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

The Problem of Accommodation



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1. A further report is presented. This deals with the difficult problem confronting the Canadian Army in the United Kingdom in the matter of accommodation. It is the third in the series initiated in No. 33.
2. The problem of accommodation is more serious, more complicated and more fundamental than might at first appear, and while it absorbs the full-time energies of a considerable number of officers holding appointments connected with the matter, it also has repeatedly engaged the anxious attention of the highest authorities in the Canadian Army Overseas.
3. The difficulty of the problem derives primarily from the unprecedented size of the military forces now quartered in this country. In this respect the contrast with the last war is striking. Whereas at that time the main field forces of the United Kingdom (and of Canada) were stationed in France, with only base units and certain reserve and training formations in Britain, to-day (since the French collapse in May - June 1940) these main forces are concentrated in Britain. With this country subjected to the constant threat of invasion from across the Channel, and obliged at the same time to send

reinforcements to the Middle East, the War Office has felt obliged to increase the strength of the Home Forces by repeated "call-ups" of successive classes of men from civil life; and Canadian troops in considerable numbers continue to come to this country under the Overseas Army Programme for 1941. The result is the presence in the United Kingdom of military forces of a size never anticipated until a few months ago. Quartering these forces has been, and is, a tremendous task.

4. Its difficulty is greatly enhanced by the demoralization of the English building industry by war conditions. Building material, including lumber, is very hard to obtain (for some remarks on the shortage of lumber, and the steps being taken to remedy it as far as possible, see my previous report No. 29, dealing with the Canadian Forestry Corps). More serious, however, is the shortage of labour occasioned by the expansion of the fighting forces and the demands of the munitions industry, and the relatively low standard of such labour as is available. Examples of the operation of these forces will be found below. To overcome the effects of the deficiency as affecting their own immediate problems, the Canadian military authorities have been obliged to resort to the use of military labour on a comparatively large scale, and to set up a special organization to direct the operations.

CANADIAN FORMATIONS AND THEIR ACCOMMODATION

5. From the beginning the ALDERSHOT area, containing the largest grouping of permanent military barracks in the United Kingdom, has played an important part in the accommodation of the Canadian forces during the present war. On its arrival in Britain late in 1939, the First Canadian Division immediately moved into permanent barracks in this area and remained there through the winter. The early summer was spent chiefly on the road, though with interludes in ALDERSHOT; and in July, 1940, 1 Cdn Div moved into the area south of LONDON where it still remains. These observations apply also to the Canadian ancillary units then in England. (See on these matters my previous

reports Nos. 15 and 33.) The units of the Second Canadian Division moved into ALDERSHOT in their turn as they arrived later in the summer, and remained there until the end of June 1941, when this division moved down to the NEWHAVEN - HASTINGS area on the South Coast. (This movement will be the subject of a subsequent report.)

6. The present situation, then, is as follows. 1 Cdn Div and Cdn Corps Troops are in billets and huts in the GUILDFORD - WESTERHAM area. 2 Cdn Div is in the accommodation on the South Coast vacated by the 55th (British) Division of the 4th Corps, which has temporarily exchanged with 2 Cdn Div and taken over ^{part of} its former accommodation in ALDERSHOT.

7. The first Canadian formation to arrive in this country under the Overseas Army Programme for 1941 is the 1st Canadian Army Tank Brigade, which arrived with T.C. 11 at the end of June, 1941, and moved at once into a tented camp at WEST LAVINGTON DOWN on SALISBURY PLAIN. (It is hoped to make this brigade also the subject of a report in the near future.)

8. The Canadian Base Units are in barracks and camps in the BORDON - WITLEY area, convenient to ALDERSHOT (see my report No. 33). One Holding Unit (1st M.G.H.U., of "A" Group) is actually in the ALDERSHOT group of barracks, at MALPLA UET BARRACKS, NORTH ALDERSHOT. The whole BORDON - WITLEY region falls within the boundaries of the ALDERSHOT AREA (formerly ALDERSHOT COMMAND). This Command was reduced to an Area as a consequence of the progressive withdrawal of British troops from it and their replacement by Canadians. It is now anticipated that with the exception of some training, repair and permanent stores organizations which cannot be moved, all barrack accommodation in ALDERSHOT and adjacent areas will be occupied by Canadians by next winter (1941-42).

