

2015

C.P. Stacey and the Use of Oral Testimony in the Dieppe Narratives

Tavis Harris

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholars.wlu.ca/cmh>



Part of the [Military History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Tavis Harris "C.P. Stacey and the Use of Oral Testimony in the Dieppe Narratives." *Canadian Military History* 21, 4 (2015)

This Feature is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Canadian Military History* by an authorized editor of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact scholarscommons@wlu.ca.

C.P. Stacey and the Use of Oral Testimony in the Dieppe Narratives

Tavis Harris

Operation Jubilee, the raid on the port of Dieppe, proved one of the most disastrous episodes for the Canadian Army during the Second World War. On 19 August 1942, a force of approximately 5,000 men from the 2nd Canadian Division under the command of Major-General John Hamilton Roberts attempted to seize the German-occupied port to destroy military infrastructure and acquire intelligence by capturing prisoners and documents.¹ Of the 4,658 who embarked on the operation, only 2,210 returned to England. The Canadians suffered 3,367 casualties including 1,946 prisoners of war.²

The task of documenting this disaster fell to Major Charles Perry Stacey, the historical officer at Canadian Military Headquarters. Stacey's job was to compile information for official histories to be written at the war's end. He undertook the task by drafting a series of "narratives," detailed, heavily referenced factual accounts based on the fullest information he could gather.³ In the case of Dieppe, Stacey, and historical officers under his command who arrived in 1942, produced no fewer than 15 narratives by the end of the European war, each incorporating new bodies of information that came to hand. These narratives are of particular interest because they represent Stacey's first attempt to capture information

Abstract: As the official historian for the Canadian Army in the Second World War, C.P. Stacey understood both the benefits and limitations of oral history. This is especially evident within his work on the Dieppe narratives which shaped a portion of the Canadian Army's Official History. Dieppe was Stacey's first foray into report writing and though his use of oral testimony related to circumstances rather than a methodological preference and he remained aware of its limitations, he nevertheless employed it throughout the narratives. It is clear that oral testimony was central to the narratives and provided otherwise irretrievable pieces of information. This study examines the narratives in conjunction with Stacey's war diaries, memoirs, and other secondary sources to determine the extent to which oral testimony was used in addition to how and when it was used, especially in the case of sensitive issues involving Dieppe's contentious legacy.

on a major battle, one that was immediately controversial, and, because of the scope of the disaster and losses, whose documentary record was incomplete. For this latter reason, Stacey for the first time relied on oral accounts, which were central to the development of the Dieppe narratives. This was Stacey's first experience in creating and using oral history materials. By using records of interviews from Stacey's war diary and the Dieppe narratives, this paper traces the role of oral testimony in

Stacey's account of tank operations, one of the key aspects of the operation for which there was little or no written evidence because of heavy casualties.⁴

C.P. Stacey is best remembered as the official historian for the Canadian army during the Second World War, but he was not appointed to this position until the autumn of 1945.⁵ At the time of the Dieppe raid, Stacey's chief task as head of the historical section at Canadian Military Headquarters (CMHQ) was to "prepare material for the official historian...and further document the war effort by collecting historical evidence 'not otherwise available.'"⁶ In 1940, then Major-General H.D.G. Crerar, chief of the general staff in Ottawa, arranged Stacey's appointment as the overseas historical officer to supervise the collection process and avoid the "disaster" of the Great War official history program.⁷ Many officers at CMHQ in London initially distrusted Stacey. They refused to believe that the authorities in Ottawa would send an officer solely to conduct historical work, and considered him a "spy for National Defence headquarters."⁸ Colonel G.R. Turner, general staff officer, 1st Canadian Infantry Division, considered sharing operational information in the planning stages a "dangerous practice," and worried that "this



Library and Archives Canada PA 501024

records or interviewing “recalcitrant individuals.”¹¹

At the time of his appointment, Stacey was a relatively young academic; he had completed his doctorate at Princeton in 1933. Although much of his work, including his dissertation, dealt with the nineteenth century, he had always been interested in current military subjects and his book *The Military Problems of Canada*, written in 1938-40 on current issues in defence policy, brought him to Crerar’s attention, then commandant at the Royal Military College.¹² From the time Stacey arrived in England in December 1940 until late 1942, he had few resources at his command and conducted much of the work himself. In addition to developing the narratives, Stacey had to personally ensure that the army created and preserved the records he, and the yet unnamed official historian, required. He visited units stationed across England, constantly reminding officers of the need to write comprehensive unit war diaries, and to retain orders, communications logs, conference notes and other material that explained the unit’s development and activities.¹³ Stacey received no directives from senior officers concerning what materials he should assemble and how he should do it. The use of oral accounts in the case of the Dieppe narratives was a pragmatic response to a difficult situation. These narratives represented a steep learning curve that he later described as “the heaviest job of historical research that fell to me during the war. [P]utting together documented narratives of [the Dieppe operation] took up all the time I could spare for the better part of two years.”¹⁴

At the time of the raid, Stacey was on privilege leave in Edinburgh and only learned of the attack as it occurred. He remarked in his diary that he had “chosen a bad time to go on leave” and contacted CMHQ

Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Perry Stacey, photographed here in London during the war, was the head of the historical section at Canadian Military Headquarters. In that capacity he was responsible for drafting a series of narratives on the Dieppe Raid.

pesky chronicler would ‘practically be at the Commander’s elbow.’”⁹ However, Stacey quickly developed a positive working relationship with General Andrew McNaughton, commander of the Canadian Army overseas from 1939 to 1943, and General Crerar, who came overseas in December 1941, and in early 1944 succeeded McNaughton in command of the Canadian Army. McNaughton, like Crerar whom he had mentored since they first served together during the First World War, had a scholarly turn of mind and understood the nature and role of official history. This positive relationship with the

senior commanders allowed Stacey considerable access to classified files and to key individuals in the British as well as the Canadian forces, and to such senior civilians as Vincent Massey, the Canadian High Commissioner in London, and his staff.¹⁰ General McNaughton “took Stacey into his confidence” discussing high-level policy with the historian, and allowing access to his personal files under condition that Stacey exercise discretion with the information. This relationship proved greatly beneficial, as Stacey was able to “invoke” the general’s name to gain access to necessary

