

NOTE

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

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

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

July 1986

~~CANCELLED~~

Cinema Films Taken at Canadian Corps H.Q.  
Newsreel Films of Canadian Activity

---

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

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

1. A further report is presented. This deals with moving-picture films made by the Photographic Section at Canadian Corps Headquarters.
2. On 19 Mar 41 Lieutenant-General McNAUGHTON, in the course of a conversation with me at C.M.H.Q., suggested that I should ask Capt. G.F. PURCELL, Public Relations Officer at Cdn Corps H.Q., to arrange a screening of these films, and that I should offer comments on the question of arranging and captioning them and the matter of their historical value.

VISIT TO CORPS HEADQUARTERS

3. I got in touch with Capt. PURCELL and he arranged to have the films screened for me at HEADLEY COURT on the afternoon of 25 Mar. Ten reels, constituting a large part of the Corps film library, were shown. The subjects were as follows (though my list may not be quite complete):
  - (i) Visits of General CHARLES and Hon. JAMES G. GARDINER (including Tunnelling Company demonstrations).
  - (ii) Gen. McNaughton inspecting vehicles, summer 1940.  
Visit of H.R.H. the Duke of GLOUCESTER (demonstrations of reconnaissance units, bridging, etc.)
  - (iii) Visit of Mr. and Mrs. CHURCHILL, Mr. EDEN, Lord IRONSIDE.
  - (iv) Demonstration of road-cratering by Tunnelling Company (Tanks attempting to cross and not succeeding; Road Construction Company proceeds to repair the damage).
  - (v) Further tank-trap demonstrations by Tunnelling Company (captioned). Tank demonstration for Canadian Junior War Staff Course.
  - (vi) The most recent film: Visit of Rt. Hon. MALCOLM MacDONALD (demonstrations by ROYAL MONTREAL REGT. etc.)
  - (vii) Signals and Engineer demonstrations (demolition, etc.) for C.J.W.S.C.



- (viii) Army Field Workshop and Mobile Laundry demonstrations for C.J.W.S.C.
- (ix) "Canada Road" (The REDHILL By-Pass)  
 (Captioned account of its construction)
- (x) Tank demonstration.

4. The films have, of course, many of the marks of the amateur operator upon them, and are uneven in quality: but on the average I was rather agreeably surprised by the standard they attained. With growing experience and perhaps greater opportunities, the improvised film unit at Corps H.Q. should produce further films of very considerable historical interest.

5. The films were shown by Private W.C. FENWICK, who took them. He explained to me that the Photographic Section consists of himself and another man for darkroom work. It takes still pictures as well as "movies". It has existed since the summer of 1940. Fenwick had had some amateur experience with a cinema camera in civil life. All the work so far done has been with 16-mm. film,

6. I prepared a memorandum making some general observations on the films, in the form of a letter to the B.G.S., C.M.H.Q., for transmission to Corps. A copy of this memorandum is attached as Appendix "A" of the present Report.

#### PROPOSED FILM UNIT, C.M.H.Q.

7. In this connection, it is worthy of note that a cable (Defensor to Camilitary, 19 Mar 41) has pointed out that so far the system of "feeding" items on Canadian activities in the United Kingdom into the newsreel films prepared in New York for Canadian circulation has not produced satisfactory results. It is proposed (tentatively) as a remedial measure the organization of a small film unit (to consist of one Lieutenant and two assistants) in the office of the Public Relations Officer at C.M.H.Q. This would obviate our present enforced reliance on commercial newsreel companies. Such a unit would of course be composed of professionals and would use 35 mm. equipment, and would thus produce films of a more advanced type than those made by the improvised unit at Corps H.Q.

8. This appears to me a moderate and sensible proposal, and one likely, if adopted, to result in our obtaining an admirable collection of historical films dealing with Canadian military activity in this country. I hope, therefore, that it will be carried into effect.

