

# Normandy: From Dieppe to D-Day

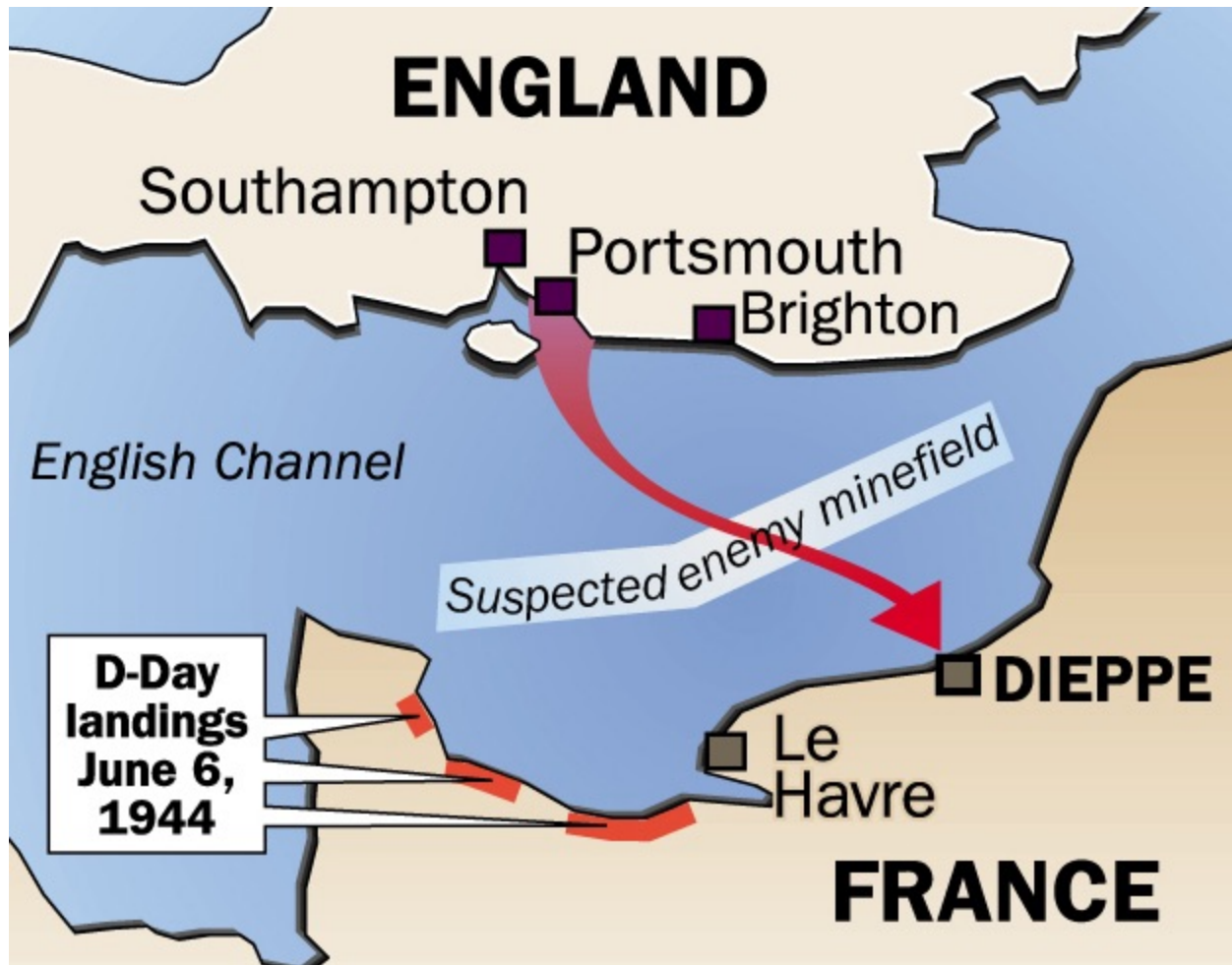
## Part One

August 2015



Every Canadian (at least until our education system went to hell) knows the story of the ill-conceived, ill-planned but gloriously catastrophic August 19, 1942, Dieppe raid. How 6,000 (5,000 of them Canucks) charged into the gates of Hades leaving three-quarters dead, wounded or captured.





It was Mountbatten's "brilliant" plan to test the Hun's defences and see if a port could be taken. Military intelligence...that oxymoron...was relied upon.



The raid began at about 5:00am. Either 9:00 or 11:00 the withdraw was called. (Hard to nail down times.) By noon it was all over. It was hell in a small place.



The 400 Kraut defenders mowed them down from the heights on either side.



This gun emplacement was built into the old castle. You can see it on the top right on the wall.  
The Canadian memorial stands there today.





But the really big guns were atop the real heights – the limestone cliffs bookending the beach. Dieppe had and has been a resort community for years. Even the casino remains, if in a modern reincarnation.



