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REPORT NO. 120

HISTORICAL OFFICER

CANADIAN MILITARY HEADQUARTERS

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Date: 11 AUG 1986

31 Jul 44

The Canadian Women's Army Corps Overseas  
September 1939 - June 1944

1. This report deals with the history and development of the C.W.A.C. Overseas from the date of the first proposal to organize Canadian women for military service in the United Kingdom in September 1939 to the date in April 1944 on which approval was granted for the employment of the C.W.A.C. in rear areas of operational theatres.

2. The materials upon which this report is based include the War Diaries of the D.A.A.G., C.W.A.C.; of C.W.A.C. companies Nos. 41, 42, 43 and 47 and No. 1 Static Base Laundry; the pertinent C.W.A.C. files at C.M.H.Q.; and personal conversations with Lt.-Col. Alice Sorby, M.B.E., D.A.A.G., C.W.A.C. (formerly Staff Officer) Overseas.

EARLY PROPOSALS TO FORM A CANADIAN WOMEN'S  
AUXILIARY ORGANIZATION

3. From the information available in C.M.H.Q., it would appear that the first proposals to employ Canadian women in war services emanated from British women's volunteer service organizations during the early months of the war. By September 1939, the women of Britain had organized not only Navy (WRNS), Army (ATS) and Air Force (WAAF) auxiliaries under their respective ministries, but also several volunteer civilian organizations of a semi-official nature. Canadian women resident in the United Kingdom, as well as in Canada, were anxious to serve in capacities similar to those filled by British women. During 1939 and 1940 offers of service from all parts of the United Kingdom and Canada were received by C.M.H.Q. and Canada House, and direct applications were made on occasions to the various British organizations.

4. With these offers in mind, in September and in December, 1939, two British Volunteer Transport Organizations, - The Mechanized Transport Corps and the Mechanical Transport Section of the Women's Legion, - presented to C.M.H.Q. similar schemes whereby Canadian volunteers in England might be enrolled, trained as transport drivers, and incorporated into their respective Corps to provide, should the need arise a group of women efficiently trained for service in medical units of the Canadian Army serving overseas (G/WAS/1, Commandant Mechanized Transport Corps to High Commissioner for Canada, 19 Sep 39, and Commandant Mechanical Transport Section to Colonel (now Major-General) P.J. Montague, A.A. & Q.M.G., C.M.H.Q. 5 Jan 40). The first of these offers was transmitted to N.D.H.Q. who advised that "it would not appear advisable at the present juncture to enter into any arrangement for the use of an organization such as that suggested" (*ibid.*, Brigadier W.W. Foster, Director



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26 Jul 44

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of Auxiliary Services, N.D.H.Q. to Lt.-Colonel E.M.F. Burns, Canada House). To the second offer, C.M.H.Q. replied that as no policy dealing with the use of women personnel had as yet been adopted, the offer could not at that time be accepted (ibid., Colonel Montague to Commandant Mechanical Transport Section, 5 Jan 40).

5. Concerning these proposals, Colonel Montague stated that while he was not prepared to say which of these services was preferable, he was of the opinion "that we should get better service from one of these Organizations than from the A.T.S." (ibid., Memo, Colonel Montague to Major (now Brigadier) N.B. MacDonald, S.S. & T.O., C.M.H.Q., 5 Jan 40). He further stated that he and Colonel (later Major-General) R.M. Luton, Senior Medical Officer, C.M.H.Q., were "disposed to recommend these women personnel as drivers in such units", although he was of the opinion that the use of women personnel in connection with Canadian forces serving in England "would be confined to very minor use" (ibid., Colonel Montague to Commandant Mechanical Transport Section, 5 Jan 40).

6. In May 1940, C.M.H.Q. received from the Women's Auxiliary Transport Service, a voluntary branch of the A.T.S., a third and similar proposal, differing from the others only in that it proposed to expand into an Empire Organization in which women of the Dominions would be recruited locally to release Dominion manpower. Individuals, drafts, or even holding units would be sent to England or to other parts of the Empire when and where required (ibid., Memo, Major (later Brigadier) M.H.S. Penhale, D.A.A.G., C.M.H.Q., 18 May 40). This offer was referred to the Canadian Government.

7. In July 1940, there is evidence of a proposal emanating from within C.M.H.Q. to consider the employment of women in Canadian military services in the United Kingdom in duties similar to those performed by enlisted women of the A.T.S. This proposal was brought to the fore by the forming of Canadian O.C.T.U. in the United Kingdom. While visiting similar British training centres, Canadian officers had found that women were being successfully employed as cooks, waitresses and clerks. These officers reported to C.M.H.Q. that British authorities were of the opinion that in this type of employment the services of women were preferable to those of men (ibid., Lt.-Colonel F.C. Hanington, G.S.O. 1 to Major W.B. Wedd, A.G. 1, C.M.H.Q., 29 Jul 40). This touched on the possibility of enrolling women from Canada in a similar manner in Canadian O.C.T.U.s. about to be formed in the United Kingdom. With this in mind, Colonel Hanington proposed "that consideration should be given to the employment of women in certain military services". The advantages of such a scheme were:

- (1) Their employment would save manpower.
- (2) There were more and better clerks among women.
- (3) Women were anxious to serve.
- (4) The cost would be less.

The argument against this proposal was that it would complicate administration (ibid.). This proposal does not, however, appear to have been submitted to OTTAWA.



8. The idea of employing women received a fillip when the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. W.L. Mackenzie King, received from the Princess Alice, Commander-in-Chief of the Volunteer Women's Transport Service, a letter dated 16 Sep 40, requesting that, in the event of British transport services being given permission to recruit in Canada, preference over any other women's organizations should be given to the V.W.T.S. This letter was forwarded to the Minister of National Defence, Mr. J.L. Ralston, with the suggestion that the matter might be discussed with General H.D.G. Crerar (C.G.S.), and with members of the Cabinet (ibid., A/Principal Secretary to Prime Minister to Mr. J.L. Ralston, 20 Sep 40).

