Canada's Roles in WWII – pt I

- before 1942, Canada only had participated in a couple of missions, both of which were near disasters
  - Hong Kong – many killed or taken prisoner by Japan
  - Dunkirk – had to be rescued off the beaches in France

- from '39-'42, most of our soldiers' time was spent endlessly training and drinking in Britain
  - Britain was fighting the Battle of Britain and the Battle of the Atlantic, and the idea of using CDN troops in Europe was the furthest from their mind

Dieppe (Aug. 1942)

- by summer of '42, Stalin was in trouble
  - the Germans had millions of troops in Russia, and Russia was barely holding on…
    - Stalin told Churchill: "If you don't open up a western front on the Nazis, I may be forced to surrender…"

- because Canada was so eager to fight, we got the job
- operations were kept top secret:
  - CDNs would make up the majority of the assault
    - amphibious attack on the beaches of Dieppe in German-occupied France (radar reconnaissance?)
    - attack early morning under cover of night
    - fierce bombing campaigns to lead the attack
    - take the beach and hold it
  - GOAL – make Germany draw troops away from Russia to defend against more possible Allied attacks

- August 19, 1942, the attack was launched, but there was a vital change made…
  - bombing was scrapped – believed that surprise was more important than bombing the Germans
    - now, the German machinegun nests and bunkers would be intact (oops…)

- the attack itself was mostly a disaster
  - bad luck struck, and the assault team was spotted by a German boat
    - they radioed ahead and the Germans were waiting with MG42s oiled and ready
  - the sail across took too long, and the first wave of troops attacked in daylight, in mostly wooden landing craft
  - the tanks that landed on the beaches were useless
    - treads did not grip the large pebbles
    - couldn't move and were sitting ducks
  - only one person in each platoon was trained in radio use
    - they LED the attack off the boats, which meant that they died first
    - nobody could use the radios to tell the men to STOP coming… it was a massacre
  - over 3600 troops were killed or taken prisoner

- on a positive note, Dieppe did see one success
- on a secret side mission, one group broke through the lines to a German radar base
  - a CDN scientist was with them…
    - needed to steal information about the German's radar that was responsible for dropping thousands of Allied planes

- figured out how to scramble the German radar as a result
    - planes dropped pieces of tin foil as they flew over German radar
    - the radar beams would be scrambled in all directions from the tin foil
        - as a result, Germans had no idea how many planes were flying overhead, or where they were at all

- newspapers in Canada wrote about how much of a success Dieppe raid was
- did not want the public to know how much of a beating we took

Did Dieppe Help For Future Invasions?

- when D-Day was being planned (greatest invasion mission of WWII), Dieppe's failures were taken into consideration

- they learned:
    - bombing is always good to weaken defenses, and surprise on a major assault is overrated
    - absolute secrecy was vital if possible prior to the attack
    - landing craft had to be metal to stop bullets
    - tanks needed better tread to grip the beaches
    - attack under cover of night… no exceptions
    - train each person on radio use to keep communication open

- it is just a shame that thousands of CDNs had to die or be captured to learn these pretty obvious lessons

Canada's Role in WWII – pt II

- Dieppe didn't go so well, but Allied attacks went on as planned after 1942
  - Africa, then up from Egypt to Italy…
  - plan was: liberate Italy, liberate France, and have Russia push towards Germany from the east
    - 3 front war = defeat of the Nazis

Ortona (1943-1944)

- CDNs played a vital role in the liberation of Italy, and this was one of our greatest achievements in WWII
- on July 10, 1943, troops moved into southern Italy
  - fierce fighting resulted as the Italians and Nazis retreated
  - bad weather created conditions similar to WWI

- CDN troops besieged the coastal Italian town of Ortona and fought for a month to liberate it
  - cost us 1372 soldiers before the Nazis withdrew
- we're still honoured by the Italians for our services

D-Day (June 6th, 1944)

- this was the massive invasion planned by the Allies to take back occupied France from the Germans
- learned from Dieppe in 1942…

- 5 beaches were hit on the French coast on the same day
  - over 500,000 troops landed at the same moment in five different locations
    - paratroopers landed behind the lines all night, and fierce bombing campaigns weakened defenses
  - over 30,000 CDNs landed on Juno Beach
    - met fairly little defense other than barbed wire, obstacles, and a few machine gun nests
    - were very successful!

- today, the Juno Beach memorial stands as a tribute to CDN soldiers lost in the attack

Holland (1944-1945)

- Canada received the unenviable job of liberating Holland from the Nazis
  - sounds easy right?
    - flat land, most of which is behind sea level
      - FLOODING when dams were blown
    - 75,000+ Nazis were dug in, waiting…
    - left all to the CDNs

- over 6000 CDNs died fighting in Holland
  - largest skirmish was the Battle of the Scheldt
    - large inlet near Antwerp
- there were many fights, but all in all, CDNs met mediocre resistance
  - the more they won, the weaker the Germans got
- CDNs were hugely successful in this liberation

- today, we're still seen as heroes to the Dutch
    - if you ever take a trip to Holland, wear your flag with pride and strangers will treat you like gold
    - of all the graveyards in all of Europe, the CDN graveyards kept by the Dutch are the most beautiful and well-kept

- as the war pressed onwards, Germany collapsed under the weight of the three-front war they were fighting
    - a simple lack of resources weakened them
    - a weakened leadership decapitated them
        - Hitler became more and more fanatical as the war in Europe came to a close
            - committed suicide in a bunker in Berlin, and his body was burned afterwards