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REPORT NO. 132

HISTORICAL OFFICER

CANADIAN MILITARY HEADQUARTERS

Canadian Operations in Sicily, July - August 1943

Part III: The Story of 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde

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27 Feb 45

## Canadian Operations in Sicily, July - August 1943

Part III: The Story of 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde

1. This report outlines the part played by 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde (now 1 Cdn Armd Bde) from the time it was allotted a role in operation "HUSKY" (The Assault on Sicily) in April 1943 until the completion of the Sicilian campaign at the end of August in the same year.

## PLANNING AND TRAINING

2. The North African campaign was still being fought when, in November 1942, the Joint Planning Staff was instructed to prepare an outline plan for an assault on Sicily and/or Sardinia. At the conference between Mr. Churchill and President Roosevelt at CASABLANCA in January 1943, it was decided to invade Sicily. The decision to include a Canadian component in the force against Sicily was made in April 1943, when 1 Cdn Inf Div and 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, with ancillary troops, were detailed for this expedition (Report Hist Offr 126 paras 1 - 23).

3. On 24 Apr 43, Lt.-Gen A.G.L. McNaughton, G.O.C. in C. First Cdn Army, advised Brigadier R.A. Wyman, commanding 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, of the plan to include a Canadian force, of which his Brigade would be a part, in operations then under consideration. (W.D., 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, 24 Apr 43). According to the Army Commander, this Brigade was chosen owing to its "very high state of training" and because it had already had some experience in the DIEPPE operation where 14 Cdn Army Tk Regt (Calgary Regt) had formed part of the attacking force. (First Cdn Army file P.A., 1-14-1, Memo of a discussion, General McNaughton - General Brooke, 28 Apr 43. For an account of 14 Cdn Army Tk Regt at DIEPPE see Reports Hist Offr Nos. 83, 89, 98, 100, 101, 107, 108, 109, 117, 128.)

4. The Brigade was, at this date, engaged in normal training and Ram II tanks were being issued to replace the Churchill tanks with which the units of the Brigade had previously been equipped. 12 and 14 Cdn Army Tk Regts (The Three Rivers and Calgary Regiments respectively) had just completed unit training on the A.F.V. firing range at MINEHEAD, SOMERSET; and on 23 Apr 11 Cdn Army Tk Regt (The Ontario Regiment) with five officers of Brigade headquarters proceeded to MINEHEAD for the same purpose. On 25 Apr, all officers of Brigade Headquarters were, however, recalled to their permanent station at WORTHING, SUSSEX, and the Brigade staff was advised that the units of the Brigade would go to Scotland for advanced training within the next week or ten days. (W.D., 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, 25 Apr 43).

5. On the following day, 26 Apr, at a meeting at the HORSE GUARDS, LONDON, the future programme for 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde was outlined as follows:

It was decided that 1st Cdn Tank Bde would despatch immediately a training liaison wing consisting of one officer and one other rank per squadron, total of 60 for the brigade, by road to commence taking over Sherman tanks issued to 33 Tk Bde. It was arranged that

- (a) 12th Cdn Regt would take over from 43 Battalion R.T.R. at Hoddam
- (b) 11 Cdn Regt would take over from 144 R.A.C. Stobbs Camp, Hawick
- (c) 14 Cdn Regt would take over from 148 R.A.C. at Langholm.

This liaison wing would move by road under arrangements made between O.C., 1 Cdn Bde and O.C., 33 Army Tk Bde.

(W.D., 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, May 1943, appx 1; minutes of a meeting held at the Horse Guards 26 Apr 43.)

It was also decided that the training arrangements made for 33 (Brit) Tk Bde would be followed by 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde with certain modifications, namely:

- (a) 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde would not be required to send instructors or soldiers in training to schools.
- (b) Compass training would be required therefore instructors would be made available to them.
- (c) The open range at KIRKCUDBRIGHT would be available to the Brigade from 7 - 26 May 43.
- (d) O.C., 33 Army Tk Bde agreed to supply instructors for the training of the R.C.E.M.E. personnel of 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde.
- (e) The 33 Army Tk Bde were to complete their training in water-proofing and would then assist 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde with their water-proofing.

(W.D., 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, May 1943, appx 1.)

6. The first flight of the Brigade staff left for Scotland on 26 Apr while on 28 Apr, Major F. Schmidlin, the Brigade Major, arrived at the new headquarters at HODDAM CASTLE, ANNAN, DUMFRIESSHIRE. By 2 May, representatives of all units in the formation had completed the takeover from 33 Army Tk Bde. (W.D., 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, 2 May 43.)

7. The Brigade promptly started a new and comprehensive training programme. On 2 May the War Diarist wrote:

A new programme in training in combined operations commenced this date. In the initial stages this programme will consist of training in the handling of the Sherman tank and the 75 mm gun with which the Bde is to be equipped. A programme of firing at KIRKCUDBRIGHT Range is being laid on.

while non-tank crews are to be practised in the A/Tk Rifle, T.S.M.G. and the rifle.

(W.D., 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, 2 May 43.)

The burden of the Brigade and unit War Diaries from 2 May till mid-June is one of long hours and hard work. The hours of duty were 0730 - 1930 hrs daily; many units continued work until 2200 hrs. Advanced training consisted of familiarizing the various tradesmen with the new equipment, while the rest were trained in compass moves, camouflage, tank tactics, security, clearing of minefields and finally waterproofing the new tanks and vehicles. (W.D., 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, May 1943, appx 8 and 9.)