The beach is ill suited for tanks, or anything else. The shingles faced are plainly evident.



To my surprise, it's made up almost exclusively of flint.



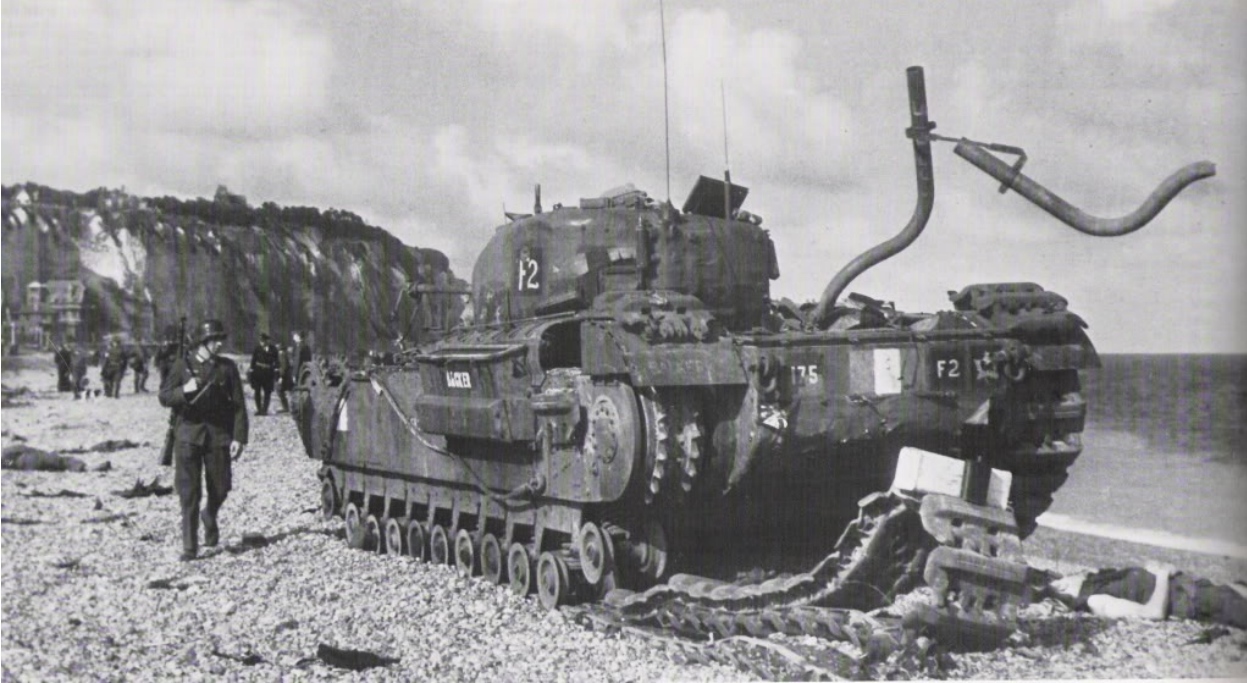
Imbedded in the limestone cliffs are flint nodules. When the limestone in the cliffs that once stood where Dieppe beach is today eroded away, it left only the flint. A smoother, more slippery rock you could not ask for. The cliffs erode at the incredible rate of a meter a year. A nearby Roman port was once two kilometers out to sea.



