

Lt William Anderson Millar, MiD

Lieutenant William Millar was born in 1913 and educated in Edmonton, AB. The eldest of a family of four boys, he was a member of the local Militia (1934-36) right after High School and became a Corporal in Artillery Survey. While attending the University of Alberta he was a member of the Canadian Officer Training Corps and graduated with a Bachelor of Engineering in Mining Engineering in 1938. Employed by several mining companies in British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Northern Ontario, he was working with Canadian Industries Limited in Montreal as a mining engineer and explosives expert with a specialty in tunnelling and special demolition techniques for underground excavations when he enlisted for WW II.



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When William joined the Canadian Army in Montreal in January 1941, he stated his interest in demolitions or tunnelling. After completing his military and field engineering training at Camp Petawawa, ON he embarked for the UK in November 1941 as a Reinforcement Officer. In April 1942 he was selected as one of the Team Leaders for Operation RUTTER. He then joined the 7th Field Company that was undergoing advanced engineer training on the Isle of Wight in preparation for Op RUTTER - the Dieppe Raid.

Lt Millar commanded a Party of 55 All Ranks for Op Rutter that was to land on RED Beach. His party was organized into four groups and their tasks after clearing the immediate beach obstacles during the assault phase were to demolish a number of assigned cranes and warehouses in the Dieppe dock area, co-ordinate activities with Navy Cutting-Out Force, and to liaise with the Essex and Scots at Z+2 hr.

Operation RUTTER was planned to take place between 4 and 8 July. After weeks of training and preparation the troops embarked on their craft but the order to sail was not given.

Unfortunately the time when the tides were most suitable had coincided with a period of very unsettled weather. In addition, the Germans spotted the convoy gathered in the Solent and bombed them. Coupled with the weather getting even worse and the possibility that the enemy was alerted to a developing amphibious operation, the operation was cancelled.

The main elements of the plan were quickly resurrected in the planning for Op JUBILEE. The objectives and target of the plan remained essentially unchanged except that that the large German coastal batteries would be seized by seaborne assault using commando instead of using airborne troops. After several delays, Op JUBILEE was eventually executed on 18/19 August.

On the morning of 19 August 1942 Lt Millar and his team landed on RED BEACH. Their landing was conducted under extreme combat conditions as the Germans had prepared many fields of fire intended to stop landing craft and advancing forces. Under fire, the team began their tasks of destroying and demolishing beach obstacles and attempted to advance to their demolition

targets. However, as with many of the landed troops, they were prevented from advancing from the beach because of the intense fire from German small arms, heavy machine guns, mortars, anti-armour guns and field artillery sited around the cliffs and beaches of Dieppe.

Lt Millar was witnessed during the assault to be leading his team to safety, administering to their wounds and to be directing their defence, while still attempting to continue to advance over RED BEACH towards his assigned demolition targets. Most of his team, however, had drowned in the surf labouring with their heavy loads, had been killed outright, or were suffering extreme wounds. Despite his best efforts he was unable to rally the surviving team members.

Lt Millar was subsequently taken prisoner of war and marched out of Dieppe with other captured officers to a POW holding area outside the town. They were then shipped by train under guard to a designated Officer POW Camp in Eichstatt, GE. Enroute to the camp, Lt Millar and others escaped from the train, with some eventually returning back to the UK. Lt Millar was quickly recaptured and sent under heavier guard to Eichstatt and transferred later to Willisbad (Prison) Castle. Lt Miller escaped from Willisbad Castle after three days but was recaptured several miles away. He was subsequently sent back to the Officer POW camp at Eichstatt. There a group of British officers joined the Canadian officers in the construction of an escape tunnel. Millar and other officers escaped but he was captured in Austria, again imprisoned in Willisbad Castle, and then returned to Eichstatt. At this stage, Lt Millar was designated as a “persistent escaper” and transferred to the highest security POW prison at Colditz Castle.

Lt Millar escaped from Colditz Castle on 28 January 1944 but was recaptured two weeks later and taken to the POW camp at Stalag VIII B. He was removed from there and taken under heavy guard by the German Secret Police to the Mauthausen Concentration Camp in Austria and it is believed that he was then shot dead on 15 July 1944 with his body being cremated there and his ashes scattered among the ashes of other murdered camp inmates.

Lt Millar is remembered on the Brookwood Memorial in the Brookwood Military Cemetery near London, England. Lt Millar’s name is also entered on the Canadian memorial in the Canadian Dieppe Cemetery, on the on the University of Alberta War Memorial, and in the Colditz Society Special Book of Remembrance. Millar Lake, NWT was named in his memory.



Millar Family Memorial in Edmonton. The family lost two sons in the War. A third served in the Artillery.



Brookwood Memorial in the Brookwood Military Cemetery near London, England

Lt Millar was awarded a "Mention in Dispatches" (MiD) for his actions and leadership under extreme combat conditions on RED BEACH at Dieppe. Awarded posthumously on 15 June 1946, this recognition was originally submitted as a Military Cross, but that award could not be made posthumously. That proposed MC citation concluded with: "...Among prisoners who had shown great determination, ingenuity, skill and daring in many and varied attempts to escape, there were few who could equal Lieutenant Millar's record of four successful breaks in a period of seventeen months, and none who surpassed him in determination and daring. Such extraordinary resolution and courage are deserving of the highest commendation."

{...with research assistance by the Canadian Military Engineer Museum...}