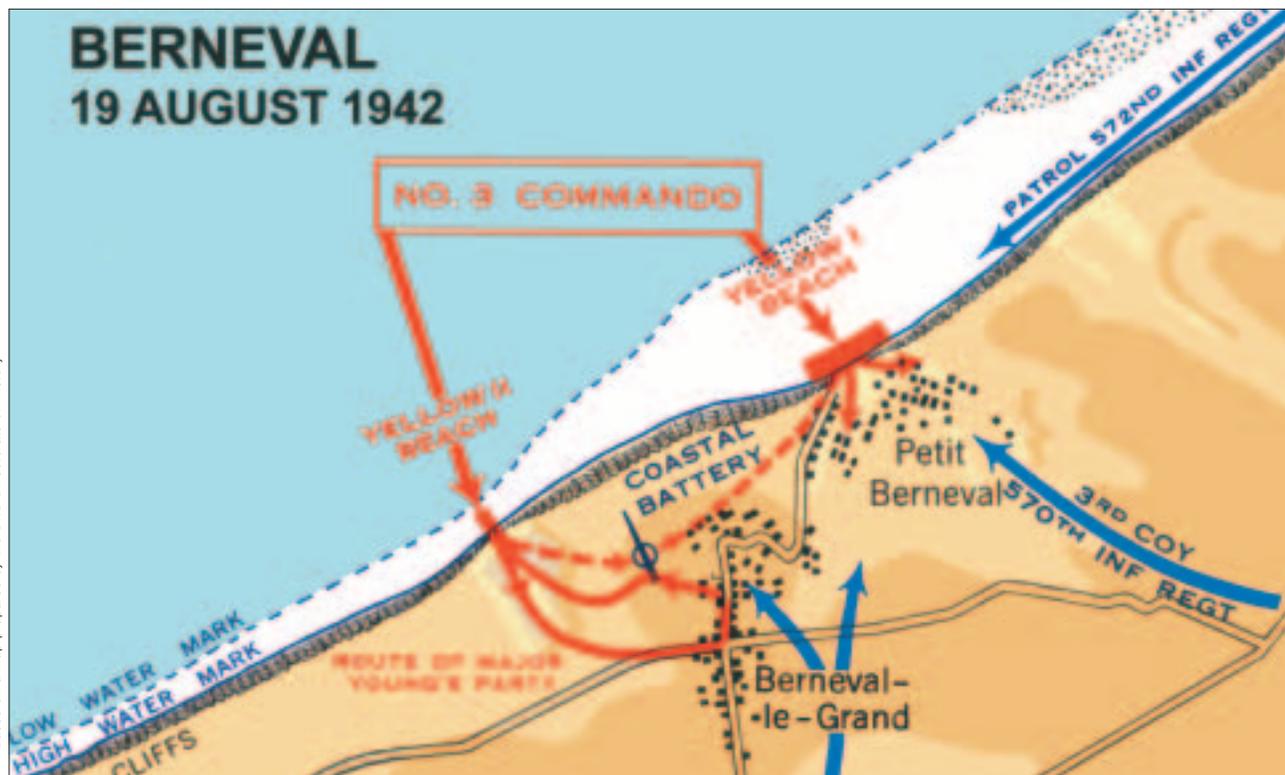


Based on a map prepared by the DND Directorate of History



## OPERATION FLODDEN: THE SEA FIGHT OFF BERNEVAL AND THE SUPPRESSION OF THE GOEBBELS BATTERY, 19 AUGUST 1942

by Brereton Greenhous

A high tide lapped quietly on the stony French foreshore. Above, on the cliff top, it was as quiet as the grave, and very nearly as dark, as a solitary landing craft commanded by a 22-year-old RNVR lieutenant, Henry Buckee, nosed in to the beach. No lights were showing anywhere, and to the crew of Buckee's little boat, the Channel appeared empty of all other shipping. Major Peter Young, MC, second-in-command of No. 3 Commando, was the ranking passenger.

"What do we do now?" I asked, rather pointlessly.

"My orders," he [Buckee] replied, "are to land even if there's only one boat."

Not to be outdone, I said: "Those are my orders, too: we are to land whatever happens, even if we have to swim."

Buckee offered to land with his sailors to swell our party, but I persuaded him to remain with the craft. We arranged that, if he should come under heavy fire from the cliffs, he would leave us and that we would try to make our way to Dieppe and join the

Canadians when the time came to withdraw. He was making directly for *Yellow II*, but, fearing that there would be machine-guns in the gully, I asked him to run in about fifty yards to the right.<sup>1</sup>

### OPERATION "FLODDEN"

Operation "Flodden", intended to take and destroy the coast artillery battery emplaced at Berneval, was a sub-set of Operation "Jubilee", the August 1942 raid on Dieppe. The planning of "Flodden" called for two landings by 3 Commando, less than a kilometre apart, on beaches codenamed *Yellow I* and *Yellow II*, with the objective sited on the high cliff between them. Manned by about 130 men, the Goebbels Battery consisted of an observation post on the cliff edge, a command post, ammunition store, and three 170-mm and four 105-mm guns that had been taken from the French in 1940, all within a wired compound. The garrison was billeted in nearby villages.

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A pre-war postcard showing the rugged coastline at Berneval where No. 3 Commando landed on 19 August 1942.

If things had gone according to plan, Young would have been leading 150 super-soldiers ashore as one arm of the pincer. As it was, he, two other officers and seventeen somewhat dejected men scrambled ashore and “Flodden” began about as inauspiciously as any amphibious operation could. The plan had gone totally awry when the vessels carrying and escorting the raiders met with a German coastal convoy earlier that night.

No part of the disastrous Dieppe affair is as shrouded in confusion as the sea fight that followed, but that should not surprise us. Moonless night actions at sea involving smoke and numbers of small craft with very different characteristics – profiles, speeds, armament – are often impossible to comprehend, even for those who were intimately involved. In this case, the contradictions in extant accounts make it very difficult to reach the truth, a difficulty compounded by the egregious errors committed by the various authors who have previously written about it. For an example, we need look no further than one of the more recent (and melodramatic) monographs on Dieppe by the late Brigadier-General Denis Whitaker (who participated in the “Jubilee” raid, albeit on the main beaches) and his wife.