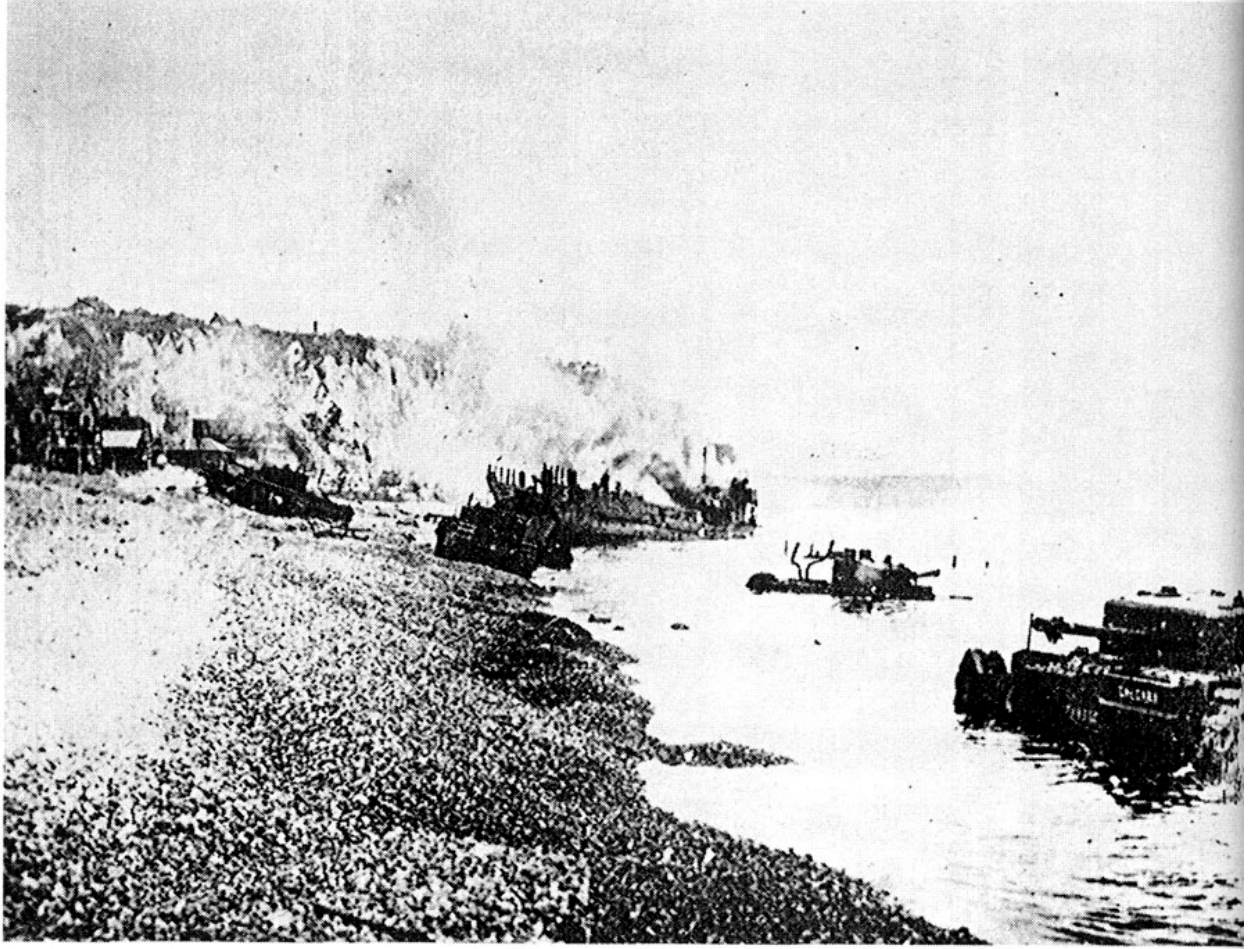
The Essexs were given front and centre and were hit the hardest. Of 550 charging up the slippery slopes, only 51 survived. It was a slaughter.



No place to hide. Like shooting ducks in a coop.













Tributes to Canucks are everywhere, starting at the Turismo office where a considerable display is set up.



There's a Canuck museum.



Streets are named in Canada's honour. That's how we spell it. Honour in the Brit was, not honor.



It's an old town, very pretty.



The attack wasn't just on Dieppe, but rather on five adjoining villages across a 16 kilometer front. I'm a Saskatchewan stubble-jumper of course.



It was tasked with taking Pourville, the next town to the west. Pretty, eh? That's another Canuckism. Eh?



Monet thought it was pretty too and he was a major connoisseur and seeker of beauty. In 1882 he was so taken with the place, he settled in for awhile, and painted this from the same viewpoint.



Gotta sneak in Madame Su's shot. It looks so much like a master's painting.





But like Dieppe it was bookended from the heights. A man friend of Nina LeCain's, a late close friend of my mother's, happened to mention ten years ago that he was at Dieppe. I asked him to tell me about it. He paused, then replied quietly, "...It's not something that should be talked about." I'm embarrassed to say I was quietly angry – how is my generation supposed to learn from the older if they clam up? Later, much later, I realized it conjured up images he just didn't want to revisit.



Pourville is so close you can see Dieppe's breakwater.



On the drive to the D-Day beaches 100k away we crossed a humongous bridge where the Seine meets the Chinless Channel.



We reached Juno Beach – the Canuck sector - with the kind of weather our boys would have known.



156,000 Allied troops attacked over 54 miles of beach and sustained over 9,000 casualties.



Like them, we had a full moon.



And this is sunrise on the Normandy D-Day beaches.



At 7:45 on June 6<sup>th</sup> our lads attacked across a six mile front.



Few scenes are as evocative of Juno as what is now Canada House at Berneres-sur-Mer.



A family appears to live here, yet there's no signs saying welcome or private, despite all the regalia related to the regiment and Canada. There's a child's play area in the front. And a manikin of a soldier in a window. The gate is open. As I'm not a member of the regiment, or a family member, etc I didn't knock.





Although Juno met with the toughest opposition of all the beaches – one in 19 casualties compared to Omaha’s one in 18 – the Teutonic defenders were, according to Stephen Ambrose in *D-Day* “...hardly a match for the young, tough, magnificently trained Canadians” who outnumbered them 2,400 to 400.