9. On 26 Sep 40, the question was referred to C.M.H.Q. for an expression of opinion, - first, "with regard to the employment of the Volunteer Women's Transport Service with the C.E.F. in England", and secondly, as to the "possibility and feasibility of the employment of a Canadian Women's Corps to carry on similar work" (ibid., Mr. Ralston to Major-General P.J. Montague, S.O., C.M.H.Q., 26 Sep 40). It was not clear whether employment in England was contemplated in the second instance.

10. To the first question, General Montague replied on 19 Oct 40 that consideration had been given to the employment of women's voluntary services in the United Kingdom, but at the moment there was no necessity for such employment as the supply of manpower was sufficient to meet the need. Should this situation alter, he was of the opinion that use could be made of M.T. drivers in ambulances and station wagons (ibid., Trans 288, CANMILITRY to DEFENSOR).

11. With regard to the second question, it would appear that General Montague did not favour the formation of a Canadian Women's Corps. He visualized the employment of women only in the capacity of "M.T. drivers for Red Cross gift ambulances and station wagons and for certain permanent headquarters" (ibid.). In the event of a need arising for women's services in this capacity, he would recommend that the services of the Mechanized Transport Corps be utilized. This Corps was willing to "give us their Canadian personnel under a Canadian officer" (ibid.). This, he stated, "would provide a unit with a Canadian nucleus under a Canadian without bringing additional people into the country" (ibid.).

12. No conclusions were reached in the matter at this time. Late in November 1940, while on a visit to the United Kingdom, Mr. Ralston discussed women's activities and organizations with Mr. Massey and with General Montague. From these discussions he obtained "a rather strong impression" that it would be preferable to have women's organizations under the military services themselves rather than under War Services. It had been found in the United Kingdom that under military services, personnel might be detailed to all sorts of difficult tasks which would be performed readily on account of the atmosphere of service discipline (ibid., CANMILITRY to DEFENSOR, G.S. 3051, 29 Nov 40).

13. From the time of this visit until June 1941, a decision was held in abeyance. The question was finally brought to a head, in the first place, by permission being granted by the Canadian Government to the Mechanized Transport Corps and



to the Women's Auxiliary Transport Section to recruit personnel in Canada, and secondly, by the decision of the British Air Ministry to send a contingent of WAAF to Canada to work in R.A.F. camps. Thus the Canadian Government found itself in the embarrassing situation of having United Kingdom women in uniform in Canada, recruiting Canadian personnel, while no provision was made for the organization of corresponding services in Canada (ibid., Mr. L.B. Pearson to Mr. Massey, 5 Jul 41).

#### THE FORMATION OF THE C.W.A.C.

14. On 26 Jun 41, the Government of Canada announced through the Press the decision to form a Canadian Women's Army Corps. In view of the increasing demand upon Canada's available manpower for the Armed Forces, industry, agriculture and other essential services, OTTAWA had decided to enroll several thousand women volunteers for service in Canada as full time auxiliaries in the Armed Forces. The employment of women would permit the utilization of their services as cooks, clerks, stenographers and telephone operators and thus release men for combatant service elsewhere. The formation of the C.W.A.C. was authorized by Order-in-Council P.C. 6289 of 13 Aug 41, and promulgated in C.A.R.O. 1422 of 1941.

15. Regulations governing the Corps were drawn up and despatched to the various Military Districts on 19 Aug 41. The first recruits reported to the Divisional Registrars on 1 Sep 41; the first course for Officers and N.C.Os. assembled on 23 Feb 42 at MacDonald College, St. ANNE DE BELLEVUE, Quebec. Included in the first course for officers were Junior Commander (now Lt.-Colonel) A.E. Sorby, D.A.A.G., C.W.A.C. Overseas, and Junior Commander (now Colonel) Margaret C. Eaton, Director-General C.W.A.C.

16. In March 1942, an important step in the growth of the Corps was its promotion from auxiliary to full army status. With this recognition, the C.W.A.C. became

a corps of the Active Militia of Canada as if it had been named as such under Section 20 of the Militia Act and the said Corps and the members thereof to be on Active Service as if the same had been placed thereon under Section 64 of the said Militia Act.

This authorization was granted by Order-in-Council P.C. 1965 promulgated in General Orders 149 and 150 of 1942 and published as an appendix to C.A.R.O. of 1942.

#### THE QUESTION OF OVERSEAS SERVICE

17. It is not clear from the evidence available at C.M.H.Q. whether or not N.D.H.Q. contemplated overseas service for the Corps at the time of its organization in 1941, but it is possible that it received some attention. Among the subjects which Brigadier G.R. Turner, B.G.S. Canadian Corps, was to discuss at OTTAWA during his visit to Canada in the summer of 1941 were the nature of C.W.A.C. employment, places of employment, training, discipline and the possibility of overseas



service (6/CWAC/1, Major K. Tow, A.G.1 C.M.H.Q. to Colonel (now Major-General) C.R. Stein, A.A.G. (Org), 17 Jul 41).

18. It was in February 1942 that the possibility of overseas employment for the Corps was first definitely advanced. The suggestion came from C.M.H.Q. A Static Base Laundry was to be established in the United Kingdom and a proposed establishment had passed the War Establishment Committee and was ready for submission to the Canadian Government. Before the submission was made, it was suggested to C.M.H.Q. by War Office laundry experts that 150 other ranks might be efficiently replaced by women (6/1 Stat Base Laund/1, Tel., A.337, CANMILITRY to DEFENSOR, 10 Feb 42). Civilian labour was not available and the most suitable alternative appeared to be the employment of a C.W.A.C. detachment. The principal objection to bringing the C.W.A.C. personnel overseas had hitherto been based upon the argument that their employment would create "most difficult administrative problems" (*ibid.*, Brigadier Beament to General Montague, 4 Feb 42). The Static Base Laundry was, however, a different matter. Administrative difficulties in this case appeared easier of solution. A group of 150 C.W.A.C. personnel could be supervised as a unit by their own officers. Furthermore, as the Laundry was still to be constructed there would be ample time for arrangements to be made for the provision of quarters. In the event of the C.W.A.C. being used in this capacity, the war establishment of the Laundry would be amended to include a C.W.A.C. element (*ibid.*).

