

NOTE

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No. 1 Canadian Convalescent Depot,
BRIXHAM, DEVON.

CANCELLED

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 a recent visit to No. 1 Convalescent Depot, R.C.A.M.C., stationed at BRIXHAM, DEVON, and with the activities and problems of this unit.
2. As I have made it a practice to seize convenient opportunities of visiting detached Canadian establishments, and as it had several times been suggested to me by senior officers that No. 1 Convalescent Depot was worth a visit, I accepted the invitation of Major J.P. PAGE (TORONTO SCOTTISH), G.S.O. 2 (I), C.M.H.Q., to accompany him on a flying trip to BRIXHAM by motor car, leaving LONDON on 20 May 41. Major Page had to visit the Depot to investigate certain matters of security and local defence.

JOURNEY TO BRIXHAM

3. In company with Major Page, Captain E.A. CHAMBERLAIN (who holds the appointment known as I.O.I.B. at H.Q., Cdn Corps) and Lt. J. PARRES, R.C.E., who was to inspect the Depot from an engineering standpoint, I left LONDON early in the morning of 20 May 41. (Major Page informs me that in his opinion "I.O.I.B." really ought to be "I.O. 1 B"; it denotes the Intelligence Officer in charge of matters of internal security.) We drove by the route SALISBURY - SHAFTESBURY - YEOVIL - CREWKERNE - HONITON - TEIGNMOUTH -

TORQUAY - PAIGNTON. The latter part of this route lying along the Channel coast, we had an opportunity of seeing something of the "beach defences" of this western region. As in the more easterly section of the coast (see my Report No. 23) Dannert wire is much in evidence, and around TEIGNMOUTH and TORQUAY we saw a good many sentries on duty along the "front". The pier at TORQUAY has been cut, like those at BRIGHTON.

4. The roads on and adjacent to the coast in this area are frequently blocked by heavily-constructed obstacles, usually taking the form of walls built out from the roadside in pairs: i.e., a wall is built out from the right side, but not across the whole width of the road, and a few yards beyond a similar wall is built out from the left side, the effect being to prevent any vehicle from passing except at the very low speed enforced by the necessary sharp turn. Such obstacles, I am told, were common also in south-eastern England last summer; but before my arrival most of them had been cut out or much modified, not merely because they were a serious hindrance to ordinary traffic but because it was considered that they would hamper the free movements of our own mobile forces in case of invasion. In this region, however, they still remain.

5. It may be worth while to remark that in Devon and Somerset the roads are even narrower and more curving than in eastern England, and the hedges enclosing them are frequently high and solid banks of turf. Steep hills are numerous. This region would appear to be an unfavourable field of operations for armoured fighting vehicles. It may also be noted that the lower reaches of the rivers in this area constitute somewhat formidable military obstacles; there is no bridge across the DART lower than TOTNES. At the same time, it is needless to observe that the course of the recent operations in Greece suggests the unwisdom of relying too much on natural obstacles to halt the progress of German A.F.V.'s.

SITE AND ACTIVITIES OF NO. 1 CONVALESCENT DEPOT

6. No. 1 Convalescent Depot, R.C.A.M.C., is at present stationed approximately half a mile from the town of BRIXHAM, and south-east of the centre of the town. It occupies two groups of light wooden buildings constructed in peacetime as seaside "holiday camps". One of these, DOLPHIN CAMP, has been occupied by the Depot since 28 May 40 (see the unit's War Diary under this date). The other, ST.MARY'S CAMP, was taken over much more recently. The officer attached to the Depot as Adjutant (Lt. R.S.J. SEALY, R.M.R. (M.G.)) told me that it had been occupied by the unit just over a month at the time of our visit; I find no reference to the exact date of occupation in the unit's War Diary (an inadequate one) save that under 18 Feb 41 it is noted that an inventory was made of ST. MARY'S "prior to our taking over" and under 23 Feb 41 the arrival of equipment for this camp is noted.

7. DOLPHIN CAMP is situated within a couple of hundred yards of the sea, in a little valley sloping down to the shore of ST.MARY'S BAY, a roughly semi-circular cove lying between DURL HEAD to the north and SHARKHAM POINT to the south. The map reference is about 360767 (Ordnance Survey of England and Wales, Sheet 145) (one-inch). ST.MARY'S CAMP lies a little closer to the sea, two or three hundred yards to the north-east. The cliffs along this stretch of coast, though not very high, are in general fairly steep. Immediately in front of DOLPHIN CAMP they are quite low and broken, and paths lead from the beach up to the camp. This point is assailable from the sea, and with this possibility in mind sandbagged posts have been constructed along the brow of the cliffs, and a narrow belt of barbed wire strung above the beach. This work was done by detachments of the 8th Bn THE BUFFS (see various references in 1 Convalescent Depot War Diary, Oct 40, Jan 41, Feb 41). At the moment, however, the limited British forces available in this sector have no troops actually allotted to beach defence at this point, and this has occasioned some anxiety at C.M.H.Q. On these matters, see the report of Major Page, annexed as Appendix "A".