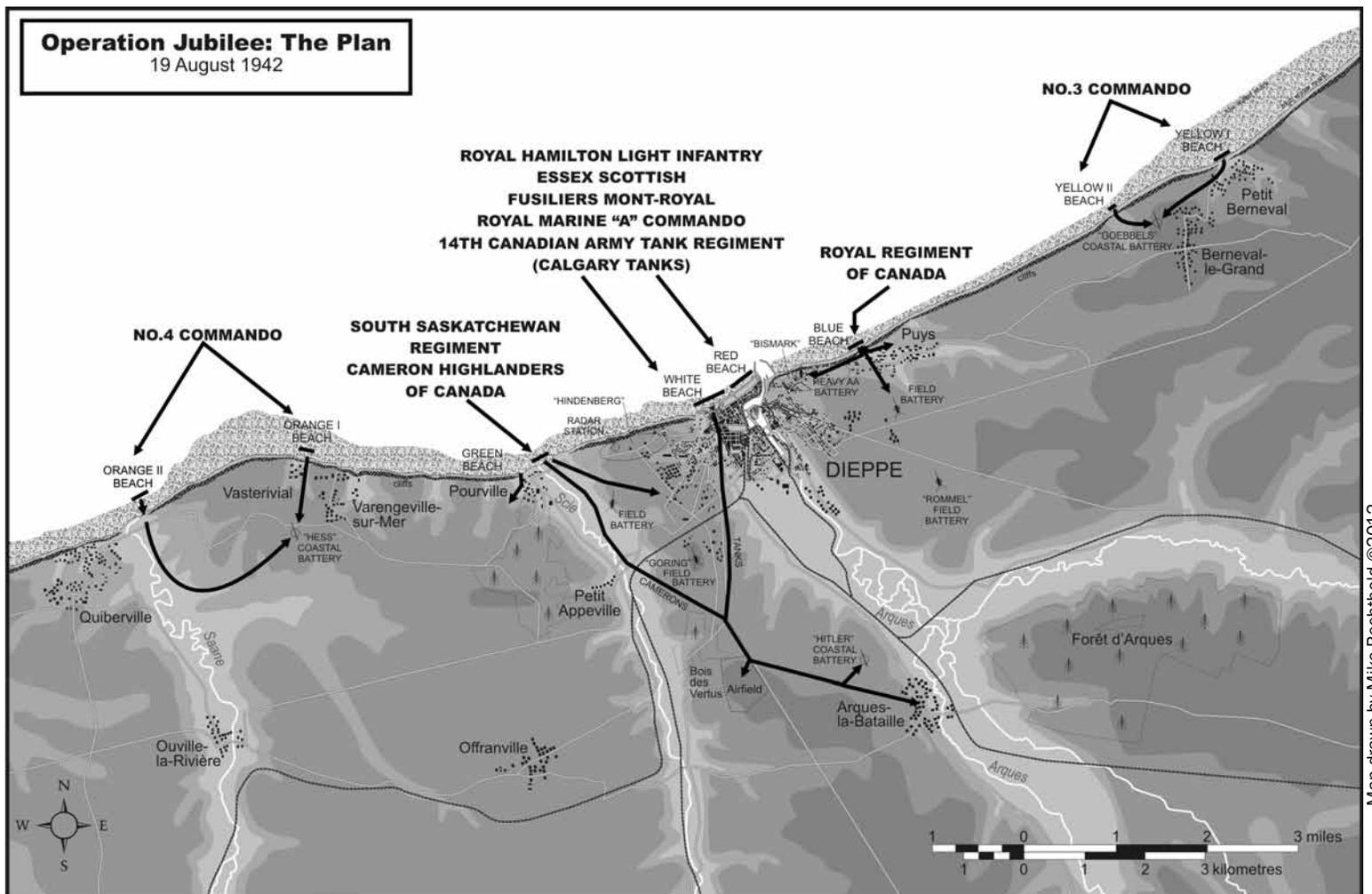
to determine if he was required back in London.¹⁵ Though CMHQ saw little reason for his return, Stacey came back on 21 August to “start work on what was clearly going to be a big job.”¹⁶ Having been entirely left “out of the loop,” Stacey had to be resourceful and determined in acquiring information. Stacey discussed arrangements with Brigadier Churchill Mann, brigadier general staff, 1st Division Headquarters, to interview survivors, which Mann granted on 24 August 1942.¹⁷ Canadian and British authorities subjected Stacey to intense pressure over the issue of assigning responsibility in creating the initial drafts of the Dieppe narratives.¹⁸

Stacey faced a daunting task creating narratives due to incomplete evidence. For example, only one member of the armoured unit landed at Dieppe, the 14th Calgary Tank

Regiment, returned to England in the immediate aftermath of the raid. Stacey noted in his war diary that “the tank story...[was] difficult to reconstruct.”¹⁹ Stacey spent months of painstaking work piecing together the events. There were a few written reports by returning non-armour officers from other units who had witnessed the activities of the Calgary tanks, and these he fleshed out by interviewing personnel of the Calgary Regiment who managed to escape from France, or who were later repatriated from German captivity on medical grounds.

Stacey’s memoirs and personal files provide ample evidence regarding his view of oral history. Though his opinion is often negative, he does concede that such evidence is valuable and often necessary in cases where there is a lack of other sources. Stacey’s attitudes reflect a “middle

ground” compared to his American and British counterparts. While the Americans were “pioneers” in oral history, conducting experiments to determine when a soldier’s memory became corrupted, the British disdained oral testimony, focusing entirely on written records.²⁰ Stacey’s chief concern with oral accounts was the amount of time between incident and interview. Though he did not necessarily agree with an American conclusion that the maximum period was six days, he did concede that the validity of an account “is directly related to the length of time that elapsed between the event and the moment when the account was written or the interview took place.” Stacey had “no hesitation in saying that one scrap of paper written on the evening of the battle is worth reams of reminiscence written down or spoken into tape recorders after



Map drawn by Mike Bechtold ©2012

months or years have passed. The best historical evidence is evidence recorded *at the time* [emphasis in original]."²¹

Gaps in evidence often necessitated interviews long after the event occurred. Though Stacey conducted such interviews, he cautioned that they should be done only "when the contemporary evidence fails you" and they are carefully checked against available written records.²² His greatest concern in this regard was the "unintentional liar." Though Stacey seldom encountered a deliberate liar, many of those he came across had undergone traumatic experiences. Prisoners of war who had spent "years behind the barbed wire, brooding about the experiences, convincing themselves that things had happened which in fact never took place, and perhaps cherishing grudges against people whom they considered responsible for their plight." Others were officers who "felt they had been hard done by, and... built up myths in their own minds about those whom they considered the authors of their misfortunes." Some individuals experienced a "sea-change" in memory over time, becoming "dedicated to their misconceptions, and refused to be convinced by contrary evidence, however overwhelming."²³ Stacey freely offered similar advice, notably to an historian who asked for guidance on a book concerning "the human side of the war in Northwest Europe" that included 460 interviews with veterans from across the country.²⁴ "All my experience as a historian," Stacey responded, "indicates that interviews based on the memories of individuals are very much less reliable than the contemporary documents. And when the memories are forty years old they are often very misleading."²⁵

In his opinion, operations logs were "superior to all others as a source of information." The log

contained timed entries concerning information received and sent out. Since officers did not create the log for historical purposes, it was impersonal and contemporary. Availability of the logbook allowed a historian to reconstruct a unit's part in a battle with confidence – and the absence of such a log left the researcher "hamstrung."²⁶