... the section of the flotilla carrying Lieutenant-Colonel Durnford-Slater’s No. 3 Commando had been intercepted by the German convoy: a tanker and its escort of some six armed E boats [motor gun or torpedo boats].... Flares exploded in the sky and searchlights pinned down the hapless men as they were strafed by 40-mm Bofors fire. In the

brief but violent firefight, serious damage was incurred by escort craft on both sides, and casualties were severe. Six of the wretched wooden R boats [Eurekas] were sunk.... The rest of the landing craft quickly dispersed; only six had escaped intact. For the assault force, the worst news was that “the entire coast defence system was alerted.”<sup>2</sup>

This paragraph is given an air of authenticity by an endnote citing a British Cabinet paper and two official historians, one British and one Canadian. But in fact, the German convoy consisted of four small freighters and a tanker, with three armed trawlers as escorts. There were certainly no E-boats involved and likely no 40-mm Bofors. None of the landing craft was sunk during the firefight at sea<sup>3</sup> (although one was lost while landing men on *Yellow I*, three while trying to take them off, and two had to be eventually abandoned in a sinking condition). At least eight escaped more or less intact. The coast defence system was *not* alerted by the sea fight.

**“Did the clash with the German convoy have an effect on Operation “Jubilee” as a whole? No, it did not. No one at Berneval realized that a raid was taking place earlier than 0450 hours, the time at which the landings at Puy and Pourville were also scheduled to occur, and not until 0458 was a general alarm raised.”**

The fighting on land has been rather better treated by narrators, but, even so, little attention has been paid to the least successful aspect of it, the landing on *Yellow I* and the subsequent vain attempts at withdrawal.

### THE CHANNEL CROSSING

Naval Group No. 5 was commanded by Commander D.B. Wyburd and carried 325 men of 3 Commando, and 40 of the 50 US Army Rangers allocated to “Jubilee”<sup>4</sup> in order to acquire battle experience. (Why such a high proportion was assigned to 3 Commando is not clear). There were also five Free Frenchmen from 10 (Inter-Allied) Commando, and an officer and three men from *Phantom*, the special signals unit whose business it was to make direct radio contact with the raid’s operational headquarters, established at the Royal Air Force’s Fighter Command headquarters at Uxbridge, some 30 kilometres west of London. The Group left Newhaven on the 112-kilometre voyage to Berneval at 2100 hours, British Summer Time.<sup>5</sup>

The soldiers were all under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel John Durnford-Slater, the Commanding Officer of 3 Commando. Most of them travelled in 23 Eureka, or Higgins, boats – official naval jargon described them as “Landing Craft Personnel (Light).” These spoon-billed, comparatively seaworthy little vessels, lacking any armour, were constructed of plywood on a steel frame with a gasoline engine that gave them a cruising speed of 9½ knots – which would therefore be the flotilla speed. They could not travel the 225 kilometres to Berneval and back without re-fuelling, so each was festooned with 16 two-gallon (7.57 litres) cans of petrol.<sup>6</sup> Crewed by one officer and three ratings – helmsman, mechanic and signaller – and armed with one or two .303-inch (7.62-mm) Lewis light machine-guns, each boat carried, on average, 18 soldiers in fighting order, together with a limited amount of specialized equipment such as two Bangalore torpedoes (lengths of iron pipe filled with high explosive, intended for breaching wire obstacles) or two 2- or one 3-inch (51.2-mm or 76.2-mm) mortars.

Why would the commandos launch an amphibious attack from such cockleshells as these when their masters at Combined Operations were in possession of numbers of armoured Landing Craft, Assault (LCAs)? All other units in the initial assault waves of “Jubilee” would cross the Channel in the comparative luxury of Landing Ships, Infantry (LSIs), pre-war Channel ferries varying in size from 3,000 to 13,000 tons, and then debark into LCAs for the run-in to shore. But only nine LSIs were available, since one, HMS *Princess Josephine Charlotte*, had been seriously damaged by a German bomb during the run-up to Operation “Rutter”, the original scheme to raid Dieppe. Simon Fraser, Lord Lovat, (4 Commando) and Durnford-Slater had flipped a coin to decide who should take the one LSI available to them and Durnford-Slater had lost the toss.<sup>7</sup>

**“I have little doubt that the failure of the coast defence battery at Berneval to play an effective part in the operation was largely due to Major Young.”**

The close escort was provided by a Landing Craft, *Flak*, Large, (LCF(L) 1), boasting twin 4-inch (102-mm) dual-purpose guns and three 20-mm Oerlikon cannon, while a Motor Launch (ML 346) equipped with a three-pounder gun and a 20-mm cannon, roamed up and down the flanks, chivvying laggards. In the van sailed a Steam Gun Boat\* (SGB 5, or HMS *Grey Owl*) capable of a speed in excess of 30 knots. It was formidably armed with a 3-inch (77-mm) gun aft, three single two-pounders in forward,

‘midships and aft positions, two 20-mm Oerlikons, two twin .50 (12.7-mm) machine-guns and a single 21-inch (530-mm) torpedo tube abreast the funnel on either side. Wyburd, Durnford-Slater, and several adjutants and liaison officers were aboard *Grey Owl*. The LCF(L) carried one troop of the commando, to be landed on *Yellow I* in a second wave.

