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Dieppe: the Awards

Hugh A. Halliday

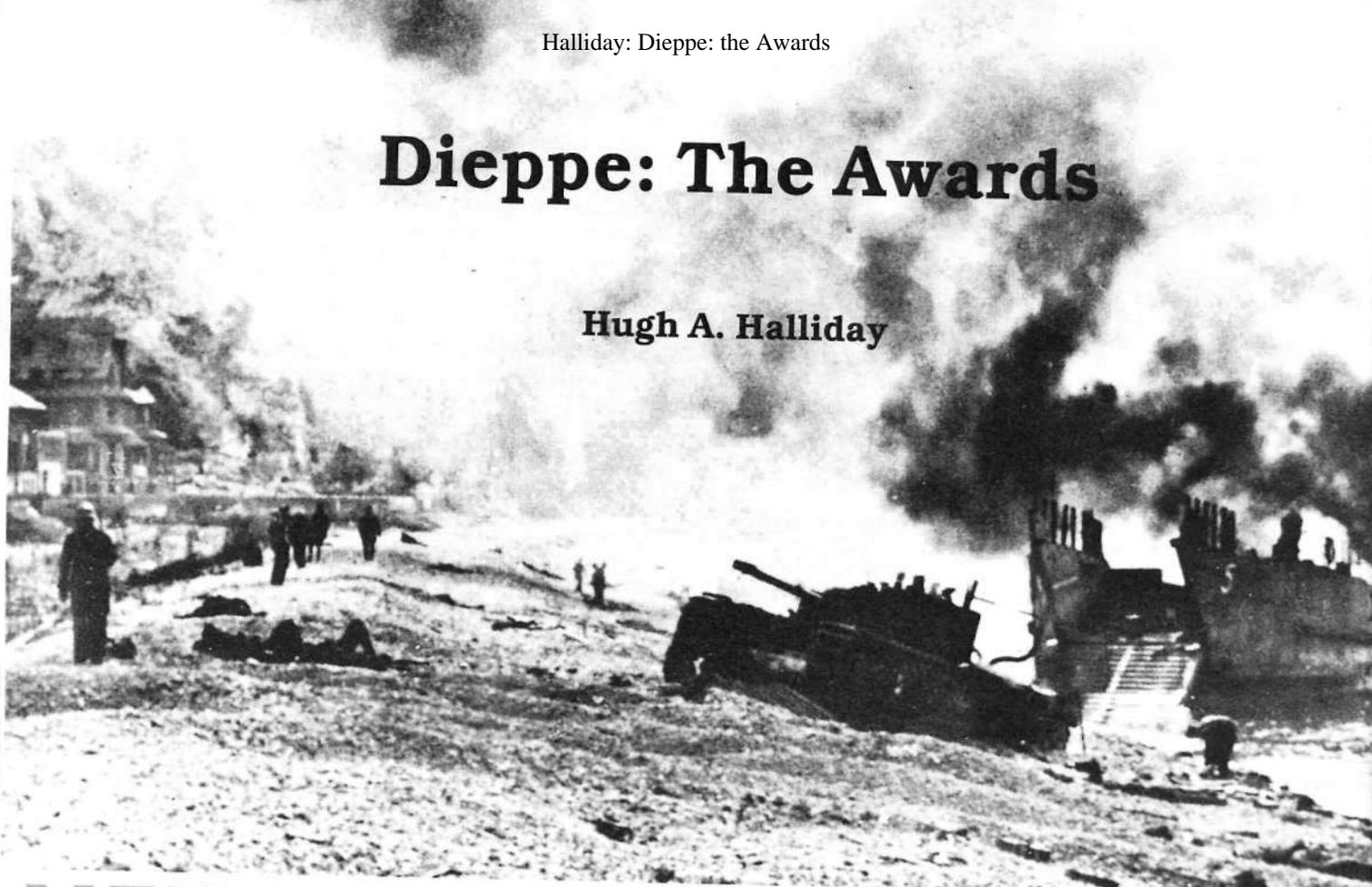
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Dieppe: The Awards

Hugh A. Halliday



MEN *of* VALOR *They fight for you*



“When last seen he was collecting Bren and Tommy Guns and preparing a defensive position which successfully covered the withdrawal from the beach.”— Excerpt from citation awarding

Victoria Cross to Lt.-Col. Merritt, South Saskatchewan Regt., Dieppe, Aug. 19, 1942

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Top: The main beach at Dieppe following the raid on 19 August 1942. (Canadian War Museum [CWM] 81-6977)

Left: Wartime poster commemorating the feat which won Lieutenant-Colonel C.C. Merritt the Victoria Cross at Dieppe. The fierce hero on the poster scarcely resembles the calm officer whose picture appears later in the article on page 38. (CWM 71-258)

Below: The Victoria Cross.