“By 1200 the entire Canadian 3<sup>rd</sup> Division was ashore...each man was carrying approximately ninety pounds of gear, land mines, ammunition, and weapons.”



“One troop of 1<sup>st</sup> Hussar tanks crossed the Caen-Bayeux railway, fifteen kilometers inland. It was the only unit of the Allied invasion force to reach its final objective on D-Day.”



John Keegan on the Canuck 3<sup>rd</sup> Division: “At the end of the day its forward elements stood deeper into France than those of any other division.” Ambrose: “Insofar as the opposition the Canadians faced was stronger than that at any other beach save Omaha, that was an accomplishment in which the whole nation could take considerable pride.”





“After two years, the Canadians had given the Wehrmacht a payback for Dieppe.”

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Camping in the Frogmobile behind “Cosy’s pillbox,” Lt. Aitken of the Winnipeg Rifles whose platoon took the pillbox at the loss of many lives.



They're among 2,000 of our boys and young men who lie here. It's difficult to look at the ages and not tear up. One feels wholly inadequate to express gratitude. My life has been a lark compared to theirs. They made it possible. They and the survivors. All heros to me. But they just claim they were just doing their "job." The least I could do was wear a poppy, which was what I did on my ballcap. Wholly inadequate....



Malinoski was a Ukrainian young man, a part of one of my many heritages, Bohunk, from Saskatchewan.



When I was 9 or 10 growing up in Carrot River, population 900, we lived on a corner. On the other corner was a family whose mother I never, ever saw. To this day. In a small town you know everyone. I was told she lost two sons in the war. She never left her house.



June 14<sup>th</sup> the brave General De Gaulle came ashore at Courseulles-sur-Mer, the heart of the Canadian attack, next to Cozy's pillbox.



It's commemorated with this cross. After what our country had done for him, in 1967 in Montreal this piece of *merde* was so ungrateful that he blared his infamous "Vive Quebec libre" rant, then ran for the nearest airport like the coward that he was. Thus setting the tone for French intransigence, ignorance, self-absorption and arrogance, and resulting international revulsion, for decades. Significantly, the cross is a double cross. Fortunately that ignorant amphibian attitude appears to have dissolved and we've been treated extremely well on this trip. In fact, the Frogs have been wonderful.



The lump of *merde* is even described as the “liberator.” Gag me with an entrenching tool. It’s especially (de)galling when one recalls that the frogs threw up their flippers in surrender after only three weeks. After the Battle of Normandy was over the Allies took 200,000 casualties, 50,000 killed (according to one museum, figures are fluid; another said 37,000 Allies dead, 50,000 Krauts...).



Although it’s only six short miles to Caen it took six weeks to take the city, fighting through Norman towns. It opened the route to Paris.



AH was right pissed.



It took six weeks partially because of the Normandy hedgerows, up to 12 feet high on either side with brush and trees at the top. Ideal defensive positions. Every single field – and they were small then, 100 X 100 meters - had to be fought over. The hedgerows are 95% gone now – I was lucky to fluke on this one. They are more common in the Omaha and Utah sectors.



With the hedgerows gone and fields consolidated the countryside reminds me much of flat Saskatchewan. That six miles that took six weeks can now be done in six minutes of course. Caen had to be bombed to drive the Krauts out. Unfortunately, 6,000 (US figures) or 17,000 (Canadian) citizens perished. Facts are very fluid in the museums of Normandy.



Commemorating Juno is the outstanding Canadian Juno Centre just back of the beach and 200 yards from Cozy's pillbox. That's how we spell center. Centre. Eh?



It's about where the white semi-circle is. On one of the bloodiest sections.



After Caen fell, my recently late godfather Mac Chubak was sent over. An engineer, he was responsible for everything from clearing minefields and laying bridges under fire to setting up hospital quarters. Being an engineer was often more dangerous than a grunt, who at least carried a rifle. "I was just doing my job," he shrugged when I talked to him about the war years. They all say that. "I was just doing my job."



There's monuments everywhere. The number of top quality museums along the D-Day beaches is incredible. You could spend weeks here. One commemorates a visit by that other war hero, Pierre Elliot Trudeau, the rich kid who by his own admission was barely aware of the war going on because he was having so much fun. Quebec balked at conscription, creating a federal crisis. It was English Canucks who landed at Juno to free France.





The town of Courseulles-sur-Mer, where the Centre is, is pretty, as it always was. It was and is a beach community. It was noted for scallops and – the Big Bopper would dig this – Chantilly lace.



We love beachcombing and the stones on this beach are unique and beautiful.



End of Part One. Please go to Part Two at <http://www.jasonschoonover.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Blah-Blah-2015-Normandy-Dieppe-to-D-Day-Part-Two.pdf> for continuation of Omaha Beach, Point de Hoc, Utah Beach, bunkers and other sites along the invasion front.