8. The Brigade was ready for action within two months. In assessing this achievement some of the things accomplished bear examination: a brigade in training had returned its equipment to Ordnance and moved from the south coast of England to Scotland in short order; the "B" vehicles had proceeded north in convoy through staging camps, while the remainder of the Brigade personnel had moved by troop trains; officers and men had mastered the change-over from one type of tank to another, normally a matter of six months training. Here, however, the early training of the Brigade stood it in good stead. The experience at CAMP BORDEN in keeping the obsolete Renault tanks, obtained from the United States for training purposes, on the road, and later experience with Churchill and Ram tanks proved invaluable. (W.D., 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, June 1943, appx 30.) Much credit is to be given to the British instructors and the many lectures on experience in tank warfare in the Middle East given by officers returned from that theatre. The fact that so much was accomplished in such a limited time presents a picture of constant work. The troops were, however, allowed the usual seven days privilege leave and all were permitted to take four days embarkation leave in June. (W.D., 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, 1, 27 and 30 Jun 1943.)

9. The Brigade was visited by Lt.-Gen A.G.L. McNaughton on 22 and 23 May. On 8 Jun, a demonstration was put on by British and Polish armoured forces to illustrate the role of tanks with infantry and engineers in an assault. This was witnessed by Lt.-Gens A.G.L. McNaughton, H.D.G. Crerar, E.W. Sansom, Major-Gens The Hon P.J. Montague, R.F.L. Keller, G.G. Simonds, E.L.M. Burns, F.F. Worthington, C.R. Stein, Brigadier C. Foulkes and other senior officers, and the officers of the Brigade.

10. The planning for "HUSKY" was carried out by various formation planning staffs. This report will refer only to the planning for the Canadian element from the United Kingdom and specifically to the planning relative to 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde. On 25 Apr 43 the planning staff of 1 Cdn Inf Div took over from the planning staff of 3 (Brit) Inf Div established at NORFOLK HOUSE, LONDON (Report Hist Offr 126 para 68). The planning staff of 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde went to work in DEVONSHIRE HOUSE, there being insufficient space at NORFOLK HOUSE (*ibid* para 74). By 11 May, HODDAM CASTLE,

DEVONSHIRE HOUSE, C.M.H.Q. and 1 Cdn Corps were linked by a D.R.L.S. established by 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde Signals (W.D., 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, 11 May 43). Thus the complementary tasks of planning and training proceeded. Despite the fact that a 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde planning staff was set up much of the actual detailed planning was, however, done by the War Office. Although 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde was to be a self-contained operational force, it lacked the expert heads of services usually found in such forces; furthermore, there was no closely defined operational task for which to plan. (Planning Staff file Tks Ldn 2-2 folio 9.) The plan for "HUSKY" provided for the division of the force into two parts, Force "X" and Force "Y". (These were originally known as Force "A" and Force "B"). 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde was the striking arm of Force "Y" and became Group 1 of that force.

11. The broad outline of the plan was as follows: Force "X" would assault Sicily on D day. The Canadian component of Force "X" was 1 Cdn Inf Div with under command 12 Cdn Army Tk Regt. 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, less 12 Cdn Army Tk Regt<sup>★</sup>, but with ancillary troops was the striking arm of Force "Y", due to land on D plus 3. These two formations would, on arrival in the operational theatre, take their place in the British Eighth Army which consisted of two corps i.e. 13 Corps and 30 Corps. 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, less the one regiment above mentioned, was to form part of the Army Reserve (Report Hist Offr No. 126 para 197). To co-ordinate timing the two Forces "X" and "Y" were broken into 4 convoys, one fast and one slow convoy, for each force. Force "X" convoys were known as K.M.F. 18 and K.M.S. 18; while Force "Y" convoys were known as K.M.F. 19 and K.M.S. 19. Attached as Appendix "A" is Group 1 of "Y" Force due to land on D plus 3 with unit strengths. At Appendix "B" is the sailing list of convoy K.M.F. 19 and K.M.S. 19. At Appendix "C" is a list of the Brigade Staff and unit commanders 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde.

12. Units began to report to their L.Ss.T. on 20 Jun 43 for loading tanks and embarking tank crews. Convoy K.M.S. 19 sailed 25 Jun. Two days later, the remainder of the Brigade, including the Brigade Commander and his headquarters staff<sup>★★</sup>, embarked on H.M.T. "CAMERONIA". The remarks of Brigadier Wyman to his men on shipboard after a Dominion Day Service on 1 Jul are worth noting:

★ The story of this Regiment is told in Part II of this series of reports which deals with the operations of 1 Cdn Inf Div in Sicily.

★★ The Brigade Major, one L.O., and personnel of the Brigade headquarters squadron sailed in L.Ss.T. The non-tank personnel, R.C.A.S.C., R.C.A.M.C. sailed in the "CAMERONIA".

Some of the training has been interesting and some of it dull, but all training has been combined to ensure that every individual soldier was battle-worthy....I feel convinced that never have there been a better trained, better equipped and a better group of soldiers than members of the Army Tank Brigade on board ships today.

(W.D., 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, 1 Jul 43)

Thus in short form may be seen the steady progress the Brigade made from the late days of April when it was in training, until 2130 hrs 1 Jul 43 when convoy K.M.F. 19 set sail from GOUROCK, Scotland, as part of a combined force launched to break into the "fortress of Europe". (W.D., 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, 1 Jul 43).