Stacey did not leave notes detailing his interview process, but combining statements from his war diary with his memoirs provides some insight. In his memoirs, Stacey stated that in preparing, one should begin by "reading the written evidence before the interview. In that way [the historian] will not only be able to assess the value of what he is being told, but he will be equipped to prompt the person he is interviewing."²⁷ After this preparation, Stacey conducted several interviews with a subject, then draft a comprehensive memorandum that aimed at capturing the subject's complete testimony. Stacey asked the subject to review the memo and make any necessary changes before signing the document to attest to its veracity. In his war diary, Stacey recorded his impression of the testimony individuals provided during interviews. An example is his reflections on Captain G.A. Browne of the Royal Canadian Artillery and Lieutenant A.A. Masson of the Fusiliers Mont-Royal, who escaped from German captivity and returned to England 27 January 1943. Stacey took the two officers to lunch and set up interviews that took place three days later.²⁸ Stacey noted that while Lieutenant Masson was "not a very satisfactory witness" having a "tendency to change his evidence when 'cross-examined,'" Captain Browne was "a first-rate witness, whose written report is a remarkable piece of observation." Of Browne, Stacey remarked, "this officer should go far."²⁹

Stacey began his work on the Dieppe raid by interviewing survivors almost immediately after his return from Scotland, suggesting he fully realized the importance of oral testimonies.³⁰ Shortly after the raid, Stacey visited Captains Cameron and Alexander of the 14th Army Tank Regiment (The Calgary Regiment) to underscore the importance of the unit's war diary given the absence of returning personnel.³¹ Nevertheless, when on 31 May 1943, Stacey reviewed 2nd Division documents slated for destruction he discovered an operational order not included in the tank regiment's war diary. There were no known copies of the order before Stacey's discovery, despite its importance as the only written operational order for any participating unit.³² The war diary did include several key pieces of evidence, notably about the difficulties the stony beach created for the tracked vehicles. The tank commanded by Captain A.G. Stanton, adjutant of the 14th Army Tank Regiment immediately bogged down in the loose shale, preventing other armoured units from exiting the landing craft. The war diary provided some detail on the unit's combat experience during the raid, leading Stacey to conclude, "all tanks which got ashore fought very hard until either out of action or out of ammunition."³³ The total approximate losses for the regiment were 17 officers and 153 other ranks along with 28 tanks and 7 scout cars.³⁴ There was, however, a paucity of detail in the diary because "only two members of the total tank crews on shore managed to get away and the remainder were either killed or taken prisoner."³⁵

The early Dieppe narratives contain very little information about tank operations. CMHQ report no.83 written in September 1942 indicated that "The first wave of tanks came under heavy fire as soon as they came out of the landing craft, and

while some immediately got on to the boulevard in front of the town and penetrated further, others did not get off the beach."³⁶ Casualties among engineering personnel assigned to breach a sea wall with explosives or timber ramps prevented many tanks from leaving the beach.³⁷ Despite the fact that a number of the tanks were immobilized by damage, they "continued to fight [sic] their guns with the greatest courage, engaging the batteries which were firing on the landing craft."³⁸ At 1100 hours an order was given to abandon the tanks in order to re-embark surviving personnel.

The importance of interviews in shaping the Dieppe narratives is evident in CMHQ report no.89 written in December 1942. Interviews with individuals who escaped were a "valuable supplement" to written evidence provided by returnees and unit war diaries. These oral accounts provided information of the operation "not available otherwise."³⁹ Unfortunately, the escapees included

no armoured personnel, but some additional details emerged from the evidence of soldiers from other branches. Several factors hindered Stacey's attempt to reconstruct the activities of the Calgary tanks. Besides the lack of returning personnel to interview, those who managed to escape and return to England had little contact with tank survivors while in captivity.⁴⁰ Much of the evidence concerning tank operations centered on instances in which infantrymen and engineers encountered tanks during the raid, and provided only momentary glimpses. Sergeant G.A. Dickson of the Royal Canadian Engineers testified that at least five tanks had reached the esplanade (sea-wall), and that at least three tanks managed to reach the town, last seen moving west on la Rue de la Barre.⁴¹

Private J. Maier of the Essex Scottish stated that all three tanks on Landing Craft Tank 4 had managed to land, and that one tank (Burns) had its track broken by enemy fire after

crossing through one wire barrier, to open a path for the infantry.⁴² Maier also stated that four tanks were "patrolling" on the road immediately above the sea-wall and firing on enemy positions but were unable to provide cover fire for an infantry advance. Despite broken tracks and shell hits, the tanks kept up continuous fire, with some still in action at the time of evacuation.⁴³

A medical repatriation of prisoners from Dieppe in late October 1943 provided Stacey with a further opportunity to fill gaps in his account. He particularly hoped that Major C.E. Page, the most senior officer of the Calgary Regiment to get ashore, and Corporal T.L. Carnie of the Calgary Regiment could "add to our knowledge of the action of tanks."⁴⁴ On 29 October 1943, Stacey arrived at Taplow hospital in Maidenhead to interview Major Page and Corporal Carnie. Carnie was wounded in the eye by shrapnel shortly after landing and was unable to provide any details on the operation.⁴⁵ Stacey's discussion

Stacey had trouble trying to accurately tell the story of the Calgary Tanks in his early narratives of the raid as most those who landed became casualties and so few men from the regiment returned to England.



Canadian Forces photo PMR 86-264



Canadian Forces photo PMR 86-292



These two photos show Churchill tanks abandoned at Dieppe. In late 1943 men from the Calgary Tanks were repatriated to England as a result of their wounds and were able to provide Stacey with a more complete picture of tanks' employment at Dieppe.

with Major Page proved much more helpful in reconstructing the activities of the Calgary tanks. Page's detailed testimony "considerably alter[ed] the picture" of tank operations.⁴⁶ Page indicated that he knew of no tanks having penetrated into Dieppe proper, though approximately 15 tanks had crossed the sea-wall with a majority later returning to the beach. Eighteen tanks had their tracks broken by shellfire with an additional four tanks immobilized by

the chert beach.⁴⁷ Heavy German fire was unable to effectively penetrate the Calgary tanks, and the unit did not incur casualties from anti-tank shells. As the result of its reliability, all the men in Page's unit were "absolutely sold on" the Churchill tank. Page was also certain that the raid had caused "numerous" German casualties (though no precise number was mentioned).⁴⁸ The following day Stacey returned to CMHQ and drafted a memorandum of his interview with

Page.⁴⁹ He then began to consider the many changes to the narratives this new information made necessary.⁵⁰

In November 1943, Major Page visited Stacey in his office at CMHQ to certify the accuracy of the draft memorandum. This meeting became a follow-up interview, as Page provided the names of 13 tanks he was certain had breached the sea wall along with two "probables."⁵¹ There is no indication of any subsequent interviews with Major Page suggesting certification of the final copy of the memorandum at this meeting. In the days following this interview, Stacey began a thorough review of the Dieppe narratives. On 10 November, he began to edit the second section of the record "in the light of new evidence."⁵² Later in the month, Stacey drafted CMHQ report 107 summarizing the interviews he conducted over the previous month. This report addressed a key issue – namely, the number of tanks that managed to reach the esplanade. The description in this report provided a great amount of detail in contrast to earlier accounts:

Although Major Page confirms that some tanks were certainly knocked out on the central part of the beach, where the esplanade was high, while moving laterally and searching for a way to cross the wall, he is quite certain that 12 to 15 tanks crossed the wall in the end sectors where it was low. The majority of these tanks had returned to the beach by about 0900 hrs. The reason for this return was the fact that the tanks could get some cover there from the guns sited in the East Cliff, while moreover they "could get better shooting from there." This accounts for the large concentration of tanks on the beach north-east corner of the Casino, an area which seemed especially favourable.⁵³

This new oral evidence also demanded Stacey re-examine early

copies of reports 108 and 109.⁵⁴ Though earlier drafts were not included in Stacey's personal papers, the end result discussed earlier suggests the important role oral testimony played in shaping the Dieppe narratives.

