August 1942, p.391.
21. Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, 23 August 1942, pp.386-388.
22. VB, Montag 24 August 1942, pp.1-2.
23. Brassey's Naval Annual, *Führer Conferences on Naval Affairs 1939-1945*, trans. Anthony Martienssen (London: Greenhill Books, 1990), pp.288-293.
24. Hitler, *Table Talk*, 26 August 1942, p.663.
25. Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, 25 August 1942, p.399; See also TNA, DEFE 2/329 German Propaganda - "The British Defeat at Dieppe," Reports from Sweden comparing German and Allied newspaper coverage of the war.
26. *Die Deutsche Wochenschau*, Mittwoch, 26 August 1942.
27. Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, 27 August 1942, p.409.
28. VB, Dienstag 25 August 1942, pp.1-3; Mittwoch, 26 August 1942, pp.1-3, in particular see article by Dr. Wilhelm Koppen, "Der Kaukasus und Europa," (in which he explains why this is the decisive campaign of the war); and Donnerstag, 27 August 1942, pp.1-2. It was the Red Army's crushing defeat at Kalatsch that led Josef Stalin to issue his famous Stavka Order No.227, "Not one step back," on 28 July 1942, see Horst Boog, et al, *Germany and the Second World War*, vol.VI, pp.1022-1025; and Glantz and House, *When Titans Clashed*, p.121.
29. VB, Sonntag, 30 August 1942, pp.1-2.
30. VB, Sonntag, 30 August 1942, pp.2-3: see also *Das Reich*, *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, and the *Königsberger Allgemeine Zeitung*, 27-30 August 1942.
31. Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, 31 August 1942, p.426. The German film *Der Große König* (*The Great King*), directed by Veit Harlan and starring Otto Gebühr (Frederich II), Kristina Söderbaum, and Gustav Fröhlich, was an epic biography of Frederick the Great, Prussia's Great King. It premiered on 3 March 1942 at the Ufa-Palast am Zoo in Berlin and cost a staggering RM 4,779,000 to make at a time when the entire German film industry made an annual net profit of between RM 50 and 80 million. This part historical and part propaganda film portrayed Frederick II as an early example of a great dictator, focusing on his heroic struggle and how through his genius and strength of will he turned defeat into victory during the Seven Years War after dismissing his incompetent generals and taking personal command of the army. The comparison between Frederick and Hitler was both deliberate and obvious. Goebbels was delighted that Hitler's generals did not like the film and that they were 'aware of the sharp criticism made in the film of the general's defeatism.' For a detailed plot summary and the political context of the film in the Third Reich see Rolf Giesen, *Nazi Propaganda Films. A History and Filmography* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2003) pp.143-150, 198-199.
32. VB, Sonntag 30 August 1942, pp.5 & 8; and Montag 31 August 1942, p.4; for regional coverage of the 1942 Bayreuther Kriegsfestspiele see the *Bayreuther Nachrichten*, 8-16 July 1942; and for the Salzburg Festival see the *Berchtesgadener Anzeiger* and the *Salzburger Volksblatt*, 5-30 August 1942.
33. I.S.O. Playfair, *The Mediterranean and Middle East*, vol.III. *September 1941-September 1942: British Fortunes Reach their Lowest Ebb* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1960), p.388; Walter Warlimont, *Inside Hitler's Headquarters 1939-45* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, Ltd., 1964), pp.252-253; and Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1936-1945: Nemesis* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), pp.534-535.
34. Warlimont, *Inside Hitler's Headquarters*, pp.253-255.
35. Glantz and House, *When Titans Clashed*, pp.121-122.
36. Warlimont, *Inside Hitler's Headquarters*, p.256. See also Kershaw, *Hitler*, pp.531-4.
37. Warlimont, *Inside Hitler's Headquarters*, pp.257-259.
38. Horst Boog, et al., *Germany and the Second World War* Vol.VI, p.1056.
39. Warlimont, *Inside Hitler's Headquarters*, p.252; and fn.14 (Lieutenant-Colonel Scherff's War Diary, 31 May and 3 June 1942), p.616.
40. Goebbels, *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, 11 September 1942, p.478.
41. For the importance and impact of the Weiße Rose in the summer and autumn of 1942 see Ulrich Chaussy, Christiane Moll, Britta Müller-Baltschun, and Franz Josef Müller in co-operation with Inge Aicher-Scholl, *Die Weiße Rose* (München: Weiße Rose Stiftung, 2006). See also Inge Scholl, *The White Rose. Munich 1942-1943* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1983); Annette Dumbach and Jud Newborn, *Shattering the German Night: The Story of the White Rose* (New York: Little Brown and Co., 1986); and Frank McDonough, *Sophie Scholl. The Real Story of the Woman Who Defied Hitler* (Stroud, Gloucester: The History Press, 2009).
42. Franz W. Seidler and Dieter Zeigert, *Hitler's Secret Headquarters: The Führer's Wartime Bases, from the Invasion of France to the Berlin Bunker* (London: Greenhill Books, 2004), p.120.
43. Max Domarus, *The Complete Hitler: A Digital Desktop Reference to His Speeches and Proclamations 1932-1945*, vol.IV 1941-1945 (Wauconda, Illinois: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, Inc. 2007), pp.2670-1.
44. Warlimont, *Inside Hitler's Headquarters*, p.258; W. Erfurth, *Geschichte des Deutschen Generalstabs* (Göttingen, Musterschmidt Verlag, 1957), p.281; and A Heusinger, *Befehl in Widerstreit* (Tübingen and Stuttgart: Rainer Wunderlich Verlag Hermann Leins, 1950), p.210.
45. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC. [NARA] Microfilm Series T - Records of German Field Command Armies. Record of Hitler's secret speech to Western Commanders, 29 September 1942, First Army War Diary, Annexes T312/23/9706 et. seq. (Microcopy T312/Roll 23/Pages 9706 onwards) as cited in David Irving, *Hitler's War*, pp.410 & 860.
46. Adolf Hitler's "Meine deutschen Volksgenossen und -genossinnen" speech at the Berliner Sportpalast, 30 September 1942. For the full text of this speech see Domarus, *The Complete Hitler*, vol.IV, pp.2672-2685.
47. Domarus, *The Complete Hitler*, vol.IV, p.2674.
48. Ibid.
49. Seidler and Zeigert, *Hitler's Secret Headquarters*, p.120.
50. Arthur Bryant, *The Turn of the Tide 1939-1943: based on the War Diaries of Field Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke* (London: Collins, 1957).

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