#### THE VOYAGE TO SICILY

13. The Brigade and unit War Diaries all reflect a similarity of experiences on the voyage to Sicily. All the units reported mines off CAPE BON. These were adequately dealt with by the Navy. On 12 Jul, 43, the Brigade diary refers to the sinking of a U-boat by a destroyer:

It has been reported that after the final batch of depth charges had been dropped by the destroyer, a U-Boat was blown to the surface where it broke into halves and sank almost immediately. Seventeen survivors were picked up by the destroyer which then rejoined the convoy.

(W.D., 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, 12 Jul 43.)

The weather throughout the voyage was generally good. No unit reported any seasickness; all, however, spoke of the common pastime of "getting a tan" with the usual consequences, i.e. some minor cases of sunburn.

14. The training programme for shipboard consisted of P.T., lectures on Italy, the country, its army and language, how to escape if captured, together with an explanation of how to use the escape kits. Health was stressed in medical lectures covering the subject generally and phases peculiar to the new climate. (W.D., 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, Jul 43, appx 22). Route marches were organized on the personnel vessel while vehicle maintenance was done in the afternoon on L.Ss. T.

15. The exact destination had not been made known to the troops. The Brigade had sailed with sealed orders delivered to the various ships in bags marked with green and red bands, known as type "A" and type "B" respectively. Type "A" was to be opened on the order of the Military Commander when, on the advice of the Senior Naval Officer, all ship to shore communication was ended. Type "B" bags were NOT to be opened under any circumstances until the signal "OPEN RED LABEL BAGS" was received. The contents of these bags would then be distributed according to the instructions found in the bags (W.D., 1 Cdn Army Tk, June 1943 appx 24). The green label bags were opened on 3 Jul and were found to contain intelligence information on Italy and booklets on the language and customs of the country. The troops were keenly interested and spent their leisure time studying the Italian language (W.D., 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, 3 Jul 43.)

16. On 10 Jul, word of the assault on Sicily was received, also orders to open the red label bags. These contained information relative to Sicily maps and escape aids (W.D., 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, 10 Jul 43 and June appx 24). Brigadier Wyman outlined the situation in a lecture to the officers, and stated that the Brigade was "now under the orders of the British Commanders" and that "at present, it was being held as a G.H.Q. reserve". (W.D., 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, 10 Jul 43.) Security had been good:

The effect of passing the information on to the troops was extremely gratifying. Immediately after the announcement that Canadian, British and American troops had landed on Sicily and that this island was also our destination, morale mounted visibly....areas around the ships loud speakers are crowded at every news broadcast.

(1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, 10 Jul 43.)

17. On the evening 13/14 Jul, the "CAMERONIA" dropped anchor off MALTA. Brigadier Wyman with a staff of 32 all ranks from Brigade Headquarters, boarded an L.C.I.(L) and proceeded to Sicily. (W.D., 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, 13 Jul 43). Simultaneously, the L.Ss.T. with tanks and fighting personnel proceeded to SIRACUSA where on the evening of 13 Jul, they disembarked. Here they were greeted by a small scale enemy air attack on the harbour, but disembarkation proceeded without interruption. The tank convoy moved off and harboured in the area of CASSIBILE. (W.Ds., 11 and 14 Cdn Army Tk Regts, 13 Jul 43.)

18. The Brigade commander arrived at CASSIBILE on the afternoon of 14 Jul having first reported to H.M.S. "LARGS" (Headquarters Ship) in SIRACUSA Harbour. He found the troops busy "dewaterproofing" and improving the harbour area. Brigade Headquarters was soon liaising with the Beach Maintenance Area and D.A.D.O.S., all of whom proved most cooperative. (W.D., 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde

with "A" and "Q" appx 14 Jul 43 and W.D., 11 and 14 Cdn Army Tk Regts, 14 Jul 43.)

19. Major-General G.W.E.J. Erskine, C.B., D.S.O., G.O.C., 7 Armd Div and his G.S.O. 2 called on Brigadier Wyman on 15 Jul to discuss the organization of the Army Reserve of which 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde was to be a part (W.D. 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, 15 Jul 43). According to an account by Capt. J.R. McLaughlin, G.S.O.3, 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde:

The G.O.C. 7 Armd Div, Major General Erskine, with a small staff was organizing an 8th Army Res of which we were to form a part, and during this period we remained under comd of 8th Army.

(Hist Sec file SICILY/1 Cdn Armd Bde/C/D)

20. The following days were very full. On 14-15 Jul, the Brigade Diarist wrote:

The Bde Staff were fully occupied in liaison with Army and Tac H.Q. regarding operational and administrative matters... Brigadier Wyman and Major Schmidlin visited various senior formations and conferred with officers of these senior formations regarding the tactical role and relationship of 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde with other formations ..... L.Os. and other staff officers were likewise familiarizing themselves with the operational picture and administrative arrangements.

(W.D., 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, 14-15 Jul 43).

The Tactical picture was explained to units and everything possible was done to prepare the Brigade for the role it was to play as Army Reserve. Early on 17 Jul, the personnel ship "CAMERONIA" docked in SIRACUSA harbour. During the day the troops disembarked and that evening marched into camp in good spirits and pleased to be on land again. The M.T. ships unloaded from 18 -21 Jul, two in SIRACUSA and six on beaches near CASSIBILE. (W.D., 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, 17 Jul 43, and appx 31, A & Q Diary.)

