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July 1986

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Authority: DHD 3-3

by Ex-100 for DHist NDHQ
Date: 29 Jun 41 24 JUL 1986

Situation of the Canadian Forces
in the United Kingdom, Summer, 1941: I

Position and Role of Canadian Forces



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2 Cockspur Street, S.W. 1,
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The Director,
Historical Section,
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1. A further report is submitted. This consists of a brief recapitulation and summary of the present position and strategic role of the Canadian forces in the United Kingdom. Their position and their role have not changed materially in recent months; this, therefore, supplemented by numerous references in the reports which I have forwarded since my arrival in this country in December, 1940, may serve to summarize the situation in these respects as it has existed during the first half of the year 1941.
2. The present report is the first of a series, to be forwarded, it is hoped, at intervals during the next few weeks, which is designed to meet the wishes of the Director, Historical Section (G.S.) as expressed in letter H.Q.S. 8676-1 of 10 Apr 41. This letter informed the Historical Officer, C.M.H.Q., of the desirability of undertaking a quarterly general survey of a large number of topics.
3. As explained in these Headquarters' letter 6/Historical/1 (GS) of 12 May 41, it may not be possible for the Historical Officer to cover all the topics mentioned, at least with any thoroughness; but an attempt will be made to survey, in a manner likely to assist and guide the Official Historian, those subjects which in the light of conditions in this country and particularly of the conversations of the Historical Officer with senior officers of the Canadian Army Overseas appear to be of fundamental importance.

POSITION OF THE CANADIAN FORCES

4. While it is unnecessary to reproduce here a complete location statement for the Canadian troops in the United Kingdom, which will be easily available to the historian from other sources, a brief summary of the general situation may be of some value.
5. The matter of greatest interest is the position of the Canadian Corps, commanded by Lieut.-General McNAUGHTON. This may be outlined as follows.
6. The Canadian Corps remains in the same position south of the River THAMES, and south and south-west of LONDON, which it has occupied since it came into existence on 25 Dec 40. As a Corps in reserve, it cannot be said to have a completely defined Corps Area; but its units are quartered in the region immediately south of LONDON and extending from ALDERSHOT on the west to WESTERHAM on the east. On the location map in the operations room at Corps H.Q. the most westerly unit is No. 400 (A/G) Squadron, R.C.A.F., which supplies the Corps' air component and is stationed at ODIHAM; the most easterly unit is the SEAFORTH HIGHLANDERS OF CANADA, at LIMPFIELD, on the eastern edge of Surrey.
7. Headquarters, Canadian Corps, remains at HEADLEY COURT, near LEATHERHEAD (map reference 837748); see my Report No. 10.
8. The First Canadian Division, and the Corps Troops, remain in the GUILDFORD - WESTERHAM area into which the CANADIAN FORCE moved early in July, 1940 (see my Report No. 15, Appendix "B").
9. The First Canadian Division (Major-General PEARCE) is in billets in the general area WALTON-ON-THE-HILL - WESTERHAM. The Division maintains an Advanced Headquarters at HOLMESDALE (or HOLMESDALE) COURT, NUFFIELD (map reference 748895; see my Report No. 11) and a Rear Headquarters at BRANDT HOUSE not far away (map reference 754896). Its three Infantry Brigade Groups are disposed as follows:
 - 1 Cdn Inf Bde Gp, the region about REIGATE: H.Q., HEDGECROFT (map ref. 660727) near THE HERMITAGE, S. of WALTON ON THE HILL.

2 Cdn Inf Bde Gp, the region about OXTED: H.Q., WOODLANDS (821697), near TANDRIDGE.

3 Cdn Inf Bde Gp, the region about CATERHAM: H.Q., TINNIVELLI, TUPWOOD UPWOOD ? RD., CATERHAM (762735).

10. The Corps Troops are chiefly in billets in the region between LEATHERHEAD and GUILDFORD, west of 1 Cdn Div.

11. The Second Canadian Division is in barracks in and about ALDERSHOT, with its H.Q. in the former 2nd (British) Division H.Q. on QUEENS AVENUE at HAMMERSLEY RD. The Brigade Groups' Headquarters are as follows:

4 Cdn Inf Bde Gp, KNOLLYS ROAD (EAST).

5 Cdn Inf Bde Gp, KNOLLYS ROAD (WEST).

6 Cdn Inf Bde Gp, GUILLEMONT BARRACKS (COVE).

12. The above particulars of locations derive from the latest location statements in the hands of the G.S.O. (M.I.), C.M.H.Q.

