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Directorate of History
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by

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2. MOHNDHINDHO

Date:

24 JUL 1966

11

22 Feb. 41

CANCELLED

Canadian Corps Exercise "FOX"
REDHILL By-Pass

Canadian Military Headquarters,
2, Cockspur Street, S. W. 1,
London, England.

The Director,
Historical Section,
General Staff,
National Defence Headquarters,
Ottawa, CANADA.

Sir,

I have the honour to make a further
report.

2. This report deals with the exercise known by the code-name FOX, conducted by CANADIAN CORPS on 11-13 Feb. 41, with 1 Canadian Division and a large allotment of Corps Troops taking part.

3. I was present (along with Major J.E. GANONG of the 48th HIGHLANDERS OF CANADA, and Major W.B. WEDD of the ROYAL REGIMENT OF CANADA, both on the Staff at C.M.H.Q.) on 12 Feb., for the latter phase of the exercise; and on 15 Feb. Major Ganong and I attended the Corps Commander's conference on the exercise at 1 Canadian Division H.Q.

4. As the papers concerning this exercise are on record (C.M.H.Q. file 2/Exercises/5) and will be available for later historical purposes, I shall confine my attention in this report to a very general account supplemented by some observations that might not be recorded in the ordinary official files.

NATURE OF THE EXERCISE

5. The objects of this exercise were to exercise units and formations (a) In a road move to a concentration area; (b) In an advance, and in gaining contact with hostile forces; (c) In the issue of orders, and deployment for an attack. The Corps Commander at his conference explained that the basic interests were traffic control and communication.

6. The "General Idea" of the exercise was that Southern England was being invaded by the enemy, whose main efforts south of the Thames were directed against the Dover peninsula and the coast between SEAFORD AND WORTHING. At 1000 hrs. 11 Feb., the Corps Commander, acting as Director of the exercise, held a conference at which he ordered 1 Cdn Div. to reinforce the Home Guard in the line of pillboxes known as the ASHFORD line, running from HAM STREET (near WAREHORNE) on the ROYAL MILITARY CANAL through ASHFORD to CHARING, with mobile units; and to concentrate the Division in the area SMARDEN - BETHERSDEN - TENTERDEN - SISSINGHURST - STAPLEHURST. At a further conference at 2000 hrs., 11 Feb., the G.O.C. 1 Cdn Div. was ordered to occupy LYMPNE aerodrome (which was assumed to be in enemy hands) and the high ground between PEDLINGE and LYMPNE, as early as possible; and to secure the line of the

railway ETCHING HILL - LYMINGE - ELHAM before dark on the 12th Jul 1944 and establish his troops on the high ground east of this railway preparatory to recapturing FOLKESTONE. (See the umpires' instructions in file 2/Exercises/5, as above.)

7. The map sheets used were the WEALD OF KENT and EAST KENT sheets of the one-inch Ordnance Survey.

VISIT TO THE EXERCISE

8. Our party from C.M.H.Q. left the Mount Royal Hotel, London, shortly before 0800 hrs on 12 Feb. and proceeded by car by the route EDENBRIDGE - TONBRIDGE - GOUDHURST to BIDDEN-DEM. Near the latter place we found the rear party of a 1 Cdn Div. report centre which informed us that the advanced Div. H.Q. was now at BRABOURNE. We pushed on thither by the route HIGH HALDEN - ASHFORD - SNEETH. Near HIGH HALDEN we passed the H.Q. of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade, which, we heard later, had delivered early in the morning an attack on LYMPNE aerodrome which was ruled to have failed owing to heavy machine-gun fire. This brigade had now been withdrawn to the rear and the 1st and 3rd Brigades were carrying on the operations.

9. Just short of BRABOURNE we ran into a very bad traffic-jam, with the guns and vehicles of the 3rd Field Regiment, R.C.A., along the road with no intervals between them, while the road was further blocked by Medical and A.S.C. vehicles, the latter attempting to come through in the opposite direction. For a short time the jam was complete, not a wheel turning; and the crowded road would have been a tempting target for any German airman from the bases just across the Channel.

10. We finally penetrated into BRABOURNE, where Major-General PEARMES, G.O.C. 1 Cdn. Div., had set up his H.Q. in an inn. We reached this point in the vicinity of 1130 hrs., and here we got information from various staff officers and umpires (among the latter, Major E.H. JONES, D.C.M., E.D., THE ROYAL REGIMENT OF CANADA) on the further course of the exercise. Hearing that an attack by the 1st and 3rd Infantry Brigades on the high ground east of the railway ETCHING HILL - LYMINGE - ELHAM (see para.6) was about to be delivered, we moved forward to see it. We passed part of THE ROYAL CANADIAN REGIMENT some considerable distance short of YEW TREE CROSS, and it was clear that this unit would be unable to deliver its part of the right (1st Bde) attack in time.