As the survivors of the Dieppe Raid gathered in England, officers rushed to sort out the administrative aftermath. This included writing reports for superiors (military and political) as well as despatching letters of condolences to next of kin. There was, however, another task to be performed—that of distributing honours and awards to those involved. This proceeded in stages, the first of which culminated in the publication of Dieppe-related awards in the *London Gazette* of October 2nd, 1942. The scale of these varied according to services; their distribution was as follows:

London, and the War Office. The matter was further discussed with Combined Operations Headquarters and with the GOC First Canadian Corps. By August 26th, 1942, the general policy had been laid down. First Canadian Corps instructed the General Officer Commanding, 2nd Canadian Division (Major General Roberts) to submit recommendations for 100 immediate awards in respect of Dieppe operations. It was suggested that 40 should go to officers and 60 to other ranks. First Canadian Corps also requested that approximately 150 Mentions in Despatches be submitted with similar officer/OR proportions.

	Royal Navy	British Army & Royal Marines	Canadian Army	RAF, RCAF, RNZAF
Victoria Cross	-	1	1	-
Order of the British Empire	2	-	-	2
Bar to the Distinguished Service Order	1	-	1	-
Distinguished Service Order	7	2	12	2
Member of the British Empire	-	-	-	1
Distinguished Service Cross	36	-	-	-
Bar to the Military Cross	-	1	-	-
Military Cross	-	4	16	-
Bar to the Distinguished Flying Cross	-	-	-	3 ¹
Distinguished Flying Cross	-	-	-	10 ²
CGM	1	-	-	-
Distinguished Service Medal	49	-	-	-
Military Medal	-	16	45	-
Distinguished Flying Medal	-	-	-	1 ³
Mentions in Despatches	198 ⁴	8	91	-

The process by which these were bestowed says much about the policies governing such honours. At the same time, study of the subject raises questions that remain unanswered. Precisely how did authorities decide upon specific awards for individuals? What distinguished a DCM action from an MM exploit? Above all, how were Victoria Crosses awarded?

The business of bestowing decorations began on August 21st, 1942, with talks between junior officers at Canadian Military Headquarters,

MiDs could cover posthumous awards, but with respect to awards of medals only posthumous VC recommendations could be entertained. However, VC recommendations would not be counted among the 100 specified. The letter went on to state, "As regards Prisoners of War, recommendations may be included but action will not be taken until after the war."⁶

As commander of the operation, Roberts was responsible for awards to British personnel as well as Canadians engaged. On September 8th,



Major-General J.H. Roberts
A portrait by Lawren P. Harris, who was commissioned soon after the raid to paint Roberts and one decorated member of each of the participating regiments. (CWM 12714)

1942, he despatched his recommendations to First Canadian Corps. The honours involved were approximately those as finally published in the *London Gazette* (see above), although his initial suggestions were for seven rather than eight DSOs (the eighth, to Roberts himself, would be added by higher authorities); he submitted 25 names for Military Crosses (only 16 were gazetted) while the number of DCMs recommended was fourteen (twelve gazetted). Roberts requested 44 Military Medal awards; the number granted was 45. His suggested 100 Mentions in Despatches were reduced in the *London Gazette* to 91.

Roberts also forwarded citations for Nos.3 and 4 Royal Marine Commando-seven gallantry awards for officers, 16 gallantry awards for ORs, two MiDs for officers, seven MiDs for ORs. This seemed to annoy him, for he wrote:

You will note that they [the Royal Marine Commandos recommendations] are far in excess

of what should be their numerical allotment for awards. Canadian forces embarked were 4,912, whereas all three Commandos comprised some 800 all ranks. On a purely numerical basis, the allotment for all Commandos should be some 13 awards and 20 mentions in despatches. I have made no comments to COHQ [Combined Operations Headquarters] concerning this.