INCOMING FORMATIONS

9. The British and Canadian quartering authorities have been engaged for a considerable time past in providing accommodation for the Canadian formations scheduled to arrive in Britain this summer and

autumn under the Overseas Army Programme above referred to. The magnitude of the problem may be judged from the fact that C.M.H.Q. informed the War Office on 1 Mar 41 that whereas the strength of Canadian troops in the United Kingdom was then 57,886, it was estimated that by the end of 1941 the total would have risen to 112,500 (C.M.H.Q. file 16/CAOS/1/2 - "Policy Regarding Future Accommodation in U.K. of Certain Units & Reinforcements, C.A.O.S." - folio 51A). It may be noted in passing that by 11 Jul 41 the total had already (thanks to the arrival of T.C.s 10 and 11) reached 77,328 all ranks, 4,616 being officers (information from A.G. Statistics, C.M.H.Q.).

10. The Third Canadian Division will arrive in this country in the immediate future, followed in the late autumn or early winter by the Fifth Canadian (Armoured) Division (new designation). It is anticipated that, as with earlier arrivals, these two formations will go into barracks at ALDERSHOT immediately after landing. On the problem of winter accommodation for these and other formations, see the concluding paragraphs of this report. During the summer, of course, the problem is eased by the possibility of putting troops under canvas, as in the case of 1 Cdn Army Tank Bde.

BASE UNITS PROBLEMS : CAMP CONSTRUCTION

11. The great prospective increase in the Canadian field force necessitates a proportionate increase in the number of reinforcements held in this country, and this raises special problems of accommodation in the Base Units area. A comprehensive reorganization of the Holding Units has been under consideration for some time past. A cable of 17 May 41 (GS. 890, Canmilitary to Defensor) estimated that, including provision for Armoured Division reinforcements, the total Base Units strength would be approximately 1750 officers and 28,000 other ranks after re/organization, as compared with 1100 and 13,000 at

that time. A more recent cable (GS. 1116, Camilitary to Defensor, 16 Jun 41) gives the scheme of reorganization now considered as probable, and noting that H.Q. Canadian Base Units will also administer the Canadian Training School, 1 Transport Coy R.C.A.S.C., the Staging Camp, and the Provost Training Depot, observes that the total strength of Canadian Base Units will be 32,700 all ranks.

12. It may be noted that the present organization of the Holding Units (including names of officers on their permanent establishment) was published as a second supplement to Canadian Army Routine Orders (Overseas) (R.O. 795, 26 Jun 41). This publication however does not include the manner in which the units are arranged in "A", "B" and "C" Groups, nor does it give locations.

13. The reorganization will be dealt with in subsequent reports when further advanced.

14. To provide the additional accommodation now required in the Base Units area has been a task of special difficulty, and special measures have had to be taken to this end.

15. On 28 Oct 40 the War Office authorized construction of five "Yukon" hutted camps in this area, at BRAIMSHOTT NORTH, BRAIMSHOTT SOUTH, LUDSHOTT, THURSLEY and HEADLEY, each for about 1000 men (date from letter, G.E. ALDERSHOT COMMAND to War Office, 4/2/41: C.M.H.Q. file 16/CAOS/1/2). The work was to be done by four civilian contractors and the contracts called for completion by the end of May 1941. It soon became apparent that civilian labour could not be found to do the work; for though the labour force forecast in Jan 41 as required was 2900 tradesmen and labourers, the force actually on the job early in February was (including all four contracts) 9 carpenters and 67 labourers (Minutes of meeting at ALDERSHOT COMMAND H.Q. in the matter, 3 Feb 41: file 16/CAOS/1/2). By March there were still only 300 workers available, and there seemed no prospect of getting many more (Minutes of conference at War Office, 19 Mar 41: folios 76A and 80A, file 16/CAOS/1/2).

16. As it was clear that this situation if not remedied would interfere with the operation of the Overseas Army Programme, and as no British military labour could be made available, the Senior Officer, Canadian Military Headquarters, had already approached Ottawa with a request for Canadian construction units to take over the work. This remedy was discussed at a conference at the War Office on 8 Feb 41, and on 20 Feb 41 the War Office wrote formally to Canadian Military Headquarters asking that such units might be made available to complete the Yukon Hut Camps and carry on further work thereafter. (See file 16/CAOS/1/2, folio 49A.) On or about 16 Mar 41, with a view to a further conference to be held at the War Office on 19 Mar, the A.C.M.G. (S.T.) at C.M.H.Q. (Lt.-Col. N.B. MacDONALD) wrote a long memorandum for the Senior Officer (same file, folio 74A) summarizing the history of the question and suggesting that the Senior Officer

... Advise General McNaughton of the winter accommodation plan and show him that without construction we cannot organize or hold the number of reinforcements which it is considered essential we should have in the country, or, alternatively, if reinforcements must be held to the agreed number, the accommodation will not be available for the 3rd Division and the Armoured Division in Aldershot Area for the winter 1941/42.