8. The Depot is in an area which enemy aircraft are constantly passing over at night, but it had not itself been the object of enemy action until the day before our visit (i.e., 19 May 41). On that day shortly after 0900 hrs two enemy planes flew over BRIKHAM, dropped bombs which did some damage, and then flew in the direction of the camp. One passed over it, the other passed some distance away. The former apparently fired on the camp (DOLPHIN CAMP, where the morning parade was in progress) with its machine-guns, and the men on parade scattered; but no casualties or damage resulted, and no bullet-marks were found.

9. DOLPHIN CAMP consists of a large number of small separate wooden "chalets", each housing one or two men (there is some reference to the arrangement in my Report No. 7) and a large central building which houses the messing and entertainment facilities. As already noted, it was built as a summer holiday camp, and the buildings were not meant for winter habitation. The camp, however, was occupied by the Depot throughout the past winter, the chalets being heated by means of oil stoves. The officers told me that though there was no snow, there was a great deal of wind during the winter, and the camp cannot have been very comfortable in such conditions.

10. ST.MARY'S CAMP is built in the same manner as DOLPHIN CAMP.

11. A more accurate impression of DOLPHIN CAMP and its surroundings than can be given in words is afforded by a number of official photographs taken by Mr. AUDRAIN on 24 Mar 41. These are to be found in film series Nos. 163 and 164, which include some pictures which show the relation of the camp to the shore. A print of one of these is attached as Appendix "B".

12. On 20 May 41 the total number of convalescents at the Depot was 325, not including a further party which arrived that evening. I was told that DOLPHIN CAMP had bed accommodation for about 240 convalescents, and ST.MARY'S CAMP for about 200. The permanent staff of the Depot at this time was 10 officers (four of whom, including the C.O., are in the Medical and one in the Dental Corps) and 58 other ranks.

13. The Officer Commanding the Depot is Lt.-Col. A.P. PLANTE, R.C.A.M.C., who is, I believe, a member of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Quebec. Several of the other officers are also French Canadians, including Captain LEBRUN, who is in charge of physical training.

14. The convalescents are organized in two companies. "A" Coy, housed in DOLPHIN CAMP, comprises the men unfit for duty, many of them fracture cases; its strength was 209 convalescents on the day of our visit. This company, Lt.-Col. Plante told me, was shortly to be dressed in blue, but it was in battle dress at the time of our visit. "B" Coy, in ST. MARY'S CAMP, and numbering 116 convalescents on the day in question, consists of men capable of light or full duty. The normal procedure when a man arrives at the Depot is to confine him to barracks for two days and post him to "A" Coy, whence in due time he graduates to "B" Coy, which undertakes an extended programme of P.T., route marches, etc., designed to assist men in regaining their strength. On being discharged from the Depot the man is posted to the appropriate Holding Unit.

15. "B" Coy, and the permanent staff of the Depot, represent the elements capable of presenting some resistance to the enemy in the event of a German enterprise against this region. Normally, however, only about 50 rifles are available at the Depot in addition to those of the permanent staff.

16. No. 1 Convalescent Depot is the only Canadian convalescent depot at present in this country. It landed at GLASGOW on 9 Feb 40 (i.e., with T.C. 3) (see unit War Diary under this date) and was stationed at BORDON until moved to BRIKHAM as noted above (para. 6).

VISIT OF COLONEL MANION

17. Our visit to the Depot coincided with that of Colonel the Hon. R.J. MANION (formerly leader of the Conservative Party in the Canadian House of Commons) who is at present conducting a survey of the work of the Canadian Auxiliary Services in this country, and is travelling widely. He told me that he was about to travel to

Scotland to investigate the nature of the arrangements made for the Canadian Forestry Corps. (I have since seen him in LONDON, after his return, and he told me that in his opinion the C.F.C. required more attention from the Auxiliary Services than they have so far been receiving. On this matter, cf. my Report No. 29.)

VISIT TO DARTMOUTH

18. On the evening of 20 May I drove with Major Page to KINGSWEAR, where we took the ferry across the DART to DARTMOUTH, where Major Page wished to call on an acquaintance, Captain CUNLIFFE, R.N., Captain of the Royal Naval College.

20. The DART estuary at this point forms a small but useful harbour which is used to some extent for convey purposes. There was a considerable concentration of shipping present at the time of our visit: a number of merchant vessels of moderate size, a large armed yacht, several motor torpedo boats, and various patrol craft. Near the lower ferry on the DARTMOUTH side of the harbour is an old stone tower (labelled "CASTLE" on the Ordnance map, but not to be confused with Henry VIII's castle at the mouth of the harbour) evidently dating from the early days of effective artillery and pierced for guns. I was amused to note that the platform where in former times the guns must have stood, which would normally be open to the sky, has been covered with a concrete canopy over the interior of the embrasures, presumably with a view to the use of the structure as a machine-gun post commanding the harbour.

