

NOTE

This is a preliminary narrative and should not be regarded as authoritative. It has not been checked for accuracy in all aspects, and its interpretations are not necessarily those of the Historical Section as a whole.

Ce texte est préliminaire et n'a aucun caractère officiel. On n'a pas vérifié son exactitude et les interprétations qu'il contient ne sont pas nécessairement celles du Service historique.

Directorate of History
National Defence Headquarters
Ottawa, Canada
K1A 0K2

July 1986

~~SECRET~~
CANCELLED

1
31 Dec. 40

Canadian Military Headquarters,
2, Cockspur Street,
London, England.

The Director,
Historical Section (G.S.),
National Defence Headquarters,
Ottawa, Canada.

DECLASSIFIED
Authority: DHD 3-3
by 002 for DHist NDHQ
Date: NOV 13 1986

Sir,

I have the honour to make my first
report in the appointment of Historical Officer, Canadian
Military Headquarters, London.

JOURNEY OTTAWA-HALIFAX

2. I left Ottawa on 13 Dec. 1940 at 0720 hrs E.S.T.

Proceeding per Canadian National Railways via Montreal, Riviere
du Loup and Moncton, I arrived at Halifax on 14 Dec. at about
2000 hrs A.S.T. and immediately embarked on the R.M.M.V.
"Capetown Castle" (Captain Thornton).

3. The ship cast off from Pier 21, Halifax, at about
0830 hrs on 15 Dec. and proceeded to Bedford Basin (where approx-
imately 30 vessels, chiefly freighters, were at anchor, in addition
to a great many more moored or anchored in front of the city). Here
she carried out degaussing tests, later dropping down and anchoring
opposite the city for the night.

4. At about 0900 hrs on 16 Dec. the ship began to move out
to sea to fall into her place in convoy.

THE ATLANTIC VOYAGE

5. The "Capetown Castle" is a new motor vessel (completed
1938) of approximately 27,000 tons. She is described, not as a
troopship, but as a troop freight ship, and still retains her
luxurious peacetime appointments. Apart from the natural discomforts
of an Atlantic passage in December, somewhat aggravated by the fact
that she was built for the South African service and was insufficiently
heated, she gave us a most pleasant voyage.

6. The number of troops on board (including five officers of the R.C.A.F.) was 1420 all ranks, the units being No. 1 Army Field Workshop, R.C.O.C.; 2nd Divisional Ammunition Company, R.C.A.S.C.; No. 2 Mobile Bath Unit. A large draft of R.C.A. reinforcements was also present. The O.C. troops on board was Lt.-Col. C.F. Curtis, No. 1 A.F.W. Second in command was Lt.-Col. G.A. McCarter, R.C.A. The ship's adjutant was Major W.E. Andrewes, R.C.E. Thanks largely to the work of these officers (which during the first day or two amounted to bringing order out of chaos) the troops were well organized and there were no serious disciplinary difficulties during the passage. Major Andrewes was proceeding to England to take the Junior Staff Course, as were two other officers on board, Major A.T. Brown (H.L.I. of C.) and Capt. C.H. Drury (R.C.A.). The ship carried as passengers Air Vice-Marshal L.S. Breadner, D.S.C. (Chief of the Air Staff) and E.W. Stedman, O.B.E., and three other R.C.A.F. officers on the Staff of the C.A.S. She also carried a large number of junior Army officers proceeding to England as reinforcements.

THE CONVOY

7. The convoy consisted of three vessels in addition to the "Capetown Castle": the "Pasteur" (formerly French), a larger and faster vessel; the "Pennland", old and slow; and the "Columbia", a Dutch ship not carrying troops, which joined the convoy for protection. The best collective speed of this group was in the vicinity of 13 knots, although the "Capetown Castle" was reported to be good for 22 under ideal conditions.

8. Two destroyers accompanied us on the first stage of the voyage as local escort, but we did not see them after the first day. They were reported to have been sent back to Halifax earlier than usual on account of the heavy seas. Our ocean escort was H.M.S. "Revenge", an old and slow but powerful battleship, which followed us out of Halifax and drew abreast on our starboard beam about 1430 hrs on 16 Dec. Thereafter the normal convoy formation was: "Revenge" in the centre, with "Capetown Castle" (followed by "Columbia") on her port

beam and "Pasteur" (followed by "Pennland") to starboard. This formation (as interpreted by our ship's officers) placed "Capetown Castle" and "Pasteur" between "Revenge" and possible enemy submarines, while "Revenge" protected us against surface raiders.