Lt.-Col. MacDonald also suggested that it should be ascertained whether General McNaughton would make Canadian engineer units already in the United Kingdom available to carry on the work on the camps, at least pending the arrival of the construction companies which had been asked for from Canada, but which the Department of National Defence had deferred proceeding with on the ground that mobilizing them could not be done at that time without interfering with the mobilization of the Armoured Division and the despatch of the Army Tank Bde and 3 Cdn Div.

17. The problem was discussed by Generals McNaughton and Montague and Brigadier MURISON (D.A. & C.M.G., Cdn Corps) at a preliminary conference on 18 Mar, and at the War Office conference the following day General McNaughton stated that as it was essential to adhere to the plans for the arrival of 3 Cdn Div, the Army Tank Bde and the Armoured Division, he was prepared to:

- "(a) Allot two Engineer Bns, each less one Coy, and a portion of 2 Road Construction Coy to this work by 1 April.
- "(b) Allot 1 Road Construction Coy, which is arriving on T.C. 10, to this work as soon as it is sufficiently equipped.
- "(c) Ask Canada to despatch on T.C. 11:-
 3 Bn R.C.E.
 The three Fd Coys of 3 Cdn Div
 Three Cdn Base Units Construction Coys.
- "(d) Set up a special R.C.E. Works organization under a full Colonel to direct this work and command the Engineer units employed thereon as soon as authority is obtained from Canada."

(Quotation from Brig. TURNER's memorandum of the conference, dated 20 Mar 41: file 16/CAOS/1/2, folio 80A.)

18. The consequence of this decision was the establishment of the WORKS ORGANIZATION, R.C.E., under the command of Colonel J.P. MACKENZIE, D.S.O., R.C.E., whose appointment and promotion from Lt.-Col. appeared in C.A.R.O. (Overseas) 692, effective 7 Apr 41. Col. Mackenzie had previously been C.R.E. 3 Cdn Div. During the week ending 19 Apr 41 two companies of 1 Bn R.C.E. and two companies of 2 Bn R.C.E., and one section of 2 Rd Const. Coy R.C.E. took up their duties at the camps under the new organization (see General Report for Cdn Corps for the week mentioned, C.M.H.Q. file 4/PROGRESS/2). The most recent General Report at present available (that for the week ending 12 Jul 41) notes that "1 and 2 Bns R.C.E. less one coy each and 1 Cdn Rd Const Coy" are at work "under C.M.H.Q. Works Directorate" (the designation by which the Works Organization has recently been referred to). In addition, I am informed by the Senior Engineer Officer, C.M.H.Q., that 12 Army Fd Coy, R.C.E., has been working under the Works Directorate (on BASINGSTOCK Hospital). Large changes in the Directorate's force are now imminent, if not at the moment in progress; 1 Bn R.C.E. and 12 A. Fd Coy are leaving it, and the three field companies of 3 Cdn Div (6, 16 and 18) - but not 3 Bn R.C.E. or any specially mobilized construction unit - arrived in the United Kingdom with T.C. 11.

19. Lt.-Col. MacDonald tells me that good progress has been made with the camps under the arrangement described in para. 18.¹ I hope shortly to be able to visit the Works Directorate and make a further report on its activities.

PRESENT SITUATION AND PROSPECTS

20. On 20 Jul 41 the D.A. & Q.M.G. Cdn Corps (Brigadier MURISON, who contrary to expectation as reported in my Report No. 36 is remaining in this appointment for the present) addressed to H.Q. ALDERSHOT AREA a memorandum (C.M.H.Q. file 16/2 DIV/1) which may be said to represent the last word on the situation at the moment of writing. This memorandum points out that C.M.H.Q. is responsible for the administration of Canadian Base Units and Canadian formations arriving in the United Kingdom until they are brought into the Corps order of battle; while H.Q. Cdn Corps is responsible for formations in the Corps order of battle. In accordance with this principle, H.Q. Cdn Corps will correspond with H.Q. ALDERSHOT AREA with reference to accommodation for 2 Cdn Div, Corps units under command of 2 Div, and Cdn Army Tank Bde; while C.M.H.Q. will correspond with H.Q. ALDERSHOT AREA with reference to accommodation for 3 Cdn Div.