#### THE MOVE TO THE CATANIA PLAIN

21. The Brigade settled down in the CASSIBILE area under conditions which not only provided certain amenities but which at the same time served as a constant reminder to the troops that they were in a theatre of operations. The weather remained steadily hot and dry; swimming was encouraged. There was ample fruit in the district which was, of course, doubly welcome both for reasons of climate and novelty; stringent hygienic regulations were laid down which seem to have proved adequate as the health and spirit of the troops was generally good. There were,

however, nightly enemy air raids on SIRACUSA, and the fragments from the exploded A.A. shells landing in the area emphasized the value of a slit trench. Morning stand-to was enforced in keeping with Eighth Army Orders:

At 0500 hrs each morning the entire Bde, including all units attached, and under command, Stand-To, with kits completely stowed, vehicle engines running and everything in readiness for instant movement or action should such occur. All sets are netted quickly but precisely and the Bde remains at the alert until Stand-Down is given on the authority of the Brigade Commander.

(W.D., 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, 2 Aug 43)

22. This period of adjustment was preparatory to a more important if still passive role. It gave the Brigade an opportunity to establish and test out its supply and maintenance services and find them adequate once the complement of "B" vehicles was unloaded. Prior to this, despite a shortage of transport, 83 Coy, R.C.A.S.C., by dint of ingenuity and hard work seems to have kept the supplies of ammunition, rations, petrol and oil moving steadily. On 18 Jul, the Brigade Commander held a conference of officers commanding units and his Brigade staff when he reviewed the organization of the Brigade third line units and their relationship one to the other. He also spoke generally of the Brigade's role under command of the Eighth Army, and pointed out that the Brigade might be employed to relieve 4 Brit Armd Bde on the CATANIA PLAIN. Officers were advised to study the maps of this area and make suitable reconnaissances, based on the use of the present area as the base with the rest of the Brigade in the CATANIA PLAIN north of SIRACUSA. Standard warning signals and battle procedures were also detailed. (W.D., 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, 18 Jul 43.)

23. While 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde was settling down and getting acclimatized, the tactical picture was rapidly changing for the better. The enemy intention had become clearer and the calibre of troops opposing the Allied Armies more apparent. The Italian as an enemy seemed to have little heart in the fight and was willing to surrender after offering the minimum or even no opposition. The German, on the other hand, proved a stout and determined fighter ever ready to take the initiative if given the chance. (C.I.G.S. Summaries for Sicily give daily reports on the progress of the campaign with marked maps.)

24. The tactical situation on 16 Jul 43, when the Brigade was in process of arriving, was as follows:

The bulk of Herman Goering Division had by this time been concentrated in the CATANIA PLAIN opposing Eighth Army. It was reinforced by two fortress battalions and elements of 1 Parachute Division, the latter having been flown into Sicily from Italy after our landings. Also opposing 13 Corps at Primasole Bridgehead were some air force ground personnel from the Gerbini and Catania airfields hastily formed into companies and thrown into the line. The enemy plan to hold a defensive position based on Mt Etna and extending generally along the line of the railroad from Catania to Enna began to emerge as 15 Panzer Division withdrew before the advance of 30 Corps and 2 Corps to positions on the right of Herman Goering Division along this line.

(Hist Sec file SICILY/15 Army  
Gp/C/F, Account of Operations  
Fifteenth Army Group, 10 Jul -  
17 Aug 43, para 31.)

By 21 Jul, the situation had improved according to the C.I.G.S. Summary No. 12:

Except for CATANIA area, advances all along the line. CANADIANS have captured ENNA and LEONFORTE and are now turning EAST.\* AMERICANS have extended their bridgehead westward to CAPE BIANCO. Only one enemy airfield now serviceable in Sicily.

25. It was apparent that the enemy was making a stand in the CATANIA area, with the CATANIA PLAIN in front of him, an open network of rivers and irrigation ditches, with high ground to his right and MT ETNA covering his right rear. He was in a strong position. Accordingly General Sir B.L. Montgomery, K.C.B., D.S.O., G.O.C. in C. Eighth Army, decided to abandon the idea of a costly frontal assault on CATANIA on the right, and to hold in the coastal sector while swinging wide with 30 Corps, on the axis LEONFORTE - CENTURIPPE - ADRANO, to

\* Actually, credit for the occupation for ENNA belongs to the Americans while LEONFORTE was not finally cleared of the enemy till the evening of 22 Jul.

outflank the enemy's strong line preparatory to the final drive into the MESSINA PENINSULA. (Hist Sec file SICILY/15 Army Gp/C/F, Account of Operations, op.cit.)

26. Meanwhile on 19 Jul, 14 Cdn Army Tk Regt reported their first contact with the enemy:

The Regiment had its first encounter with the enemy, when a patrol under Sgt. Batchelor of "A" Squadron came upon a party of eight Italians of an Artillery Regiment, in the hills behind camp. The Italians immediately gave themselves up and were escorted by the patrol to Bde H.Q. where they were interrogated. Here they revealed that there were approximately 5 or 6 more members of their Regiment hiding in the hills, and patrols were sent out to round them up.

(W.D., 14 Cdn Army Tk Regt, 19 Jul 43.)

27. On 21 Jul, the Brigade, less the Workshop and Ordnance Sub Park, started to move forward to concentrate in the area CONTRADA CUCCO. 11 Cdn Army Tk Regt led off at 2300 hrs, 20 Jul, arriving at their new headquarters at 0300 hrs, 21 Jul. (M.R. 754597, sheet Italy 56 1/250,000). Brigade headquarters made the journey in two stages establishing a temporary headquarters near VIGNALI (M.R. 0352) from whence, with 14 Cdn Army Tk Regt and 2 Cdn Lt Fd Amb, they completed the move to the Mt. VOGLIASI area (M.R. 790580). Some difficulty was experienced about three kilometres west of CARLENTINI where a bridge had been so weakened by the tanks of 11 Cdn Army Tk Regt the previous day that the carriers and tanks of the following units had to make their way across country. While this necessarily delayed the move, it was completed without mishap by 1000 hrs 22 Jul. (W.D., 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, 21-22 Jul 43.)

