

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

## HISTORICAL OFFICER

## CANADIAN MILITARY HEADQUARTERS.

8 Oct 43

CANADIAN OPERATIONS IN SICILY, JULY - AUGUST, 1943:Preliminary Report.

1. The present Report affords a very brief sketch of the operations of Canadian Forces during the Sicilian campaign of July and August, 1943.
2. At Appendix "A" will be found a "Sketch of Operations of Canadian Troops in Sicily". This was prepared for the use of Mr. Charles Murphy of the American magazine "Fortune", who has been preparing an article dealing with the Canadian Army Overseas for publication in that periodical. At Appendix "B" is a series of Notes to this sketch, taking in the main the form of references to sources of information but affording also certain additional facts which could not be published at the present time.
3. The sketch prepared for Mr. Murphy is obviously exiguous in the extreme, even when considered in conjunction with the notes now provided. It is felt, nevertheless, that it may be worthwhile to forward this brief outline of the Canadian share in the Sicilian operations, the more so as a complete historical record cannot be made available for a considerable time to come. In the meantime, the information now forwarded may possibly have some utility.
4. Throughout the operations in Sicily, historical interests were represented in the theatre of war by Capt. A.T. Sesia, R.H.L.I., who holds the appointment of Historical Officer at H.Q., 1 Cdn Div. This officer has busied himself in collecting for historical purposes documents relating to Canadian operations in the Mediterranean theatre, including a great many concerning the planning stage. In addition, he has interviewed many officers in the theatre of war, usually at a period only a few days after the events described, and has made written records of their evidence. His endeavours, supplementing the records created by more ordinary procedure - and many of the War Diaries already received from the Mediterranean area are of very considerable value - have resulted in the accumulation in LONDON of a very large collection of source material for the history of the Canadian components of the Central Mediterranean Force. This collection has lately been supplemented by a large group of files taken over from the Canadian Planning Staff.
5. An additional Historical Officer (Capt. S.H.S. Hughes) was recently despatched to the Mediterranean with a view to working with Capt. Sesia there and ultimately relieving him. It is proposed that Capt. Sesia shall in due course return to Canadian Military Headquarters and assist in preparing the narrative record of the Sicilian campaign. It is probable that not much can be done towards the actual composition of this record until this officer's return. In



the meantime, the present very brief outline of the operations, combined with the large mass of source material now available (from which information on a specific point can usually be extracted without great difficulty if required) must serve for immediate purposes.

6. With a view to making available for planning and training purposes the information received from Capt. Sesia, or included in War Diaries received from the theatre of war, steps have been taken to circulate pertinent extracts from these sources under a procedure arranged between Historical Section and Overseas Records Office. Three series of such extracts have already been forwarded to W.D.H.Q. (Attention: D.S.D.) under file number 24/21011/1. While these extracts are not intended to serve historical purposes, they are occasionally referred to, as a matter of convenience, in the notes constituting Appendix "B" to the present Report.

7. In addition to the written sources mentioned above, it may be noted in passing that important pictorial material will be available concerning Canadian activities in the Mediterranean theatre. Large numbers of Official Military Photographs, fairly adequately captioned, have been received from Canadian photographic officers in that area; while in addition to Capt. W.A. Ogilvie, the War Artist who proceeded thither with 1 Cdn Div (see Report No. 99), a second War Artist, Capt. C.F. Comfort, has now been sent there. This officer, at last advices, had reached the Canadian Base Reinforcement Depot near PHILIPPEVILLE, North Africa.

(C.F. Stacey) Lt.-Col.  
Historical Officer,  
Canadian Military Headquarters.



SKETCH OF OPERATIONS OF

DECLASSIFIED

Authority: DHD 3-3

CANADIAN TROOPS IN SICILY

by            for DHD NDHQ

Date:           

July - August, 1943.

1. The following is a very brief outline of the operations of the Canadian component of the Eighth Army during the campaign in Sicily which began with the landings in the south-eastern corner of the Island on the morning of 10 Jul 43 and ended with the occupation of MESSINA on the night of 16 - 17 Aug 43.