19. In addition to these considerations, there was the paramount factor: the manpower shortage. C.M.H.Q. was deeply concerned over this matter, and was therefore interested in any suggestion which promised to alleviate the situation. Under these circumstances, Brigadier Beament, who up to this time had been opposed to the employment of C.W.A.C. personnel in England, agreed that it would be uneconomical of manpower "to tie up 150 men on the washing of clothes when women could do the job just as well" (*ibid.*). On 10 Feb 42, the proposal was accordingly submitted to OTTAWA that 150 C.W.A.C. personnel trained in laundry work should be despatched overseas for employment in the Static Base Laundry (1/CWAC/1, Tel., A.337, CANMILITRY to DEFENSOR). On 6 May 42, N.D.H.Q. concurred in this proposal: "Policy re employment of C.W.A.C. personnel overseas now approved" (*ibid.*, Tel., G.S. 916, DEFENSOR to CANMILITRY), and requested C.M.H.Q. to

indicate number of C.W.A.C. that can be employed at Static Base Laundry or otherwise. State if approval for establishment as already submitted should be sought (*ibid.*).

This was followed on 8 May by another telegram which stated:

Would C.W.A.C. personnel be acceptable to B.O.D. Could send 50 June and further drafts up to maximum 300 by August. This proposal has tentative approval here.

(*ibid.*, Tel., A.G. 164, DEFENSOR to CANMILITRY).

20. On the strength of the words "or otherwise" in the N.D.H.Q. telegram of 6 May (para. 19), C.M.H.Q. submitted a further request to OTTAWA on 6 Jun 42 for 200 trained C.W.A.C.



personnel to be employed as clerks in C.M.H.Q. and in Records, ACTON (57/CMHQ/1, Tel., A. 1652, CANMILITRY to DEFENSOR). Three days later, OTTAWA concurred in this request (*ibid.*, Tel. A.G. 466 DEFENSOR to CANMILITRY, 9 Jun 42), and advised that during the month of August 1942 the first draft of 200 C.W.A.C. personnel would be despatched to the United Kingdom. As the Static Base Laundry was still to be constructed and would not be ready to operate for some months, the clerical personnel for C.M.H.Q. and ACTON were to precede the Laundry draft overseas.

21. Having embarked upon the policy of employing C.W.A.C. personnel overseas, C.M.H.Q. decided to enlarge the field of action in this regard. On receipt of OTTAWA's approval of the request for 200 C.W.A.C. clerks, a survey of all C.M.H.Q. branches was undertaken with a view to ascertain how many and in what capacity "A" category male personnel might be replaced by the C.W.A.C. The summary of submission revealed that a total of 301 could be used (*ibid.*, Lt.-Colonel D.K. Tow, S.O. (Insp), C.M.H.Q. to Brigadier Beament, 31 Jul 42). It was estimated that in addition to this number administrative personnel for this group would bring the total requirement up to 400 all ranks (*ibid.*, Brigadier Beament to Brigadier J.H. MacQueen, D.Q.M.G., 1 Aug 42).

#### ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS PRECEDING ARRIVAL OF THE FIRST DRAFT

22. Immediately following the decision to employ C.W.A.C. personnel overseas (para. 20) steps were taken to arrange with the War Office for the necessary accommodation for the first draft of 200 personnel. As this group was to be employed at C.M.H.Q. and Records, ACTON, accommodation was to be found within reasonable distance of both these places. It was considered that one large building would be ideal for a company but adjoining houses would be satisfactory if a large building were not available (16/CWAC/1, Lt.-Colonel E. James, D.Q.M.G. (Q), C.M.H.Q. to British Minister of Works and Buildings, 3 Jun 42). Requisition forms were issued for the acquisition of the Chesham Hotel, Surrey Street, Strand, and for 38 South Street, W.1, (*ibid.*, Q.C., London District N.E., and Q.C., London District S.W. to General Montague, 29 Jun and 1 Jul 42). When by 1 Aug 42 it became evident that a total of 400 all ranks would be required from Canada (para. 21), C.M.H.Q. found it necessary to obtain further accommodation, and authority was granted by the Senior Officer, C.M.H.Q., to requisition premises in Sussex Square, W. 2 (*ibid.*, Minute 4, Lt.-Colonel James to Lt.-Colonel P.M. Abel, A.D.Q. & M., 10 Aug 42). Accommodation for 510 was now provided and was allotted as follows:

38 South Street	105
Chesham Hotel	135
Sussex Sq. Area	270
	—
	510

(1/CWAC/1, General Montague to Brigadier Beament, 21 Aug 42).

23. Repair, decoration and alterations to these buildings commenced immediately; central heating was installed, air raid shelters were prepared; electric wiring was put in order; additional baths and sinks were provided. Work on all three barracks was to be completed by 15 Oct 42.

24. With respect to stores and equipment, it was agreed that they would be obtained from British sources rather than through



Canadian ordnance stores and would be paid for under the capitation rate. Under this scheme, barrack stores and furnishings would be provided on a scale according to that of the A.T.S. All furnishings over and above this scale would be supplied by the Canadian Government (ibid., Lt.-Colonel James to Colonel G.E.R. Smith, D. "Q" S., C.M.H.Q., 9 Jul 42). It was agreed that Auxiliary Services would furnish pianos, radiograms, radios, card tables, writing tables and sundry games.

25. On 16 Jul 42, <sup>MAJOR</sup>~~Capt.~~ Alice Sorby was appointed Staff Officer, C.W.A.C. Overseas, and in order to assist in administrative arrangements was despatched to the United Kingdom in advance of the first draft. Major Sorby reported at C.M.H.Q. on 18 Aug 42, and on the following day visited the three barracks in order to assess the administrative needs of the companies. Having regard to the requirements of each building and to the necessity for each barrack area being a self-contained C.W.A.C. unit, Major Sorby recommended to Brigadier Beament that the best way to provide the necessary personnel for the different barracks was

to draw up a proposed W.E. for each separate barracks on the basis of the accommodation available.

(1/CWAC/1, Major Sorby to Brigadier Beament, 21 Aug 42).

The establishment would be that of a company consisting of a Company H.Q. and four platoons each of two sections subdivided into two subsections. Certain modifications would be made to meet existing conditions in each barracks.