28. On the night 21-22 Jul, the enemy dropped paratroops in the vicinity of SCORDIA and FLORIDIA presumably to blow bridges. These may have been responsible for some of the intermittent sniping reported by nearly all units. Though it was not apparently effective in causing casualties, it kept all on the alert. On 23 Jul, the Brigade deployed into their new positions:

These positions were forward of the escarpment along the DITTAINO # River with an inter-regimental boundry Rd Junc 74911 - BR 781668 incl to 11 Cdn Army Tk Regt. This new position will come under the code name of WELLINGTON. The Bde's role is to support the A.Tk screen of 5 Div on the right or frustrate

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# More likely the GORNA LUNGA River.

enemy attempts (if any) to work around 51 Highland Divs southern flank on the left.

(W.D., 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, 23 Jul; appx 22 is a location state of the Brigade as at 25 Jul 43.)

These positions, while occupied on 23 Jul, were confirmed in an operation order dated 27 Jul, which stated as the intention:

The 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde will destroy all enemy attempting an attack between the left flank of 13 Corps and the right flank of 30 Corps.

(W.D., 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, Jul, appx 24.)

This order further detailed the method of occupation with trace and degrees of readiness (ibid).

29. On 26 Jul, General Montgomery visited the Brigade and met personnel of Brigade Headquarters, 11 and 14 Cdn Army Tk Regts and 2 Cdn Lt Fd Amb. He recalled that he had inspected 14 Cdn Army Tk Regt when they were with him in South Eastern Command in England and stated that he was "delighted to have Canadians with him at last" and added he "had been trying to get them with him for such a long time." The Brigade War Diary noted:

The General's visit and the interest he has taken in Canadian troops will remain as a main highlight of the 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde's experiences in SICILY.

(W.D., 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, 26 Jul 43)

30. During 29-30 Jul, the Brigade took part in an important deception scheme. The Brigade Diary outlined the scheme as follows:

A bogus wireless transmission manoeuvre was carried out this date by Bde HQ, 14 Cdn Army Tank Regt, 2 Cdn Lt Fd Amb (less dets) and 11 Cdn Army Tank Regt...This was part of a deception plan ordered by Eighth Army in which dummy tanks erected in area H9466 (PRIMOSOLE BRIDGE) during the night 29/30 Jul, and general activity in front line and "lying up area" were displayed in an effort to "feel" the enemy positions and intention. The Brigades part in this plan was

to occur between 2130 hrs 29 Jul with dispersal of wireless vehicles at 0015 hrs, 30 Jul. The movement itself was not carried out but all wireless stations took part in the deception and all normal transmissions and acknowledgements to simulate a move were passed over the area....Officers of Bde G.S., under direction of Major Cameron, proceeded to a fwd area south of the PRIMOSOLE BRIDGE and carried out bogus wireless transmission purporting to be those controlling the movement of an Army Tank Regt into an F.U.P. "C" Sqn, 1 Scorpion Regt\* carried out activity that would normally be done by a tank Regt, near the dummy tanks erected in the area.

(W.D., 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, 29-30 Jul 43.)

31. Thus ended the month of July. The Brigade had not been called upon to go into any offensive action, but had, during the month, moved from the United Kingdom to Sicily, landed, reorganized, and moved into a defensive position against the enemy. They found that their training covered the situations they had to face. The Services were able to cope with administrative and supply problems. The health of the Brigade had been affected somewhat by dysentery and diarrhoea and some malaria but strong preventive measures were taken against all these troubles.

\* The following description of a Scorpion is given by Capt. J.R. McLaughlin, G.S.O. 3, 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde: These scorpions are actually modified General Grant Tks with special attachments to clear paths through minefields. Projecting from either side of the tk from the front are two steel booms some 15 to 20 ft long from the ends of which is supported a huge steel drum. This drum is studded with I bolts from which are suspended lengths of very hy cable and chain which reach down to the ground with an excess length of about 18 inches. This drum revolves through the medium of an auxiliary motor (Ford V8) which transmits its power from the tk to the drum by means of a long driveshaft. On revolving the drum the chains act as flails, beating the ground in front of the drum and setting off any mines that may be there.

(Hist Sec file SICILY/1 Cdn Armd Bde/C/D.,)

Liaison and cooperation between British and Canadians had been at the highest level and there was apparently considerable mutual respect and admiration. (W.D., 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, 1 Aug 43.)

#### THE FINAL PHASE

32. The final phase of this campaign saw the Brigade filling a dual role. On 31 Jul, 11 Cdn Army Tk Regt was placed under command 13 (Brit) Inf Bde covering the SFERRO Bridge; 12 Cdn Army Tk Regt continued under command 1 Cdn Inf Div; 14 Cdn Army Tk Regt occupied a reserve position forward of the escarpment along the DITTAINO RIVER (see para 28).

33. The following paragraphs covering the operations of the 11 Cdn Army Tk Regt, while under command 13 Inf Bde, are based on an account by Lt.-Col M.P. Johnston, the Officer Commanding this Regiment, who stated:

We were placed under the command of 13 Bde Group commanded by Brig Lorne Campbell, V.C., D.S.O. & bar. His force consisted of the 2nd Cameronians, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers and the Wiltshire Regt. In addition, he had a battalion of the Royal Marines, a battalion of the Hampshires (near full strength), a battalion of the Cheshires, and a full complement of supporting arms including a Fd Regt, a Bty of medium guns and our own unit.

