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Review of *Eyewitness at Dieppe: The Only First-Hand Account of WWII's Most Disastrous Raid* by Ross Reyburn

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REVIEWS

Ross Reyburn, *Eyewitness at Dieppe: The Only First-Hand Account of WWII's Most Disastrous Raid*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword Books, 2022. Notes, Index, 181pp., ISBN: 978-1399059978 (hardback). Price £15.00.

This book is a reissue of the writer Wallace Reyburn's eye-witness account of the infamous British-Canadian raid on the German occupied port of Dieppe in August 1942, with the addition of a foreword by his son, freelance journalist Ross Reyburn. The background to the raid will be fairly well known to most who have an interest in the history of the Second World War. Operation Jubilee, as it was called, was reputedly a rehearsal for the Allied invasion of France that took place in June 1944. The fact that the Allies landed on beaches in 1944 rather than attempting to capture a port of entry was probably a result of the Dieppe raid. The latter was a total failure and most of the 6,000 or so troops who landed became casualties or were taken prisoners-of-war.

The reasons for this failure were many and varied and are well rehearsed in the book. Suffice to say that ignorance, optimism bias, poor planning in some quarters, and bad luck combined to make Jubilee the costly fiasco that it turned out to be. What cannot be denied, however, is the courage and determination of the men who took part. Wallace Reyburn, whose original account was entitled 'Rehearsal for Invasion' and first published in 1943 not long after the action, was the only journalist who landed with the troops at Dieppe, so his account of the fighting in the town which lasted for a scant six and a half hours has an immediate and personal impact. He was lucky enough to land at Pourville - to the south of Dieppe proper - with the Canadian South Saskatchewan Regiment and the Cameron Highlanders of Winnipeg, and where the assault was initially successful and casualties relatively light. Others who landed elsewhere were not so fortunate.

Reyburn survived the fighting on land and withdrew over the same beach with minor shrapnel wounds, only to have two ships sunk under him before being picked up by a third. He was on the last ship to leave Dieppe and made it back across the Channel to England.

His initial reporting was written shortly thereafter and is very much in the 'hit Hitler for six out of Europe' jingoistic style that prevailed at the time, and was no doubt cleared by the wartime censors before it saw the light of day. As such it is short on coverage and commentary of the Allied failures. Later in life, he corrected the record with a number of commentaries and letters in the British press, in which he was particularly excoriating in his criticism of Lord Louis Mountbatten and his role in planning and conduction the operation.

His son Ross Reyburn's prologue, on the other hand, suffers no such censorship and has the benefit of hindsight and his father's later criticisms. It is not light in its condemnation of the mistakes of the operation. He too devotes a considerable amount of time to re-examining Mountbatten's role in the operation, and in an objective and balanced way before, inevitably, coming to the same conclusion as his father.

At the same time, whilst the sacrifice was very much a Canadian one on the day, he does point out that they were keen and raring to go. They had spent two years training in Britain whilst their Commonwealth cousins from Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India and other countries had been involved in combat operations for years in theatres like North Africa and Burma, plus of course at sea and in the air. Nobody needed to persuade the Canadians to go to Dieppe, although some had reservations about throwing inexperienced and unblooded troops into such a difficult assault.

There is a plethora of books written on Dieppe and Operation Jubilee, and I have read some of them previously. But as the only eyewitness account from the ground this has a place amongst them. I did like the book and it gave me a new perspective on a well-known story. If I was being picky, I might suggest that Ross Reyburn's prologue might have served better as an afternote or epilogue, for personally I would have preferred to read his father's original account before reading his son's modern commentary. Nonetheless, I would happily recommend this book to general readers and military historians alike as an important addition to our understanding of combined operations and the Second World War.

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Robert Forsyth, To Save An Army: The Stalingrad Airlift. Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2022. Notes, Index, 385pp. + 57 Illustrations & Maps, ISBN: 978-1472845382 (hardback). Price £20.00.

There are few Second World War topics that equal the Battle of Stalingrad in terms of drama, scale and impact. For just over five months during the Autumn and Winter of 1942/43 Friedrich Paulus's German 6 Army, along with elements of the 4 Panzer Army, fought a life and death struggle to take and retain a city which arguably held marginal strategic importance, but which carried the name of the Soviet Union's leader