21. Future arrangements for accommodation of units in the Corps order of battle are outlined as follows. When 2 Cdn Div returns from the coast (a movement which other sources indicate will take place early in August) it will at first be accommodated with two brigade groups (approximately) in tented camps (near ALDERSHOT) taken over from 55 Div, and one Brigade group (approximately) and divisional troops less 8 Recce Bn in quarterings (i.e., requisitioned buildings) in ALDERSHOT AREA. Subsequently two brigade groups and the divisional troops less 8 Recce Bn will be in quarterings, with one brigade group remaining under canvas; and in a third phase the Division (less one brigade group and 8 Recce Bn) will be in ALDERSHOT

¹ Two of the camps (BRAMSHOTT NORTH and SOUTH) are still being carried on by civilian labour, and a healthy spirit of competition has developed between military and civilian workers. Much of the material employed in these camps was originally intended to provide accommodation for Canadian troops in Iceland during the winter of 1940-41; but most of these troops were withdrawn to the United Kingdom.

AREA, with one brigade group in the area GODALMING - DORKING - NEWDIGATE (now occupied by 8 Armd Div) and 8 Recce Bn at WOODLANDS, GUILDFORD, in a hatted camp to which it is to move on or about 25 Jul 41.

22. The Canadian Army Tank Brigade (the memorandum continues) is to be accommodated in an area indicated as in the southern part of ALDERSHOT AREA, including HINDHEAD, ELSTEAD, HEADLEY and WITLEY PARK STABLES. (Documents in file 16/CAOS/1/3 note that the Canadian authorities have been offered quarterings in this region lately vacated by a British armoured brigade, and that General McNAUGHTON wishes to utilize them for 1 Cdn Army Tank Bde.) It is anticipated that the Brigade will begin its move to the ALDERSHOT AREA in the first week in September and complete it by 25 Sept. It will not remain there for a very long period, however, but will make room for 5 Cdn (Armd) Div when that formation arrives: see below.

23. Turning to the formations and units under C.M.H.Q., these are only touched upon in the memorandum of the D.A. & Q.M.G. From this and documents in 16/CAOS/1/3, however, it is clear that the Third Canadian Division, like the divisions preceding it, will go into barracks in ALDERSHOT upon arrival. The Corps Commander wished to avoid moving this formation into quarterings for the winter, but it now seems evident that this cannot be avoided, for room must be made for 5 Cdn (Armd) Div when it arrives in its turn. (It is felt that the training of newly arrived formations can best be carried on in permanent barracks.) The D.A. & Q.M.G. points out that if the whole of 3 Cdn Div can then be accommodated in quarterings in ALDERSHOT AREA, the area GODALMING - DORKING - NEWDIGATE will become available for other purposes. He adds: "It is of course realized that the move of 5 Cdn Div from barracks to quarterings will entail the move of 2 Cdn Div elsewhere."

24. At the same time, the situation is complicated by the need of accommodation in ALDERSHOT for the expanded Base Units organization. This is not dealt with in the D.A. & Q.M.G.'s memorandum. Lt.-Col.

MacDonald informed the War Office on 5 Jun 41 (16/CAOS/1/3, folio 9) that the contemplated reorganization of Holding Units would entail "the extension of an area devoted to Holding Units beyond the present limit of their present area of Witley and Bordon"; and various permanent barracks in ALDERSHOT NORTH, ALDERSHOT SOUTH and COVE are now earmarked for Holding Units.

25. The memorandum of the D.A. & Q.M.G. deals at some length with 5 Cdn (Armd) Div. (This suggests that this formation may, like 1 Cdn Army Tank Bde, come under Cdn Corps directly upon arrival.) It is stated that "in accordance with the wishes of the Army Commander" (i.e., the G.O.C.-in-C. South-Eastern Command) it has been decided that the Armoured Division on arrival shall be accommodated (except for one armoured brigade group) in barracks in ALDERSHOT to be vacated by 3 Cdn Div. The remaining brigade group will be in the area now assigned to 1 Cdn Army Tank Bde (above, para. 22), which will be moved "elsewhere".

26. It will be noted that this document gives no details as to the final disposition for the winter 1941-42 of 2 Cdn Div and 1 Cdn Army Tank Bde. It is at present understood that considerable changes in the strategic role of the Canadian Corps are pending, and the location of these formations will of course be determined by operational needs.

HOSPITAL ACCOMMODATION

27. The question of hospital accommodation is a large topic in itself, and can scarcely be more than referred to here. My earlier Report No. 7 deals with some aspects of the matter, and mentions the question of whether or not the existing accommodation is adequate to the real needs of the Canadian Army in this country. As noted in that report, the physical difficulty of obtaining accommodation for additional hospitals is a considerable element in the question. The situation was reviewed in a long cable of 8 Apr 41 (Canmilitary to Defensor: GS. 584) to which reference should be made.