(Hist Sec file SICILY/1 Cdn Armd Bde C/D.)

The task, which had been allotted to the Brigade, was "to protect or defend two valuable bridgeheads at STIMPATO and SFERRO, which covered a frontage of about five miles" (ibid). The SFERRO crossing was the only approach to 51 (H) Div on the left, while the STIMPATO crossing protected the right flank and maintenance route for 51 (H) Div. Both of these points were "constantly under observation and movement of M.T. to the rear of that line could be made at night only" (ibid). The role given to the Regiment in the Brigade plan was:

To provide a strong, mobile armoured reserve with which the commander could quickly reinforce it in time and at any given point when and where an enemy counter attack might be thrown in (ibid).

This was done by holding "A" and "C" Squadrons in reserve with R.H.Q. on the right flank and placing "B" Squadron in a reserve role on the left flank.

34. The Regiment soon received its first warning for action.

On 1 Aug at 1240 hrs the Regt was ordered to stand-to on ten minutes notice to counter attack a possible enemy armoured force attacking on the SFERRO front (ibid).

The enemy force was estimated at about twenty-five tanks. At 6000 yards they were engaged by artillery, one tank was destroyed, the remainder then withdrew towards PATERNO. The next day, "B" Squadron, on the left, was required to neutralize two enemy mortar positions on the SFERRO front. A tank commanded by Capt. L.I. Knowles engaged these targets at 2,500 yards and destroyed them with ten rounds of H.E. "These were the first shots fired by the Regt in this war" (ibid).

35. 51 (H) Div, on the left, pushed a force forward to occupy the high ground east of the DITTAINO RIVER; at the same time patrols on the Brigade front reported very few enemy left in that area. On 3 Aug, a strong fighting patrol from the Wiltshires supported by two troops from "A" Squadron, thrust forward towards GERBINI aerodrome. Some opposition from 37 mm guns was met and neutralized. The same day, "B" Squadron covered a patrol of the Cameronians to MONTE TURCISI. They met little opposition accordingly the Brigade Commander decided to hold a bridge-head over the SIMETO RIVER. 11 Cdn Army Tk Regt was ordered to support the attack. "B" squadron was then detailed to support the Inniskillings from the high ground POGIO MONACO. This plan was abandoned as the bridge over this crossing had been demolished by the enemy. In order, however, to maintain the advance the Cameronians pushed forward in the area of the GERBINI aerodrome with "C" Squadron in support. At 1800 hrs on 4 Aug the whole regiment harboured at this point.

36. On the night 4/5 Aug, "A" Squadron, in support of the Wiltshires, was ordered to make contact with 15 Bde on the right flank. This proved a most difficult operation taking seven hours to cover five miles through a minefield cleared by the infantry. 5 Aug was spent in patrolling and on 6 Aug PATERNO was entered without opposition, the enemy having withdrawn before a planned attack was delivered.

37. On 7 Aug "B" Squadron in support of the Inniskillings moved towards Belpasso where they made contact with the enemy on the high ground N.E. of NICOLOSI. On 8 Aug, two troops of "B" Squadron supported an attack by the Inniskillings on the TREMONTI feature. The initial attack was successful, but a counter-attack forced the infantry to withdraw. The Commander 11 Cdn Army Tk Regt stated: "During this attack exceptional work was done by our own two troops of tanks which put us in great favour with the Innisks" (ibid). In this particular action the Regiment sustained its only battle casualty of the campaign when an N.C.O. was wounded in the leg.

38. The Regiment was delayed on Aug 9 by well sited demolitions and it was 1800 hrs before "A" Squadron was

able to support the Cameronians north of TRECASTAGNE. On 10 Aug, two troops of this squadron under Capt. Millen supported the Cameronians at ZAFFERENA ETNEA:

These troops occupied a very questionable position on the outskirts of the town and were subjected to continuous shelling all day. The Cameronians were held up on the north side of ZAFFERENA ETNEA by determined enemy resistance. At about 1800 hrs, these troops of tanks were successful in beating off the enemy and assisted in establishing the infantry on the high ground on the north of the town (*ibid*).

39. 13 Bde was relieved on 11 Aug by 15 (Brit) Bde and 11 Cdn Army Tk Regt reverted to the command of 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde. They returned to the Brigade concentration area on 13 Aug.

40. In concluding his account, the commanding officer, 11 Cdn Army Tk Regt says:

This constitutes the first time that a Canadian Unit came directly under British Command and although our task was a short and minor one we nevertheless felt gratified in the manner with which our assistance was received by the British troops with whom we fought (*ibid*).

41. On 8 Aug, General Montgomery ordered 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde to concentrate at once (W.D., 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, 8 Aug 43), "in the area between 74 and 82 Eastings and North of 55 Northing" (*ibid*). The concentration was not completed until 11 Aug as both 11 and 12 Cdn Army Tk Regts were engaged in operations. The three Regiments and Brigade Headquarters then concentrated in an area about SCORDIA. On this date, the Brigade Commander held a conference to discuss modifications in the organization and equipment in the light of recent operations, also problems of training and recreation during the coming weeks when a lull in operations was anticipated (W.D., 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, 11 Aug appx 16 is a memorandum of this meeting). During the night of 11-12 Aug an enemy air attack took place, some bombs falling in the harbour area of 11 Cdn Army Tk Regt, killing one other rank and wounding two others (W.D., 11 Cdn Army Tk Regt 11 Aug 43).