Conditions were ideal – a warm night and only the gentlest of breezes from the south. The moon was in its first quarter and set at 2316 hrs, leaving the flotilla ploughing through a calm, slate-dark sea. But not all of them were still ploughing towards the French coast, for four of the Eureka had already had to turn back with engine trouble. Among those motoring on, Major Young, in the leading boat of the starboard, or right-hand, column, recalled later that “after a time we tried to get some sleep; it was very uncomfortable and cramped in the landing craft and I doubt if anyone dozed for more than a few minutes. About midnight we opened some tins of self-heating soup. It was tepid.”<sup>9</sup>

### ENCOUNTER WITH THE GERMAN CONVOY

If the soup was tepid, the environment was about to turn hot. Moving down the French coast, en route from Boulogne to Dieppe, was a German convoy consisting of five small freighters – one a tanker – escorted by three minesweepers or armed trawlers, pressed into service as convoy escorts under the pseudonym of *U-bootjäger* (UJ), or Submarine Chasers. Typically, these vessels were equipped with a 37-mm dual-purpose gun, four 20-mm cannon, and several 12.7-mm machine-guns.<sup>10</sup> Such convoys sailed almost nightly and there was really nothing unusual about this one’s presence. Indeed, two of its components had been noted by radar stations on the English coast, and two signals radioed to Captain Hughes-Hallett, the senior naval officer for “Jubilee”, on board the command ship, HMS *Calpe*. The second signal, transmitted at 0144 hrs Greenwich Mean Time (i.e., 0244 hrs, raid time) reported: “Two craft 302° Tréport 10 miles, course 190°. 13 knots at 0226 [hrs]” This was at the limit of radar range and perhaps explains why only two ships were noted. Still, ample warning had been given of the presence of unidentified but almost certainly hostile vessels that were then on a converging course to meet with Wyburd’s Group at approximately 0345 hours. This important signal was not received

by *Calpe*. However, it was picked up by HMS *Fernie*, the alternate command ship, which made no attempt to inform Hughes-Hallett, assuming he had also received the message.<sup>11</sup>

Nor was it heard by a peripheral, more remote escort, the 3rd Destroyer Division, assigned to screen the eastern side of the whole raiding force. It consisted of the Polish destroyer, ORP *Slazak*, whose captain, Commander R.N. Tyminiski, was senior officer, and the Hunt Class destroyer HMS *Brocklesby* commanded by Lieutenant-Commander E.N. Pumphrey. Had they known of the approaching convoy, they could have intercepted it, and, with their vastly greater speed and firepower, ensured that it would not meet any part of the raiding force.

According to Commander Wyburd, at 0340 hrs *Slazak* and *Brocklesby* crossed the bows of *Grey Owl* as they patrolled to the east, towards Le Tréport and the oncoming convoy. Meanwhile, on board the gunboat Captain Patrick Barber, the raid specialist seconded by Combined Operations as a liaison officer between the navy and the commandos, watched, with worry, the showers of sparks that were occasionally disgorged from the funnel.

It was after one of these unnerving explosions of sparks, accompanied by the inevitable outburst of abuse, that there followed a loud report and there, high above us, was a large parachute flare drifting very slowly down towards us illuminating the SGB and the trail of Eureka's behind us with a very bright light whilst all around us was a deep pitch blackness. Until you have actually experienced it you cannot imagine how naked and vulnerable you feel.<sup>12</sup>

### THE SEA FIGHT OFF BERNEVAL

Ex-Sub-Lieutenant D.J. Lewis, RCNVR, of Westmount, Quebec, whose Eureka was closest to the enemy, just behind the steam gunboat, when the fight began, wrote his recollections of the event.

At 3.30 a.m. [actually, at 0347 hours], a starshell went up on the starboard hand and lit the whole fleet in a horrible quivering semi-daylight. Our boat was leading the starboard column.<sup>13</sup> It was immediately enveloped in the hottest tracer fire I have ever seen. The air was filled with the whine of ricochets and the bangs of exploding shells, while after every burst of the streaking balls of fire came the clatter of Oerlikons.

**“Of the 120 commandos and rangers landed on *Yellow I*, 82 were eventually captured, many of them – perhaps most of them – wounded. Thirty-seven were killed, and one man ... got away by swimming out to ML 346, which was still hovering offshore.”**

The SGB's thin armour was riddled and the shells exploding inside filled her boiler room with [superheated] steam. One of the burst[ing shells] struck LCP (L) 42. Sub-Lieutenant C.D. Wallace [RCNVR] of Montreal ... was killed instantly....

In my boat men threw off their blankets, fumbled for tin hats and weapons. The flak was flying but a few feet ahead and a few astern. Some was right above us..

.... Our boat put on full speed and went under the stern of the disabled SGB....

At full speed we tore away from the lashing streams of flak.... Astern we could see starshells, flak con-

verging, and a big flash which died down and then blew up and lit the sky. I never found out what this was.<sup>14</sup>

Did any of the sailors or commandos spare a thought for those extra cans of fuel the Eureka's were carrying as all this firing was going on? Lance Corporal James Smith did, for one. “I glanced through an opening on one side of our boat and I thought this was the end, especially when I saw cans of petrol strapped all around our little wooden craft.”<sup>15</sup>

It was dark, the arena was soon shrouded in smoke, and every warship's radios or antennae, British and German, were quickly demolished, all of which led to great confusion. “We had no illuminant,” according to Wyburd, “and although clearly silhouetted ourselves, were unable to see the enemy....”<sup>16</sup> He had earlier decided – in defiance of orders that called for drastic avoiding action if enemy forces should be encountered during the passage – that in those circumstances he would maintain his course and speed and endeavour to fight his way through. He was convinced (probably rightly) that any alteration would cause such havoc in the flotilla as to make it impossible to land the commandos at the right places and time. *Grey Owl* accordingly tried to maintain her course at 9½ knots rather than manoeuvring at her best speed. The *U-bootjäger* focussed its fire on her and her radio antennae were promptly shot off, making it impossible to notify *Calpe* or anyone else of what was happening. All of her guns were soon rendered unserviceable, while 40 percent of the crew was burned or wounded. By some fortunate chance, however, only one was killed. In less than ten minutes, her boiler was hit repeatedly, the boat lost power, and eventually she lay dead in the water.