The task of preparing citations had been complex. To speed matters, on August 29th Canadian Military Headquarters attached three officers to 2nd Canadian Division to assist in drafting texts; these were Major C.P. Stacey, Captain J.C. Morrison and Lieutenant L.W. Taylor. Previously, Major F.E.D. Wallace (DAAG, 1st Canadian Division) had been loaned to 2nd Division, visiting units and advising on what was needed by way of documentation. They were aided by three Other Ranks, Corporals R.D. Gale and M.G. Tester (clerk stenographers) and Private H. Cunliffe (clerk). Stacey subsequently wrote that the job was particularly trying because he was also drafting reports of the raid for the Canadian government itself.

There were many problems associated with the honours. Much correspondence passed between Ottawa and London to ensure that British awards were not announced before those to Canadians. The Minister of National Defence was also anxious to make clear that honours granted to Canadians not only had Royal approval but also the consent of Canadian ministers. These matters of etiquette and national status were resolved by simultaneous publication of the awards in the *Canada Gazette* and *London Gazette*.

Notwithstanding the limits placed on posthumous awards, one major procedural error was committed in the confusion following the raid. Private Jack James Hunter (Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada) was recommended for a Military Medal. It was believed that he had been wounded but had returned safely to England. The award was approved and duly gazetted. When Hunter did not appear for an investiture, inquiries revealed that he had, in fact, been reported as "Missing." Inadvertently, the Canadian Army had awarded a posthumous MM.

Roberts himself attempted to strike a balance among units, so that no regiment could be deemed to have been favoured over another. Nevertheless,

at least one award was subsequently queried by Canadian politicians. On October 24th, the Minister of National Defence (James Ralston) cabled CMHQ, asking that a possible MC be explored for Honourary Captain J.A. Sabourin, Chaplain, who had been granted an MiD on recommendation of the Officer Commanding, Fusiliers de Mont-Royal. It was contrasted with an MC awarded Honourary Captain J.P. Browne, Chaplain to the Cameron Highlanders of Canada. Ralston was apparently concerned about discrimination being discerned. Roberts investigated, but he soon concluded that upgrading the award was out of the question, for reasons he explained on October 28th, 1942:

It is pointed out for your information that, information from M.S. [Military Secretary], The War Office indicates that reconsideration of an award is a very rare occurrence (only two cases so far in this War). If new facts had been brought to light which would warrant a higher award, the case might be re-opened and if approved the higher award would be gazetted, whilst at the same time cancelling the previous gazette entry for the lower award. As a matter of general policy, however, there would be great reluctance to suggest that awards can be reviewed and there is no doubt that in so doing a dangerous precedent might be set.⁷

Roberts' opinions were much more clearly stated in discussions with Crerar. As of October 29th he had described his actions as follows:

...in forwarding these recommendations I did not take into consideration the denominations of the padres, and all awards were judged solely on the basis of the intrinsic value of the action described.

The CO., Fus M.R. recommended H/Capt J.A. Sabourin for a mention in despatches, and as it appeared that he had spent the majority of his time in an L.C.T I saw no good reason for raising this award.

In addition an attempt was made to equalize awards in all units including attached officers, and in the case of the Fus M.Rs they received their full proportion.

To this, Crerar added his own comments:

I believe that to recommend revision of a published award would create a most dangerous precedent, and result in future pressure for awards on a proportionate and representative basis.

It would also tend to destroy confidence in our recommendations. Discovery of fresh information would create a different situation, but that appears most unlikely to develop in the present case.

The Fus M.R. received a total of 12 awards. No other Bn received more than 10 and only two—the R.H.L.I. and Camerons of C—that number.

In the case of the Camerons of Canada a recommendation for one additional DSO to a prisoner cannot be dealt with while the officer remains in enemy hands.



The Distinguished Service Order

Robert's reluctance to second guess the opinion of the officer making the original recommendation is understandable. Nevertheless, some awards were altered between initial suggestion and final gazetting. Thus, Major J.E. McRae (South Saskatchewan Regiment) received a DSO, although he had originally been recommended for a Military Cross. Private William A. Haggard, also of the South Saskatchewan, was recommended for an MM and was awarded the more prestigious Distinguished Conduct Medal. The available paper "trails" suggest

that the changes were made at the level of Canadian Military Headquarters in London, but what considerations lay behind the alterations is not apparent.

The matter of awards for Prisoners of War presented a problem. When Roberts sent forward his recommendations, they included two for Victoria Crosses. At the time it was believed that one candidate, Lieutenant-Colonel C.C. Merritt, was dead. When news arrived that he was alive as a POW, the question of any award became contentious. British policy was that officers and men who were taken prisoner should be considered eligible for awards only after they either escaped captivity, died or hostilities ended.