42. 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde came under command 1 Cdn Inf Div at 1200 hrs 11 Aug 43 (W.D., 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, 11 Aug 43). The purpose of this was "to centralize the Canadian command so that there will be uniformity of policy on all Canadian matters" (*ibid*). On 12 Aug 43 General G.G. Simonds, G.O.C., 1 Cdn Inf Div visited 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde. He discussed a number of subjects with Brigadier Wyman relative to the role of an Army Tank Brigade, its problems of reinforcement

and administration arising out of the fact that individual tank Regiments and even the Brigade itself might frequently be detached and placed under command of other formations (W.D., 1 Cdn Army Tk Regt, 12 Aug 43). It was decided that 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde "would be maintained as a separate formation" (ibid); the object of this being to enable the Brigade to move readily under command of any other formation and "to stand on its own feet" (ibid). Other matters discussed at this conference included discipline, general health and anti-malarial measures and relations with civilians (ibid).

43. MESSINA fell on 17 Aug thus ending the Sicilian campaign. General Montgomery visited the Brigade on 20 Aug and addressed all ranks. He outlined the successive steps of the campaign and the plan behind them. He also gave some intimation as to the future. A full account of this visit is given at appx 29, W.D., 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde for August, with additional impressions in each of the unit War Diaries in the Brigade.

44. The Brigade sports were held on 23 Aug. The sports were officially opened by Lt.-Gen A.G.L. McNaughton, who was then on a visit to Canadian formations in Sicily. Each unit had constructed a "float" representative of itself. These were collected and constructed with much ingenuity and fun for all. The final and crowning event was the officers' donkey race! The day was won by 11 Cdn Tk Regt. The programme and a special order by Brigadier Wyman relative to this event may be found in appx 28 and 30 in the Brigade War Diary for August.

45. The sports were followed, on 24 - 26 Aug by a study group for the Senior Officers in the Brigade. The detailed duties of key officer personnel were laid down on a Brigade basis; administrative problems were discussed; tactical drills in light of lessons learned were worked out and standardized. The study group in fact became a clearing house of ideas and experiences learned during the previous month. (W.D., 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, Aug appx 31.)

46. The end of the month found the Brigade well up to strength. The rear parties from the United Kingdom reached their units by 27 Aug. While there were very few casualties from battle, there were losses of personnel from enemy air action<sup>\*</sup>, accidents and sickness. The tank state by the end of the month showed 181 fit for battle, 15 for unit repair and eight for workshop. (W.D., 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, appx 38, Int log 30 Aug 43). On 31 Aug, the first units started to move to CATANIA to prepare for the operation which was to carry the Canadian troops across the STRAITS of MESSINA into the Italian Peninsula (W.D., 11 Cdn Tk Regt 31 Aug 43).

\* Unit War Diaries show 1 N.C.O. wounded (see para 37) in battle, 3 O.Rs. killed and 5 officers and 7 O.Rs. injured through air raids, mines or accidents.

## MEDICAL AND SUPPLY

47. Throughout the Sicilian campaign, 2 Cdn Lt Fd Amb had been attached to 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde. They positioned themselves in the Brigade area sending forward light sections in rotation as Advance Dressing Stations. These stations were not, judging from their diaries, kept very busy at first. However, before the middle of August, morning sick parades started mounting steadily, the chief complaints being diarrhoea and fever. The difficulty in diagnosing this fever was due apparently to the loss of the malaria panniers en route to Sicily. It was later found that as high as 80 per cent of these cases proved to be malaria. The War Diary of 2 Cdn Lt Fd Amb indicates that this unit displayed a great deal of initiative. Training in rapid movement was practised during the early days of the operation until the increase in patients made it necessary for the unit to devote their whole time to medical duties. Considerable time, thought and effort were directed to acquiring supplementary equipment and its conversion to suit the new role. On 31 Aug, the War Diarist of the unit wrote:

We are the only medical formation in this area at present and are acting as C.C.S., M.A.C. as well as field ambulance....We are getting a goodly number of surgical accident cases on this account...Since coming to the island we have cleared 638 Cdn's and 345 British other ranks, as well as 40 British Officers and 68 Cdn officers. We have returned 234 back to duty from here.\*

(W.D., 2 Cdn Lt Fd Amb 26-31 Aug. 43)

48. The first part of the Sicilian campaign found "A" Platoon, 83 Coy., R.C.A.S.C., under command 1 Cdn Div while they serviced 12 Cdn Army Tk Regt. The remainder of No. 83 Coy., R.C.A.S.C. landed the night 16-17 Jul and started drawing supplies for the Brigade on 18 Jul. Until 4 Aug, rations consisted of 14 man compo packs. On this date, 70 per cent of the Brigade were issued with Middle East force rations (hard scale); compo packs were still drawn for the remaining 30 per cent, to simplify the feeding of the forward elements of the Tank Regiments. The "A" and "Q" story of this campaign does not, however, properly belong to this account. Details may be found in the War Diaries of No. 83 Coy, R.C.A.S.C. and the "A" and "Q" appendix to the War Diary of 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde for July and August.

\* As stated by the 2 Cdn Lt Fd Amb, they performed medical duties including morning sick parades, for all units British or Canadian in the vicinity of their forward sections, and main headquarters and reception centre. These very high figures do not necessarily represent serious accidents or illness; in actual fact judging by the unit War Diaries, battle casualties were extremely light (see footnote to para 46).

49. The final conclusion, if one is to be drawn, is that, while very limited action was encountered, the experience of active service gained by all arms and services of the Brigade was invaluable at a very low cost in casualties and misadventures. At Appendix "D" is an outlined map of the east coast of Sicily tracing the movements of the Brigade.

