

2015

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Recommended Citation

Johannes Jörgensen, Andreas Gropp, and Krista Gropp "Dieppe From the Other Side German Newspaper Accounts of the Raid." *Canadian Military History* 21, 4 (2015)

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Dieppe From the Other Side

German Newspaper Accounts of the Raid

Johannes Jörgensen, translated by Andreas Gropp and Krista Gropp

Much has been written about Operation Jubilee and the Canadian/Allied experience, but, apart from official histories, much less has been written from the viewpoint of "the other side." The following articles are excerpted from Dieppe, die Bewährung des Küstenwestwalles, a compilation of reports from German war correspondents covering the events at Dieppe. These reports sit within a larger framework that seeks to portray the Atlantic Wall defences as impenetrable, that Dieppe was a test, and the coastal defences triumphed. These reports tell the story of the raid for the ordinary citizen and lack military jargon. They were written in the immediate post-battle period, however, the book was published in 1943, when the tide was beginning to turn in favour of the Allies, but before the second "test" at Normandy.

This first excerpt offers a look at the landing attempt from the perspective of a German sergeant:—

On the Fight of Our Infantrymen

Johannes Jörgensen

The glowing red fires of burning tanks are reaching up to the cloud-covered sky. A sweltering humidity weighs over the battle zone. The day was hot, especially for the defenders of this stretch of the coast. Members of a company – which was successfully engaged in the fight since this morning – are sitting and standing around. The excitement of battle has not yet waned. Just an hour ago, the last shots were fired at the fleeing ships, some of which reached the island. The company commander lost his life during this battle. A sergeant-major took command of the company and reports on their success as follows:

At the first light of dawn, English fighters and bombers suddenly appeared and covered the city and most of the coastal defenses with bombs. Low-flying attacking enemy planes fired off all their weapons. Protected by a smoke screen, speedboats and transporters reached

our coast, which we targeted with the combined fire of all our weapons. The enemy still managed to destroy a few tanks and several teams on land, but the other defences were well constructed, and from there we shot everything our barrels could handle. We counted 28 heavy tanks trying to enter the city, and behind them, the Tommies. Only 2 tanks managed to reach within 15 metres of the first houses at the beach. It was there that they broke down with mangled tracks. The others struggled to get across the rocky beach and were finished off by our artillery. English destroyers, speedboats and the landing craft took the first houses under heavy fire, where marine and flak units were located. These buildings had to be evacuated since they caught fire and were in danger of collapsing. Protected by the enemy's heavy tanks, some enemy troops managed to enter the first houses in Dieppe. A fierce house-to-house fight broke out, in which we took prisoners. At this point it was noon, and the fight was still raging. Our Luftwaffe entered the battle and pinned down the attackers with fighters, Stukas and bombers. Our heavy anti-tank guns and artillery took out the remaining tanks on the beach with direct fire. They were completely destroyed. The ships off

the beach took direct hits and were disabled. In the meantime, we noticed that nearly the entire enemy landing force consisted of Canadians; only the ship's crews and the corporals were English. Throughout the morning, our infantry, anti-tank units, engineers and coastal artillery effectively joined the fight. We gathered in the city and commenced a counterattack. We ploughed through the remaining enemy forces from two sides. It was almost 3 pm when the last Canadians were marched off with raised arms. Still, it was not finished. English fighters raked us with their weapons and once again covered the city in smoke. Enemy fighters attacked us, flying low, and fired not only at us, but also at their fellow countrymen and their allied supporters, regardless of whether they were wounded or captured. I, myself, ran into some Canadians that, without awaiting an order, handed over their weapons. They were, as they said, glad to have come out of this insane landing attempt alive.

Source: Jörgensen, Johannes. "Von Kampf unserer Grenadiere," in *Dieppe, die Bewährung des Küstenwestwalles*; Ein Gemeinschaftswerk der Kriegsberichter Willi Antonowitz, Dr. Julius Friedrich, Ulrich Haussmann, Johannes Jörgensen, Günther Niemeyer, Hans Wamper. 31-32. Berlin: Verlag von E.S. Mittler & Sohn, 1943.

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The second excerpt offers a look at the aftermath of the battle, and also purports to feature a first-hand account from a Canadian prisoner of war. Of particular interest is the apparent attitude of the Germans toward the Canadians. Contrary to the vitriolic rhetoric often used in Nazi propaganda with regard to the “enemy,” especially in the East, the report communicates a tone of superiority, yet also of respect for the Canadians as honourable soldiers:—

“My needs are forever met”: A Captured Canadian Reports

Johannes Jörgensen

As we inspected the success of our defences at the Dieppe beach on that catastrophic day, we discovered strange notes, shaped like package labels, scattered all over the place amongst all that was destroyed, demolished and shattered by grenades. They were less interesting to us than the bullet-riddled ships, the destroyed tanks and the numerous spoils of weapons.

What were these labels? Their imprint answered our question: “On His Majesty’s Service.” Below that read: “Prisoner” and “Captured by... Place..., Time...” and the other side had the heading: “Material.” It went on: “Taken By...” and “Article...”

