

What were the Aims and Origins of the 1942 Dieppe Raid?

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proved to be a complete bloodbath for the allied forces involved. Beyond the two sources chosen for evaluation, the study uses a range of sources that are listed in the bibliography. These include a report by Canadian Military Headquarters¹, a book by military historian Mark Zuehlke², and an analysis of the significance and impact of the raid by the Canadian Veteran Affairs Organization³. The military report on the planning and execution of the raid outlines the Military's official position on Operation Jubilee. This information is supported by the official analysis of the events at Dieppe by the Canadian government. However, individual historians such as Zuehlke provide alternative theories on the operation's objectives.

Source: O'Keefe, D. (2014). *One Day in August*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Vintage Canada. [Kindle Edition]

The first source selected for detailed analysis, the book *One Day in August* by award-winning historian and professor David O'Keefe, outlines his discoveries contradicting the official published military reports about Dieppe. Therefore, its purpose is to convince people of these new theories. O'Keefe was allowed access to classified Canadian and British Government material from which he pieced together the origins of the raid. On this basis, the book is valuable to the investigation as it provides a new perspective using information from otherwise inaccessible sources. Due to the classified nature of these sources, O'Keefe is only able to refer to them in his book, not actually produce them. Consequently, as the reader is unable to confirm the reports' authenticity, the utility of *One Day in August* as a source is limited. Despite this, O'Keefe's credibility as a historian - and as a professor of modern and military history at the Marianopolis College in Montreal - does add an element of reliability to his work. Furthermore, he has produced a number of notable TV documentaries (most recently *Dieppe Uncovered*) about WWII.⁴

Source: Balzer, T. J. (2004). *Selling Disaster: How the Canadian Public was Informed of Dieppe*. M.A Thesis, University of Victoria, Department of History

Another source chosen for more detailed analysis is a Master of Arts Thesis Essay written by a history student at the University of Victoria entitled *Selling Disaster: How the Canadian Public was Informed of Dieppe*. As such, the aim of the document is to effectively convey a large amount of information in a concise manner to the examiner. The focus of the report is the portrayal of Operation Jubilee in the media, not the aims and origins of the raid. As a result, Balzer provides an excellent overview of the historiography surrounding the operation without getting into specifics. Nevertheless, the report offers a good starting point to begin further research on relevant theories and refereed historians. Conversely, this document alone does not provide the depth of knowledge required for this

¹ Stacey, C., 1943. *OPERATION "JUBILEE": The Raid on Dieppe, 19 Aug 42. Part II: The Execution of the OPERATION. Section 1: General Outline and Flank Attacks.*, s.l.: Canadian Military Headquarters.

INVESTIGATION:

“This was too big for a raid and too small for an invasion: What were you trying to do?”⁵ A German interrogator famously asked Major Brian McCool in August 1942 after almost 2000 Canadian soldiers were captured in the disastrous Dieppe Raid. Over 70 years later, the answer remains the same, “If you could tell me...I would be very grateful.”⁶ Historians’ inability to piece together the puzzle of Dieppe depends solely on the lack of any apparent rationale for the raid. Over time, many standard reasons - or excuses –have emerged; they were testing Hitler’s defences of ‘Fortress Europe’ or Great Britain was simply placating Russia’s demands for a ‘Second Front’.⁷ This essay will evaluate the following interpretations about the aims of the Dieppe Raid before reaching a conclusion. Firstly, the raid was, “Reconnaissance in force”⁸ as described by Winston Churchill and in official military reports. Secondly, the raid was carried out simply “for the sake of raiding”⁹, an alternate theory proposed by historian Mark Zuehlke. Finally, another historian David O’Keefe has concluded that the whole operation was simply a diversion for a separate mission led by Ian Fleming’s commando unit.¹⁰ If any of these theories were to be officially acknowledged by military leaders, it could provide closure for the seemingly suicidal attack that has been missing for so many years.