In May 1944, one month before the Overlord invasion, Canadian military intelligence sent a number of translated German documents concerning the Dieppe raid to Stacey at CMHQ.⁵⁵ There was no clear indication as to how the documents fell into allied hands. Stacey thought it probable that "they were captured by allied troops in North Africa or Italy."⁵⁶ The documents addressed issues concerning pre-operation security and the element of surprise, the composition of the German defenders and German casualties. There was a concern that the invasion force's unexpected contact with a German convoy had alerted shore forces of the allied presence. The German combat report stated, "the entire coast defence system was alerted," though Stacey suggested this passage was inserted in an effort to "gloss over the fact that this alert was not wholly general, if this was in fact the case."⁵⁷ The report also detailed the number of German casualties. Earlier narratives had simply stated that the Germans had suffered "many" casualties without providing a precise number. Unfortunately for Stacey, the report contained several differing totals. A combat report submitted by the 302nd Infantry Division (which presumably contained all totals from the operation) cited 67 killed (all ranks), 10 missing, and 167 wounded.⁵⁸ This differed greatly with the 440 total casualties cited in an Organization Todt report and significantly differed from the German High Command's claims of 591 casualties.⁵⁹

These discrepancies led Stacey to ponder why German authorities would falsify the figures. Though it was "surprising" Stacey suggested

CMHQ and AHQ Reports on Dieppe

The Directorate of History and Heritage has digitized the valuable collection of CMHQ and AHQ reports written by C.P. Stacey and the other historians of his historical section. The reports can be found at: <http://bit.ly/RBpMYj>

CMHQ Report no.83 (19 September 1942)

Preliminary Report on Operation "JUBILEE" (The Raid on Dieppe) 19 Aug 42.

CMHQ Report no.89 (31 December 1942)

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

CMHQ Report no.90 (18 February 1943)

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

CMHQ Report no.98 (15 July 1943)

Article Dealing with the Operation at Dieppe, 19 Aug 42.

CMHQ Report no.100 (16 July 1943)

Operation "JUBILEE": The Raid on Dieppe, 19 Aug 42. Part I: Preliminaries.

CMHQ Report no.101 (11 August 1943)

Operation "JUBILEE": The Raid on Dieppe, 19 Aug 42. Part II: The Execution of the Operation. Section 1: General Outline and Flank Attacks.

CMHQ Report no.107 (29 November 1943)

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

CMHQ Report no.108 (17 December 1943)

Operation "JUBILEE": The Raid on Dieppe, 19 Aug 42. Part II: The Execution of the Operation. Section 2: The Attack on the Main Beaches.

CMHQ Report no.109 (17 December 1943)

Operation "JUBILEE": The Raid on Dieppe, 19 Aug 42. Part III: Special Aspects.

CMHQ Report no.116 (10 May 1944)

**Operation "JUBILEE": The Raid on Dieppe, 19 Aug 42.
Additional Information from German Sources.**

CMHQ Report no.128 (20 November 1944)

The Operation at DIEPPE, 19 Aug 42. Some New Information.

CMHQ Report no.130 (27 November 1944)

The Operation at DIEPPE, 19 Aug 42: Pictorial and Cartographical Material.

CMHQ Report no.142 (18 July 1945)

Operation "JUBILEE": The Raid on Dieppe, 19 Aug 42. Further New Information.

CMHQ Report no.153 (22 March 1946)

Operation "JUBILEE": The Raid on Dieppe, 19 Aug 42. New Light on Early Planning

CMHQ Report no.159 (5 October 1946)

**Operation "JUBILEE": The Raid on Dieppe 19 Aug 42.
Additional Information on Planning.**

AHQ Report no.10 (5 December 1946)

Operation "Jubilee": The Raid on Dieppe, 19 Aug 42 (Info from German War Diaries)

AHQ Report no.36 (31 March 1950)

"The development of the German defences in the Dieppe sector

that "it might be dangerous...if only from the point of view of morale, to have it known in the Army that the figures of losses [sic] given to the public were notably different from the truth." He thought it conceivable "that figures of losses circulated in a document like the Combat Report now under review might be altered before circulation." This was especially the case given "the impression left with Canadian prisoners after the operation is that the Germans in fact has [sic] suffered greatly."⁶⁰ Statistical divergences in the captured German files frustrated Stacey who thought it possible that "we shall never receive a completely reliable account of the German losses at DIEPPE."⁶¹ Post war analysis of German war diaries suggested that the figures had not been misstated in the earlier intelligence intercepts leading Stacey to conclude that "German casualties, at least so far as ground troops are concerned, were