One doesn’t have to be a clairvoyant to recognise immediately that these labels were meant for our buttonholes, should we be captured by the Tommies.

Should we be captured! Apart from that, the number of deliberate labels seemed grossly overestimated – and the shoe is on the other foot. More than 2,000 Canadians, and relatively few English among them, were made to pay for the failed landing attempt with imprisonment.

We walk by the rows of brown-grey uniformed Canadians in a prisoner reception camp that was set up three years ago by the French



Canadian Forces Photo PMR 86-284



Canadian Forces Photo

Two German soldiers keep watch on the beach at Dieppe from a machine gun position shortly after the conclusion of the battle. Smoke still rises from the beach and the casino is visible on the left side of the photo.

From their position on the western headlands overlooking Dieppe, German soldiers view the scene of destruction on the beach at Dieppe following the end of the battle.

and intended to house us Germans. Their shock from the unexpected murderous fire of our defences yielded a certain lethargy. Some of them are still nervous wrecks and just can’t believe that they – the elite troops of the Royal Canadian Army – fell into German captivity. Others seemed to be completely distressed and apathetic. Anyone who saw the beach of Dieppe couldn’t hold against the Canadians that they remember

the morning hours of 19 August 1942 with a shudder. Many of them had to leave parts of their uniform behind, many wore bread-bags tied with string instead of boots and socks, and there were others among them that had covered their bullet graze-wounds, scratches and scrapes with first-aid bandages. The seriously injured were admitted to sick bays, while another group with minor injuries get treated by German and

Canadian Forces Photo PMR 86-254



Canadian soldiers captured at Dieppe rest in a field before being taken away to German prisoner of war camps.

their own doctors in special barracks. Most of the prisoners are laying on the grass, exhausted and tired, and they sleep or doze.

As we walk through the crush of Canadians, we're reminded of the Bolsheviks that we saw in great numbers in the East. What a difference. Over there, subhumans brutalize, personified beasts, ragged, amorphous, yet here, good-looking, often blond and mostly tall men that decisively refused every attempt at conversation about military topics when we spoke to them. They candidly looked us in the eyes and didn't have that stubbornly contemptuous, lurking and spiteful glance that we saw so often with the Bolsheviks. The conversation was a little difficult, though, because the Canadians spoke a distinct English dialect.

The demand for tobacco was certainly huge. It wasn't a surprise that we were surrounded by a dense crowd of prisoners when we handed out some cigarettes. We were surprised when we were asked for a cigarette by a prisoner in immaculate German. We spoke with him. The Canadian soldier, of muscular build and with a bandage around a bullet wound on his head, was born on 5 November 1914, as the son of a

Austrian German and a Russian in the province of Saskatchewan. He is a trained blacksmith and ran his father's huge wheat farm until he voluntarily joined the Canadian army in July 1940 and came to the British Isles in March 1941.

He is an infantryman and stands shirtless in front of us. He had to leave his shirt and jacket behind at the beach. As with many of his comrades, he didn't make it beyond the beach during the fight but had to stay under cover, completely exhausted, because an impenetrable wall of fire prevented their assault. He was told, too, that the landing at Dieppe would be completely harmless, slight resistance was to be expected.

But even this they were told just a few hours before the landing and until then they were in good faith that the trip was a larger military exercise. Also, the live ammunition had been distributed just before the reloading of the transporters into smaller assault boats on the open sea. When they were within view of the French coast, the ships were equipped with grenades of all calibres, but many boats sank before they reached the shore.

"Horrible and desperate scenes took place," the Canadian continues. "Many of my comrades died or were

heavily wounded in the boats, and these were then sunk by direct hits. I was in the water in a life vest for five hours and kept myself afloat on planks. Since I couldn't swim, I was almost unconscious when I was finally washed ashore with the tide. Because of the exhaustion, I was not able to join the actual fight. So I stayed under cover until I was captured. There was no thought of getting back, as not many of our boats would have made it across. As far as I could tell, all of the ships intended for the return were under heavy fire and sunk. We have none of our belongings, but nothing could be saved. The shelling on the coast was terrifying – I can say I have never before been through something like that. I thank God that I got out alive. I saw many of my comrades fall and die next to me. I'm sorry for them because they and I, us Canadians, didn't really know what would happen here. We believed we would have quite a nice and interesting time in France. After all, one wants to see something of the world. It's certainly bitter that I have to see it from behind the barbed wire of a prisoner camp now. However, I am glad that the war is over for me. My needs are forever met, for in Dieppe all hell broke loose."

Source: Jörgensen, Johannes. "Mein Bedarf ist immer bedeckt," in *Dieppe, die Bewährung des Küstenwestwall; Ein Gemeinschaftswerk der Kriegsberichter Willi Antonowitz, Dr. Julius Friedrich, Ulrich Haussmann, Johannes Jörgensen, Günther Niemeyer, Hans Wamper*. 57-61. Berlin: Verlag von E.S. Mittler & Sohn, 1943.