After Operation Overlord in 1944, the Dieppe Raid was triumphantly flaunted as a comprehensive ‘dry-run’ for D-Day. In the decades since, the validity of this myth has continued to grow. In fact, Admiral Mountbatten¹¹ claimed that “the battle of Normandy was won on the beaches of Dieppe”¹² and Winston Churchill declared, “I personally...regarded the Dieppe assault...as an indispensable preliminary to full-scale operations.”¹³ According to the Canadian government, the operation was “designed to test new equipment, and gain the experience and knowledge necessary for planning a great amphibious assault.”¹⁴ Conversely, a report by Canadian Military Headquarters (CMHQ) suggests that orders had been issued to destroy specific targets: “It is doubtful if any programme for the destruction of objectives of a similar nature has ever been so completely and scientifically prepared.”¹⁵ Although it could be argued that the military strategists were inexperienced, with all the resources dedicated to the raid, extensive reconnaissance was undoubtedly carried out. Knowing the strength of their opponent, it seems unlikely that the Canadian military would be willing

⁵ Grint, K., 2008. *Leadership, Management and Command: Rethinking D-Day*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan . p.36

⁶ Grint, K., 2008. *Leadership, Management and Command: Rethinking D-Day*. p.36

⁷ O’Keefe, D., 2014. *One Day in August*. Toronto(Ontario): Vintage Canada. p.280

⁸ Churchill, W., 1943. *The End of the Beginning*. 1st ed. London: Cassell and Company Ltd. p.205

⁹ Zuehlke, M., 2012. *Tragedy at Dieppe*. Vancouver(BC): D&M Publishers Inc. p.37

¹⁰ O’Keefe, D., 2014. *One Day in August* p.307

¹¹ Admiral of the Fleet (Royal Navy) Mountbatten

¹² ...

the real aims of the Dieppe raid.

While the military maintains that Dieppe was a preparatory invasion for Normandy, there is material that suggests the target was chosen for convenience. In his book *Tragedy at Dieppe* Mark Zuehlke theorises that the real motivation behind Operation Jubilee was to avoid further raiding in Norway.¹⁷ Unpredictable weather and sheer distance from England meant that far too many raids were being delayed or aborted, so targets were being chosen simply for ease of access.¹⁸ Dieppe may even have been selected simply because it was within range of English bombers.¹⁹ Captain Hughes-Hallett²⁰ said, “We were not so much concerned...with the intrinsic value of objectives...but rather the feasibility of reaching the place undetected.”²¹ Furthermore, Admiral Mountbatten stated “We really want to take a port...because even if the invasion itself took place across open beaches, a sheltered port would be necessary immediately.”²² If Zuehlke is correct, then the Dieppe Raid was an utter waste of time, money, and most importantly, human life. He asserts that, “From the outset, the planning was flawed. Combined operations, particularly Mountbatten and Hughes-Hallett, wanted to stage something spectacular- not just to meet strategic goals...but to cement and extend the influence of Combined Operations Headquarters.”²³ As a respected historian in this field, it seems likely that Zuehlke’s notions hold some truth. However, there are flaws in his theory. Would the military command really sacrifice so many resources for no apparent gain other than to increase their influence within their own armed forces? Due to this inconsistency, it is difficult to make any firm conclusions based solely on Zuehlke’s work.

Though not officially confirmed by Government of Military representatives, David O’Keefe has theorised that the true aim of the Dieppe raid was simply to be a diversion. He believes “The raid on this seemingly unimportant French port had, at its heart a potentially war-changing mission.”²⁴ O’Keefe’s book – *One Day in August* – summarises his decades of research into the origins of Operation Jubilee. He claims that British Intelligence’s inability to de-code German messages - due to the new four-rotor Enigma coding machine in the U-boats²⁵ - led to the creation of Ian Fleming’s²⁶ commando force, the Intelligence Assault Unit,²⁷ tasked with capturing German coding technology located in Dieppe.²⁸ He asks, “Could it even be that the pinch of the target materials...was the driving

¹⁶ Veterans Affairs Canada, 2014. *The 1942 Dieppe Raid*.