UNITS NOT IN CANADIAN CORPS

13. A large proportion of the Canadian troops now in the United Kingdom are not on the strength of the Canadian Corps. The most important groups outside it are noted hereunder.

14. BASE UNITS. The largest of these groups comprises the HOLDING UNITS, in which the first reinforcements for field units in this country are held. These are located in the BORDON - WITLEY area of Hants and Surrey, to the south of ALDERSHOT and convenient to the area occupied by the Corps. Headquarters, CANADIAN BASE UNITS, is at BROXHEAD HOUSE, BORDON (see my Report No. 4). The three groups of HOLDING UNITS have their Headquarters at the following locations:

"A" Group (Inf. and M.G.), LAURENTIDE CAMP (formerly called Camp 102), WITLEY.

"B" Group (R.C.E., R.C.C.S., R.C.A.S.C., GENERAL), OAKLEY COTTAGE, BORDON.

"C" Group (Artillery), QUEBEC LODGE, BORDON.

These units are partly in barracks and partly in hutted camps.

15. ANTI-AIRCRAFT AND ANTI-TANK UNITS. On the Canadian A.A. and A.Tk. Group, organized at COLCHESTER for training purposes, see my Report No. 18 and Addendum.

16. FORESTRY CORPS. The Canadian Forestry Corps units now in this country are at work in scattered locations in the Scottish Highlands. See my Report No. 29, Appendix "A".

17. MEDICAL UNITS. Canadian hospitals and allied establishments are likewise scattered. See my Reports Nos. 7 (and Addendum) and 31. Except for minor individual establishments such as the Canadian Base Depot (see my Report No. 32) and detachments such as that from No. 1 Tunnelling Company, R.C.E., working at LOCH LAGGAN (see my Report No. 30) the above statement describes the general situation of the Canadian military forces in this country at the present time.

NUMERICAL STRENGTH OF THE FORCES

32. While the Official Historian will have full particulars of strengths available to him, it may be worth while to set down here the basic figures of strengths for the Canadian troops at present in the United Kingdom. As compiled by A.G. (Statistics), C.M.H.Q., the totals as of 6 Jun 41 are as follows:

| | <u>Officers</u> | <u>Other Ranks</u> |
|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| C.M.H.Q. | 137 | 613 |
| 1st Cdn Div | 757 | 14525 |
| 2nd Cdn Div | 774 | 14468 |
| Corps Troops | 589 | 12540 |
| Reinforcements | 660 | 10157 |
| Others not included | 1038 | 10731 |
| TOTAL CDN TROOPS IN U.K. | <u>5955</u> | <u>63123</u> |

The "Others not included" figure includes the units mentioned in paras. 15, 16 and 17, above, and the permanent personnel of the Holding Units. The discrepancy of 89 between the components and the grand total of other ranks is due chiefly to errors in Holding Units figures, but I gather that the grand total is considered to be accurate.

19. It should also be noted that the above figures include the Canadian detachments at GIBRALTAR, as follows:

| | | |
|---|-------------|------------|
| No. 1 Tunnelling Coy R.C.E. (Special Detachment) | Offrs. 1 | O.R. 20 |
| No. 2 Tunnelling Coy R.C.E. | 9 | 217 |

These are included in the category "Others not included".

STRATEGIC ROLE OF THE CANADIAN CORPS

20. The following brief summary of the strategic role of the Canadian Corps is based upon an interview with Brigadier E.L.M. BURNS, O.B.E., M.C., (who has recently taken up the appointment of B.G.S. at Corps Headquarters) on 9 Jun 41; on reading of the relevant files at C.M.H.Q.; and on observation of exercises in which the Corps has participated.

21. Attention is directed to my previous Reports Nos. 11, 13 and 23, dealing with Corps exercises, in which much information on this matter is incorporated. A concrete example of the Corps role was provided in South-Eastern Command Exercise "WATERLOO" (14-16 Jun 41); this exercise will be made the subject of a subsequent separate Report.