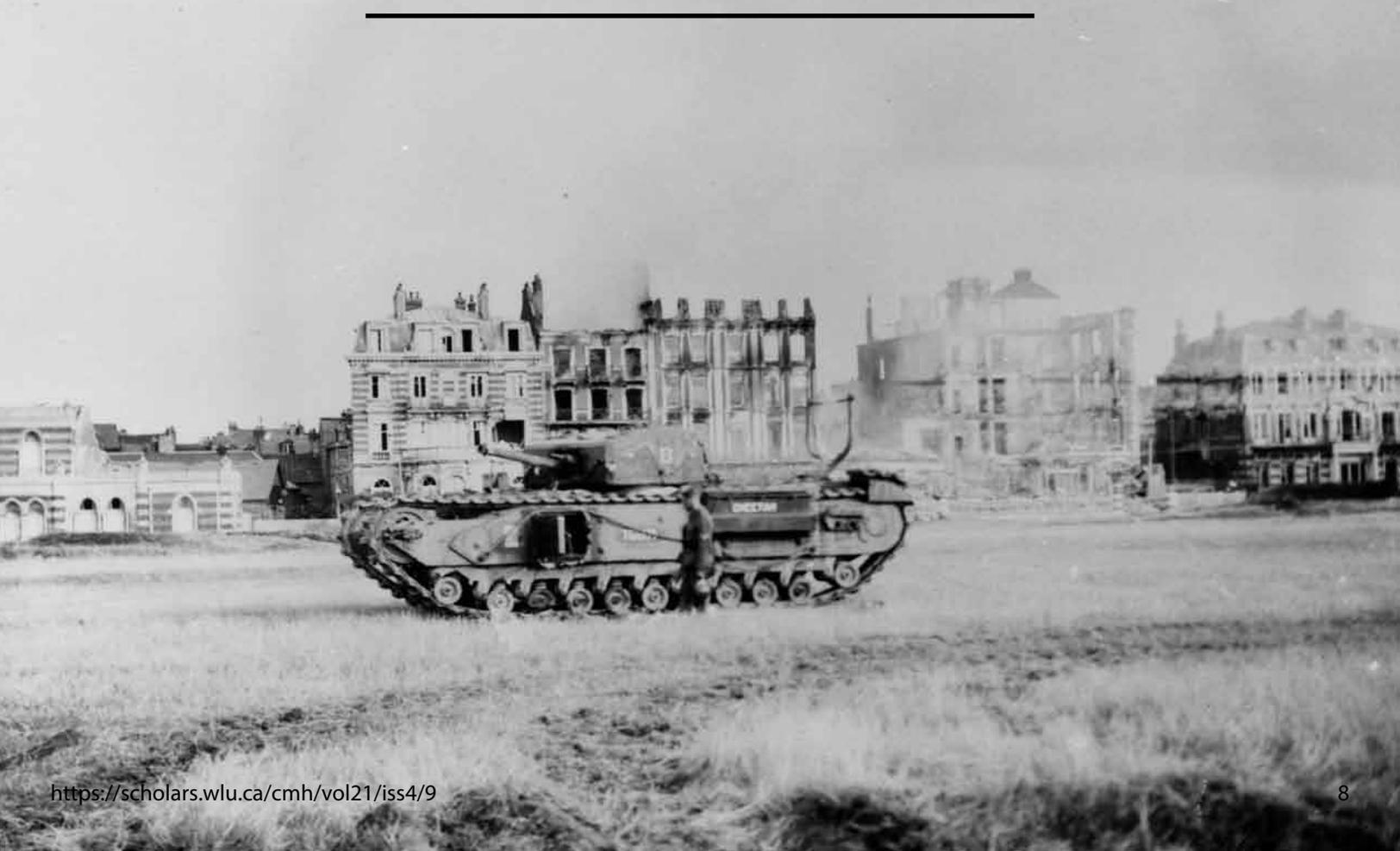
actually smaller than were heretofore have been prepared to concede."⁶² A report from the Commander in Chief West cited the total losses as 591 men – identical to a High Command official communiqué that "forced ... the conclusion that the C. in C. West was more concerned with maintaining uniformity with the story already published than with producing a completely accurate statement."⁶³ Given discrepancies and shortcomings in written reports, oral testimony played an important role in Stacey's reconstruction.

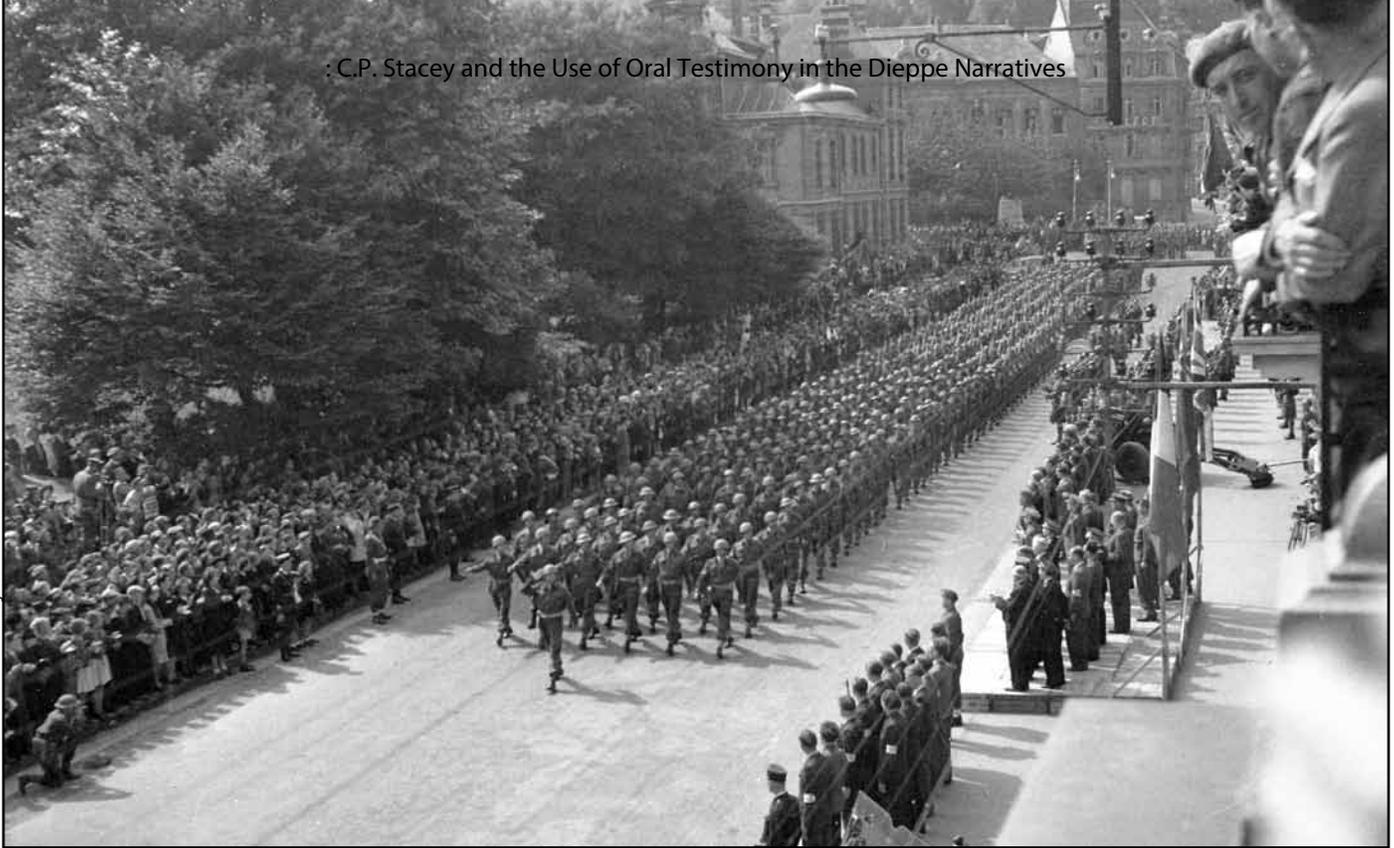
These German reports also corroborated the testimony of Major Page on key points – the number of tanks crossing the sea wall and the durability of the Churchill tank. German sources estimated the number of tanks that reached the Esplanade as sixteen in total, a number similar to Page's claim. German fire was also generally unable to pierce the Churchill's armour. Though two 37

mm shell holes had been found in the tanks left on the beach after the raid, German reports concluded that both greater numbers and heavier calibre anti-tank weapons would be required to effectively penetrate enemy armour. This supports Page's statements asserting the Churchill tank's satisfactory performance.⁶⁴

On 1 September 1944, the reconnaissance regiment of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division occupied the town of Dieppe as part of operation Fusilade. The plan had originally called for heavy bomber strikes and significant naval bombardment.⁶⁵ Such preparations proved unnecessary as the Germans "chose to abandon Dieppe without a fight."⁶⁶ The first tasks for the Canadians was to rest and conduct a remembrance ceremony at the graveyard containing casualties from the August 1942 attack followed by a ceremonial march through the town by the original participating units.

An abandoned Churchill is examined by a German soldier after the raid.