9. "Revenge" remained with us until 21 Dec. (five days out) when about 1600 hrs she began to drop astern and parted company. She did not explain her departure and in the light of later events our ship's officers were inclined to blame her captain for leaving us before we met our local escort.

10. In the capacity of Ship's Orderly Officer, I visited the bridge at 0700 hrs on 22 Dec. and the Officer of the Watch then informed me that we should reach our rendezvous with the destroyers of our local escort that evening. The rendezvous, he said without consulting the chart, was then perhaps 100-120 miles distant. In fact, however, the destroyers missed us altogether, and we passed through the whole of the "danger zone" without visible naval protection. This naturally occasioned some anxiety, and Air Vice-Marshal Breadner, in a conversation with me on the afternoon of 23 Dec., said that he intended to call the matter to the attention of the Minister of National Defence, then in England.

11. I learned something of the naval side of this situation from a rating of H.M.C.S. "St. Laurant" whom I encountered in Glasgow on 25 Dec. He explained that the escort which went to meet us was composed of six destroyers; two Canadian (his own vessel and H.M.C.S. "Ottawa"), two British, one French and one Polish. He said that they hunted for us in vain for three days, and on the basis of his past experience congratulated us on having come through safely. In point of fact, the safe arrival of this convoy with perhaps 7,000 troops appears to have been in part a matter of pure luck.

12. On the afternoon of 23 Dec. the ships of the convoy zigzagged, the process sometimes bringing our consorts very close to us, sometimes carrying them far away. At dusk, the "Capetown Castle" (presumably with permission of the Vice-Commodore on board the "Pasteur") parted company with the convoy to proceed independently at her best speed. At daylight the next morning we were in sight of land, moving

through the North Channel. The first naval vessels I saw were a group of patrol vessels and minesweepers which we passed about 0945 hrs; soon afterwards a Stranraer flying-boat of the R.C.A.F. passed close and waved to us.

COMMENTS ON THE VOYAGE

13. Though we had a good many officers and men sick (especially on 17 Dec., when the sea was very rough) the voyage was a happy one. In this respect our ship was a contrast with "Pasteur" and "Pennland" which we were told later had been overcrowded and uncomfortable. Many even of our private soldiers had cabin-class staterooms. The men messed in the cabin-class dining saloon, and the food was excellent. The maintenance of the ship's morale was further facilitated by the presence of a group of Auxillary Services officers who worked long and hard at organizing entertainments and distributing comforts: at 0700 hrs on Christmas Day, for instance, they were in the men's mess handing out cigarettes and chocolate. It was perhaps unfortunate that almost the whole group of these officers moving with this flight had been assigned to our ship; the other vessels got no such service. On the other hand, although we had a full hospital throughout the voyage, including several cases of measles, our medical officers had no nursing sisters to help them; the sisters moving with the flight had all been assigned to other ships.

14. The behaviour of the troops was in general admirable. The unit which occasioned most difficulty was, perhaps, the 2nd Divisional Ammunition Company; in the beginning, the French-Canadian soldiers of this company were slow getting out to boat drills, and their quarters were not neat; there was, however, notable improvement in the course of the voyage.

PRECAUTIONS

15. It may be worth while to describe the precautions taken on board against the possibility of enemy attack. Boat drills were held beginning at 0930 hrs on 16 Dec. (although bad weather prevented them on a number of occasions). Measures were taken to ensure that every man knew his boat station, officers were assigned to command

boat parties, and the arrangements were soon working with considerable smoothness. From Reveille on 20 Dec. all ranks slept fully dressed and carried lifebelts everywhere, and the Ship's Orderly Officer reported hourly to the Officer of the Watch on the bridge.

16. During the hours of daylight, after 1300 hrs on 22 Dec., military personnel manned seven Anti-Aircraft Lewis Guns on the upper decks, as well as two Hotchkiss guns on the bridge. The ship's crew provided for the manning of the 6-inch anti-submarine gun, the 3-inch anti-aircraft gun, and two Savage light machine guns. Firing practice was carried out on the afternoon of 20 Dec. by the Lewis gun crews. Orders were issued that in case of attack the military personnel were not to open fire without orders from the bridge; the opening of fire by the Hotchkiss guns or the 3-inch would constitute a signal. Rifle parties were also allotted to positions.

17. During 24 Dec. the ship flew a kite from the fore truck and another from the main truck to deter hostile aircraft from low-flying attacks. However, we arrived at our anchorage without seeing anything of the enemy.

