



# The Dieppe Raid: Jacques Nadeau remembers August 19, 1942

By Isabelle Croteau

Sixty-two years ago, Jacques Nadeau was aboard a ship moving silently through the water to the beaches of Dieppe. Today, at age 82, he still remembers this time in his life.

A native of Saint-Henri in Montréal, Mr. Nadeau was a young man who loved history and geography and read a lot about the Great War. On September 10, 1939, Canada declared war on Germany and the following July, he enlisted with Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal and was sworn in on July 6, 1940, at the age of 17. After training at Valcartier, he shipped out in February 1941, arriving in England on March 1. He met Robert Boulanger, who quickly became his best friend, at a training camp in early June 1941 and they both ended up on the Isle of Wight in May 1942 for intensive training.

Early in July 1942, Mr. Nadeau and Mr. Boulanger boarded the ships and were told they were off to Dieppe for Operation RUTTER. However, bad weather threw the entire operation into question. In the end, it was postponed until August and renamed Op JUBILEE.

At dawn, August 18, the ships loaded with troops slipped silently across the Channel. "There were cheers when we heard we were leaving for Dieppe. But the cheers quickly died when we started thinking..." said Mr. Nadeau. He was all set with 30 kilos of equipment on his back, a weapon, only 61 bullets, grenades and ...a bicycle. "I was the messenger who was to bring the orders from one unit to another. To speed things up, they gave me a bike. The bike wasn't made for a little guy like me—I couldn't even sit on the seat and pedal," says Mr. Nadeau, laughing.

Through much of the night, they advanced quietly towards the French coast. But about an hour before sunrise, the ships that were to land to the east at Berneval and Belleville encountered a

German convoy from Boulogne-sur-Mer and a brief but violent clash ensued.

The landing craft on the left wing carrying men was dispersed. Only seven of out 23 ships would land their troops on the beaches of Berneval and Belleville. Unfortunately, the noise of naval combat also alerted nearby German coastal defences. All the while they were approaching, the Canadian units were under fire from German batteries.

The first tanks, along with the engineers, landed late, so the infantry did not have any support in the most critical minutes of the attack. Out of 56 tanks, only 27 made it to shore, with the second group being ordered to turn around. "There was even a tank that was landed in deep water; it went straight down, with all the men aboard," said Mr. Nadeau. It proved impossible for the tanks to advance under unremitting fire from the Germans, and only a handful of men succeeded in entering the town.

"We landed last. There were two battalions of the 4th Brigade, the Essex Scottish and the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry, which landed before us, in front of Dieppe. When they arrived, the Germans were waiting for them. No sooner were you out of the boats and on the beach, than you were mowed down by a hail of bullets," he said. The Royal Regiment of Canada, and 135 augmentees from the Black Watch that landed in Puy, about one km east of Dieppe, were massacred. They lost half of their men. Out of the 554 men that landed, 227 died and most of the others were wounded." Never again during the war would a Canadian unit suffer so many human losses in a single day, as on the beach at Puy. And the whole thing only took two hours.

Under even heavier fire, Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal, Mr. Nadeau's regiment, landed farther to the west than planned. "At that time we didn't know of the

carnage on the beaches. A bomber laid down a smoke screen to enable us to get as close as possible to the beach for landing, but the wind shifted... The Germans on top of the cliffs could pick off their targets at will," he says. "I threw my bike overboard and jumped. I was up to my neck in water. I quickly tried to grab my bike under heavy fire, but then said to myself: 'To hell with it, I'll get another one in Dieppe!' I went to join my comrade, Louis Goldin, who had jumped before me," he said. "You had to yell to make yourself heard, the noise was deafening. I told him, at the next break in firing, let's run and hide under the cliff. But he shook his head no, he was going to crawl. That was when he got hit twice, just a few feet from me." A mortar bomb struck his friend down right before his eyes—he was 26.

The troops of Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal were pinned on the beach and evacuation was impossible because of enemy fire. The

only chance of getting out alive was to surrender to the 571st German Infantry Regiment. It was only later in the day that Mr. Nadeau learned that his best friend, Mr. Boulanger, had been killed.

Conditions in Stalag Lufts were horrible and it was a breeding ground for disease and the guards were not very kindly either.

While he was prisoner of war, for over 11 months, Mr. Nadeau tried to escape three times. His first two attempts failed. "The third time we knew the Germans were going to evacuate us shortly, because the Russians would soon be there and they had to get out quickly. The guards no longer knew what to do. We escaped and hit the road. We crossed Poland and Ukraine and finally formed a convoy of former prisoners of war and civilians. There were 40 Canadians in the convoy. We spent a few days in a camp in Odessa, in Russia. At long last we were free! I arrived in Britain April 1, celebrating victory in London, then arrived in Halifax, May 23, 1945, and on May 24, I was in Montréal where my family was waiting for me."

A year after his return, in May 1946, Mr. Nadeau married his confidante and friend, Jacqueline Senay. Mr. Nadeau served three years in the artillery and 20 years in the Air Force before retiring from the CF in 1972.

Ms. Croteau is a writer for *Servir*.



Robert Boulanger, 18 years old, died on August 19, 1942, on the beach at Dieppe.

Robert Boulanger, 18 ans, est mort le 19 août 1942 sur la plage de Dieppe.



The Germans on top of the cliffs could pick off their targets at will.

Les Allemands en haut des falaises n'avaient qu'à choisir leurs cibles.

PHOTOS: COURTESY/GRACIEUSEMENT FOURNIES PAR M. NADEAU