Lieutenant-Colonel C. C. Merritt, VC, being interviewed by correspondents shortly after his release from a prisoner of war camp, 21 April 1945. The award of a decoration, even a VC, to someone who had been taken prisoner was unusual.

(Photo by A.L. Cole. NAC PA 161938)

This would lead to 90 more awards to Dieppe Raid participants after the war. However, Canadian authorities argued that Merritt's was a "special case." The line of argument used is not recorded in detail, but on September 20th, the Adjutant General, Major-General H.F.G. Letson, cabled Major-General P.J. Montague (Senior Combatant Officer, Canadian Military Headquarters, London) that an award to Merritt would have a good effect on army morale; two days later, Montague replied that a precedent existed, though he gave no name.⁸ One can guess that another consideration would be that matters would appear unseemly if a VC went to one of 800 British Commandos with no comparable award to any of the 6,000 Canadian soldiers involved. Merritt's VC was duly gazetted with the other Dieppe awards on October 2nd, 1942.

Even as Canadian authorities pushed hard for Merritt's Victoria Cross, they worried that a lack of awards to those held prisoner might be resented at home. In his cable of September 20th, Letson asked for suggestions as to how the policy

might be explained to the public. Montague's response was very pragmatic; he declared that no statement or explanation should be offered. "If you do," he said, "you will have started an endless trouble." Silence on the issue was the accepted approach, but it was not altogether successful, for on October 30th, 1942, Army Headquarters in Ottawa cabled London to report that questions had indeed been raised as to why POWs had not been decorated.⁹ However, there is nothing in the records to suggest that any public explanation was ever offered.

If Merritt's award challenged accepted policy, the case of Honourary Captain John Foote posed another problem. On October 20th, 1942, General Roberts wrote to Headquarters, First Canadian Corps, requesting that postwar consideration be given to an award for the Chaplain. He enclosed three statements by returned soldiers who testified to Foote's actions—including reports of Foote firing a Bren gun, a job not part of a padre's job description! Even Roberts was moved to ask, on November 4th, that any

recommendation respecting Foote omit reference to handling weapons "as being liable to cause political complications."

Roberts did not recommend himself for an award; the initiative for his DSO came on September 16th from Brigadier A.E. Walford, basing his report on observations made aboard HMS *Calpe* by Lieutenant-Colonels G.P. Henderson and J. Macbett (2nd Division Signals Staff); Crerar concurred the same day and sent the recommendation on to GOC-in-C, First Canadian Army (McNaughton).

Awards continued at a trickle in subsequent months. On December 31st, 1942, Army Routine Orders announced that Private Harry Wichtacz (Royal Hamilton Light Infantry) had been awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal; Warrant Officer Lucian Dumais and Privates Conrad Lafleur, Guy Joly and Robert Vanier, all of Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal, had been awarded the Military Medal "in recognition of gallant and distinguished services in the field"; It is not clear why Wichtacz's award had been delayed; he had made it back to England, seriously wounded, after performing heroically on the Dieppe beach. The time lag for the other four, however, is easily explained: following their capture they executed successful escapes which culminated in their return to England with help from the French Resistance.¹⁰

More poignant were awards announced in the London *Gazette* of September 16th, 1943-Mentions in Despatches for Major Paul Richard Savoy and Private Gerard Cloutier (Fusiliers Mont-Royal), whose deaths had been confirmed. The story of Private Cloutier was especially telling, for at that time the only gallantry awards that could be issued posthumously were the two highest (Victoria Cross and George Cross) and the lowest (Mention in Despatches):

An officer's batman. Private Cloutier showed extreme courage and heroism during the action at Dieppe, 19 August 1942. When

communications between his company commander and Battalion Headquarters were interrupted, he volunteered to cross the open beach to Battalion Headquarters and there obtain the necessary orders for his Company, a task which he carried out successfully under extremely dangerous conditions. Throughout the action he exposed himself continually in carrying messages and in giving first aid to the wounded. When a concentrated machine gun barrage was directed at his group he flung himself across the body of his wounded Company Commander and was there killed. His last words were, "It's all right sir, they got me, but you can do more for the remainder than I could."