11. From the road OTTINGE - ELHAM we saw THE HASTINGS AND PRINCE EDWARD REGIMENT develop its attack and begin to cross the road towards the railway and the high ground beyond. Moving some distance northward towards ELHAM we found the right battalion of the 3rd Bde., THE CARLETON AND YORK REGIMENT, considerable parts of which had already crossed the road and were well on towards the high ground. Evidently the left of the attack was ahead of the centre, while the right was hopelessly behind. We heard later that a last-minute attempt had been made to put in the 48th HIGHLANDERS (the support battalion of the 1st Bde) in the place of the ROYAL CANADIAN REGIMENT which had failed to get into position in time.

12. While watching the CARLETON AND YORK from the road about a mile south of ELHAM, we were joined by Lt.-Gen. MCNAUGHTON and his party. The General expressed some dissatisfaction with the troops' failure to make better use of cover in the attack.

13. After a futile effort to locate THE ROYAL CANADIAN REGIMENT on the right, we proceeded into ELHAM. In an inn

here we had lunch about 1330 hrs. General McNaughton, with Lt.-Gen. A.F.A.N. THORNE, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., commanding the 12th Corps, was at the next table. We had a little conversation with him and heard his comments on the Canadian Overseas Army Programme, recently announced for 1941.

14. As the operations were now at an end and the main task remaining was dispersal, we returned to London, reaching C.M.H.Q. late in the afternoon.

15. We heard later that the dispersal of the Division was not effected without some further traffic difficulties, and that some of the units did not reach their own quarters until well on in the small hours of the morning of 13 Feb.

16. The attack which we witnessed was on the whole an old-fashioned affair of infantry advancing across open fields on foot, in successive waves in extended line. The troops were well equipped with Bren guns and anti-tank rifles. We actually saw few carriers, and these few were keeping to the roads. We did not see the 1st Division's mobile units (the brigade reconnaissance squadrons, now reorganized to form a divisional reconnaissance battalion). No armoured units were engaged in this exercise.

CORPS COMMANDER'S CONFERENCE

17. The conference on this exercise which Major Ganong and I attended took place at H.Q. 1st Canadian Division (HOLMESDALE COURT, NUTFIELD, SURREY, near REDHILL) at 1000 hrs. on 15 Feb. It consisted entirely of remarks by the Corps Commander. The officers present may have been about 150 in number, chiefly field officers.

18. After some preliminary remarks, General McNaughton began the serious discussion of the exercise by saying that it had shaken the complacency of everyone participating, from the Corps Commander to the lowest private soldier. He added that the shortcomings revealed by it must be remedied within the next few days; for Mr. CHURCHILL had said to him only the previous day that the only way in which Hitler could be certain of winning the war was by a successful stroke directly at the United Kingdom.

19. The General recalled that the role of the Canadian Corps was G.H.Q. Reserve. It occupied a "position of readiness" from which it could deliver a counter-stroke against an invader who might penetrate the coastal defences. Three main areas had to be watched from this point of view. The invader's blow might fall in the region of DOVER and FOLKESTONE; he might land in the region of the South Downs; or he might assail the PORTSMOUTH - SOUTHAMPTON area. This exercise had been based on the first possibility.

20. Referring to the HAM STREET - ASHFORD - CHARING line of pillboxes (see para. 6, above) the General explained that this was a covering line in which the reconnaissance elements were to reinforce (but not relieve) the Home Guard. Patrols should be sent forward to an indefinite distance beyond it. The Corps Commander emphasized the fact that the role of the reconnaissance battalions was to get information, and to get it back so that use could be made of it.

21. The main lesson which the Corps Commander drew from this exercise was the extreme importance of more effective traffic control. So important was such control, he said, that it would have to be enforced to the extent of shooting those who contravened the rules laid down. In the present war, the traffic map possessed the importance which in the last war attached to the artillery barrage map; it drew together all the fundamentals of the operation.

22. General McNaughton spoke particularly of the failure of the artillery to get forward in this exercise. The infantry had been allowed to attack without artillery support; this, he said, "almost justified capital punishment". (Apparently the traffic tangles on the roads on the morning of 12 Feb. were largely due to artillery regiments failing to follow their proper routes; and I was told - though perhaps not wholly accurately - that only one battery actually got into position for action.)