This cable runs in part as follows:

General requirements hospital beds difficult to give due inability foresee type of operations in which Canadian Army may be employed. Factors to be considered are normal requirements for active operations either in United Kingdom or in other theatre of war balanced against accommodation problems in United Kingdom and desirability not having more hospitals than are necessary under present conditions.

The great recent and prospective increase in the Canadian force in this country has of course necessitated some increase in hospital accommodation. Two additional important medical units arrived on T.C. 11: No. 14 General Hospital and No. 5 Casualty Clearing Station. The former, a 1200-bed unit, staffs PINWOOD HOSPITAL, at WOKINGHAM, Berks, which was taken over from the British authorities beginning 9 Jun 41, and will also staff COMNAUGHT HOSPITAL, ALDERSHOT, when this is taken over. The latter has been accommodated in FORD MANOR, near LINGFIELD, Surrey, formerly utilized for the first Canadian Junior War Staff Course (see my Report No. 14). This house was held on lease, with its furniture, as accommodation for the Staff Course; for the C.C.S., it has been requisitioned without the furniture, the change involving some fairly complicated negotiations (C.M.H.Q. file 16/J.W.S.C./1).

28. The possibility of taking over further British hospitals has been repeatedly discussed.

29. The hospital accommodation problem, like that of Base Units accommodation, has been somewhat eased by the employment of Canadian military labour. Engineer units under the Works Directorate have been engaged in construction at BRAMSHOTT and BASINGSTOKE Hospitals and a small labour party is at work at the hospital near BIRMINGHAM (on these hospitals, see my Report No. 7), and in addition a Canadian V.D. Hospital has been built of Yukon hutting at BRAMSHOTT.

C.M.H.Q. ACCOMMODATION

30. Providing for the constant expansion of Canadian Military Headquarters, LONDON, has been another problem. It has been solved in part by requisitioning additional offices in the Sun Life Building, Cockspur Street (see my Report No. 5) from civilian tenants; a large

part of the fourth floor is now occupied by C.M.H.Q. In addition, however, more accommodation has had to be acquired in nearby buildings. The Dental and Chaplain services are now in British Columbia House in Lower Regent Street; and the Judge Advocate General's Branch, which (due mainly to the number of claims to be dealt with) has grown faster perhaps than any other, has been moved to Trafalgar House in Waterloo Place, close by. Considerable attention has been given to the problem of alternative accommodation in the event of or necessary evacuation air-raid damage. This matter is complicated by the fact that the East and South Coasts, being restricted areas, are not available; and in country districts where hotels, etc., may be available for offices, there is no accommodation nearby for personnel. The British Ministry of Works has been requested to include space for the C.M.H.Q. departments, ^{including those} at ACTON, ~~(see Report No. 6)~~ in the pool of accommodation which it maintains for use in cases of damage..

MISCELLANEOUS

31. Accommodation for various miscellaneous establishments has provided other problems for the staff at C.M.H.Q. who deal with this matter. One outstanding example is the case of the Base Post Office. For some time this was located at BOURNEMOUTH, sharing a very suitable building with British postal personnel. It was decided that this must be evacuated, and a search for other accommodation went on for some weeks. It was difficult to find a proper building, for though the number of personnel involved is not large they sometimes have to deal with consignments of as many as 5,000 bags of mail at one time, and this means that considerable space is required. Finally the War Office offered the Mills Garage at MANCHESTER, and as nothing else was to be found this was accepted, and the Base Post Office opened there during the week ending 19 Jul 41.

GENERAL

33. The progress of construction on the camps at THURSLEY, HEADLEY and LUDSHOTT, and on the other tasks being undertaken by the Works Directorate, is being recorded monthly in photographs taken by the Public Relations section of C.M.H.Q. These photographs will form a useful source for the future historian.

34. In preparing this report I have had the advantage of consultations with Lt.-Col. MacDONALD (above, para. 16), with Lt.-Col. P.M. ABEL (A.D.C. & M., C.M.H.Q.), and with Major E. JAMES, D.S.O., M.C., D.A.Q.M.G. (Q), C.M.H.Q. Lt.-Col. Abel pointed out certain sources of information and kindly read an early draft. Lt.-Col. MacDonald likewise most kindly read the completed report and enabled me to make certain additions and corrections.

35. It will be noted that this report, while fairly long, does no more than scratch the surface of a very large and complicated subject. The aim has been to direct the attention of the Official Historian to a topic which, while difficult and perhaps dull, can scarcely be altogether neglected. He may not wish to devote a great deal of space to it, but its importance in present circumstances is such that some summary will have to be attempted. The above sketch is intended to assist in the preparation of such a summary.

C.S.

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