Second Canadian Infantry Division makes a triumphant return to Dieppe, 3 September 1944.

Stacey was present [on an historical liaison trip to the army in the field?] described the affair as “moving.”⁶⁷ This occupation was not simply for sentimental reasons as it provided an opportunity for the Canadians to examine Dieppe’s defences, which the Germans had significantly expanded since 1942. It was possible to determine the degree of growth by comparing recent aerial photos to an earlier defence overprint.⁶⁸

Postwar repatriations provided Stacey with valuable sources. Several former prisoners provided testimony affording “interesting additions to our knowledge of the Dieppe operation” but Stacey cautioned the official historian against “taking (these accounts) in all respects precisely at their face value” as officers who had been prisoners of war “were not in possession of the full facts concerning the results of the operation (Dieppe).”⁶⁹ Interestingly Stacey related a comment by a Lieutenant Lee to the effect that “every P.W is always extremely

bitter.” The general perception of those in prisoner camps was “liable to be coloured by circumstances.”⁷⁰

The war’s conclusion did not end the work on the Dieppe narratives. Controversies developing in the post-war period would greatly influence the perception of the Calgary tanks operational performance. Lieutenant-Colonel Robert Ridley Labatt, former prisoner of war and commander of the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry during the Dieppe raid visited Ottawa after the conclusion of hostilities to provide his personal commentary on the Dieppe narratives.⁷¹ Labatt asserted that only three tanks had reached the esplanade at any time during the operation.⁷² With such a divergence in testimony, Stacey’s wrote to other recently repatriated officers of the Calgary Regiment who had served at Dieppe for further information: Captain Edwin Bennett and Lieutenant A.L. Breithaupt. He used these officers’ written reports acquired along with Major C.E. Page’s oral account ascertaining the

actions of tanks at Dieppe. Stacey noted that responses by both Captain Bennett and Lieutenant Breithaupt generally supported the earlier oral testimony provided by Major Page.⁷³ Breithaupt recalled, “13 or 15 tanks had crossed the sea wall and reached the Esplanade ... Most of these tanks with the exception of the few that were knocked out on the Esplanade... return[ed] to the beach on the order of withdrawal.”⁷⁴ The written statements of these two officers in conjunction with Major Page’s oral account “appear[ed] to establish definitively the number of tanks which crossed the wall.” Stacey’s views concerning the “unintentional liar” outlined in his memoirs likely emerged as the result of incidents such as this.

The result of this debate found its way into CMHQ Report no.142 which addressed several issues centering on testimony of former prisoners of war. The description of tank actions in the report strongly reflected Major Page’s testimony:

initial landing of three L.C.T.s [Landing Craft Tanks] approximately on time (nine tanks), a dry landing, moved up shingle but stopped by anti-tank ditch. About this time one troop from first flight was able to reach promenade at extreme east and near harbour jetty where they came under heavy fire from cliffs. One tank reached promenade on extreme west end of promenade and came under heavy fire. Town could not be entered due to road blocks and these tanks tried to neutralize observed enemy positions from promenade. They also tried road blocks on their own without success. Consequently tanks were confined to promenade and beach. Approximately eighteen tanks had racks knocked out by fire but the interior of tanks were not effected [sic] by fire. Subsequently out of remainder of battalion, eleven tanks reached shore making in all twenty nine tanks. Many L.C.T.s sunk. No tanks were evacuated. Commanding Officer of Battalion was killed. Intercommunication was good throughout within [sic] tank battalion but communication with infantry useless.⁷⁵

In addressing the issue of the numbers and operational use of tanks at Dieppe, oral history proved a key source. In 1946, Stacey conducted interviews with both Captain Hughes-Hallett and Brigadier A.H. Head for insights on planning.⁷⁶ Stacey conducted these interviews in an effort to determine why planners chose a frontal assault. A lack of "strictly contemporary written evidence" gave the interviews increased importance.⁷⁷

In the first volume of the official histories, Stacey dedicated an entire section to "The Fortunes of the Tanks." There were many reasons the activities of the 14th Army Tank Regiment's performance at Dieppe was important. It was the first unit of the Canadian Armoured Corps to see action, the first battle for the

Churchill tank as well as the first amphibious landing of tanks under combat conditions. The interview with Major Page played a prominent role. Stacey used this information in detailing the number of tanks in operation and reconstructing their activity once ashore. In all, 29 tanks exited the landing crafts with 27 successfully landing.⁷⁸ Once the tanks had landed, they immediately faced a sea-wall only surmountable at the extreme ends which rose only two feet above the beach. A track-laying device created by a Major B. Sucharov was to assist the tanks in crossing the rocky beach facilitated this, but he developed the chespaling track for a beach with a different composition to the chert rock at Dieppe.⁷⁹ Plans for the construction of timber ramps allowing tanks to breach the wall in the centre could not be built given the heavy casualties sustained by Canadian engineers resulting from heavy German fire. Heavy concrete roadblocks barred the streets leading from the Promenade into the centre of the town, effectively refusing entry to the tanks. These obstacles remained intact due to casualties, lost equipment, and non-landed demolition personnel.⁸⁰

Major Page's testimony provided the basis for much of this section.⁸¹ Though Page was certain that 13 had successfully crossed the wall (along with two "probable"), his testimony along with correspondence with Lieutenant Bennett established that 15 tanks had crossed the wall.⁸² Stacey dismissed claims by some infantry commanders (Lieutenant-Colonel Labatt for example) who provided "much lower estimates of the number that reached the Promenade" by emphasizing that "the evidence of the men who were in the tanks was conclusive."⁸³ The accounts provided by Page and Bennett were supported by captured German files from the 81st Corps held that "'probably 16' tanks crossed the Promenade."⁸⁴ Major Page's evidence

also confirmed the "staunchness" of the Churchill tank. The tank's armour "gave complete protection" from the German's 37 mm anti-tank fire, suffering only 13 fatal casualties during the operation.⁸⁵ The lack of returning personnel was explained by the fact that the tanks "continued firing, operating in effect as pillboxes, and effectively supporting the infantry" until long after evacuations ceased. Infantrymen who witnessed the actions of the tanks "speak in the warmest terms of the manner in which they fought."⁸⁶

The official histories also reflect the difficulties Stacey had in reconstructing the activities of the Calgary tanks. "Information about the tanks' action was long very meager, chiefly because only one man (Trooper G. Volk) who had been in a tank on shore returned to England. Only when our first prisoners were repatriated (on medical grounds) in 1943 did the real facts begin to emerge."⁸⁷ Many of these "real facts" relied upon oral testimony.

The creation of the Dieppe narratives and the role of the Calgary tank regiment therein represented several years of methodical and painstaking research. In reconstructing the activities of tanks during Operation Jubilee, Stacey employed a mixture of oral testimony, allied planning documents, war diaries, written testimony, and captured German files. The testimony of Major Page proved important in establishing key facts concerning the number of tanks that managed to breach the sea-wall that withstood contrary claims with assistance of written evidence supplied by other tank officers who participated in the raid. In his memoirs, Stacey advocated a very cautious view regarding the efficacy of oral testimony, believing such sources were best used in cases where no documentary sources existed, and that there was an inverse relationship between elapsed time

and the accuracy of an interview. In spite of these reservations, Stacey made effective use of oral testimony in examining the role of tanks in creating the Dieppe narratives. The lack of returning personnel from the Calgary Tank Regiment left a gap in documentary evidence elevating the importance of oral testimony. Under pressure and lacking resources and directives, the young C.P. Stacey sought to collect as much information for the yet to be appointed official historian to use in the future official histories. To this end, Stacey created a series of narratives in which the oral testimony of individuals such as Major Page played a vital role.

