

Why Sugar the Pill?

"Almost the turning point of the war" was one phrase Defense Minister Ralston is quoted as using to describe the action at Dieppe for a group of veterans in Ottawa last week. He supported it with this equally incredible statement: "Dieppe was a thrust and a menace to the Hun, and I believe it had something to do with the situation as it has since developed in North Africa and in Russia."

Col. Ralston was a soldier, an officer of distinction, in the last war. In possession of information which must be his as Minister of Defense, how can he have the effrontery to say any such thing? Put aside the heroism of the men of Dieppe, and that action ranks as a fiasco of the first order; a tragedy of military blundering without parallel in this war.

What did Dieppe accomplish? Col. Ralston says it proved the possibility of landing on a heavily defended coast and withdrawing; that it showed how the infantry could flush the enemy for the air force to shoot. Add them up, and what is there which could not have been purchased more easily, at much smaller cost?

The Minister may imagine what he said to be the case. But how does he square it with the facts from the whole record? How does he square it with the fact that the commanding officer of the raid, Maj.-Gen. Roberts, the man the King decorated for heroism, has been "kicked upstairs"? We have nothing to say against the record of Gen. Roberts. It is not our intention to single out him or any individual for the blame for Dieppe. We don't think any one person can be made to carry the blame.

It is necessary clearly to understand how Gen. Roberts has been rewarded for his leadership at Dieppe. He has not engaged in a single operation since, except training exercises. At the time when it would appear that the Canadian force is to see action, and is, apparently, being reorganized for battle, its only high officer with battle experience is demoted. Let there be no mistake about the Roberts appointment as chief of reinforcements. Demotion it was.

Even were failure not the real story of Dieppe, with what realism could the Minister regard that raid as the turning point of the war? How then are we to characterize such "incidents" as Pearl Harbor, El Alamein, the stand of the Russians before Moscow and again at Stalingrad? Let us not lose all perspective.

When we talk about the turning point of this war there is one for all democracies to acknowledge. Five hundred young airmen, about 30 per cent of whom are still alive, fought it over Britain in the autumn of 1940. It was they and no one else who won us the chance of victory. As for Dieppe, Col. Ralston should be well content if that story is left to slumber.

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