

Ron Beal

A Canadian POW story

Interviewed on November 22, 2011

By Richard Laramie

# Ron Beal enlistment photo



- Ron Beal enlisted because he was part of the regiment already as a bugler and it was expected of him.
- Most young boys signed up with the thought of adventure and that it was their duty to fight to save their country of birth, whether it was Belgium, France, Great Britain, or even to Canada.

Ron Beal's enlistment photo

# Canadian Royal Regiment



- This is the regiment to which Ron Beal belonged
- Militaries were divided into several regiments based on their specific skills or their geographic locations.

Canadian Royal Regiment Insignia

# Training



- Mr. Beal's training was specialized in hand-to-hand and up-close fighting.
- By the end of his training he was able to disarm a soldier charging with a bayonet and turn it against him.

Soldiers taking part in hand-to-hand training

# Transportation



- Ron was transported to Britain on a troop transport from Canada
- Troop transport ships were the means of transporting soldiers across the Atlantic before and after the war.
- It continued to be the main means of transportation until the airplane was developed further.

A ship on the Atlantic transporting soldiers to Britain

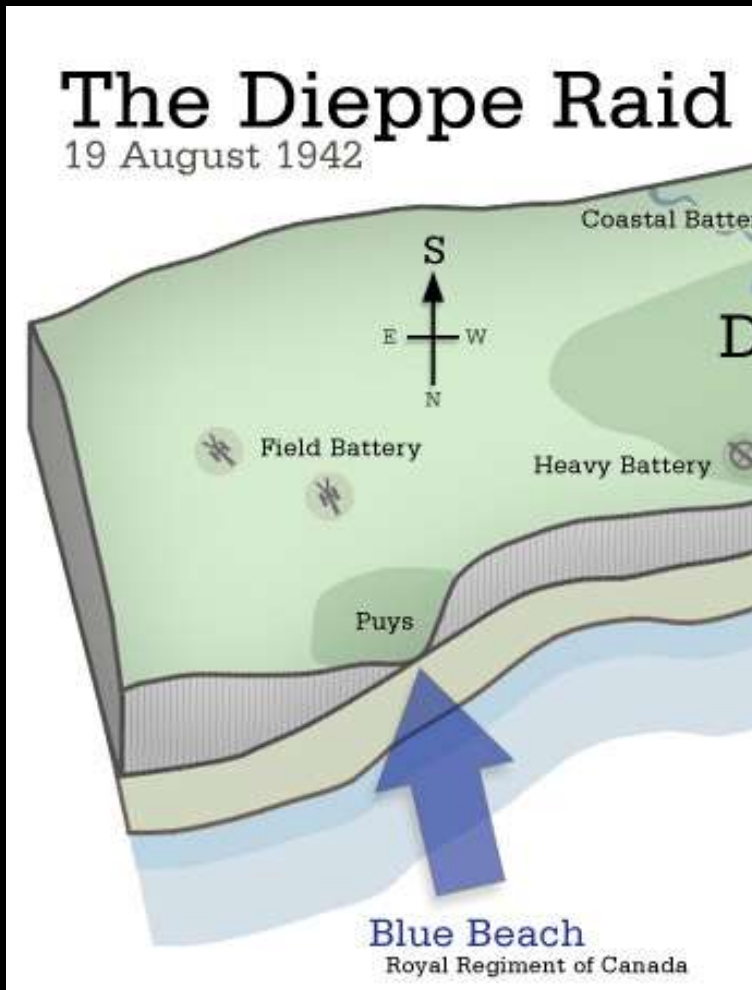
# Deployment to Dieppe



- Ron was deployed to Dieppe from Britain after several months of waiting to get into action.
- He was deployed in a landing craft which was used in Allied landings throughout the war.

Soldiers waiting in a landing craft

# Plan



- Ron's division was given the task of clearing the field battery that had a firing position on the beach
- Regiments were given tasks to make the overall objective easier to accomplish through completion of the tasks.

Part of the plan for the Dieppe Raid

# Disaster at Dieppe



- The training received and resources allowed to the mission was not enough and the Canadians suffered a horrendous defeat.
- The landing had three purposes: to get a feel for German defenses for the bigger D-Day landing that was planned; to open up another front; and to alleviate pressure on the Russian front

Battlefield of Dieppe after the Canadian assault



# Surrender



- Ron and his comrades surrendered after their officers decided that more bloodshed was useless.
- Like all prisoners taken during the war they were stripped of all supplies and told to leave all their weapons behind

Canadian prisoners being directed by their German captors

# Transportation



Cattle cars transported prisoners from Dieppe to the prison camp in Germany cattle cars stuffed with POWs

This was the basic way that Germans transported prisoners both from the war and those imprisoned from the holocaust

Cattle cars used to transport prisoners

# Life in captivity



Prisoners bathing at Stalag VIII B

Life in German Prisoner of War Camps was very difficult, which forced soldiers to adapt to their conditions in order to survive. The conditions in German POW Camps were not pleasant. Each camp was different in terms of its set up of its available resources. They usually consisted of different compounds that kept officers and enlisted men separate from each other and almost none of the barracks were weatherproofed. The barracks were, however, equipped with bunks and had a wood or coal-burning stove. Prisoners were given two meals a day that consisted of black bread and thin soup. They were generally put to work on tasks, such as maintaining railway lines or helping with domestic projects such as mining for salt. <sup>2</sup>