ARRIVAL IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

18. At 1250 hrs on 24 Dec. the "Capetown Castle" passed Ailsa Craig. The weather, which had been misty, cleared as we moved up the Firth of Clyde and our troops were able to see and admire the rugged beauty of the shores. At 1540 hrs we passed through the boom defence across the Clyde and about 1650 hrs anchored at Gourock. There was a tremendous concentration of naval and merchant shipping large and small in the river hereabouts. A Canadian party including Brigadiers Phelan and Sargent came out to the ship but did not board her owing to quarantine regulations; Air Vice-Marshal Breadner and Stedman, however, were taken off. We spent the night on board at Gourock, and Christmas Eve was fairly thoroughly celebrated by all ranks. The blackout in this region is less complete than further south (full precautions being taken only after a raid warning is received) and we were able to relax the prohibition (hitherto strictly enforced) against smoking on deck.

19. Shortly before 0900 hrs on 25 Dec. (Christmas Day) the ship began to move up the Clyde, and docked at Glasgow a little before noon.

(Large vessels seldom go up so high, and we were told that the "Capetown Castle" would have to go out again stern first.) This was fortunate for our troops, as it gave them an opportunity of seeing the great Clyde ship-yards in operation. An almost incredible amount of naval construction is in progress here, and there is no evidence of any attempt on the part of enemy aircraft to interfere with it. The troops constantly exchanged greetings with people on shore and on passing vessels (perhaps the warmest single greeting we received was from the coloured crew of a Liverpool freighter). An especially loud cheer came from the crew of a weather-beaten destroyer moored at John Brown's yard at Clydebank; we learned later that she was H.M.C.S. "St. Laurent", which had been out searching for us.

20. Disembarkation and entrainment were effected with considerable promptitude. Most of the officers travelling as individuals remained in Glasgow for the balance of the day, and took the night train for London at 2130 hrs. On this train I made the acquaintance of Captain Abel, Public Relations Officer, C.M.H.Q., who spoke of the historical value of the growing collection of Canadian official war photographs and invited me to inspect it, which I propose to do at the first opportunity.

21. It will be observed that we disembarked in the United Kingdom on 25 Dec 1940, which in addition to being Christmas Day was the date of the official formation of the Canadian Corps.

ARRIVAL IN LONDON

22. I arrived in London on the morning of 26 Dec. In the afternoon I reported for duty at Canadian Military Headquarters to Brigadier M.A. Pope, M.C. (B.G.S.), who introduced me to Major-General P.J. Montague, C.M.G., D.S.O., M.C., V.D. (Senior Officer, C.M.H.Q.). I also had a moment's conversation with Major-General H.D.G. Crerar, D.S.O. (C.G.S.). Brigadier Pope briefly discussed with me the details of my appointment and some questions that have arisen in connection with it. I was assigned an office on the second floor of the building in which C.M.H.Q. is located. This building (the Sun Life Building) is next door to Canada House. I propose to write a fuller account of it when I have an opportunity.

23. The B.G.S. (Cdn) 7th Corps (now Canadian Corps) has taken some exception to the draft instructions for the Historical Officer

(C.M.H.Q.) as prepared in Ottawa. Brigadier Pope very kindly gave me the opportunity of making some suggestions for the revision of the instructions to meet the objections. A revised draft was, I believe, subsequently prepared and has gone forward to the Corps. There will presumably be a communication to Ottawa on the subject in due course.

24. On 27 Dec. Brigadier Pope showed me a memorandum which he had drawn up for the C.M.H.Q. war diary relative to the circumstances immediately preceding the formation of the Canadian Corps; financial negotiations with the War Office, etc. This will be a valuable historical source. I lunched with Brigadier Pope, and he later showed me ^{another} memo-
randum written by him on the organization of C.M.H.Q. which made interesting observations on the effect of air raids on the staff and its work. He described the London raids of September 1940 as fulfilling Jomini's definition of war as "a dreadful and impassioned drama".

25. While staying for a short time at the Cumberland Hotel I was introduced by Lt.-Col. McCarter to Brigadier W.O. Carr, of the Branch of the Master-General of the Ordnance, who is temporarily in this country. He described the complete destruction by enemy bombers of the (former General Motors) assembly plant at Southampton, which had been assembling Canadian motor vehicles. The plant is to be re-established elsewhere.

THE CONDITION OF LONDON

26. It is in order to make some comment upon the state of London at the end of the year 1940, at a time when it has been the target of intensive enemy air attack for nearly four months. A few days' observation in the intervals of work at C.M.H.Q. is scarcely an adequate basis for a full description, but it is worth while to note down some impressions while the impact of the situation is still fresh.