General Outline of the Plan of Assault and the Canadian Part in it.

2. The plan for the assault on Sicily involved a concerted attack by a very large force operating from widely scattered bases, and concentrating near the objective just before the attack. The assault was directed against the south-eastern corner of the Island. The right wing of the invading force was formed by the Eighth British Army, commanded by General Montgomery, whose business it was to attack the beaches from the vicinity of SYRACUSE southwards to the western side of the PACHINO PENINSULA. On the left of the Eighth Army, the Seventh U.S. Army, commanded by General Patton, attacked on a front extending west as far as the LICATA area. The two Armies together constituted the 15th Army Group, commanded by General Alexander under the supreme command of General Eisenhower. Powerful Allied Naval and Air forces covered and supported the landings.

3. The Canadian component of the Eighth Army consisted of the 1st Canadian Division, commanded by Major-General G.G. Simonds, C.B.E., the 1st Canadian Army Tank Brigade, and various ancillary units. The 1st Division had been in Britain since 1939 without being given any chance of meeting the enemy, though one of its brigades had landed in France after Dunkirk, only to be immediately withdrawn. The 1st Army Tank Brigade was the senior armoured formation of the Canadian Army and had served in Britain since 1941. The Canadians sailed to Sicily direct from the United Kingdom, and on the night before the assault their convoy made its rendezvous with British and American convoys from various Mediterranean bases exactly to time. The Canadian Division was to form the extreme left flank of the Eighth Army; and its initial task was the capture of the PACHINO airfield.

The Assault and the Advance Inland

4. In the early hours of 10 Jul the attack went in. The opposition encountered on the beaches was very slight. The Germans in the island had misread our intentions and had not expected an assault at the point where it came. The beach defence troops were Italian and showed little



stomach for fighting, although on the afternoon of 10 Jul there was a minor counter-attack headed by Home Guard cavalry. The town and airfield of PACHINO were in Allied hands early in the afternoon, the field having been seized; not without some casualties, by the Royal Canadian Regiment; and within a short time the entire PACHINO PENINSULA had been cleared. The Canadians were getting artillery ashore while it was still early morning.

5. The first objectives on the high ground dominating the beaches having been consolidated, the advance inland began on 11 Jul. The direction of the Canadian march was north-west, through ISPICA and ROSOLINI towards MODICA, whose Italian garrison surrendered on 12 Jul. On this same day Canadian patrols entered RAGUSA, where contact was made with U.S. forces. These advances were made in great heat, to which the Canadians, new to the Mediterranean and fresh from a long sea-voyage, were wholly unaccustomed; and as very little transport was available at this stage, they were mainly made on foot.

6. After a short rest, the advance was resumed, this time in a northerly direction. General Montgomery had decided to use the Canadian Division for a "left hook" manoeuvre. A very rapid movement, beginning on the night of 14 - 15 Jul, brought the Canadians into the VIZZINI area. In the course of this advance, one infantry brigade marched "nearly fifty miles in twenty-four hours". The Canadians were now profiting by their long months of hard training in Britain; and observers remarked that for this type of warfare they were in some respects actually better fitted than the battle-hardened veterans of the Desert Army, long accustomed to making all their moves on wheels.

#### The Crisis of the Campaign

7. Up to this point the Canadians had had little in the way of severe fighting; the troops in front of them had been Italians who were, as a general rule, glad to surrender. The Americans on the left, with Germans in front of them, had had a harder time. Now, however, the Canadian Division ran into German units and its real battles began. The enemy it now faced was both experienced and determined; and the extraordinarily rugged terrain of the island gave him opportunities of which he made the most.

8. The Canadians first made contact with the Germans at GRAMMICHELE, north-west of VIZZINI, on 15 Jul. Here a German rear-guard was encountered and driven back. The town was defended by units of the Hermann Goering Division, and there was some tank fighting. By the next morning the Canadians were in CALTAGIRONE, some miles to the west, and were pushing on in the general direction of ENNA.