21. We visited the Royal Naval College and Major Page introduced me to Captain Cunliffe. Major Page called the defensive situation of the Convalescent Depot to Captain Cunliffe's attention (he is Senior Naval Officer in this area) and he promised to bear it in mind.

RETURN JOURNEY

22. We left the Convalescent Depot soon after 0900 hrs on 21 May. Major Page wished to consult the local British military authorities on the situation of the Depot. Accordingly we proceeded to NEWTON ABBOT, where he called on the D.C.R.E. Devon and Cornwall Division.

This so-called Division is not an operational formation, but is really an area command. Defensive operations in this region, Major Page discovered, are under the 8th Corps, which has however delegated large authority to a series of independent brigade groups. The BRIXHAM region comes under the ^{Infantry} 208th Brigade Group, with headquarters at BERRY POMEROY, near TOTNES. We proceeded to this place (a picturesque little village overflowing with flowers) and Major Page interviewed the Brigadier; on this interview, see his report annexed. It will be noted that 208 Bde Gp has very extensive responsibilities.

23. We returned to LONDON by the same general route as that of our outward journey, and arrived at C.M.H.Q. about 2000 hrs, 21 May 41.

C.S.

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

C O P Y

6/1 Conv. Depot/1

29 May 41.

TO:

G.S.O. (S.D)

Defence Scheme -

No. 1 Convalescent Depot, R.G.A.M.C.

With reference to folio 54 on file 6/1 Conv. Depot/4, I would like to make the following comments on defensive conditions at No. 1 Convalescent Depot.

- A.D. At 0910 hours 19 May 41 two bombs were dropped on Brixham, the enemy plane then dispersing a parade at this Depot. Officers present reported M.G. fire, but no bullet marks were in evidence. No fire was returned.
- (a) Pits for A.A. L.M.G.s have been well built, and fairly well placed in both Dolphin and St. Mary's Camps, but NO guns are mounted.
 - (b) Only 2 L.M.G.s are on charge (one defective), although B.G.S. wrote A.Q.M.G. (O.S.) on 26 February 41 (folio 36A 6/1 Conv. Depot/1) asking that 4 more be furnished.
 - (c) No effort has been made to camouflage this Camp, and it may well serve as a guide for enemy aircraft. Parades on the open square are vulnerable.
 - (d) A.D. scheme herewith Appendix 1 - good, but instructions "B" not complied with.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) That D.Q.M.G. be asked to supply the 4 additional L.M.G.s forthwith.
- (2) That at least 2 A.A. L.M.G.s (one per Camp) be mounted and manned from dawn to dusk daily.
- (3) That all permanent personnel - 58 O.R.s and convalescent personnel of the Non Fracture Company be trained to man the remaining 4 guns.
- (4) That the white chalets be painted dark green (including the roofs).

DEFENCE.

This question has been the subject of considerable correspondence. Appendices 3 to 8 herewith prove conclusively that the Depot is NOT responsible for Coast Defence at St. Mary's Bay, but only for local protection of its own Camp area.

Unfortunately the Formation administering this area - Devon and Cornwall Division operating under VIII Corps - has insufficient troops for efficient protection. 209 Infantry Brigade - Headquarters Berry Pomeroy, Nr. Totnes, Devon, has been allotted 60 miles of coast. The Brigade is under strength, and has no reserve.

I spoke to the Brigadier, who was the first to admit that No. 1 Convalescent Depot could not be considered responsible for the coastline of St. Mary's Bay in any respect. Nevertheless he had asked for Col. Plante's co-operation in view of the shortage of troops in his Brigade.

Colonel Plante is reported to have agreed, particularly as the R.A.F. Convalescent Hospital nearby at Ter Bay has also agreed to help him by manning a considerably greater portion of the coast.

By actual inspection at 0030 hours on 21 May 41 there was no sign of any soldier, home guard, coast-guard, or other form of observer or defence on the two-mile stretch in front of the Convalescent Depot.

Col. Plante is under the impression that he will be able to evacuate the complete Depot in the event of Invasion. In view of his lack of transport, and the fact that no reception area has been arranged, and also that it is hoped to keep the roads free at such a time, I do not consider this plan practicable, and if his 50% personnel capable of bearing arms are actually in the Camp, I feel that they should be in a position to defend themselves.

(Sgd.) John P. Page

(J.P. Page) Major G.S.
Canadian Military Headquarters

Appendices do not accompany this copy.

C.P.S.

Appx B to CMHQ31