Stacey's impact on the writing of military history goes beyond his role in shaping the Dieppe narratives into the official histories as a whole though much work remains to be done to determine the extent of this influence. After-action reporting and the interviewing of returned personnel is now common practice and historians through the Directorate of History and Heritage make extensive use of war diaries and oral testimony in crafting their narratives. Oral history is increasingly playing an important role in military history as evidenced by the University of Victoria's ever-expanding catalogue of interviews with veterans and proves an invaluable source for researchers. Though gaps remain to be filled on this topic, Colonel Charles Perry Stacey's influence on the writing of military history and use of oral sources is evident.

Notes

This article originally appeared in *Oral History Forum d'histoire orale* 31 (2011) and has been reprinted with the kind permission of its editors.

1. C.P. Stacey, "Preliminary Report on Operation JUBILEE," Canadian Military Headquarters (CMHQ) Report no.83, Directorate of History and Heritage (DHH), 19 September 1942, A-1.

Note: Reports were often divided into alphabetized sections. Capital letters before numbers indicate the section and page of the cited report.

2. C.P. Stacey, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War. Vol.I: Six Years of War: The Army in Canada, Britain and the Pacific* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationary, 1955), pp.387, 389.
3. These narratives took the form of preliminary reports to the Canadian Military Headquarters (CMHQ) in London during the war and more thorough reports to Army Headquarters (AHQ) in the postwar era.
4. There are two versions of Stacey's war diary available at both Library and Archives Canada [LAC] and the University of Toronto Archives [UTA]. The former (in the following cited as Stacey, War Diary, LAC) focuses more on Stacey's official duties while his personal papers held in Toronto (in the following cited as Stacey, War Diary, UTA) include a more personal reflective view.
5. Tim Cook, *Clio's Warriors: Canadian Historians and the Writing of the World Wars* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006), p.133.
6. *Ibid.*, p.94.
7. *Ibid.* Colonel A Fortesque Duguid was tasked with creating the official history of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) during the First World War, but had only managed to produce a single volume in 1938. Tim Cook notes that despite Duguid's inability to complete the official histories, he was subject to many pressures and successfully upheld the CEF's "memory and reputation."
8. *Ibid.*, p.95.
9. LAC, Record Group [RG] 24, vol.10752, 220 C.1009 (D35), Turner to McNaughton [no date on letter], cited in Cook, *Clio's Warriors*, p.95.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Cook, *Clio's Warriors*, p.95.
12. Paul Douglas Dickson, *A Very Thoroughly Canadian General: A Biography of General H.D.G. Crerar* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), p.116. Stacey had served as a militia subaltern in the Canadian Corps of Signals and had offered his services as such in summer 1940. General Crerar pushed for Stacey's appointment "in a capacity for which (he was) so particularly suited." C.P. Stacey, *A Date With History: Memoirs of a Canadian Historian* (Ottawa: Deneau, N.D, 1983), p.63.
13. Cook, *Clio's Warriors*, p.97.
14. Stacey, *A Date With History*, p.97.
15. Library and Archives Canada, RG 24, vol.17508, C.P. Stacey War Diary, 19 August 1942.
16. Stacey, *A Date With History*, p.89.
17. Cook, *Clio's Warriors*, p.99. See also Stacey, War Diary, LAC, 24 August 1942.
18. Stacey initially shifted blame from Canadian staff officers to Combined Operations Headquarters (COHQ). After "a significant amount of pressure," he created a draft acceptable to Mountbatten and the COHQ. Seeing an explanation for the raid, the Canadian government commissioned Stacey to create a "White Paper" (which became CMHQ Report no.83 – Report on Operation JUBILEE). This was well-received in Canada, with Minister of National Defence J.L. Ralston reading the entire report into Hansard. See Brian Loring Villa, *Unauthorized Action: Mountbatten and the Dieppe Raid* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1989), p.25; Stacey, *A Date With History*, p.92; Cook, *Clio's Warriors*, p.100.
19. Stacey, War Diary, LAC, 18 September 1942. The returned was a Trooper G. Volk sent to Bramshott hospital as the result of unspecified wounds. Unfortunately, Stacey did not note the given name or initials for either Captain Alexander or Cameron.
20. Stacey, *A Date With History*, pp.229-230. See also UTA, B90-0020 C.P. Stacey, War Diary, Box 15, Notebook no.29, 11 December 1943–16 February 1944, 28 January 1944, p.64: "Called on Col. Lathan to discuss various problems. Explained our field system to him. He has little faith in interviewing, however; like all the British official historians, he founds everything on the war diary."
21. Stacey, *A Date With History*, p.230.
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*, pp.231-232. Bereton Greenhous express a similar view of oral history to Stacey's in his work on the Dieppe raid "Whenever practicable the words of actual participants have been used...and (since recollections often change over the years in favour of more dramatic, amusing or self-serving versions)...[the words] are as contemporary, or near-contemporary as research permits." Bereton Greenhous, *Dieppe, Dieppe* (Ottawa: Publishing, Supply and Services Canada, 1992), p.11.
24. Personal letter from Jean E. Portugal to C.P. Stacey 29 July 1987. UTA, C.P. Stacey Personal Records B90-0020, Box 005. The book in question is likely *We Were There: A Record for Canada*, 7 vols. (Shelburne: Royal Canadian Military Institute Heritage Society, 1998). This is the only published work listed under the name Jean E. Portugal, and the topic matter is similar to that described in the letter to Stacey. The length of the work (seven volumes in total) would require a lengthy research and writing process.
25. Personal letter from C.P. Stacey to Jean E. Portugal, 1 July 1987 (content of letter strongly suggests it was misdated) UTA, C.P. Stacey Personal Records B90-0020, Box 005.
26. Stacey, *A Date With History*, p.230.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Stacey, War Diary, (LAC), 27 January 1943.
29. *Ibid.*, 30 January 1943.
30. *Ibid.*, 24 August 1942. Stacey interviewed a Sub-Lieutenant D.J. Lewis of the RCNVR, who had been a member of a commando party. In addition to writing the narratives, Stacey was also charged