26. The W.E. of the C.W.A.C. personnel at the Static Base Laundry was of a different nature. It was similar to that of mixed batteries in the A.T.S. where the employing unit carries on its strength both soldiers and A.T.S. C.M.H.Q. therefore recommended that the

most efficient method of handling C.W.A.C. personnel for Static Laundry will be to absorb individuals in each normal establishment and administer them within that establishment. This is the most economical in manpower as male personnel within laundry do not warrant separate administrative set up.

(6/Stat Base Laund/1, CANMILITRY to DEFENSOR, A. 592, 19 Feb 43).

On 20 Mar 43, OTTAWA concurred in this proposal (6/CWAC/1/2, Tel., A. G. 2854, DEFENSOR to CANMILITRY).

27. The accounting routine originally put into effect for the C.W.A.C. overseas was based upon that in operation in Canada (C.A.R.O. 2297 of 1942). In accordance with the instructions outlined in this system, a C.W.A.C. volunteer is carried on the strength of a C.W.A.C. company for purposes of pay, administration, discipline and in most cases rations and quarters, and is shown as attached for duty with the employing unit (6/CWAC/1/2, Circular Letter 19, 2 Dec 42). C.M.H.Q. felt that the method therein outlined was a complicated one, although there were certain obvious advantages in having the overseas system correspond with the method used in Canada. It was, moreover, desirable to have some system



in working order for the arrival for the first flight of C.W.A.C. Instructions were therefore issued early in October that the Canadian Routine Order mentioned above should be the basis for C.W.A.C. accounting in the United Kingdom (*ibid.*, Minute to letter, Lt.-Colonel F.B. Matthews, A.A.G. (Pers), C.M.H.Q. to Colonel (now Brigadier) W.N. Bostock, A.D.A.G. (A), C.M.H.Q., 3 Oct 42).

28. By January 1943 it became evident that the system as outlined was becoming unwieldy. In the first place, certain mixed units were about to be established, such as the Static Base Laundry (para. 26). Secondly, consideration was being given to the employment of C.W.A.C. officers in C.M.H.Q. as replacement for "A" category younger group male officers. A survey of "G", "A" and "Q" Branches during January and February 1943 had revealed that 31 suitably trained C.W.A.C. officers might be employed in this manner at C.M.H.Q. (*ibid.*, Major Sorby to Lt.-Colonel W.B. Wedd, A.A.G. (Org), C.M.H.Q., 5 Feb 43). No provision had been made for these officers in C.W.A.C. companies, and they could only be carried on the strength of C.M.H.Q.

29. On 16 Mar 43, as a solution to this accounting problem, the proposal was put forward by Brigadier Bostock, that "the System"<sup>x</sup> be amended to make provision for the establishment of mixed units in which C.W.A.C. personnel would be carried on the strength of the employing unit (*ibid.*, Brigadier Bostock to Brigadier Beament). Discussions followed over the next three months on the various methods of accounting. On 24 Jun 43, Major Sorby submitted a draft amendment for inclusion in "the System". The proposed plan, which conformed to that of the A.T.S., would include two methods of accounting: the system then in operation in C.W.A.C. companies plus that used by mixed units (*ibid.*, Major Sorby to Lt.-Colonel Wedd).

30. Three months later, the principles involved in Major Sorby's memo were adopted, and on 1 Oct 43, instructions were issued by Brigadier Beament that

all CWAC personnel employed in formations or units of the Canadian Army Overseas be absorbed in the War Establishment of the employing formation or unit.

Effective that date, Part II Order entries would show the posting of C.W.A.C. personnel to their employing units as far as War Establishments would permit and their attachment back to the C.W.A.C. company concerned for all purposes except duty and pay. The strength of these units employing C.W.A.C. personnel would be reported in two parts, - the first to show total strength including C.W.A.C., the second to show C.W.A.C. strength only (*ibid.*).

#### FORMATION OF CWAC COMPANIES OVERSEAS

31. On 28 Oct 42, the first draft of the C.W.A.C. to be detailed for overseas service left Canada, two months later than had originally been contemplated owing to unexpected delays in accommodation arrangements. On 5 Nov 42, 104 C.W.A.C. personnel arrived in the United

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\* A pamphlet outlining the "System of providing and maintaining Canadian Army (Overseas) in the United Kingdom", occasionally referred to as the "System".



Kingdom, functioning temporarily under the name of "Special Detachment, C.W.A.C.". This Detachment, which was accommodated in the barracks at 38 South Street, was authorized on 28 Dec to operate as No. 41 Company under the temporary command of Captain M.F.M. Riley (6/CWAC/1/2, Admin Order 266).

32. Excited, happy, and delighted with the splendid mansion which had become a C.W.A.C. barracks for the duration, this group was given a most enthusiastic welcome. Particularly happy to greet them were "Canadian soldiers who had not seen home in two and three years" (W.D., 41 Coy, 8 Nov 42). The one telephone in the building was greatly over-worked as the girls endeavoured to establish communication with husbands, relatives and friends (ibid.). Much interest in the arrival was shown by members of the press who were busy with cameras. Movies of the landing, of the house, and of the girls were secured for future records (ibid., 6 Nov 42). Papers ran special articles.

33. The girls acclimatized themselves remarkably well during the first week although there were two or three stumbling blocks, the greatest of these being blackouts. Another was the difficulty of finding staffs large enough to handle the work in the barracks. Cooks worked hard under the direction of trained and experienced army cooks to master the unfamiliar methods of rationing and of preparing food. Close helpful liaison in this regard was established between the A.T.S. and the C.W.A.C. (ibid., 8 Nov 42).

34. "Considerable interest was shown in the CWACS", and offers of hospitality poured into barracks (ibid., 16 Nov 42). Tours, tea-dances and theatre parties were arranged by P.R.O. and the Y.M.C.A. The first mail arrived in gratifying quantities on 2 Dec (ibid., 2 Dec 42), and by the middle of the month Christmas preparations and parties were an absorbing interest. In addition to Christmas gaiety there was the added excitement of preparing for the second draft which it was rumoured was soon to arrive.

35. The second flight of 141 all ranks arrived on 19 Dec 42 as a second London Company, later authorized No. 42, and took up residence in Chesham Hotel Barracks. Captain G.K. Queen-Hughes was detailed temporarily to command this company (ibid., Admin Order 226). There was some slight interchange of individuals between Nos. 41 and 42 Companies to ensure that personnel were quartered in barracks most available to their work (W.D., 42 Coy, 29 Dec 42).