9. While it is scarcely my function to make suggestions in this matter, I may mention that it has been a source of surprise to me for some years past that Canada has been forced to rely for her newsreel films so exclusively on American sources. Many times I have heard Canadian audiences laugh at the ludicrous mis-pronunciations of Canadian proper names and misunderstanding of Canadian situations found in the remarks of American commentators which have been superimposed in New York on film taken in Canada; and I have often noted also the low technical quality of these Canadian scenes that have been fed into the American newsreels. The present moment, when excellent short feature films are being produced in Canada, would seem to offer an opportunity for reviewing the newsreel situation in general, with a view to the possibility of bringing the control of Canadian newsreels into Canadian hands and thus ensuring the accurate presentation of Canada's war effort, in the United Kingdom and elsewhere, to the Dominion's public.



10. Captain ABEL (Public Relations Officer, C.M.H.Q.) asked me some time ago to attend a screening of the newsreel films already taken commercially of Canadian activities in this country, with a view to giving advice as to what prints should be purchased for purposes of historical record. Needless to say, I was glad to promise to do so. Captain Abel has not yet succeeded in arranging this screening.

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

(Copied in Historical Section, Jul 43.)



31 Mar 41.

Brigadier, General Staff,  
CANADIAN MILITARY HEADQUARTERS.

CINEMA FILMS.

1. On 19 March 41, the General Officer Commanding Canadian Corps suggested to me that I take an early opportunity of seeing a screening of the cinema films taken by the Photographic Section at Cdn. Corps H.Q., with a view to offering advice on the question of their historical value and on the best manner of captioning them and otherwise arranging them for exhibition.
2. On 25 March, I visited Corps H.Q., and about ten reels of film were screened for me. The following observations are submitted.
3. The quality of the films seemed to me to be quite high, and I believe that with a little more effort in editing and captioning, they could be made into something which, in addition to having material historical value, might have considerable immediate interest for Service audiences in Canada.
4. Only two or three of the films seen had been captioned; notably, one dealing with a tank-obstacle demonstration by No.1 Tunnelling Company, R.C.E., and another dealing with the Redhill By-Pass. Even in these cases, the captioning was not very complete. I am of the opinion that captioning is likely to be of special importance in films such as these, taken by a photographer who cannot make his subjects "pose" for him, but must take what he can get as events move on; for it may have to supply parts of the story which the camera could not catch and which there is no sound-track to supply.
5. From the historical point of view, what is most important is a complete and accurate record of the circumstances in which the film was taken; the date, the place, the unit, etc. The negatives of the films taken at Corps H.Q. are apparently being fairly completely labelled. It would be a further safeguard if the relevant facts were also included in the captions of the prints. It seems desirable that the Photographic Section should also maintain a full register of films taken, if this is not already being done. It would be useful, both for immediate and for historical purposes, if full identifications of equipment shown could be recorded - e.g. "Bofors 40-mm. gun Mark II", or the like.
6. It seems likely that audiences of officers in Canada would welcome the opportunity to see such material as demonstrations of various types of tanks and anti-tank obstacles, or films on the work of the Road Construction Company. Much preliminary arranging would be necessary however. For example, the account of the Redhill By-Pass in the film as now arranged, struck me as lacking clarity. I believe that more captions and (assuming that the film was being prepared for private showing to Service audiences)



at least one map, would be required to clarify it and add interest; while the expenditure of more film in "shots" of the completed road might also be necessary.

7. I gathered that not much has so far been done in the way of attempting to make a film record of Corps exercises, and it occurs to me that such films, if made, might have some historical value as a record of the present phase of the war.

8. I doubt whether cinema films will have more than a rather limited value in the future as historical material in the narrow sense - i.e., as contributions to the preparation of an Official History. They will, however, be important from the point of view of the possibilities they present for telling the Canadian people at large, -including a great many who will never, by any stretch of imagination, open the Official History, -something of what their countrymen did in this war. It seems possible that a series of cinema films of a unit's work on active service might have a more powerful and useful effect in promoting sound morale in peacetime than the most scholarly regimental history ever composed.

9. Films would presumably be more effective for such purposes if they were of the full 35-mm. size instead of the 16-mm. size now used.

10. I shall be happy to give any assistance in my power in connection with the work of the Photographic Section at any time. The photographic branch of the Public Relations staff at C.M.H.Q. might be able to give valuable advice in connection with arranging and editing these films.

(C.P. Stacey) Major,  
HISTORICAL OFFICER: C.M.H.Q.

(Copied in Historical Section, Jul 43.)