9. South of PIAZZA ARMERINA they bumped into heavy opposition. A successful night attack was delivered against the enemy positions; and on 17 Jul PIAZZA ARMERINA fell into Canadian hands and the advance went on towards VALQUARNERA.

10. On the heights in front of this town the enemy again stood and fought; but a carefully prepared attack at mid-day



(13) on 18 Jul completely broke his defence and cost him many casualties. The northward advance continued through VALGUARNERA towards LEONFORTE and ASSORO. The Germans occupying these two lofty hill towns dominated the whole of the ground across which the Canadian attack had to be made. As for ENNA, the enemy now decided to abandon this "almost impregnable city" and it was occupied by one non-commissioned officer and seven men of a Canadian reconnaissance (14) regiment, the Princess Louise Dragoon Guards.

11. On the night of 20 - 21 Jul two Canadian infantry brigades attacked ASSORO and LEONFORTE respectively. The Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment, whose Commanding Officer had been killed by shellfire during the day, made a silent movement through the darkness, climbed the steep escarpment to the south of ASSORO, and, penetrating into the heart of the German positions before they were discovered, seized and held the high peak upon which the town (15) stands. LEONFORTE was captured only after bitter fighting, in the course of which the Canadians were twice counter-attacked by infantry and a few tanks. The Germans had blown up a bridge at the entrance to the town, and this had to be replaced by Canadian Engineers working under machine-gun and mortar fire. Throughout the campaign, indeed, (16) the Engineers carried an especially heavy burden, labouring with great devotion to repair the enemy's skilful demolitions, establish tactical routes and ensure the movement of supplies.

12. The "left hook" now swung eastward towards AGIRA. The Americans, who had now nearly completed the task of mopping up the Italians in the western part of the island, were coming up on the Eighth Army's left. The right wing of the Eighth was held up in front of CATANIA, and General Montgomery now planned to turn the enemy out of this city, and the line in front of Mount Etna pivoting upon it, by a movement round his western flank. The country continued to be extremely difficult and demolitions were numerous; while the German defenders, troops of high quality chiefly of the Hermann Goering and 15th Panzer Divisions, contested every mile of the way. There was particularly heavy fighting in the vicinity of MISSORIA, a small village between LEONFORTE and AGIRA, and here one Canadian brigade suffered a temporary check. In consequence, a full-dress attack, supported by a very heavy concentration of field and medium artillery, was delivered against this position on 24 Jul, and it was (17) duly taken.

13. The Division now pushed on towards AGIRA, and on the night of 26 - 27 Jul, again with powerful artillery support, it attacked the commanding enemy positions on the hills covering this town. Heavy fighting continued through the following day. A company of the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada, by scaling a lofty cliff, gained a foothold on the high ground which was the key to the situation. On the morning of 28 Jul they were reinforced; and they then delivered an attack which captured the whole position, killing many of the defenders and routing the rest. After fighting hard in the early stages of the operation, the Germans finally fled in complete disorder. AGIRA was in (18) our hands by the evening of the 28th.



14. The next objective of the Canadians was REGALBUTO, east of AGIRA. A bridgehead was established across the River DITTAING at CATENANUOVO by the right brigade of the Canadians in co-operation with the 78th British Division which General Montgomery had now brought up and moved into this area. The enemy offered fierce opposition on the outskirts of REGALBUTO, and the Canadian troops, and a British brigade operating under command of the Canadian Division, established themselves in the town only by fighting their way forward foot by foot. The enemy was using his tanks as mobile pill-boxes to retard the advance of our infantry (in places they operated by running into houses and firing through the windows) and Canadian tanks were brought into action to assist in dealing with them. The Germans here, reinforced by detachments of paratroops, continued to counter-attack, and REGALBUTO was not clear (19) of them until 2 Aug.