The Landing Craft, *Flak*, commanded by an Australian, Lieutenant T.M. Foggitt, gave as good as she got, perhaps better, with her twin 4-inch guns and three cannon. She set

one of the enemy trawlers, UJ 1404, on fire, compelling the crew to abandon her eventually, and also claimed “two small craft probably armed trawlers were damaged and possibly sunk.”<sup>17</sup> “LCF (L) 1 continued the action until 0450, by which time many of her crew, including all her officers, were killed or wounded. As it was then zero hour [for the landings at *Yellow, Orange, Blue* and *Green* beaches], she broke off the action and ... proceeded towards Dieppe in company with three LCPs.”<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, the commanding officer of ML 346, Lieutenant A.D. Fear, made “several attempts ... to close with what appeared to be SBG 5 or the LCF, but these ships were enemy trawlers who fired on us.”<sup>19</sup>

The captain of one of the German escorts, *UJ 4014*, recorded that:

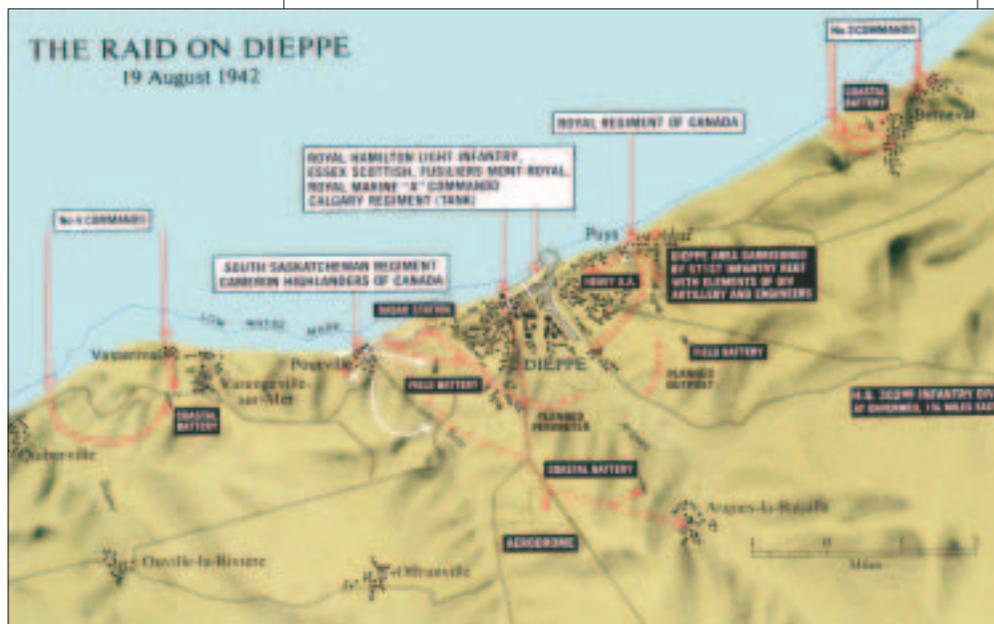
... a very large number of vessels of various types could be made out in the light of the starshell.... It was presumed on board that it would be one of the usual S[peed]-boat skirmishes.... A particularly large and clearly defined target first brought under fire was a long, rather heavily armed vessel. A noticeable feature was that this vessel had its bridge superstructure very far aft.<sup>20</sup>

In his reference to speedboats, perhaps confused by their low silhouettes the enemy was presumably mistaking the Eureka for much faster and better armed motor torpedo boats (MTBs) or motor gunboats (MGBs). As for the “long, rather heavily-armed vessel”, that must have been Lieutenant Foggitt’s LCF (L), but the German skipper was quite wrong when he reported “two further vessels of this type were identified in the same direction”, even while he claimed that “these vessels returned the fire immediately with all weapons, apparently of heavy calibre.” There were no other similar ships in the flotilla. While admitting hits on his own vessel and “a severe explosion ... on Sub[marine]-chaser 1404”, after which she “was not seen again”, he claimed to have sunk a “gun-boat” and “a British speed boat of large type (apparently of most recent construction).” This, presumably, was *Grey Owl*, which was disabled but not sunk.<sup>21</sup>

The commander of the German escort, leading the convoy in *UJ 1411*, appears to have been anxious to acquire a decoration. He reported exchanging fire with “numerous gun boats and E-boats .... Take on one of them, calling me in Morse code with German speedboat recognition signal, approaching within

300 metres with rapid fire from all weapons. Enemy boat explodes, sinks immediately.” A little later, another British vessel “receives direct hit, explodes, sinks immediately.” Finally, he claimed to have rammed and sunk “one large LCA .... with approximately 50 men as landing troops aboard .... many of the embarked soldiers drown in the propeller wake.”<sup>22</sup> In fact, Captain John Smale, aboard one of the Eureka, subsequently recalled how one German boat “changed course and came straight at us to ram.” The commando corporal, who had taken over when the naval helmsman had been hit by machine-gun fire, jammed the Eureka into reverse, “so it just missed us. That was when I decided to jump overboard.”<sup>23</sup> Was he, too, thinking of that extra gasoline? Smale divested himself of his equipment, boots and uniform, and was carried west on the ebb tide until picked up off Dieppe harbour by a German vessel after the raid was over. At least one of his companions, not such a strong swimmer, drowned.

*Slazak* and *Brocklesby* were less than eight kilometres from the flotilla when the firing began. They could certainly see and hear the battle, although according to Commander Tyminski [in 1973] “our radar on [against?] the background of land gave no echo.”<sup>24</sup> However, he made no attempt to intervene, while Lieutenant-Commander Pumphrey (with two gallantry medals to his name) omitted to turn a Nelsonian eye to his superior. Tyminski is quoted (in 1982) saying that “by coming to attack the convoy, we would not have saved the situation created in the beginning of the fight, we would have aggravated it”.<sup>25</sup> But the two destroyers could, at the very least, have closed up to investigate the situation more closely. Instead, they held an easterly course until 0425 hours, according to *Brocklesby*’s log, when they made a hairpin turn back to the west, re-crossing the projected course of the now-scattered flotilla at about 0500 hours. Ten minutes later, *Brocklesby* turned south – whether *Slazak* turned with her this time is not clear – on to a course for *Yellow I*. At 0530 hours,



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she shelled, and finally sank, the trawler that Foggitt had set on fire, *UJ 1404*, about four kilometres offshore, rescuing from the water 25 of the crew who had already abandoned her.<sup>26</sup>

Hughes-Hallett, for one, was unhappy with Tyminiski's performance.

