

that, "in the event of tragic results, they must act quickly" to rebuild the regiment "and ensure that it is not struck" from the order of battle as had happened to the two Canadian battalions lost at Hong Kong the previous December.⁵⁹ After that there was nothing to do but wait, and fortunately the wait was not a long one. At 10 A.M. on 18 August Catto received a telephone call from the brigade major of the 4th Brigade, who told him: "The show is on."⁶⁰

For security reasons, only the officers knew that an actual assault was about to take place; the enlisted personnel thought they were going on Exercise FORD I. Sergeant Arthur Smith from the Intelligence section of Regimental Headquarters saw the preparations being made. Earlier in the morning the unit dentist had removed two of Smith's teeth and had been forced "to pry the root" of one of them out of his mouth. For this reason, the dental officer excused Smith from duty for two or three days, but when the sergeant saw his comrades boarding trucks, he decided to join them.⁶¹ Private Jack Poolton was a 2-inch mortar man in D Company. His platoon leader, Lieutenant Sterling Ryerson, told him the regiment was going on manoeuvres but when Poolton was issued with High Explosive (HE) mortar bombs, he decided this was not a training exercise.⁶² Shortly after noon the battalion boarded trucks provided by the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps and set out for their port of embarkation. The men were annoyed when the canvas covers were fastened across the rear of the vehicles so that they could not look out or communicate with civilians. "This was a disappointment," Private John Grogan commented, "as we had been accustomed to waving and calling to the girls as we went along."⁶³

"The sea was smooth, the sky was clear": En route to France, 18–19 August 1942

The regiment moved in three separate truck convoys, two going to Portsmouth and one to Southampton. During the afternoon of 18 August there were many similar vehicle convoys moving toward ports on the south coast of England. By 7 P.M., 554 officers and men of the Royal Regiment of Canada were on board their respective landing ships. At Portsmouth, RHQ, A and B Companies embarked on HMS *Queen Emma*, a former Dutch passenger ship, while C and D Companies boarded the newly repaired *Princess Astrid*. A small detachment under Captain Raymond Hicks, consisting of mortar detachments from the Royals and a mortar detachment and three rifle platoons of the Black Watch, boarded HMS *Duke of Wellington*, a converted ferry, at Southampton. Once the troops had embarked, both they and the sailors were told that they were on their way to France to attack Dieppe. "Oh no," one of Private John Grogan's comrades moaned, but Captain Raymond Hicks was quick to reassure his men and tell them not to worry, as "we will have all the air and naval support we need."⁶⁴ Not everyone, however, is cut out to be a hero. On board the *Queen Emma* Sergeant Smith remembered that another NCO "became very frightened and I had to calm

him and his men."⁶⁵ That done, Smith bought a mickey of rum from a sailor and poured it into his water bottle, intending to have a shot or two before landing.

Around 9.25 P.M., as twilight turned into darkness, the ships raised anchor and put to sea. Lieutenant Thomas Taylor of C Company remembered that from his ship, the *Queen Emma*, they could see Nelson's three-masted flagship, HMS *Victory*, and thought to himself, "here we go again – 100 years later."⁶⁶ Taylor also recollected that as soon as the ship was under way, Lieutenant-Colonel Catto held an O Group and informed his officers that he had left behind a letter addressed to Canadian Military Headquarters in London "to the effect that the raid *would not succeed* due to the lack of artillery support and the heavy bombers which if used could kill too many French."⁶⁷ * Ross Munro, who was on the *Queen Emma* with Catto, remembered the start of the voyage:

The barrage balloons tugging from the sterns of our ships sparkled in the soft evening sunshine and our fleet put to sea without a signal or a cheer from a single soul. We were on our way to France.

It was one of the finest evenings of the summer. The sea was smooth, the sky was clear and there was the slightest of breezes. The ships cleared and the Royals went to dinner before making their final preparations. In the wardroom, the officers sat around the tables and dined in navy style as the last sunshine poured through the open portholes. We had a good meal and everyone ate hungrily, for on the way to the boats all we had was haversack fare – a few bully beef sandwiches.

The Royals officers were in good spirits at dinner. Looking around the table you would never have thought that they were facing the biggest test of their lives.⁶⁸

Munro noted, however, that the enlisted men were somewhat subdued. "Few of the Royals," he recalled, "seemed to be in as confident a mood as I had known them" in RUTTER, as

The rush to the port and the mass of detail, which had to be crammed again in a few hours, left everyone rather ragged.

Even before we put to sea some had an ominous feeling about what was ahead of them on the other side of the Channel. Nobody said anything but many were wondering how the security had been in the time since 7 July. Did the Germans know the Canadians were going to France and were they waiting? This was the question being asked in many minds.

They were puzzled, too, why the raid had been decided upon so suddenly. They would have liked more time to adjust themselves.⁶⁹

* Unfortunately, this letter has never been found.



The Royals' landing place: Blue Beach at Puys. Under the final plan for the raid, the Royals were to land under cover of darkness at this spot, approximately a mile east of Dieppe. They had to get across the seawall that bordered the little beach, which was only 250 yards wide and 25 yards deep at high tide. Next, they had to scale the heights behind, which were defended, and then capture a number of German artillery positions. They were given exactly 30 minutes to accomplish these tasks. (RRC Museum)

That was a perceptive comment on the feelings of the men. "In June," Private Ron Beal recalled years later that during RUTTER, "when we were told we were going on a raid against Dieppe everybody was cheering, light-hearted and eager" but in August "when they told us where we were going, there was no cheering," the reaction was simply "just 'OK, I guess we have to go.'"⁷⁰

On the *Princess Astrid*, Private Jack Poolton thought it was a beautiful and peaceful night, with the Channel "as calm as a mill pond."⁷¹ Once he and his comrades had eaten, they were busy

listening to lectures and studying aerial photographs and maps which later proved obsolete. While trying to picture what we were about to encounter during the landings, we were very calm, almost as if we were on manoeuvres. Being dedicated to the task ahead and having trained hard we were eager to see action and prove ourselves good soldiers. Each man had to go out on deck to prime his two grenades. This was a ticklish job to do particularly in the dark and on a moving ship.⁷²

Grogan remembered that on the *Duke of Wellington* each soldier received as many grenades as a man thought he could carry, but they "were packed in grease and had to be cleaned," which they did, one by one, on the mess decks. Suddenly there was a muffled explosion when a soldier from the Black

Watch accidentally detonated one of his grenades, killing himself and wounding 18 men around him. Grogan now saw "at first hand the damage caused by these deadly little weapons in an enclosed space."⁷³ Sten guns were issued to many of the officers and NCOs. These weapons had been provided during the training for Operation RUTTER but withdrawn after it was cancelled. There was much disquiet about being handed new weapons, still full of cosmoline, just hours before the raid was to take place because the Sten was a tricky thing and needed considerable adjustment, including filing various bits, before it could be trusted.



Waiting to leave for Operation JUBILEE. Late in the morning of Tuesday, 18 August 1942, the Royals wait to board the trucks that will take them to their ports of embarkation, either Portsmouth or Southampton. The large weapon with the bipod on the ground is a Boys anti-tank rifle. Most of these men would not be coming back. (RRC Museum)