15. The Canadians now fought their way eastward towards the road running between BRONTE and ADRANO, which formed the lateral communication essential to the maintenance of the enemy's Etna line. They continued to meet "very nasty resistance from Germans in naturally strong positions both (20) north and east of their line of advance". On 5 Aug tanks and infantry working in close co-operation fought their way across the SALSO river and cleared positions on the ridge beyond, which were held by German paratroops. The (21) crossings of the TROINA and the SIMETO rivers were also forced, and by noon on 6 Aug the Canadians were within a few hundred yards of ADRANO, on the backbone of the Etna line.

16. At this point the Canadian Division came into reserve, (22) and it was subsequently withdrawn into a rest area. It thus did not participate in the final stage of the campaign, the pursuit of the retreating Germans up the MESSINA PENINSULA, a process which took some ten days. The Canadians, however, were able to congratulate themselves upon the fact that the outflanking move against ADRANO, carried out in co-operation with the 78th Division on their right, had levered the enemy out of that town and broken the western hinge of his line. Thereafter, withdrawal into the MESSINA PENINSULA was the one course open to him. As a result of the developing threat to the enemy's western positions, he had been forced to retire from CATANIA, in front of which the Eighth Army's right wing had been held up so long; and British troops entered the city on 5 Aug, the day before the Canadians left (23) the line.

17. For three weeks the Canadians had been in the forefront of the Eighth Army's battle, continuously in action, fighting their way forward in the face of stubborn resistance by excellent German troops. The terrain had been extraordinarily difficult and the climate extremely trying. The performance of the Division in these circumstances, and particularly in view of the facts that it had never been under fire before and was wholly unaccustomed to the Mediterranean climate, was a source of satisfaction to all concerned; and the commanders under whom it had fought (24)



(24) congratulated General Simonds warmly on its achievements.

18. Canadian casualties during the Sicilian campaign amounted to 38 officers and 438 other ranks killed or died of wounds; 123 officers and 1641 other ranks wounded; and 10 officers and 137 other ranks missing or prisoners of war - a total of 171 officers and 2216 other ranks.

(25) 19. On 3 Sep 43 a special communique from Allied Headquarters announced:

British and Canadian troops of the Eighth Army, supported from the air and the sea, crossed the Straits of Messina early today and landed in metropolitan Italy.



NOTES TO ACCOMPANY "SKETCH OF OPERATIONS  
OF CANADIAN TROOPS IN SICILY, JULY - AUGUST, 1943".

- (1) Map accompanying CIGS Summary No.2, 11 Jul 43. A file of these summaries for the Sicilian campaign is in the custody of Hist Sec, C.M.H.Q.
- (2) "Story of Operations 1st Canadian Division", by Lt.-Col. G. Kitching, G.S.O.1, 1 Cdn Div. (C.M.H.Q. file 24/SICILY/1).
- (3) Account given by Major T.M. Powers, 18 Aug 43 (memorandum from Capt. A.T. Sesia).
- (4) "By 0730 hours" (CIGS Summary No.2).
- (5) "Story of Operations 1st Canadian Division".
- (6) Ibid.; account given by Major T.M. Powers.
- (7) See the comment of Lt.-Gen. Sir Oliver Leese (G.O.C. 30 Corps, in which 1 Cdn Div was included) in letter to General Simonds, 6 Aug 43 (Extracts, Series 1, C.M.H.Q. file 24/SICILY/1).
- (8) "Story of Operations 1st Canadian Division".
- (9) Ibid.; this was 2 Cdn Inf Bde.
- (10) The Times (LONDON), 26 Aug 43: Special article "from our Special Correspondent in Sicily".
- (11) "Story of Operations 1st Canadian Division"; note by Lieut. J.E. Steinbuckl, 12 Cdn Tks (Extracts, Series 1).
- (12) "Story of Operations 1st Canadian Division".
- (13) Ibid.
- (14) Ibid.
- (15) Ibid.; and see account by Capt. H.J. Macintosh, Extracts, Series 1. 1 Cdn Inf Bde attacked ASSORO and 2 Cdn Inf Bde LEONFORTE.
- (16) "Story of Operations 1st Canadian Division"; "History of 3rd Field Company, Royal Canadian Engineers, Sicily, 10 Jul - 7 Aug 43" (Extracts, Series 3).
- (17) "Story of Operations 1st Canadian Division". The brigade repulsed was 1 Cdn Inf Bde. See also account of Lt.-Col. R.A. Lindsay, O.C., P.P.C.L.I., 30 Jul 43 (Extracts, Series 1).
- (18) Accounts by Brigadier C. Vokes, commanding 2 Cdn Inf Bde (29 Jul 43) and Lt.-Col. B.M. Hoffmeister, O.C., Seaforth of C. (31 Jul 43), Extracts, Series 1. The Seaforth company concerned was "A" Coy, commanded by Major H.P. Bell-Irving; it was subsequently reinforced by "C" Coy.
- (19) Sitrep from 1 Cdn Div to 30 Corps, 2130 hrs, 2 Aug 43, "REGALBUTO clear of enemy" (Intelligence Log G.S., H.Q., 1 Cdn Div). The British brigade was 231 Brigade (from Malta). On tank operations at REGALBUTO, see note by Lieut. Steinbuckl, Extracts, Series 1.