Another batch of awards for Dieppe gallantry was announced in Canadian Army (Overseas) Routine Order 3950, dated October 27th, 1943. These were French honours, granted by de Gaulle's Free French. Inquiries from de Gaulle's government had begun as early as November 1942, with correspondence passing through Canada's representative to governments-in-exile, Major-General Georges Vanier. The French insisted that fifteen nominations be submitted, and these were supplied in May 1943. However, gazetting was delayed pending agreement on texts and approval by British and Canadian authorities. The honours involved were Croix de Guerres in four categories, distributed to eight officers and seven Other Ranks. They also represented a balance of arms and units; the Canadian Army had put forward names from the Signals Corps, Artillery, and seven infantry battalions. Of the regiments that had been heavily engaged at Dieppe, only the Calgary Tanks had been overlooked.

Meanwhile, the process of preparing for postwar awards was already under way. It had begun with the first letters received from officers being held prisoners of war. Even in captivity, they were writing letters of condolences to families back in Canada and sending correspondence (bearing POW Camp stamps) to London, praising various individuals for courage. One of the most diligent of these was Brigadier William W. Southam, the senior officer captured. In May

1943, Canadian Overseas Military Headquarters received a twelve page listing of recommendations from him. Other officers who were particularly diligent were Lieutenant-Colonel C.C. Merritt (whose VC had already been gazetted) and Major Joseph R. Painchaud (Fusiliers Mont-Royal).¹¹

The most remarkable views were those of Lieutenant-Colonel Douglas E. Catto (The Royal Regiment of Canada) who suggested in a letter dated June 30th, 1943, that recommending awards for specific individuals would result either in an inordinate number of recommendations being made or unfair discrimination as between those finally honoured and those not decorated. Having canvassed his fellow POW officers, Catto recommended that all surviving members of the regiment be entitled to wear a special badge or patch denoting their presence on the raid. Catto repeated this suggestion even more forcefully after being liberated. On June 8th, 1945, Lieutenant - General Montague (by now Chief of Staff, Canadian Military Headquarters), virtually scotched the idea in a memo to the General Officer Commanding in Chief, First Canadian Army. Having summarized Catto's arguments, Montague went on to declare:

- (a) It is difficult, if not impossible, to accept that other units which participated in the Dieppe operation are not equally entitled to a similar distinction.
- (b) All other units which participated in the Dieppe operation have submitted individual citations.
- (c) Individual awards have been made as a result of the Dieppe action.
- (d) Participation in particular actions is normally recognized by the award of battle honours to be carried on the regimental colours.
- (e) There is no precedent in the Canadian Army during this war for such a regimental or unit award.
- (f) Such an award would provide a precedent for claims by other units for recognition of other actions.

On balance I do not feel justified in recommending this application. In all the circumstances, however, I have considered that the matter must be presented to you with all the factors which have occurred to be as relevant to the issue.



Major John Foote photographed after his release from captivity and before his award of the Victoria Cross. Foote was indeed a "fighting chaplain" whose activities at Dieppe may have violated the codes governing military clergy. (CWM ZK1075)

In a telegram dated June 12th, 1945, General Crerar concurred with Montague; Colonel Catto would have to submit recommendations for awards in the same manner as other officers. Fifty-two years later, Canadian authorities reconsidered the issue and issued a "Dieppe" Bar to be worn on the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal for which all Canadian Dieppe veterans (land, sea and air) were eligible.

As of June 4th, 1945, Canadian Military Headquarters was holding recommendations for dozens of awards. These included statements from eye witnesses, testifying to the courage and dedication of their comrades, subordinates and superiors. Some files had been growing since September 1942; others were being started in light of reports from returning POWs. These included suggestions for no fewer than five additional Victoria Crosses. Of these latter, one would be downgraded to a DCM, three (all posthumous) would be recognized by Mentions in Despatches, and one-Padre John Foote-would clear all hurdles to be gazetted as a VC. That such

an award was granted was undoubtedly due to the body of evidence submitted by former prisoners; when General Roberts had first pondered an award for Foote (November 1942) he had drafted a citation for a Military Cross.

