

A SHORT LIFE ON THE OCEAN WAVE: AMPHIBIOUS OPERATIONS

The Royal Regiment of Canada was carried to Blue Beach at Dieppe in two types of landing craft: the LCA (Landing Craft, Assault) and the LCM (Landing Craft, Mechanized). The LCA was 41.5 feet long and 10 feet wide and could transport 34 soldiers – a complete platoon. Fully loaded, it had a top speed of about 8 knots and a range of around 50 miles. The LCA had ¾-inch-thick armour plate on its sides and ¼-inch on the narrow decks above the troop well. The LCM was 49 feet long, and 14 feet wide and could transport vehicles as heavy as 16 tons or 100 soldiers. It had a top speed of 6 knots fully loaded and a similar range to the LCA. Neither craft provided a comfortable ride but it was never intended that troops should spend more than a few hours in them.



(Above) **Landing Craft, Mechanized.** Two LCMs alongside their Landing Ship during one of the YUKON exercises in June 1942. Boarding the craft from the ship at sea was a tricky business, particularly in rough weather. Note that the closest LCM is loaded with a carrier as well as troops. (LAC, PA-183767)

(Right) **Landing Craft, Assault.** Smaller than the LCM, the LCA rode more roughly, in a series of slapping motions as its flat bottom rose out of the sea and fell back. The troops were in three rows, the two outside rows having minimal protection from wave splashes. The circular object is a radio antenna. (LAC, PA-131504)



Anxious to get off the thing. It is notable that few of the soldiers shown in pictures of landing craft look happy about the things. The interior shot at left shows the crude benches in the well deck. Men were jammed in very close and those who threw up from sea-sickness were not well regarded by their comrades. The effect of a mortar bomb or machine-gun burst on men crowded so close is not a happy thought. (LAC, PA-136281, PA-189489, RRC Museum)



Ross Munro watched Lieutenant-Colonel Catto set up his office in the wardroom of the *Queen Emma* and work “over his maps and his orders and his photographs, with officers coming and going from the room every few minutes.”⁷⁴ “In every cabin on the ship,” he recalled,

officers were running over their orders and scanning their maps once again. It was the same on the troop decks. Platoon commanders, company commanders, sergeants, corporals and privates were going over the details of the plan and their part in the attack.

Weapons and ammunition were checked and then the soldiers just lay down on the decks or on their own kit and dozed.⁷⁵

Not all the Royals benefited from this study period. Having lied about his age, Private William Stevens on the *Princess Astrid* was just 17 years old and, having been posted to the regiment just three weeks before, had missed all the earlier training and

briefing. On board ship, he remembered that he was “shown some intelligence photos, not that they helped me much either.”⁷⁶

As they had not had an opportunity to do so before embarking, the men were told that they could write letters, which the naval authorities would mail. Not all of the Royals did so – Private Harold Price later recalled that “every guy I can remember who wrote a letter got killed, every guy.”⁷⁷ Most of the men, however, took the opportunity to write to family and loved ones. Private Earl Ricard of B Company, whose home was at Renfrew, Ontario, wanted to clear his conscience and wrote to his mother that

I just want you to know Mum that I think you & Nina [his sister] are the two sweetest people in the whole world and anything I have ever said that may have made you heart sore was only a childish remark, as you will remember that I was only a boy when I was at home with you, and I have regretted saying anything like it ever since. ... Cheerio, chin up.⁷⁸

Private Jack Poolton of D Company wrote to his mother to tell her that he was on his way to attack Dieppe and that, “although the enemy has well-trained and experienced soldiers ... we volunteered and trained hard for this and would not want to miss it under any condition.” “I know your thoughts and prayers will be with me tomorrow August 19th,” he concluded, ‘God Bless You All. Your Loving Son, Jack.’⁷⁹ Lance-Corporal Leslie Ellis cautioned his mother not to worry if she did not hear from him for a while “because, although I may be in good health I may not be in a position to write to you.”⁸⁰

Corporal D’Arcy Howick of HQ Company had only been married to his English bride, Joyce, for a short time. He explained to her that he was now nearing the French coast for a long-delayed raid and

How glad I am now, darling, that I went up to see you last weekend, and I thank you for a lovely day and a half.

I don’t know about this week end now but I guess I’ll be able to get away anyway so we’ll paint the town red when I get up there.

And now, adios, my sweet, I have a terrific lot of work to do yet. Until Sat[urday]. then.

I send you all my love ...⁸¹

After midnight, as the first hours of Wednesday 19 August 1942 passed – very slowly for most men – the 267 ships and vessels carrying the 6,100 soldiers and marines taking part in Operation JUBILEE neared the coast of France. Shortly before 3 A.M. the officers and men of the Royal Regiment of Canada began to board the landing craft that would take them to Blue Beach.