The commanding officer of ORP *Slazak* has since informed me that he considered the firing came from the shore and therefore thought it best to continue with his patrol. I consider this was an error of judgment, observing that the sole reason for his patrol was to provide support for vessels engaged in the landing in the event of a contingency such as this. In future operations of this complexity, it would be better to ensure if possible that British Officers are in command of all detached units.<sup>27</sup>

Aboard *Grey Owl*, Durnford-Slater, slightly wounded by shell splinters, noted that:

The landing craft had scattered in all directions and there was [sic] none to be seen. Dawn was breaking but we were beyond sight of land. There was a slight haze on the water and nothing was visible in it. I knew that some of the landing craft had been sunk, perhaps all of them. Then I saw a small boat push through the haze towards us. It was one of the missing landing craft...

... Leaving all the wounded in the gunboat, which no longer seemed likely to sink, the rest of us piled into the undamaged landing craft and headed for Dieppe.<sup>28</sup>

What happened to the other landing craft? Despite German claims and Durnford-Slater's pessimistic assumption, none was sunk, although a number were damaged and the formation lost all cohesion. By the time he and Wyburd had "piled into the undamaged landing craft and headed for Dieppe", four more had re-appeared and been ordered to tow the now-helpless but still floating *Grey Owl* back to Newhaven. This they did, at least until a much more powerful vessel, a Free French *chasseur*, took over in mid-Channel. Four, we know, had earlier returned to Newhaven with engine trouble, four had been seriously damaged in the firefight but succeeded in making their way home individually, while three closed on the badly-damaged LCF, and accompanied it to join the main naval force off Dieppe. The remaining seven held their course, six to *Yellow I* at Petit Berneval (accompanied by the Motor Launch), and one to *Yellow II* which was nothing more than a notch in the cliff about 800 metres west of *Yellow I*.<sup>29</sup> (Many years later, Peter Young noted that "I think [the] other craft could have gone in, actually. I don't like saying this, but I've always felt that some of the others should have perhaps had courage and gone in."<sup>30</sup>)

The landings were supposed to take place at 0450 hours, the beginning of nautical twilight – technically 'the period of incomplete darkness when ... the centre of the sun is not



National Archives of Canada

R-Boats crossing the Channel to Dieppe.

more than 12° below the celestial horizon'. In layman's terms, this means when it is still dark enough to see the stars and the horizon is only just becoming visible. High tide at Dieppe was at 0403, so that these landings would occur just as the tide began to ebb. However, Buckee's boat reached *Yellow II* perhaps five minutes early, just as the *Kriegsmarine's Oberkommando West* was signalling its army equivalent in Paris that, "At 0350 hours attack on our convoy by surface forces, 4 kilometres off Dieppe. Particulars not yet known. It is the opinion of the Naval Command that it has been one of the usual attacks on convoys."<sup>31</sup>

### ASHORE ON YELLOW II

Major Young, Captain John Selwyn, Lieutenant Buck Ruxton and seventeen men disembarked, armed with one 3-inch mortar, one 2-inch mortar, one Bren light machine-gun, six Thompson sub-machine guns, ten rifles and several revolvers between them. Buckee, his offer to join them being politely declined, promised to wait for them offshore as long as he possibly could.

The notch leading to the cliff top was choked with barbed wire, held in place by metal stakes driven into the chalk on each side, and Young used these to lever himself up the near-vertical sides of the cleft.

We had no Bangalore torpedoes to blow holes through the first thick coil of barbed wire, but fortunately the Germans had strung the wire on pegs all the way to the top of the cliff. We started up one side. I fell off. We tried the other side. I got part way up, pulling myself up on the wire, hating it, using the only foothold we had, the German pegs. My rifle [an American Garand given him by one of the rangers] fell to the crook of my arm. I swung away from the cliff. I thought, 'Oh, Christ, if I fall off this time I won't have the guts to start over again.' My toe stuck in a cleft and up we went. In twenty minutes we were at the top.<sup>32</sup>

Behind him, his men linked their toggle ropes – each carried one, six feet long, with a loop at one end and a wooden toggle at the other – to make a handrail. With the aid of this improvised line, they managed to take the 2-inch mortar, weighing only 3.32 kg, with them, although they had only six bombs for it. The 3-inch mortar (which could be broken down into three parts for manhandling) was too awkward and heavy at 57.2 kg and had to be left on the beach. By the time they reached the top, it was 0510 hours, and dawn had just broken. Facing inland was a sign, *Achtung – Minen*, but, by climbing up the sides

**“[Major] Young's men had come ashore [on *Yellow II*] with about a hundred rounds per rifleman and by 0730 ammunition was running low while the sound of fighting around *Yellow I* were getting fainter, and the longer they stayed ashore the more firepower would likely be brought to bear against them.”**

rather than cutting through the wire in the centre, they had avoided that particular hazard. The defence posts constructed at the head of the gully were unmanned – the first indication that the Germans had no foreknowledge of the Dieppe raid.<sup>33</sup>

### THE LANDINGS ON YELLOW I

Five of the six Eureka's, accompanied by ML 346 and carrying about 100 men between them, including the *Phantom* detachment, had taken longer to re-organize themselves and get back on course. From their cliff-top grandstand, Young and his men could now see them approaching *Yellow I*, where the enemy was moving as quickly as possible from the state of *erhöhte Aufmerksamkeit* (Increased Vigilance) stipulated in their orders for the period 10-19 August when the tides and moon were considered

suitable for raiding,<sup>34</sup> to *Gefechtsbereitschaft* (Action Stations). Ten minutes earlier, at 0500, the alarm had been raised by divisional headquarters, 10 kilometres away at Emvermeu, but it took time to rouse the off-duty men out of their beds, and for them to get dressed, and organized to fight. These things do not happen instantaneously.

Experience had taught the commandos the importance of getting off the beach before the enemy could organize or reinforce any defence. An unidentified participant in the initial landing on *Yellow I* recounted his experience.