36. The Chesham Hotel lends itself nicely to the purpose of barracking C.W.A.Cs. Damaged by the 1940 blitz, fresh decorations and alterations had obliterated all evidence of scars (preface to W.D., 42 Coy). In this, as in the South Street Barracks, central heating had been installed. Officers and N.C.Os. of the "Special Detachment" were on hand at 0100 hours 19 Dec 42 to greet the new arrivals (W.D., 41 Coy, 18 Dec 42). Old acquaintances were renewed, and a hot meal was served midst much pleasant uproar.

37. During the first few months there were several memorable days for both companies. On 17 Jan 43 the girls had their first air raid experience (W.D., 41 and 42 Coys). Particularly important was 11 Feb to Privates (now Lieutenants) Joyce Jellett and Jean Shum who that day departed "on a very secret mission" and later found themselves serving tea to His Majesty the King as he visited Canadian troops "in Southern England" (W.D., 41 Coy, 11 Feb 43). There was 19 Feb which was graduation day for the first group of recruits. A special ceremony was arranged and held at Wellington Barracks Parade Ground, Birdcage Walk. General Montague took the salute and addressed the class (2/CWAC/1, Colonel (later Brigadier) W.N. Bostock, A.D.A.G.(A) to General Montague, 12 Feb 43).



38. A third company of 103 all ranks for London Area arrived in the United Kingdom on 31 Mar 43. This company, authorized No. 43 (ibid., Admin Order No. 31), under command of Lieut. G. Forsland, was quartered at Sussex Square Barracks. Accommodation for No. 43 Company differs from Nos. 41 and 42 in that it consists of a group of houses instead of a single building. All buildings had received the same cheerful decorative treatment and presented a pleasant appearance for the new company.

39. The fourth flight of 85 all ranks arriving on 17 May 43 was a company for Headquarters C.R.U. Under the command of 2/Lieutenant C.R. Gough, it was designated No. 47 Company, subsequently becoming 200 Company on 11 Jun 43 (Admin Order No. 90), reverting again to 47 Company on 15 May 44 (Admin Order No. 84). The advance party for this group arrived on 10 May and "set up house in pouring rain" (W.D., 47 Coy, 10 May 43). The main party arrived a week later on 17 May to find themselves comfortably and happily quartered. Picnics and gardening proved welcome alternatives to typing and shorthand classes for this group. According to the War Diary of No. 47 Company, June 1943, H.Q. C.R.U. "is immensely pleased with its C.W.A.Cs."

40. After many months of delay the laundry draft of 142 all ranks was despatched as the fifth flight and arrived in the United Kingdom on 29 Jul 43. As this group was accounted for in the Laundry establishment, no C.W.A.C. organization was required. The girls of this group were delighted with the welcome they received from the personnel at No. 1 Static Base Laundry and from neighbouring units. They were immensely pleased with their new quarters. "Nothing had been spared to make them comfortable" (W.D., No. 1 Static Base Laundry, 1 Aug 43). Special training in laundry work preceded the settling into jobs. By the end of their first month at the laundry this group had established a very fine esprit-de-corps (ibid., 31 Aug 43).

41. The sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth flights, arriving in the United Kingdom 21 Feb, 18 Apr, 8 May, 19 Jun and 4 Jul 44 respectively, were reinforcements. Additional accommodation at Addison Road in the Acton Area had been acquired in anticipation of the arrival of these drafts.

#### PARADES, VISITS

42. The largest, and generally conceded the finest parade attempted by the C.W.A.C. Overseas was held on 5 Sep 43 to celebrate the second anniversary of the formation of the Corps. All C.W.A.C. units in the United Kingdom were represented; 22 officers and 405 other ranks took part and later received commendation from General Montague for "a smart show" (27/CWAC/1, Major Sorby to O.Cs. CWAC Coys, 6 Sep 43). The salute was taken by Her Royal Highness the Princess Royal.

43. On 8 May 43, at the request of the Commanding Officer, European Theatre of Operations, United States Army, 100 personnel represented Canada in a parade of women's services at White City Stadium (ibid., Major Sorby to O.Cs. CWAC Coys, 30 Apr 43). The salute was taken by Major-General W.S. Key, U.S. Army. Regarding this occasion the War Diary of the Staff Officer, C.W.A.C., comments, - C.W.A.C. personnel were "the smartest on parade".

44. All companies have been, on various occasions, honoured by visits from distinguished guests. War Diaries of the companies note a long list, among whom are included H.R.H. the Princess Royal,



the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire, Lord Bennett, the High Commissioner (the Rt.-Hon. Vincent Massey), the Minister of National Defence (the Hon. J.L. Ralston), and the Director, Auxiliary Territorial Service (Major-General Jean Knox).

#### C.W.A.C. TRAINING OVERSEAS

##### (a) Basic and NCO Training

45. The training syllabus for recruits is a modified form of "the Standard Syllabus for the Canadian Women's Army Corps - Basic Training 1942". It is based on a total of 180 periods of a four weeks course (2/CWAC/1, Brigadier Rodger to Major Sorby, 29 Dec 42). The training detachment and training quarters are located at No. 43 Company in Sussex Square Barracks; parade grounds are in a suitable area close by.

46. As the supply of N.C.Os. from Canada has been ample to meet the requirements in the United Kingdom, N.C.O. training classes have not been established.

##### (b) Officer Training

47. With the exception of those who were obtained from Canada for the administration of the first group arriving overseas, provision of officers had been made by appointment from the ranks through the normal selection process. The procedure adopted was based upon the series of proposals drawn up by Major Sorby on 2 Dec 43. Briefly, these were: The recommendation for the appointment, which was to be initiated by the Officer Commanding the C.W.A.C. Company concerned, would be followed by an interview with Personnel Selection, after which the candidate would appear before the C.W.A.C. O.C.T.U. Board. A written examination would complete the procedure (6/OCTU CWAC/1, Major Sorby to Lt.-Colonel F.N. Owen, A.A.G. (Org)).