27. The first impression upon the arriving visitor is the great extent to which the old city remains as it was. The fabric of the familiar streets still stands up, in general, in the old shapes; London is still London, and is far from being a mass of rubble. Not less striking is the extent to which normal life continues: the manner in which the population has adapted itself to new and perilous conditions in the resolution that business must go on. Four days in London have served to convince me that a war cannot be won by bombing civilian populations, at least

populations like that of London. The enemy probably counted upon a growing crescendo of terror in the minds of civilians as the raids went on; but my impression is that the reverse has taken place. The great initial raids, I gather, had considerable disrupting effect, but familiarity with the bombs has apparently bred at least a measure of contempt in the mind of the Londoner, and the newspapers say (and my own observation indicates) that people are actually becoming careless and are taking an increasingly fatalistic attitude towards the menace. There is no evidence that any effect of military value to the Germans has been produced among the English civil population. On the contrary, civilians in general are very optimistic about the outcome of the war; two people have spoken to me hopefully of a victory in 1941.

28. Closer inspection of the city reveals, however, the great extent and seriousness of the physical damage. The bombing (conducted, we are told, from a height of 20,000 - 30,000 feet, for safety from our anti-aircraft guns) has been thoroughly indiscriminate and few streets have escaped; one passes a row of intact houses - perhaps several rows - and is then pulled up short by a patch of damage. It may be merely a small crater in the road; it may be merely that a house has lost part of its upper storey; or it may be that a large bomb, or a "land-mine" floated down by parachute, has completely destroyed six or eight houses. The damage^{is} said to be worst in the poor districts of the East End, which I have not yet had time to visit; but it is evident that no district has come off scot-free.

29. It may be proper to note down some impressions of the two raids which have taken place since my arrival. The first, on the evening of 27 Dec., found me at the Cumberland Hotel preparing for dinner. Lt.-Col. McCarter and I ate dinner in the hotel surrounded by people who showed no concern whatever at the distant sound of bombs and gunfire. Later we walked through the streets in the vicinity. The worst was over by then, but an occasional machine still passed overhead. Transport was moving normally. On a back street the Auxillary Fire Service was fighting a stubborn small fire. On the whole, the unconcern of the public was astonishing. It was surprising to read in The Times the next morning that this raid "equalled in intensity, but not in duration, some of the

heaviest attacks on the capital".

30. There was no raid on 28 Dec., but the following evening (last night) there was a heavy and dramatic one lasting from about 1900 hrs to midnight. On this occasion I was out of doors throughout the heaviest phase, though not close to the centre of the attack. One could hear the bombers coming over in successive waves, and could trace their progress, to a limited extent, by the explosions of our shells. This time more public concern was in evidence - this presumably is always the case out of doors - and we saw many people running for home or for shelters; yet there was still a rather surprising amount of activity in the streets. In the early stages very large fires were started to the east (I was watching from the vicinity of the Queensway Tube Station at the corner of Queensway and the Bayswater Road.) In the glare of these we could pick out the barrage balloons which are so numerous in London; and about 2100 hrs the sound of machine-gun fire suggested that our night fighters were availing themselves of the light of the fires to locate the enemy. After this activity was less; there was a brief and violent burst of gunfire about 2330 hrs (following the sound of a plane or planes passing over) and then came the "all clear".

31. The above may not be material of strictly Canadian interest; but it may serve at least to suggest the atmosphere in which C.M.H.Q. has been working for many weeks past. Brigadier Pope remarked to me that this situation has been an advantage to Headquarters in at least one way; it has caused the fighting troops to regard the organization in London with a respect unknown in the last war. And a good many people in London - civilians as well as soldiers - take, I think, a certain pride in being in the front line, even though, as with most front lines, the position is not particularly comfortable.

32. Written 31 Dec. The evening newspapers of 30 Dec. gave details of the damage done in the "great fire raid" of the previous night, of which some impressions are given above. It is described as the heaviest incendiary attack yet experienced in London, and evidently resulted in the almost complete destruction of the Guildhall, while nine City churches were destroyed or damaged, in addition to a large number of lesser buildings.

33. The material included in this report is necessarily various, and the effect perhaps somewhat disjointed. In subsequent reports it may be possible to focus more effectively upon special topics.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient servant,

Sgd. C.P. Stacey,
Major,
Historical Officer, C.M.H.Q.