Expecting that the enemy would be sitting waiting for us, we were very surprised and relieved to land without a shot being fired at us. We made haste to get off the beach, but were held up while the wire was being cut. While this was being done, Jerry began firing from the cliffs, and although our passage through the wire was slow because of the mines, nobody, so far as I know, was hit, in spite of terrific firing overhead. Once on top, we went forward until we were stopped by very heavy machine-gun fire from the front. We were also being fired on from the left, so myself and three others crawled forward until we located the enemy position and gave it several bursts from our Stens [sub-machine-guns]. The firing stopped and we ran for a house just ahead, which we found empty. From the upper windows we had a good field of fire and saw a lot of Germans moving about. They went to ground quickly when we fired at them, and turned a machine-gun on us, smashing all the windows. We decided that two men would go out to outflank the gun, while the other two engaged it from the front. They soon came back to report too much open ground and too many Germans, so we thought we had better make our way

back to the main body. We now noticed that the firing from our right, which had been very heavy all morning, had stopped except for occasional bursts. As we made our way towards the cliffs, we discovered a large party of Germans ahead of us, between us and the gully. It began to look as if we were cut off. We crawled up to the cliff edge and looked over, but could see no sign of our friends; the beach was deserted except for a burning vessel towards the west. I had the horrid thought that the troops had either pulled out or been overcome.<sup>35</sup>

The last boat, coming in 20 minutes later, disembarked its commandos under heavy fire from the high ground on each side of the beach, and was sunk while trying to make its way back out to sea. Meanwhile, those first ashore, under Captain Richard Wills, pushed on into the fringes of Berneval-le-Grand, where resistance quickly built up. The company-strength defenders were first reinforced by a coast patrol of the 572nd Infantry Regiment, approaching from the east, then by the anti-tank company of the 570th Infantry Regiment, and finally by a company, plus a cyclist squadron, of combat engineers from the 302nd Engineer Regiment.<sup>36</sup> The odds were now better than four to one in favour of the enemy. Wills was wounded and incapacitated, but his men fought savagely. Most of them had been under hostile fire before, either in the short-lived French campaign of 1940 or in earlier raids – an important experience denied their Canadian and American colleagues assaulting the Dieppe beaches. Among those who had not, 19-year-old ranger Lieutenant Edwin Loustalot was killed while attacking a machine-gun post, gaining the unenviable distinction of becoming the first American soldier to lose his life in land warfare in Europe since 1918.

At sea, ML 346 had encountered a straggler from the convoy, a vessel that appeared to mount two or more fairly heavy guns amidships. The pugnacious Lieutenant Fear “closed at full speed”, firing his three-pounder and Oerlikon and preparing to depth charge the enemy ship. This was, in fact, the *Franz*, a small tanker armed with a single 20-mm cannon intended primarily for anti-aircraft defence.<sup>37</sup> Fear had mistaken valves and oil pipes on deck for the barrels of 105-mm guns.<sup>38</sup> A medical orderly with the *Flak* detachment aboard *Franz*, *Obergefreiter* Conrad Bärenruther, recorded, only four days after the event, how “we were attacked by a destroyer [?] at a distance of 500 metres. It pursued us.... The destroyer started to shoot with heavy artillery at the *Franz* and after the *Flak* platform had already been blown away ... the whole crew jumped overboard.”<sup>39</sup>

From *Yellow I* the commandos pushed slowly forward against increasing resistance. By 0700 hours, they were more than half a kilometre inland, and nearly level with the battery, off to their right, although the sharp rim of the valley above them prevented them from seeing it and subjecting it to aimed fire. A few bombs were fired from a 2-inch mortar but apparently failed to find their target. Ammunition now began to run low and the men were compelled to withdraw, but when they reached the shore there were no landing craft to take them off. One *Eureka* had become impaled on an iron stake driven into the seabed. Another, trying to avoid the same fate, was irretrievably aground. A third had reached shore, embarked the four-man naval beach party, and now made valiant but unsuccessful efforts to tow away the grounded boat before making its way back out to sea under heavy fire. The remaining two boats were simply unable to reach the shore through the combination of man-made obstacles and heavy machine-gun fire.

### SURRENDER ON *YELLOW I*

“I made my way back and collected a party – we were the last to withdraw,” recalled Lieutenant W. Druce. “Making our way back to the beach was quite eerie. We arrived safely at the gully and on to the beach.”

Some of us lined up along a small groyne and opened fire on a German patrol. I was using by this time a very good American Garand 300 rifle I got off one of the marines, possibly that of Lt. Loustalot.... I shot a German and was preparing to aim again when the order came to cease fire. I looked around and saw an officer, senior to me, standing up showing the white surrender flag.

I laid my rifle down and ran off down the beach with the vague idea of trying to get away. I came to a large, high but shallow cave with about 22 men in it. They said it was not possible to get further down the beach as the Germans had it covered with machine-guns. All we could do was to hope to get away at night. I reported that all had surrendered further up the beach and if the Germans searched

the beach we would have to surrender also. All the weapons were made so they could no longer fire and we sat and waited....

About 1500 hours a German patrol came along the beach and I surrendered the men. We were lined up and I spoke to the officer, having learned German at school. I asked to look at my wounded. He agreed. This also gave me a chance to remind the lads it was ‘name, rank and number only.’<sup>40</sup>

“‘Flodden’ began about as inauspiciously as any amphibious operation could. The plan had gone totally awry when the vessels carrying and escorting the raiders met with a German coastal convoy earlier that night.”

Of the 120 commandos and rangers landed on *Yellow I*, 82 were eventually captured, many of them – perhaps most of them – wounded. Thirty-seven were killed, and one man, a Lance-Corporal Sinclair, got away by swimming out to ML 346, which was still hovering offshore.

### ATTACK ON THE GOEBBELS BATTERY FROM YELLOW II

On the cliff top a kilometre to the west, the ebullient Peter Young had decided that his men looked “miserable” and found it necessary to give them a brief pep talk. Then, he led them through the fields to the road that ran parallel to the coast, about a kilometre inland, and turned left towards Berneval-le-Grand. Cutting the telephone wires that linked Berneval with Dieppe, they cautiously advanced to the edge of the village and reached it just as the battery fired its first ranging round towards the armada assembled off Dieppe. “I wanted to get on, so we ran down the village street as far as we could.... By this time, all the men had changed from being gloomy; they’d suddenly cheered up. And the reason, I’m sure, was that they had had a run and got the blood going.”<sup>41</sup>

When they tried to advance on the battery through the orchards at the northwest corner of the village they came under sporadic fire from a machine-gunner and several riflemen. Young decided that they might do better to move to the ripe wheatfields a little further west.