48. On 23 Feb 43, the establishment of a C.W.A.C. officers' training increment to No. 1 O.C.T.U. Wing, Overseas Canadian Training School, at BORDON, Hants, was approved by General Montague (*ibid.*, General Montague to General McNaughton; see also Admin Order No. 39, 27 Feb 43). A block syllabus based upon an eight period day, six working days per week of a three weeks course was adopted. The course was to follow closely that of the male O.C.T.U. course (*ibid.*, Brigadier Rodger, B.G.S. to C.T.S., date obliterated, possibly 24 Feb 43).

49. Directives concerning "Selection of Candidates for Commissions in C.W.A.C." were issued by Brigadier Beaumont on 1 Mar 43 and again on 6 Aug 43 (*ibid.*). In these he pointed out the necessity of maintaining a high standard in the selection of C.W.A.C. officers. He emphasized that a commission should not be held out as a reward for satisfactory service to an other rank when it had the result of turning "a good N.C.O. into an indifferent officer". He urged that employing officers arrange to have a potential officer acquire "a wide and varied experience of policy before putting her forward for a commission". Following the publishing of these directives, a policy covering selection procedure and qualities to be assessed in a C.W.A.C. candidate was published in Routine Order (Overseas) 3759 of 1943.

50. There is little difference between C.W.A.C. selection routine and that used in the selection of male candidates. In the case of the C.W.A.Cs., an additional interview is obtained by the utilization of the facilities of the British War Office Selection Board. The interview conducted by this board takes the form of a two-day series of tests conducted entirely by women. Following



Following this examination, recommendations are made by the board to C.M.H.Q., and candidates then appear before the C.M.H.Q. Selection Board whose decision as to the eligibility of the candidate is final.

51. Following the completion of the first class, approval for the transfer of C.W.A.C. O.C.T.U. classes from C.T.S. to an A.T.S. Training School was granted by General Montague on 30 Jun 43 (*ibid.*, Memo to letter G.S.O. I, Trg, C.M.H.Q., to Brigadier Rodger, 25 Jun 43). The War Office signified its approval on 11 Aug 43 (*ibid.*, Senior Controller L.E. Whateley to General Montague). By this move O.C.T.U. training was extended from a three to an eight weeks course.

(c) Training for Visiting C.W.A.C. Officers on Attachment to A.T.S.

52. During the visit of Major-General Jean Knox, Director of Auxiliary Territorial Service, to Canada in September and October 1942 the Adjutant-General, Major-General H.F.G. Letson, discussed with her the possibility of sending officers of the C.W.A.C. to the United Kingdom for attachment to A.T.S. schools for training. Early in November 1942, the War Office signified its approval of this proposal and agreed that this attachment would be of approximately three months duration, that the first group of 12 officers would arrive late in December 1942, and that thereafter approximately eight officers would follow monthly for similar attachment (2/CWAC/2, General Montague to War Office, 16 Nov 42).

53. The itinerary for this course includes visits to A.T.S. training centres, and rotating attachments in small groups to War Office and to one of the British or Scottish commands. On completion of this series of attachments, senior officers of the group proceed to the Senior Officer School at BAGSHOTT, the junior officers to the Junior Officers School at EGHAM for a complete course (*ibid.*, War Office to Major Sorby, 3 Dec 42). Between January 1943 and April 1944 five groups completed this training.

54. At the time of writing, this course has been replaced by an exchange of Canadian and British Officers. Thirty A.T.S. officers are now on three months duty in Canada (9/CWAC ATS/1, Memo, Major Sorby to Brigadier Bostock, 30 May 44), while twenty-four C.W.A.C. officers are on attachment to A.T.S. centres in the United Kingdom (*ibid.*, Tel., A.G. 6454, DEFENSOR to CANMILITRY, 2 Jun 44).

#### ENLISTMENT OF C.W.A.C. OVERSEAS

55. C.W.A.C. policy for enlistment in the United Kingdom is similar in respect to that of men in the Canadian Army Overseas. It is on a selective basis. The C.W.A.C. may enlist only Canadian nationals, that is, those who are either (a) Canadian born (b) Canadian by right of domicile, or (c) married to Canadian soldiers. In the case of (b), the candidate's legal status is decided by the Department of Immigration (8/Enlist/9, Major Sorby to Brigadier J. Mess, D.A.G.(C), 8 Oct 43). A civilian applying for enlistment is required to produce a release from the Ministry of Labour. Candidates must be between the ages of 18 and 35 (*ibid.*). In the case of A.T.S. personnel wishing to transfer to the C.W.A.C., permission must be first obtained from the War Office. Total enlistment of recruits in the United Kingdom as of 12 Jun 44 is 219. Of these 51 were former A.T.S. personnel (22/CWAC/1, Memo, 31 May 44). The strength of the Corps Overseas as of 5 Jul 44 totals 67 officers and 964 other ranks (Figures supplied by the office of the D.A.A.G., C.W.A.C, 6 Jul 44). Additional detail may be found at Appendices "A" and "B".



56. With the enlistment of recruits in the United Kingdom and with the despatch of reinforcements from Canada, it was decided to carry these personnel on the strength of No. 43 Company. Subsequently, the Y-3<sup>1</sup>list also became the responsibility of this company. By April 1944, No. 43 Company was administering 379 personnel, and it was Major Sorby's opinion that in the interest of efficiency the company should be relieved of its duties as a reinforcement unit by the establishment of a small C.W.A.C. Wing at No. 1 C.G.R.U. On 19 May 44, the establishment of this wing was approved by Brigadier Booth (6/CWAC/1/3, Minute to Letter, Brigadier Bostock to Brigadier Booth, 18 May 44).

#### DISCHARGES

57. Discharges for the C.W.A.C. in the United Kingdom generally follow the provisions of C.A.R.O. (Overseas) 1784, although each case is judged on its own merit. Disposition of pregnant personnel depends upon the circumstances. Appropriate adjustments are made in all cases. Under authority of A.G. Cable 3308, those whose home is in Canada are returned there; those who are resident in the United Kingdom or whose husbands are citizens of the United Kingdom are discharged in England (8/Enlist/9, Major Sorby to Brigadier Mess, 8 Oct 43). Discharges from the Corps in the United Kingdom up to 31 May 44 total eight (22/CWAC/1, Memo, 31 May 44). Personnel returned to Canada to the same date number 11 officers and 64 other ranks. Further detail concerning discharges may be found in Appendix "C".