22. It will be recalled that the original role of the Canadian forces in this country was conceived as being operations in France with the British Expeditionary Force, and portions of the First Canadian Division actually spent a few days in France in June 1940, as briefly described in my Report No. 15. The collapse of France led to the assumption of a new role, which had already been fore-shadowed in the move of the Canadian Force to NORTHAMPTON in May, 1940 (Report No. 15, Appendices "A" and "B").

23. The new role was one of counter-attack against any enemy forces attempting the invasion of Britain which might penetrate the coastal defences. In the period immediately following the withdrawal of the British forces from France in the early summer of 1940 the First Canadian Division was almost, if not quite, the only division in this country in a fit state of equipment and training

to undertake this function; and with it in view it was moved first to the OXFORD area (23 Jun 41) and soon afterwards (2 Jul 41) to the GUILDFORD - WESTERHAM area where it still remains. See my previous Report No. 15, Appendices "A" and "B".

24. The formation of the Seventh Corps, under General McNaughton's command (21 Jul 41) was evidently a measure designed to provide more effectively for the fulfilment of this role of mobile counter-attack, and the Corps, incorporating within itself 1 Armoured Div and 1 Army Tank Bde in addition to 1 Cdn Div and 2 N.Z. Div, was a formidable weapon to this end. As noted in my Report No. 10, the formation of the Canadian Corps (25 Dec 40) and the withdrawal of the two armoured formations left General McNaughton's order of battle for the moment rather less formidable than before. At the same time, the multiplication and improvement of British formations had certainly led to a relative decline in the importance of the Canadian force in the anti-invasion organization. It remained an important element, however, and its role remained essentially the same.

25. Canadian Corps Operations Instruction No. 14 (31 Dec 40) defines the role at this time. It notes 1 Army Tank Bde (less two battalions) as under command Canadian Corps (though it was not actually in the Corps order of battle) and observes further that 1 Armoured Div is located in an adjacent area "and may be put under command in certain eventualities". The task of the Corps is thus described:

Canadian Corps is in C.H.Q. Reserve. ⁹ Its primary task is to counter-attack and destroy any enemy forces invading the counties of SURREY - KENT - SUSSEX - HAMPSHIRE (as far west as the R. ITCHEN U 93) which are NOT destroyed by the troops of Eastern and Southern Commands.

It is further stated that all troops are at 12 hours' notice to move, and will normally be placed at 4 hours' notice on receipt of the order to "stand to". The area of probable operations was divided into three zones: (a) Kent and E. Sussex, from SHEERNESS to BEACHY HEAD; (b) the South Downs from BEACHY HEAD to LITTLEHAMPTON; (c) the PORTSMOUTH area from LITTLEHAMPTON to WINCHESTER. (For General

McNaughton's remarks on these areas at the conference on Cdn Corps exercise "FOX", see my Report No. 11.)

26. Subject to certain minor amendments, the operation instruction just quoted (which itself derives largely from 7 Corps Operation Instruction No. 3, 5 Aug 40) is still in effect, and the Corps role remains the same. It is still in G.H.Q. Reserve, but Brigadier Burns explained to me on 9 Jun that it is agreed that it will probably be employed under South-Eastern Command. This Command has its Headquarters at REIGATE and is commanded by Lt.-Gen. B.C.T. PAGET, C.B., D.S.O., M.C., whose appointment is dated in the Quarterly Army List for April, 1941, as 15/2/41. South-Eastern Command is a new command created to meet the present situation, and this date may presumably be taken as indicating the period when it came into existence. The Command's boundaries as indicated on the location map at Cdn Corps H.Q. commit to it the responsibility for the coast from CHICHESTER HARBOUR, a little east of PORTSMOUTH, east round the NORTH FORELAND and along the south shore of the THAMES estuary to a little below ERITH.