Once we were in among the crops I formed the men into two lines in extended order, with a good distance between each man and with the second line firing between the intervals in the first line. We now opened a hot fire at the smoke and flashes around the gun positions. Groups of riflemen were firing at us from the battery position, but they were not marksmen.

All this time the guns went on shooting at a slow rate; possibly only one gun was in action, trying to find the range. Certainly there were no salvoes, and some of us estimated that the total number of rounds fired was no more than fifteen or twenty....

We had to fire from the kneeling position because of the height of the corn, taking snapshots and moving about, so as to offer the most difficult target to the enemy, but we were almost exactly at right angles to the enemy gun-line and any bullet that whistled over No. 4 gun would give a good fright to the crew of No. 1 as well – at least so we hoped. I am very far from claiming that we caused many casualties, and indeed it was very difficult to see anyone to get a shot at. It was harassing fire, more or less controlled. The guns were twenty or thirty yards apart and surrounded by concrete walls.<sup>42</sup>

The walls were not high enough to give the German gunners adequate protection from aimed small arms fire. For his part, the quick-witted Young encouraged his men by assuring them that 15 feet of standing wheat would stop a rifle bullet! Happily, the enemy had no mortars. What they did have, although Young makes no mention of it, was that 20-mm cannon intended for anti-aircraft defence and why they made no attempt to bring it into action remains a mystery. Twenty-millimetre shells would have scythed through the wheat even more effectively than mortar shrapnel. But perhaps it was fixed in a position particularly exposed to sniping from the wheat field, and therefore unusable.

After a time, at about eight o’clock, we had our reward. There was a sudden explosion about one hundred and fifty yards to our front, an orange flash, and a cloud of black smoke. A shell screamed past overhead and plunged into a valley about a mile behind us. The Germans had turned their left-hand gun around and were firing it at us....

Every time the gun fired we gave it a volley of small arms, aimed at the black and yellow fumes which appeared. They fired four rounds at us, at the same slow rate as before, and then gave it up.<sup>43</sup>

### WITHDRAWAL FROM YELLOW II

Young’s men had come ashore with about 100 rounds per rifleman and by 0730 hours, ammunition was running low while the sounds of fighting around *Yellow I* were getting fainter, and the longer they stayed ashore the more firepower would likely be brought to bear against them. Young also feared the arrival of enemy armour. He sent Selwyn and several men back to the beach with orders to fire three white Very lights if Buckee was still there, while he, Ruxton, and three men engaged the observation post. Then the requisite Very lights burst above them and they began a withdrawal to the beach by tactical bounds – with Young always bringing up the rear. “A group of riflemen were following us at a respectful distance, and someone else was sniping from the Dieppe side of the gully.”

Captain Selwyn now withdrew his party and embarked, while the rest of us covered their withdrawal from the top of the cliff. The landing-craft had been under fire from the observation-post for some time. Riflemen had reached the cliffs about three hundred yards to the east and the solitary sniper was still plugging away from the west. Three men waiting on the beach to cover Ruxton and myself down the cliff were cursed at by the sailors for their slowness and told to get into the boat.<sup>44</sup>



Prior to going ashore at Dieppe. The troops wearing balaclavas in the small landing craft are Royal Marine Commandos.

One soldier, part of the crew of the 3-inch mortar, had the misfortune to kick an anti-personnel mine on the beach, but the good fortune not to lose his foot, only lacerate it. As a member of the 3-inch mortar crew, he was still able to help get the big mortar into action and drop a few farewell bombs on the battery before his comrades dragged him aboard the Eureka. They dumped the heavy mortar into the sea but took the sight with them.

By this time Ruxton and myself, with Abbott our Bren-gunner, had crossed the beach and were wading out to the landing-craft. It was like those dreams you have of trying desperately to walk and making no progress. Eventually we laid hold of the lifelines and were towed out to sea. About three hundred yards out the craft hove to and we were

dragged aboard. Quite a number of shots hit the craft at this point, and a sailor a yard away from me was severely wounded in the thigh....

Shortly afterwards we fell in with the motor launch and transferred to her. We then returned to Newhaven.<sup>45</sup>

### ASSESSING THE RESULTS

Young and Buckee were rewarded with Distinguished Service Orders (DSOs), Selwyn and Ruxton with Military Crosses (MCs). Commander Tyminiski also got a DSO, courtesy of the Chief of Combined Operations, Lord Louis Mountbatten – which only goes to suggest that politics or random acts of kindness probably account for as many decorations as do valour or professional excellence! The military lost 140 men killed, wounded or taken prisoner, 120 incurred on the beaches and inland and 20 as a result of the firefight at sea. There were certainly a number of naval casualties as well – perhaps as many as 60 to 70 – but no figure is available.

According to the report of the commander of the *117 Artillerieregiment*, the final tally for the battery was 14 shots fired at the vessels off Berneval – *Brocklesby*, ML 346, SGB 5 and LCF(L) 1 – between 0500 and 0510 hours; 12 at Young and his men from 0554 hours; nothing seaward between then and 0745 hours; 22 at the armada off Dieppe and 63 at a transport vessel from 0745 hours on; and 40 at an MTB from 0830 hours; a total of 558 rounds of 105-mm and 47 rounds of 170-mm.<sup>46</sup> The figures do not agree. However, the failure to bring any fire to bear against the armada off Dieppe from 0510 hours until 0745 hours is remarkable.