- with the task of compiling a list for honours and awards. See Stacey, War Diary, LAC, 25 August 1942.
31. Stacey, War Diary, LAC, 18 September 1942. Stacey notes that Captains Cameron and Alexander were the "Adjutant and Medical Officer respectively." There is no mention in the diary whether the two officers had been a part of the Dieppe raid or had remained in England to compile the war diary.
 32. Stacey, War Diary, LAC, 31 May 1943. Stacey had written to 2nd Division headquarters on 28 January 1943 seeking any messages not included in the war diary. Stacey managed to acquire discretionary rights in regards to the retention or destruction of documents sent to the historical section. Stacey, War Diary, LAC, 31 May 1943.
 33. Stacey, War Diary, LAC, 31 May 1943.
 34. Ibid.
 35. Ibid. It is not clear who the second individual was. Stacey's typed war diary, the Dieppe narratives and the later official history cite Trooper Volk as the sole returnee.
 36. Stacey, "Preliminary Report on Operation JUBILEE," CMHQ Report no.83, DHH, A-8-9.
 37. Ibid., A-9. See also Hugh G. Henry, "The Calgary Tanks at Dieppe," *Canadian Military History* 4, no.1 (Spring 1995), pp.61-74, 67.
 38. Ibid., p.A-9.
 39. C.P. Stacey, "The Operation at DIEPPE, 19 Aug 42: Personal Stories of Participants," CMHQ Report no.89, 31 December 1942, DHH, p.3.
 40. C.P. Stacey, The Operation at DIEPPE, 19 Aug 42: Further Personal Stories of Participants CMHQ Report no.90, 11 February 1943, DHH, p.A-3.
 41. Ibid., p.F-4 .
 42. Ibid., pp.D-1, D-3.
 43. Ibid., D-4, D-5.
 44. Stacey, War Diary, UTA, B 90-0020 Box. 16 Notebook no.28, 8 October – 10 December 1943, 23 October 1943, pp.21-22.
 45. C.P. Stacey, "The Operation at DIEPPE, 19 Aug 42: 'Further Personal Stories of Participants'" CMHQ Report no.107, 29 November 1943; DHH, p.8. Note: Report title same as Stacey's CMHQ report number 90.
 46. Stacey, War Diary, (LAC), 29 October 1943.
 47. Chert is a hard, sedimentary rock composing the beaches at Dieppe. Tanks would dig themselves into ruts created by their tracks, which allowed stones to enter between the drive sprocket and track, breaking the pins that secured the track links. See Henry, "Calgary Tanks at Dieppe," p.66.
 48. Stacey, War Diary, UTA, B 90-0020 Box. 16 Notebook no.28, 8 October–10 December 1943.
 49. Ibid., 30 October 1943, pp.31-33.
 50. Ibid.
 51. Ibid., 6 November 1943, p.36. Page stated that the following tanks crossed the wall: Bob, Bellicose, Bert, Cougar, Bill, Cat, Betty, Cheeta, Blondie, Caustic, Brenda, Company and Bluebell. The two "probables" were Beefy and Bloody. Stacey, CMHQ Report no.107, p.9.
 52. Stacey, War Diary, UTA, B 90-0020 Box. 16 Notebook no.28, 8 October–10 December 1943.10 November 1943, p.51.
 53. Stacey, CMHQ Report no.107, p.9.
 54. Stacey, War Diary, LAC, 11-15 December 1943.
 55. Ibid., 8 May 1944.
 56. Stacey, "Operation 'JUBILEE': The Raid on Dieppe, 19 August 42. Additional Information from German Sources," CMHQ Report no.116; 10 May 1944, DHH, p.2.
 57. Ibid.
 58. Ibid., p.5.
 59. Ibid., pp.6-7. Organization Todt was a civil and military engineering group named after its founder Fritz Todt. The organization was responsible for coordinating engineering projects across the Reich and its conquered or occupied territories. "Organization Todt," Yad Vashem, Shoah Research Centre, <http://www1.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%205807.pdf> (accessed 5 March 2008).
 60. Stacey, "Operation 'JUBILEE': The Raid on Dieppe, 19 August 42. Additional Information from German Sources," CMHQ Report no.116. 10 May 1944 DHH, p.6.
 61. Ibid.
 62. C.P. Stacey, "Update" Army Headquarters Report [AHQ] no.10, n.d., DHH, p.43.
 63. Ibid., pp.43-44.
 64. Stacey, CMHQ Report no.116, p.9.
 65. C.P. Stacey, "The OPERATION at DIEPPE, 19 Aug 42: Some New Information," CMHQ Report no.128, 20 November 1944, DHH, pp.8-9. The naval squadron tasked consisted of two battleships, two monitors (shallow draft shore bombardment ships), four cruisers, and eight landing craft gunboats. If the original raid had received similar naval support (and aerial bombardment), the event may not have been such a debacle.
 66. Ibid., p.9.
 67. Ibid., p.10.
 68. Ibid., p.12. A defence overprint is a type of topographic map.
 69. C.P. Stacey, "OPERATION 'JUBILEE': The Raid on Dieppe, 19 Aug 42. Further New Information," CMHQ Report no.142, 19 August 1942, DHH, p.2.
 70. Ibid.
 71. C.P. Stacey, "OPERATION 'JUBILEE': The Raid on Dieppe, 19 Aug 42. Part II: The Execution of the Operation. Section 2: The Attack on the Main Beaches." CMHQ Report no.108. 26 November 1949, DHH, p.2. Lieutenant-Colonel Labatt had been captured "after some time in the water" while awaiting evacuation on the Royal Navy Gunboat *Locust*. See C.P. Stacey, "Article Dealing with the OPERATION at Dieppe, 19 Aug 42. CMHQ Report no.98 15 July 1943, p.A-20.
 72. Stacey, CMHQ Report no.108, pp.2-3.
 73. Ibid., p.3.
 74. Ibid.
 75. Stacey, CMHQ Report no.142, p.10.
 76. Brigadier A.H. Head was the military advisor at Combined Operations at the time of the Dieppe Raid.
 77. C.P. Stacey "Operation 'JUBILEE': The Raid on Dieppe, 19 Aug 42. New Light on Early Planning," CMHQ Report no.153, 22 March 1946; C.P. Stacey Papers, UTA, B91-0013 Box 007, File 2. See also C.P. Stacey, CMHQ Report no.159, "OPERATION 'JUBILEE': The Raid on Dieppe 19 Aug 42. Additional Information on Planning," UTA, B91-0013, Box 001.
 78. Stacey, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War*, p.379. Two of the tanks had "drowned" upon exiting the LCT.
 79. Henry, "Calgary Tanks at Dieppe," p.68. "Chespaling" was a long roll of wooden track mounted at the front of the tank, which would unfurl to provide a firm path for the tanks and other vehicles to traverse. The track laying mechanism on several tanks was damaged during transport to Dieppe and removed by engineers in the landing crafts.
 80. Stacey, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War*, p.380.
 81. Ibid., p.379.
 82. Ibid.
 83. Ibid.
 84. Ibid.
 85. Ibid., p.380.
 86. Ibid.
 87. Ibid.

Tavis Harris completed a BA and MA in history at the University of Waterloo before commencing his PhD under Dr Roger Sarty at Wilfrid Laurier University. His thesis addresses Canada's participation in the interwar naval disarmament process and the impact these conferences had on autonomy and security planning. He has published work on Canada and the Geneva Protocol along with Stacey's development of the Dieppe Narratives. Besides his academic pursuits, he serves as an officer in the Royal Canadian Navy, a director of the Hamilton Naval Historical Association and is an avid powerlifter.