23. That the men had in many cases not been properly fed was, the General said, again a question of traffic control.

24. On the forward move, the speed of vehicles had been excessive and uneven. Units had not carried out the Corps orders respecting the lighting of vehicles; this was to be done within 36 hours.

25. In general, the channels of command had not worked properly. Orders had not been promptly forwarded and properly executed. In future, responsible officers must see that orders got through to those for whom they were intended.

26. In connection with the problem of reducing the congestion on roads in forward areas, the Corps Commander said that he hoped that it would be found that this could be effected in part by a proper utilization of the longer ranges now available to the artillery.

27. As for Signals matters, he called to the attention of unit and formation commanders the importance of keeping their Signal officers beside them and giving these officers an opportunity to make clear the limiting considerations of the Signals situation before drastic tactical measures were taken.

28. In connection with Air Force cooperation, General McNaughton spoke of the importance of the confidential device - yellow triangles - worked out for informing our aircraft of the position of our troops. He also emphasized the importance of making full use of the "T and Ball" method of ground communication with aircraft. The Home Guard have been instructed in this. He spoke also of the air "tentacles" provided at brigade headquarters to facilitate obtaining bomber support for troops; experience had shown that the average time required for such support to be obtained was 17 minutes. Similar arrangements were made for obtaining artillery support; and a tremendous volume of fire would be available to assist the infantry if proper use were made of these arrangements. (In practice, during this exercise, weather conditions prevented the Air Component of the Canadian Corps - No. 110 A.C. Squadron, R.C.A.F. - from playing an active role.)

29. Emphasizing the necessity of the smoothest and most complete cooperation of all elements of the Corps, General McNaughton recalled an observation of General Smuts, to the effect that the whole is very much more than the sum of its parts. He had previously mentioned this to me at Headley Court.

30. In general, the Corps Commander concluded, the experience of this exercise gave no ground for despondency. It was the first test of the machine with all its equipment, and the mistakes made could now be rectified. And, he added, these Canadian troops of ours were by far the finest body of men he had ever seen.

MISCELLANEOUS.

31. After the conference, Major Ganong and I drove over the REDHILL BY-PASS, constructed last autumn by No. 2 Road Construction Coy., R.C.E. The half of the road which consists of new concrete work appears to be a sound and solid job, though it seemed possible that the levels were not perfect, as a certain amount of water was lying on the concrete. The upper half of the road, that which comes out in the village of NUTFIELD, consists of old and rather winding and steep roads widened and improved. The net effect of the construction of this by-pass is to eliminate the dangerous bottleneck of REDHILL village. It connects two main roads which run roughly at right angles to each other and cross at Redhill. A crude sketch to show its general position is given herewith. The total length of the by-pass is about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles; half of this distance, as noted, being new concrete construction.

32. Major Ganong and I later visited his regiment's quarters at KINGSWOOD, in the midst of a most charming piece of Surrey countryside; and we enjoyed the hospitality of "A" Mess for luncheon. Major W.B. HENDRIE is at present in command of the 48th HIGHLANDERS in the absence of Lt.-Col. W.W. SOUTHAM at the Senior Officers' School.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient servant,

(Sgd.) C.P. Stacey

(C.P. Stacey) Major,
Historical Officer, C.M.H.Q.

POSTSCRIPT. I have shown the above to Major Ganong, who makes some suggestions: (1) He believes that General McNaughton's remarks on the working of the "channels of command" referred particularly to such routine matters as carrying out orders relating to lighting, etc., rather than to the working of the exercise itself. This is not my recollection, but I may be mistaken. (2) Major Ganong suggests that we saw, by chance, only certain bad sides of the exercise, and that doubtless there was much excellent work which we had not the luck to witness. This is probably true, but it seems proper to report what we actually saw, adding that the report is by no means intended to be an indictment of the First Division. The Corps Commander's remarks are sufficient evidence that the exercise was not a complete success.

FURTHER POSTSCRIPT (added 7 May 41). With reference to para. 8 (above) the following passage from the Report on Exercises "FOX" and "DOG" (signed by Brig. DEMPSEY for the Corps Commander and dated 8 Mar 41) should be noted:

The Bde Gp detailed to recapture LYMPNE aerodrome left the concentration area at 0400 hrs. (12 Feb) debussed at ALDINGTON and endeavoured to put in an attack before first light at 0700 hrs. This was not successful, and the Bde Gp eventually attacked with artillery and M.G. support at 1130 hrs.

This Report (see C.M.H.Q. file 2/Exercises/5) touches also upon the shortcomings in traffic control.

C.P.S.

(Copied in Historical Section, Jul 43.)