“I have little doubt that the failure of the coast defence battery at Berneval to play an effective part in the operation was largely due to the action of Major Young”, concluded Captain Hughes-Hallett in his “Jubilee” narrative.<sup>47</sup>

Two questions arise from the events that occurred on and off the *Yellow* beaches that morning. First, did the clash with the German convoy have an effect on Operation “Jubilee” as a whole? No, it did not. No one at Berneval realized that a raid was taking place earlier than 0450 hours, the time at which the landings at Puy and Pourville were also scheduled to occur, and not until 0458 hours was a general alarm raised by divisional headquarters at Envermeu. Moreover, as Professor John Campbell has noted in his magisterial study of aspects of the raid, “the collision with the convoy could be interpreted as a stroke of good fortune for Jubilee, although it has invariably been

held up as an example of the sort of mischance that can ruin the best of operational plans.” When the *Luftwaffe* radar at Dieppe (designed primarily for detecting aircraft) reported shipping off the coast at 0232 hours to the navy’s plotting centre at Boulogne, and an hour later added that a number of vessels were approaching the port, it was perfectly possible for the *Kriegsmarine* to conclude that either the plot was false<sup>48</sup> or that it was that of the convoy coming from Boulogne.<sup>49</sup>

Second, did the bold leadership of Young and Buckee significantly affect the course of events off Dieppe? The answer, in this case, is not so clear. The battery did fire a considerable number of shells (even if many less than they might have done had there been no interference) with little or no effect. Because of their position, high above sea level, the guns’ fire was ‘plunging fire’ even at short ranges, falling in the target area almost vertically, like a

bomb dropped from an aeroplane. But whereas the air bomber enjoyed an uninterrupted, plan-like view that made corrections relatively easy (at least in theory), an observer near the guns had to rely upon a nearly horizontal line-of-sight that made it extremely difficult to mark the fall of shot in terms of a distance perspective. In the absence of radar ranging, he had to employ the slow, painstaking process of trying to bracket his target until, hopefully, a shell found its mark. Nevertheless, 558 rounds of 105-mm and 47 rounds of 170-mm were fired in total, with apparently no great harm done. Would the German gunners have performed significantly better if they had not been under pressure from Young and his men? That we simply do not know.



**NOTES**

1. Peter Young, *Storm From The Sea* (London: William Kimber, 1958), p. 63.
2. Denis and Shelagh Whitaker, *Dieppe: Tragedy to Triumph* (Toronto and Montreal: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1992), p. 235.
3. This author also made this particular error in his insufficiently researched *Dieppe, Dieppe* (Montreal: Art Global, 1992).
4. DND, DHH 79/139, Marcell Swank to Brereton Greenhous, 28 January 1979.
5. All times BST unless otherwise noted.
6. David Lewis, Len Birkenes and Kit Lewis, eds., *St. Nazaire to Singapore: The Canadian Amphibious War 1941-1945*, (privately printed, no place or date of publication).
7. Lord Lovat, *March Past* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1978), p. 239.
8. Why a *steam gunboat*? Well, one of the problems with motor gunboats (and motor torpedo boats for that matter) was that the engines were noisy at high speed. The seven steam gunboats designed and built especially for Coastal Forces, for whom stealth as well as speed was important, were an attempt to overcome that problem. However, for reasons that are unclear, the design was not pursued further. *Jane’s Fighting Ships, 1944-45*, p. 87.
9. Peter Young, *Storm From The Sea* (London: William Kimber, 1958), p. 61.
10. DND, DHH, SGR II, 283, ‘Dieppe Operation, Combat Report of Boat M 4014, August 1942’.
11. Naval Staff Study No. 33; Phillipe Chéron, Thierry Chion and Olivier Richard, *Dieppe, Operation Jubilee* (n.p., petit B petit, n.d.), pp. 52-54.
12. Quoted in Chéron, Chion and Richard, *op. cit.*, p. 53.
13. In fact, the port, or left-hand column – Lieutenant Buckee’s LCP(L) 15, with Major Peter Young, was leading the starboard column.
14. Lewis, Birkenes and Lewis, *op. cit.*
15. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
16. DND, DHH 78/492, Hughes-Hallett Papers (M.051641/42), Section III, f 2.
17. *Ibid.*, f 6.
18. Naval Staff Study No. 33, p. 11.
19. *Ibid.*
20. DND, DHH, SGR II, 283.
21. DND, DHH, SGR II, 283, ‘Combat Report of Boat M 4014’.
22. DND, DHH, SGR II, 270, ‘Combat Report of Sub Chaser 1411’.
23. Quoted in Ronald Atkin, *Dieppe, 1942: The Jubilee Disaster* (London: Macmillan, 1980), p. 77.
24. DND, DHH, 78/52, Tyminski to John Mellor, 9 December 1973.
25. Quoted in Chéron, Chion and Richard, *op.cit.*, p. 30.
26. Naval Staff Study No. 33, see chart ‘Dieppe: Action with Enemy Forces, 0347, Aug. 19th’.
27. DND, DHH 78/492, Hughes-Hallett Papers (M.051641/42), Section III, f 2.
28. John Durnford-Slater, *Commando*, (London: William Kimber, 1953), pp. 104-105.
29. Naval Staff Study No 33, p. 12.
30. DND, DHH 79/567, f 124, p. 37.
31. <[www.warships1.com/index\\_history/HSII\\_Dieppe3.htm](http://www.warships1.com/index_history/HSII_Dieppe3.htm), p. 2>.
32. DND, DHH 594.009 (D 13).
33. Young, *Storm From The Sea*, p. 71.
34. Stacey, *op. cit.*, p. 356.
35. Maguire, *op. cit.*, pp. 68-69.
36. C.P. Stacey, *Six Years of War: The Army in Canada, Britain and the Pacific* [Vol. I of the Canadian Official History] (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1955), Map 5.
37. Lewis, Birkenes and Lewis, eds, *op. cit.*, p. 101.
38. DND, DHH 78/492, Hughes-Hallett Papers (M.051641/42), Sect. III, f 2.
39. *Ibid.*
40. Lewis, Birkenes and Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 86.
41. DND, DHH 79/567, f. 124, p. 14.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
43. *Ibid.*
44. Young, *Storm From The Sea*, pp. 68-69.
45. *Ibid.*
46. Quoted in Mordal, *op. cit.*, p. 179.
47. DND, DHH, 78/492, Hughes-Hallett Papers (M.051641/42), Section III, f 2.
48. On the night of 16/17 July another *Luftwaffe* plot had confused a cloudbank with an amphibious force off Le Havre. ‘On another occasion, a GAF attempt to track a convoy from Le Havre to Cherbourg produced a plot overland across the Cotentin peninsula.’ – J.P. Campbell, *Dieppe Revisited, A Documentary Investigation* (London: Frank Cass, 1993) p. 135.
49. *Ibid.* p. 142.