OF CANADIAN TROOPS IN SICILY, JULY - AUGUST, 1943.

(20) 1 Cdn Div Int Summary No.10, 8 Aug 43.

(21) Note by Lieut. Steinbuckl, Extracts, Series 1.

(22) 1 Cdn Div Int Summary No.10.

(23) CIGS Summary No.28, 6 Aug 43.

(24) See particularly the letter of General Leese (note 7, above).

(25) Figures as at 10 Sep 43: telegram AG 5171, DEFENSOR to CANMILITRY, 12 Sep 43 (C.M.H.Q. file 18/8/43/1). These figures were not in agreement with those received from General Eisenhower in A.F.H.Q. telegram dated 10 Sep 43 (ibid.) and are probably not final.

(6) Ibid.; account given by Major T.M. Powers.

(7) See the comment of Lt.-Gen. Sir Oliver Leese (D.C.O. 30 Corps, in which 1 Cdn Div was included) in letter to General Simonds, 6 Aug 43 (Extracts, Series 1, C.M.H.Q. file 18/8/43/1).

(8) "Story of Operations 1st Canadian Division".

(9) Ibid.; this was 2 Cdn Div.

(10) The Times (LONDON), 28 Aug 43: Special article "from our Special Correspondent in Sicily".

(11) "Story of Operations 1st Canadian Division"; note by Lieut. J.E. Steinbuckl, 12 Sep 43 (Extracts, Series 1).

(12) "Story of Operations 1st Canadian Division".

(13) Ibid.

(14) Ibid.

(15) Ibid.; and see account by Capt. H.J. MacIntyre, Extracts, Series 1. 1 Cdn Div was attacked ASBONO and 2 Cdn Div was LEONORATE.

(16) "Story of Operations 1st Canadian Division"; "History of 3rd Field Company, Royal Canadian Engineers, Sicily, 10 Jul - 7 Aug 43" (Extracts, Series 3).

(17) "Story of Operations 1st Canadian Division". The brigade reported was 1 Cdn Div. See also account of Lt.-Col. R.A. Lindsay, O.C., P.C.A.I., 20 Jul 43 (Extracts, Series 1).

(18) Accounts by Brigadier C. Vokes, commanding 2 Cdn Div, 20 Jul 43 and Lt.-Col. H.W. Hollister, O.C., 2nd Cdn Div, 20 Jul 43, Extracts, Series 1. The 2nd Cdn Div company concerned was "A" Coy, commanded by Major H.P. Bell-Irving; it was subsequently reinforced by "C" Coy.

(19) Report from 1 Cdn Div to 30 Corps, 2100 hrs, 2 Aug 43, "RECAPSUTU clear of enemy" (intelligence log D.S., H.Q., 1 Cdn Div). The British brigade was 201 Brigade (from 1st Army). The Canadian operations at RECAPSUTU, see note by Lieut. Steinbuckl, Extracts, Series 1.