The final Dieppe awards were bestowed by announcement in the *Canada Gazettes* of February 9th and 16th, 1946; the latter dealt only Foote's Victoria Cross. A list in the Directorate of History demonstrates the degree to which recommendations had been pared down, with some awards being downgraded, a few upgraded, and some being "washed out" altogether. It also demonstrates that Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal had been particularly active in suggesting awards; their hopes had been frustrated by the continuing Canadian Army policy of granting rough equality among regiments. Thus, the FMR's recommended 30 awards—one VC (gazetted as an MiD), one DSO (gazetted as an MiD), nine MCs (two granted, one gazetted as an MiD, six "washed out"), one DCM (granted), nine MMs (two granted, two downgraded to MiDs, five "washed out") and nine MiDs (all washed out). The total grant to Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal was thus ten awards, to add to the nineteen Commonwealth and French honours they had received at various times since the raid. The Queen's Own Camerons of Canada submitted fourteen recommendations and had thirteen approved (one MC, two DCMs, three MMs and seven MiDs); the South Saskatchewan recommended thirteen and had eleven approved (one DSO, one DCM, two MCs, one MM, four MiDs). Apart from Foote's VC, the final distribution of Dieppe awards encompassed seven DSOs, thirteen MCs, nineteen MMs, seven DCMs, and 44 Mentions in Despatches; 23 MiDs were for soldiers who had either been killed in action or had died in captivity.

While admitting that the awards were to some degree arbitrary, it is worth concluding with two citations from the 1946 awards (both for Mentions in Despatches) which illustrate different

aspects of the Dieppe Raid and its aftermath. Captain Scott's citation demonstrates that defiance of the enemy continued even into captivity; Warrant Officer Jacobs' citation was but one more instance of heroism that could come to light only after the war.

**Lieutenant (Acting Captain)
William H. Scott (Essex Scottish)**

Lieutenant Scott was a platoon commander of the Essex Scottish Regiment in the Dieppe Operation, 19 August 1942, and throughout displayed conspicuous gallantry and leadership.

His high example of personal courage under heavy fire contributed greatly to the morale of his men. During the morning, although wounded himself, when one of his men who was severely wounded became caught in the wire at the top of the sea wall, Lieutenant Scott unhesitatingly exposed himself to severe fire and drew the soldier to safety behind the sea wall. During imprisonment, this officer effected an escape by tunnel from Oflag VIB on or about 4 June 1943, with a party, and remained at large for some days in south Germany before recapture.

**Warrant Officer II
William Stewart Milford Jacobs
(Royal Regiment of Canada)**

While in command of the Royal Regiment of Canada battalion headquarters protective detachment, at Dieppe, 19 August 1942, Company Sergeant Major Jacobs

led his men to the sea wall. Noticing that a landing craft filled with wounded men was attempting to back off the beach while under heavy fire from a pill box, he left the comparative safety of the sea wall and, going out into the open, threw his grenades at the vision slits of the pill box, disrupting the aim of the garrison. Having exhausted his supply of grenades he called to his men to toss him more, and these he continued to throw until killed by enemy light automatic fire.

The distribution of military honours following the Dieppe Raid is but one instance of how such awards were made. Authorities were concerned with striking proper balances; restrictive policies might leave courage unrecognized; excessive generosity risked dilution of the honours themselves. There were unwritten rules designed



The Military Medal

to avoid even the appearance of regimental favouritism. The system was to some degree arbitrary. It could not be otherwise, for it was being administered by humans rather than machines. Nevertheless, when one reads the stories of men like Lieutenant Scott and Warrant Officer Jacobs, it is very difficult to be cynical.

Notes

1. Including one to Squadron Leader L.S. Ford, RCAF.
2. Including one to Flying Officer G .A. Ford, RCAF.
3. To Sergeant G.A. Casey, RCAF.
4. Including two to RCN personnel, Ordinary Seaman B. McIntyre and Able Seaman N. Mitchinson.
5. Three posthumous.
6. Unless otherwise noted, all correspondence can be found on the former Directorate of History file 229C1 (D36),

- now held in the National Archives of Canada (Record Group 24 Volume 10827).
7. Lieutenant-Colonel M. Noel, writing on behalf of Senior Officer, CMHQ to GOC, First Canadian Army.
 8. Canadian Military Headquarters file 21/Dieppe/1, "Honours and Awards-Dieppe," held by National Archives of Canada, RG24, Volume 12730.
 9. *Ibid.*
 10. Ronald Atkin, *Dieppe, 1942: The Jubilee Disaster* (London, Macmillan, 1980), p.271.
 11. The correspondence and recommendations are fragmentary; most are in an uncatalogued binder held (as of September 1994) by the Directorate of History.

Hugh A. Halliday recently retired from the Canadian War Museum. He is currently in the process of choosing a new project, probably to do with Air Force honours and awards.