27. South-Eastern Command includes the 4th Corps (which is responsible for the coast from CHICHESTER HARBOUR to BROOMHILL SANDS, east of RYE) and the 12th Corps, responsible for the coast in the rest of the Command, including the DOVER Peninsula. 4 Corps H.Q., according to the latest information available at C.M.H.Q., is at PADDOCKHURST, WORTH, CRAWLEY, SUSSEX, and 12 Corps H.Q. at TUNBRIDGE WELLS, KENT. Also in the Command is the 8th Armoured Division (which has lately replaced 1 Armd Div, now in the SALISBURY PLAIN region) with H.Q. at BETCHWORTH, near DORKING, and the 25th Army Tank Brigade. 1 Army Tank Brigade left the area some time ago. Its H.Q. was at MAIDSTONE; 25 Army Tk Bde is in the BRIGHTON area.

28. The present role of the Corps, and the manner in which it is likely to cooperate with these British formations in the event of active operations, is exemplified in the recent "WATERLOO" exercise:

see subsequent Report, No. 34. On this occasion Cdn Corps and 8 Arm'd Div were released to South-Eastern Command and employed by it to deliver a counter-attack against a theoretical enemy established on the SOUTH DOWNS, and represented by various formations including 25 Army Tr Bde.

SURVEY OF OPERATIONS, RECENT MONTHS

29. The letter of the D.H.S., above referred to, (para. 2), suggests as one topic for quarterly treatment "General Survey of Employment and Dispositions of Canadian Formations". This topic is dealt with in the foregoing pages, which may also be said to have some bearing upon another suggested topic, "Prosecution of, and changes in general Policy". On the third topic, "General Survey of Operations for the Quarter", little can be said; for if operations be taken to mean active operations against the enemy, as is presumably the case, there have been none. The Canadian Corps has formed an important element in the protective force guarding the United Kingdom against the invasion which has been a possibility for more than a year past; but in the absence of such an enterprise on the part of the enemy it has seen no action. It has been occupied in improving its training (the major training operations are dealt with in Reports 11, 13, 23 and 34) and perfecting its equipment so far as circumstances permitted: this problem of equipment will be the topic of a separate subsequent report.

30. The troops are undoubtedly tired of inaction, and would welcome an opportunity to come to grips with the enemy. This war is now nearly twenty-two months old; two Canadian divisions were ordered mobilized on the day of the German invasion of Poland; yet the Canadian Army has as yet seen no action, and has suffered no casualties from enemy action except a comparatively small number as a result of air raids and the torpedoing of a ship (see my Reports Nos. 17, 24, 25, and 28).

31. The situation was recently recognized publicly by General McNaughton in a message to Canadians in Britain which ran in part

9
as follows (THE TIMES, 31 May 41):

I know that it is hard to stand and wait, but, at present, this continues to be necessary. I have every confidence that all associated with the Canadian Forces will have patience and that they will continue to bend their minds to the arduous task of preparation against the day when we will have the long-awaited opportunity for decisive action.....

We have not had the satisfaction of great military accomplishments against the enemy which has been the fortune of the Forces from our sister Dominions... Nevertheless, we are assured that, in remaining alert and on guard for month after month, a useful contribution has been made to the cause for which we bear arms. Here in England we garrison the one vital citadel, the retention of which decides the war.

32. The question of the possible employment of the Canadian Corps in an expeditionary role in the event of a front being opened somewhere on the Continent (e.g., in Portugal and Spain) is an interesting one, though at the moment perhaps a trifle academic. I mentioned this to Brigadier Burns, who observed in reply that since at the moment Canada appeared to be taking no part in the higher direction of the war the procedure would presumably be that if the possibility of an expeditionary role arose the matter would then be put to the Canadian Government as a concrete proposal and decided on its merits.

33. It is interesting in this connection to note that in a broadcast to the people of Britain in connection with the opening of the Canadian Victory Loan, the Prime Minister of Canada said (as paraphrased in THE TIMES of 3 Jun 41),

Every month would see more Canadians in Britain to share in the defence. They were ready to go wherever their service might count for most.

34. At this moment, when even enemy air activity over Britain has been slight for over a month past, and military activity centres in the Mediterranean area, England seems almost a backwater of war. Yet a summer which is certain to be one of the most eventful in the history of Europe has no more than well begun; and the people highest in authority in this country warn us both publicly and privately that the possibility of a German attempt at invasion of the British Isles cannot be dismissed. Should such an attempt be made, the Canadian Corps, and perhaps other Canadian troops as well, would immediately

find themselves deployed in the forefront of the most desperate
and decisive battle of the war.

C.B.S.

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