#### EMPLOYMENT OF THE C.W.A.C.

58. As compared with those of Canada, the types of employment of the C.W.A.C. Overseas are not greatly varied. However, the field of activity has expanded to an extent which would have seemed decidedly improbable at an earlier time.

59. A very large majority are employed in a clerical capacity. C.W.A.C. personnel are now employed in Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, 21 Army Group, Allied Army Italy, C.M.H.Q., H.Q. C.R.U., Army Show and in eight Army corps, - Medical, Dental, Postal, Pay, Service, Engineers, Ordnance and Signal Corps. As of 30 Apr 44, with total other rank strength at 853, eleven trades were represented as follows: clerks 378, cooks 29, switchboard operators 17, cipher operators 4, dental assistants 4, keyboard operators 3, postal sorters 2, driver mechanics 2, storewomen T.O.D. 1, and draftswomen 1. Apart from the trades, as of the same date, there were 390 general duty personnel and 22 drivers IC (A.G. (Stats) Monthly Returns, 44/Statements/1/5, 30 Apr 44).

#### EMPLOYMENT OF THE C.W.A.C. IN REAR AREAS OF OPERATIONAL THEATRE

60. On 18 Mar 44, Brigadier A.W. Beament, OIC Cdn Sec, G.H.Q., 1 Ech, 21 Army Group, proposed to Lt-General K. Stuart, Chief of Staff, that consideration might be given to the question of employing the C.W.A.C. in both 1st and 2nd Echelons, 21 Army Gp. The need for clerical help was pressing and "this HQ would welcome a small number of clerk stenographers" (1/CWAC/2, Brigadier Beament to General Stuart). This proposal had the approval of the M.G.A. 21 Army Gp who declared himself as being favourably disposed towards the employment of the C.W.A.C. in Cdn Sec. G.H.Q., 1 and 2 Ech 21 Army Gp in capacities similar to those already being filled by the

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\* A list of personnel admitted to hospital.



A.T.S. in British Headquarters. Brigadier Beament further suggested that there were substantial opportunities in hospitals for the C.W.A.C.

61. Existing policy regarding C.W.A.C. employment had not envisaged such expansion of activities, and the proposal was therefore thoroughly discussed at C.M.H.Q. before it received the approval of the Chief of Staff. Availability of manpower was surveyed to ensure that fully competent male personnel would not be retained in C.M.H.Q. while C.W.A.C. were sent out. Subsequent submissions revealed that there were definite tradesmen deficiencies impossible to fill with male personnel. Since, in this event, tradesmen would have to be brought from Canada, it was suggested that manpower would be saved by the employment of C.W.A.C. in rear areas. Approval of this policy was expressed by General Montague on 12 Apr 44 (ibid., General Montague to Brigadier Booth), and by General Stuart on the following day (ibid., General Stuart to General Montague, 13 Apr 44).

62. Meanwhile, a similar discussion had been taking place at OTTAWA, and on 10 Apr 44 N.D.H.Q. sought the views of C.M.H.Q. on the advisability of such a move (ibid., Tel., A.G. 309, DEFENSOR to CANMILITRY, 10 Apr 44). In reply, C.M.H.Q. advised OTTAWA on 13 Apr 44 that the situation was being canvassed to determine the number of individuals and the types of employment which could be utilized in the United Kingdom. To meet the immediate demand of 1 Ech for six stenographers, C.M.H.Q. agreed to supply this number from among those already serving overseas but pointed out that this method of provision could not be carried on indefinitely as Echelon would thus be built up by the sacrifice of C.M.H.Q. Future demands for operational areas would therefore have to be supplied by despatch of further drafts from Canada (ibid., Tel., A. 2459, CANMILITRY to DEFENSOR, 13 Apr 44).

63. Late in May, the first detachment of one officer and 17 other ranks of the C.W.A.C. (6 of whom were detailed to the Army Show) to serve in these areas left the United Kingdom for service with Cdn Sec, G.H.Q., 1st Echelon, A.A.I. (57/AAI/1, Brigadier Booth to Major-General R.M. Luton, D.M.S., C.M.H.Q., 9 Jun 44). According to information supplied by the office of the D.A.A.G., C.W.A.C. (5 Jul 44) 4 other rank C.W.A.C. personnel<sup>\*\*</sup> had preceded this group to Italy. Further information from the same source reveals that S.H.A.E.F. has three C.W.A.C. clerks on its strength, while at Cdn Sec, G.H.Q., 1 Ech 21 Army Gp, two C.W.A.C. officers and 10 C.W.A.C. other ranks are employed. On 17 Jun 44, authority was granted by the Chief of Staff for the posting of C.W.A.C. personnel to 2 Ech, 21 Army Gp (1/CWAC/2, Brigadier Bosstock to Lt.-Colonel Sorby).

64. The administrative policy adopted for these areas is that of a mixed unit (ibid., CANMILITRY to ADNAP for CANDEX, A. 3259, 12 May 44). This method, which has proved particularly feasible in the Static Base Laundry, is considered more economical of administrative staff than is the establishment of C.W.A.C. administrative companies.

#### THE MANPOWER CEILING AND THE C.W.A.C.

65. All female army personnel come under the manpower ceiling of 232,100<sup>\*</sup> for the Canadian Army Overseas (1/Cdn Army/1/4, Tel.,

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<sup>\*</sup> The inclusion of Paratroopers has subsequently raised this total to 233,200.

<sup>\*\*</sup> Canadian Army Show Personnel.



G.S.D. 1307. DEFENSOR to CANMILITRY, 7 Oct 43). On 14 Oct 43, C.M.H.Q. set their total C.W.A.C. requirements within the ceiling at 4500, an estimate which, they pointed out, was not to be considered as a demand until policy was firm on whether or not the ceiling was capable of absorbing large numbers of C.W.A.C. (44/CWAC/2, Tel., A.3693, CANMILITRY to DEFENSOR). It was agreed at that time that C.W.A.C. personnel should be despatched overseas at the rate of 50 per month (ibid., Tel., A.G. 1750, DEFENSOR to CANMILITRY). In March 1944 it was agreed that this number should be increased to 75 per month, possibly even to 100 per month after June 1944 if enlistments in Canada should warrant it (ibid., Tel., A.G. 1919, DEFENSOR to CANMILITRY, 7 Mar 44).