Prisoners of war did the best they could to adapt. They scarcely received parcels from the Red Cross, but when they did, these parcels contained food and other amenities such as soap and toothbrushes. The prisoners often repurposed supplies they were given to suit their needs, such as making an improvised brick stove and using condensed milk to cook their food. They also repurposed their blankets into socks and distributed to those soldiers who did not have socks. Life at camp was very boring, and in order to combat this boredom some prisoners played sports, took up music and eventually held concerts at night for both guards and other POWs. Most prisoners were not fond of waiting to be rescued and started planning to escape. It was said that it was the sworn duty of a soldier to try to make it back to their country so that they can once again fight. There were several ways that soldiers attempted to achieve this: they dug tunnels, stowed away on trains and, most creative of all, tried to build a glider. Camp life for the Prisoner of War was centered around the achievement of freedom or escape: the prisoners were always trying to outsmart the Germans, trick them and even send the harsh ones to the Russian front. <sup>3</sup> They did this by giving a skilled pickpocket some cigarettes to put on a harsh German guard. After this the prisoners told the guard's superior that they were trading with prisoners: the guard was searched and then taken away, never to be seen again. <sup>4</sup>

Some prisoners had great success with their efforts to make life easier and escape, so much so that some camps ended up with prisoners being content in their surroundings and waiting out the end of the war comfortably. As the Allies advanced into Germany towards the end of the war, prison camps either surrendered and released its prisoners or moved deeper into the heart of Germany where much more horrendous living conditions waited for all. As for the soldiers who tried to escape, some made it back to their respective countries and fought another day, but most ended up being recaptured. In some of the worst case scenarios prisoners were killed unjustly by the Gestapo or subjected to horrendous working conditions that scarred them for the rest of their lives. Therefore, for most soldiers, life in German POW Camps was harsh and difficult.

<sup>1</sup> Historyonthenet, [http://www.historyonthenet.com/WW2/german\\_pow\\_camps.htm](http://www.historyonthenet.com/WW2/german_pow_camps.htm), accessed December 10, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> POW RESEARCH LINKS, <http://www.303rdbg.com/pow-camps.html>, accessed December 10, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Historyonthenet, [http://www.historyonthenet.com/WW2/great\\_escape.htm](http://www.historyonthenet.com/WW2/great_escape.htm), accessed December 10, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Ron Beal, Interviewed November 23, 2011

# Lamsdorf Stalag VIIIB



- Ron was taken to Lamsdorf, Germany and placed in Stalag VIIIB
- After Prisoners were captured they were usually moved to camps in France awaiting transportation back to permanent ones in Germany

Prisoners at Lamsdorf Stalag VIIIB

# Living Conditions



- The barracks at Stalag VIII B were made of wood and had bunk beds inside to house prisoners.
- This was a typical set-up for camps as they could house soldiers efficiently using the least amount of space.

Barracks at Stalag VIII B

# Passing time



- This is a photo of prisoners at Stalag VIII B passing time by playing cards.
- Boredom was very present for prisoners in POW camps: they constantly thought up with creative ways as to how to keep themselves busy.

Soldiers playing cards at Stalag VIII B

# Red Cross Aid



- Soldiers received Red Cross aid that included food and luxuries such as meat and toothbrushes.
- Red Cross was able to send representatives to check on living conditions of all prisoners covered by the Geneva Convention, which led to improved conditions and prisoners receiving aid.

Soldiers unloading Red Cross packages

# Musicians



- In Stalag VIII B there was a music band set up from instruments given by the red cross.
- This was another way for prisoners to pass time and this led to concerts that improved prisoner-captor relations.

Musicians putting on a concert at Stalag VIII B



# Working



- Prisoners at Stalag VIII B were put to work mending materials for the camp, such as barrels and the barracks.
- It was not uncommon for prisoners to be given jobs to make themselves useful for their German captors.

Soldiers working at Stalag VIII B

# Freedom for the prisoners



- After prisoners were liberated some celebrated but most were too weak to move and were transported to Britain for care.
- Most had been so deprived of nutrients in the camp that upon leaving they weighed half of what they did going into the camp.

These are prisoners who had recently been liberated

# Trip to Britain from the camp



- Ron was transported back in a hospital ship so that as an injured soldier he would not be targeted while aboard.
- Hospital ships were not targets open to attack but had to be clearly marked and not carry any ammunition or weapons.
- It was allowed to be searched by the enemy , although near the end of the war they were generally just sunk by u-boats

Hospital ship used to transport wounded

# British Hospital



- Ron was put into the hospital with all the other injured soldiers while he was regaining his strength and planning his return to Canada
- Hospitals for wounded were a luxury for the injured: usually they would have to be treated by a field hospital without proper medical tools or conditions.

British hospital near Oxford, England

# VE Day



- For VE-Day Ron was still in the hospital but all patients had been given a shot of rum.
- Not all patients drank rum so some like Ron received a little more than just a shot and had to sleep it off
- VE-Day was a time of celebration for the Allies, especially for Britain
- After having to black out windows from air raids and seeing their soldiers come home wounded or not at all there was peace in their region.

Celebrations taking place in Britain during VE-Day

# Impact moment

- The impact moment that stood out to me was when Mr. Beal described how if he had a chance to do it all again he would not even give it a second thought. This was because he said that what they did had to be done and that the world was a better place for it.
- The title where this takes place is in “How do you feel about the war”.



Picture of Ron Beal now with a photo of him as a soldier

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