50. This report was prepared by Captain R.F. Gray, S.D. & G. Highrs.

*R. F. Gray capt.*  
*for* (C.P. Stacey) Colonel,  
Historical Officer,  
CANADIAN MILITARY HEADQUARTERS

# APPENDIX "A"

## COMPOSITION AND STRENGTH - GROUP 1 "Y" FORCE

<u>Unit or Det.</u>	<u>Offrs</u>	<u>O R</u>	<u>Total</u>
H.Q. 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde	24	143	167
1 Cdn Army Tk Bde Sigs	3	71	74
11 Cdn Army Tk Regt	38	625	663
59 L.A.D. (RCOC) Type "C"	1	24	25
14 Cdn Army Tk Regt	37	624	661
61 L.A.D. (RCOC) Type "C"	1	24	25
1 Cdn Tk Del Sqn	11	186	197
1 Cdn Army Tk Bde Coy (83 Coy) RCASC	12	435	447
2 Cdn Lt Fd Amb	10	181	191
★ 3 Cdn Prov Sec		16	16
★ Det Cdn Public Relations	4	11	15
1 Cdn Tk Bde Wksp	5	191	196
1 Cdn Tk Bde Sub Pk	3	78	81
1 Cdn Hy Rec Sec	2	80	82
1 Cdn Tk Tps Wksp	6	250	256
★ 1 Cdn Inf Tps Wksp	6	177	183
★ 1 Cdn Div Sub Pk	4	137	141
★ Auxilliary Services	4	8	12
★ Graves Registration	-	4	4
★ 70 Med Regt less one Bty			
★ 70 Med Regt Sig Sec			
★ 70 L.A.D. (RCOC)	20	288	308
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	191	3553	3744

(Appendix "D" to 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde O.O. No.1 - 1 Jun 43.)

★ Units marked ★ belonged to "X" Force but due to shipping space were "shut out" of convoys K.M.F.18 and K.M.S.18. They were therefore included in convoys K.M.F.19 and K.M.S.19.

COMPOSITION OF CONVOYS K.M.F.19 AND K.M.S.19THE FAST FOLLOW-UP CONVOY KMF 19

LSP	)	Empire PRIDE	)	
Personnel	)	DUNNOTTAR CASTLE	)	Force "X"
Ships	)	ARUNDEL CASTLE	)	
Personnel		CAMERONIA		Tk Bde Gp 1 of
Ship				Force "Y"
Personnel		ORMONDE		Airfield operating &
Ship				Airfield defence plus
				advance Recce party
				(Group 2 of Force "Y")
Personnel	)	BANFORA	)	R.N. and Army Port
Ships	)	LETITIA	)	defence & General
		FRANCONIA	)	Hospital (Gp 3 of
				Force "Y")

THE SLOW FOLLOW-UP CONVOY KMS 19  
(Relative to "Y" Force)

M.T. Ships		MIDDLESEX TRADER (Commodore Group 1)		
		ALBERT CUYP	)	
		LAMBROOK	)	
		EMPIRE GRANGE	)	
		EMPIRE NERISSA	)	
		FORT YORK	)	
		FORT YALE	)	
		CHERTSEY	)	TANK BRIGADE
IST (2)	63	)		GROUP 1
	64	)		
	164	)		OF FORCE "Y"
	198	)		
	200	)		
	418	)		
Cased Petrol	JADE	)		
Ships	COXWOLD	)		
M.T. Ships		CITY OF DELHI (Commodore Group II)		
		FORTHBANK	)	Airfield Operating and
		EMPIRE NEWTON	)	Airfield defence plus
		CITY OF NEW CASTLE	)	advance Recce Party
		DEFENDER	)	(Gp 2 Force "Y")
M.T. Ships	JOHN BAKKE	)	R.N. and Army	)
	CAPE HOWE	)	Port defence &	)
	OCEAN VIKING	)	General Hospi-	)
	EMPIRE FLORIZEL	)	tal.	)
	OCEAN VIRTUE	)		)
				Group 3 of
				Force "Y"

(Hist Sec file "HUSKY"/RC/C/I File No.3)

## APPENDIX "C"

### LIST OF THE OFFICERS OF 1 CDN ARMY TK BDE BY APPOINTMENT:

Bde Comd	Brig. R.A. Wyman, C.B.E., D.S.O., E.D.
Bde Major	Major E.F. Schmidlin, M.B.E.
DAA&QMG	Major H. Williamson
GSO III	Major D.F. Cameron, M.B.E.
DADME	Major R.H. Noble, O.B.E.
S.C.	Capt. N.T. Leggett
S.L.	Capt. W.T. Hunter (M.L.O.)
BRASCO	Capt. F.G. Swanson
I.O.	Lieut J.R. McLaughlin
L.Os.	Capt. C.J. MacDonald
	Lieut W.J. E. Simmons
	Lieut.D.S. Clapperton
DADOS	Capt. L.M. Gillespie
Sub Fd	
Cashier	Capt. J. Curran
Paymaster	Capt. C. Polley

(W.D., 1 Cdn Army Tk Bde, Jul 43)

### UNIT COMMANDERS

Lt.-Col M.P. Johnston, E.D.	11 Cdn Tk Regt (Ontario Regt)
★ Lt.-Col E.L.Booth, D.S.O.& Bar	12 Cdn Army Tk Regt (Three Rivers)
Lt.-Col C.H. Neroutsos, D.S.O.	14 Cdn Army Tk Regt (Calgary Regt)
★ in "X" Group with 1 Cdn Inf Div	

**1 CDN ARMY TK BDE**

— SICILY JUL-AUG 1943 —