66. Because of the extra staff required for administration, female personnel cannot always be counted on a basis of soldier for soldier. The British, when employing A.T.S., had found that it required three A.T.S. to replace two soldiers on some establishment while a ratio of one for one is adequate on others (1/CWAC/2, Brigadier Bostock to Brigadier Booth, 30 Apr 44). C.M.H.Q. had proposed to OTTAWA that C.W.A.C. personnel might be supplied on the basis of 10 women for every seven or eight men (ibid., General Montague to Brigadier Bostock, 26 Apr 44).

67. With the adoption of the policy to employ the C.W.A.C. in operational areas, an assessment of C.W.A.C. requirements was made by C.M.H.Q. and it was found that the demand from operational areas for clerical help, plus those from H.Q. C.R.U. and those of C.M.H.Q. itself for various types of employment amounted to approximately 1173 individuals (44/CWAC/2, Memorandum, Major Sorby, 10 May 44). It was pointed out to N.D.H.Q. that provision of these numbers would have to be made from OTTAWA (para. 62). The question arose: could the Canadian Army Overseas absorb C.W.A.C. personnel to this extent? General Montague considered it doubtful owing to the large number of low category men available not only in the United Kingdom, but also within 21 Army Gp and particularly in the A.A.I. (ibid., Brigadier Booth to Brigadier Bostock, 26 Apr 44). The supply of this type of soldier was approaching a saturation point in all theatres overseas, and policy in this regard was to explore every possible means of employing a soldier now overseas before despatching him to Canada as unemployable. While it was true that there were deficiencies in certain trades which could be quickly and efficiently filled by the C.W.A.C. in forward areas, it was Brigadier Bostock's opinion that it would be unwise to employ them in these theatres except in those trades for which male personnel could not be found (1/CWAC/2, Brigadier Bostock to Brigadier Booth, 30 Apr 44). It was therefore suggested by Brigadier Bostock that before further C.W.A.C. drafts were despatched overseas "consideration should be given to providing an allowance under the manpower ceiling" (ibid.). He further recommended that C.M.H.Q. should reach an agreement with N.D.H.Q. whereby the ceiling would be increased by 300 for every 1,000 C.W.A.C. employed overseas (ibid.).

68. General Montague discussed the matter on 5 May 44 with Brigadier Booth and with General Stuart who proposed that the solution to the problem would be to count the C.W.A.C. outside the ceiling, a solution which he was submitting to OTTAWA (ibid., Brigadier Booth to Brigadier Bostock, 5 May 44). Until a decision in this regard was reached, it was agreed that immediate action should be taken in the first place by sending a "token draft" of the C.W.A.C. to A.A.I. Secondly, a statement of all jobs now performed by "A" category men which might be filled by low category men or by the C.W.A.C. was to be prepared by C.M.H.Q. It was also recommended that OTTAWA be requested to indicate the numbers of



the C.W.A.C. they were prepared to supply to meet these requirements. In the event of the C.W.A.C. being provided outside the ceiling the proposal to increase the ceiling (para. 67) would not be pursued (*ibid.*). Present information reveals nothing further in regard to General Stuart's proposal to count the C.W.A.C. outside the manpower ceiling.

69. This report was drafted by Lieut. M.E. Abey, C.W.A.C.

*M. E. Abey, Lt.*

*for* (C.P. Stacey) Lt.-Col.,  
Historical Officer,  
CANADIAN MILITARY HEADQUARTERS.



# APPENDIX "A"

## GROWTH OF C.W.A.C. STRENGTH IN U.K.

		<u>31 May 43</u>	<u>31 Dec 43</u>	<u>31 May 44</u>
<u>LONDON AREA</u>				
	Offrs	20	28	37
	ORs	438	430	569
<u>C.R.U. AREA</u>				
	Offrs	1	8	7
	ORs	54	278	334
* <u>UKIT</u>				
	Offrs	--	--	1
	ORs	--	--	17
* <u>Y-3 LIST</u>				
	Offrs	--	--	--
	ORs	--	--	21
' <u>"Q" LIST</u>				
	Offrs	--	--	--
	ORs	--	3	2
<u>TOTAL</u>	Offrs	21	Offrs 36	Offrs 45
	ORs	492	ORs 711	ORs 943
		<hr/> 513	<hr/> 747	<hr/> 988

Information obtained from Memo,  
22/CWAC/1, 31 May 44 and office  
D.A.A.G., C.W.A.C., June 1944.

\* A list of personnel despatched from the United Kingdom,- in  
this case to Italy.

' A list of personnel on loan to the British.

\* A list of personnel admitted to hospital.



APPENDIX "B"

C.W.A.C. PERSONNEL RECRUITED IN U.K.  
(as at 12 Jun 44)

<u>Course No</u>	<u>Recruits</u>	<u>Course Commenced</u>	<u>Passed Out</u>
1	39	25 Jan 43	19 Feb 43
2	36	7 Apr 43	7 May 43
3	53*	23 Jun 43	23 Jul 43
4	28	18 Aug 43	17 Sep 43
5	36	25 Nov 43	24 Dec 43
6	27	2 Mar 44	31 Mar 44

(Memo, 22/CWAC/1)

\* only 52 passed out.

C.W.A.C. RECRUITS IN U.K.

31 May 44

Formerly in ATS	51
Wives of Cdn Soldiers	32
Total enlisted in	
United Kingdom	219
Discharged in U.K.	8
Returned to Canada	5

(Memo, 22/CWAC/1)



APPENDIX "C"

C.W.A.C. PERSONNEL X-UK

31 May 44

	<u>Offrs</u>	<u>ORs</u>
1. Medical (Pregnancy)	2	36
2. Medical (Other than Pregnancy)	3	20
3. Returned for duty	5	1
4. A.G. Disposal	-	4
5. Compassionate	1	4

(Memo, 22/CWAC/1)