¹⁷ Zuehlke, M., 2012. *Tragedy at Dieppe*. p.37

¹⁸ Zuehlke, M., 2012. *Tragedy at Dieppe*. p.37

¹⁹ Zuehlke, M., 2012. *Tragedy at Dieppe*. p.39

²⁰ Captain Hughes-Hallett - Naval Commander of the Dieppe Raid

²¹ Villa, B., 1989. *Unauthorized Action: Mountbatten and the Dieppe Raid*. s.l.:Oxford University Press.p.167

²² Admiral of the Fleet (Royal Navy) Mountbatten, *Address to the Dieppe Veterans and Prisoner’s-of-War Association*, 29 September, 1973

²³ Zuehlke, M., 2012. *Tragedy at Dieppe*. p.366

²⁴ ...

intelligence material was not *a* driver for the [Dieppe] Raid but indeed *the* driver.”²⁹ Despite the potential importance of these finding, it would be irresponsible to limit an investigation solely to O’Keefe’s research as it is impossible to verify his sources. Nevertheless, if his theory was to be formally acknowledged, it could change the way historians look at Dieppe, and perhaps to the war itself.

Realistically, it cannot be argued that military officials would be willing to sacrifice so many lives, even as a practice for future operations, without concrete objectives. It is impossible to say if O’Keefe is completely accurate without access to the classified documents. However, it seems likely that Operation Jubilee was used as a diversion for some secret operation, even if Ian Fleming’s commando raid theory proves incorrect. As James MacGowan of the Toronto Star states, O’Keefe’s theory “...clears up decades of misinformation about the ignoble raid and should provide comfort for the few remaining survivors of that notorious massacre.”³² However, not being a historian himself, MacGowan’s sentiments may not be any more useful than to comment on the potential significance of this discovery. Nevertheless, knowing the origins of the raid, although never compensating for the losses, may help justify the terrible sacrifice of those who gave their lives and those they left behind.

²⁹ O’Keefe, D., 2014. *One Day in August*. p.421

³⁰ O’Keefe, D., 2014. *One Day in August*. p.385

³¹ O’Keefe, D., 2014. *One Day in August*. p.5813

³² MacGowan, J., 2014. O’Keefe’s Theory on Dieppe Raid Could Change History. <http://www.torontostar.com>

them from using those methods. In particular to this study, one obstacle is the lack of primary sources as few survivors involved in the decision-making process of the Dieppe Raid are still alive. Therefore, I am unable to access first hand accounts of the events surrounding Operation Jubilee. I partially overcame this problem by using secondary sources that had interviewed people directly involved in the raid such as Captain Hughes-Hallett and Admiral Mountbatten. Most useful of which were the quotes Zuehlke sourced in his book, *Tragedy at Dieppe*. Unfortunately, I concluded that in cases where there are limited primary sources, historians are forced to rely on information from other people and have no way of determining its accuracy.

This leads to another challenge; assessing the reliability of secondary sources. It might be expected that the official Canadian Government document (Stacey, C., 1943. *OPERATION "JUBILEE": The Raid on Dieppe, 19 Aug 42.*) is accurate and reliable, but what if the information contained in it is simply what the Government wanted people to know? For example, there are no references in that report to any other operation taking place in Dieppe that day in 1942, yet O'Keefe maintains he found evidence to the contrary in classified papers. These reports are not necessarily lying, but they may not be telling the whole truth. Accepting this, historians can only present the information as accurately as possible, and cross reference with other sources to try to improve their reliability.

Perhaps the most significant dilemma is that each of the many historians studying Dieppe have their own evidence and theories; how do we determine who is correct? In terms of my investigation, I have selected just three different theories about the origins of the Dieppe Raid, each with substantial verification. Can we come to any definitive conclusion until further sources have been declassified? Is it ever possible to prove one theory as the final indisputable truth, or must we synthesise conflicting opinions into a meaningful conclusion? Once again, historians must look at all the information available to them and decide on the most likely answer.

Overall, this study has revealed to me that, although it may be expected that modern history should have an abundance of sources compared to earlier periods, contentious subjects such as this are often even more difficult to investigate as a result of archives being inaccessible under official secret legislation - emphasising why history is always being rewritten.

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