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27 Oct 41

Home Forces Exercise "BUMPER"
(Army Manoeuvres), 29 Sep - 3 Oct 41.

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 the very extensive Army Manoeuvres carried on north and west of LONDON on 29 Sep / 3 Oct last. Along with Lt.-Col. G.C. SMITH, C.A.C., the writer represented Canadian Military Headquarters during these manoeuvres, being present throughout as a spectator and a guest of the War Office.
2. The operational portions of Canadian Corps (1 and 2 Cdn Divs and a large force of Corps Troops) participated in the exercise under command of Lieutenant-General McNAUGHTON, the Corps Commander.
3. This exercise, which was known by the code-name "BUMPER", is believed to have involved the most extensive army manoeuvres ever conducted in Great Britain. Two Army Headquarters and four Corps participated. The total number of divisions taking part was twelve; three of these were armoured. Two army tank brigades and corps troops in large numbers were also involved. The force engaged amounted in all to about a quarter of a million men.
4. To compile a complete narrative of the exercise would be a very large task, and the value of such a narrative to the Official Historian would probably be limited. The writer will therefore confine himself to presenting a general outline of the course of events, emphasizing where possible the part played by the Canadian force. He did not, however, see as much of the Canadians as he

could have wished. The basis of the outline will be the official narratives compiled as the operations proceeded, supplemented by his own necessarily fragmentary personal observations and by the remarks of the Chief Umpire and the Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, at the subsequent conference on the exercise.

GENERAL IDEA OF THE EXERCISE

5. As the Commander-in-Chief (General Sir Alan BROOKE) explained (see below, Appendix "A"), the exercise had three main objects : to give the higher commanders the opportunity of handling large forces in the field; to test the organization of the Army with a view to its possible employment beyond the English Channel; and to experiment with the possibility of "picking up a whole Command" (in this instance, the Southern Command) and using it as a striking force to destroy an enemy lodgement effected elsewhere in the country.

6. The assumption made in the Opening Narrative was that the Germans had launched a heavy attack against the British Isles "simultaneously with operations against EIRE and the SHETLANDS" at dawn on 20 Sep. Four major thrusts developed, against Northern, Eastern, South Eastern and Southern Commands; but in all these cases except that of Eastern Command the defence dealt fairly successfully with the invading force in the early stages. In the instance of South-Eastern Command, particularly, the situation was assumed to have been cleaned up during 26 Sep by successful counter-attacks by 12 Corps and Cdn Corps (cf. my Reports No. 33 for the roles of these formations), Cdn Corps having re-taken the beaches in the BRIGHTON area.

7. In Eastern Command, however, the enemy had made rapid progress through East Anglia and by the morning of 27 Sep had reached the line WISBECH - ELY - KENTFORD M 18 - SUDBURY M 35 - HALSTEAD M 24 - WITHAM M 25 - MALDON M 22; and in addition to his Army which had effected this penetration (the Third) another Army (the Sixth) was landing successfully with its armoured vehicles on the

beaches in rear. It was assumed that both the British Eastern Army and the enemy Third Army were largely exhausted. The enemy Sixth Army, in these circumstances, was ordered to pass through the Third and carry on the attack, sweeping to the north of LONDON (which was stated to have been rendered to a large extent impassable as a result of bombing) with the object of drawing to itself the British reserves, destroying them and ultimately taking in rear the defences of the South Coast. On the British side, Southern Command was warned (at 1200 hrs on 27 Aug) of the probability that it would be called upon to advance into East Anglia and destroy the Germans.

8. The German Third Army was purely imaginary; the German Sixth Army was represented by the troops of Eastern Command. The exercise, therefore, resolved itself into a campaign between Eastern Command (commanded by Lt.-Gen. L. CARR, C.B., D.S.O., O.B.E.) and Southern Command (commanded by Lt.-Gen. the Hon. H.R.L.G. ALEXANDER, C.B., C.S.I., D.S.O., M.C.). Lt.-Gen. Alexander is remembered as the officer who took command at DUNKIRK at the end of May, 1940, on the return of General Lord GORT to England. In addition to his own troops, he was given on this occasion certain formations normally stationed in South-Eastern Command; Cdn Corps, 8 Armd Div and 25 Army Tk Bde. 1 Armd Div, stationed in Southern Command area, did not take part in the exercise; it was assumed to have suffered too heavily in the operations on the South Coast to be capable of further action. In these circumstances, all the armoured divisions participating were "young" formations.

9. The formations involved were, on the "German" side, 8 Corps (1 and 46 Divs) and 11 Corps (43 and 54 Divs), plus 6 and 9 Armd Divs. The Southern Army consisted of 5 Corps (3 Div less one bde, 4 and 48 Divs) and Cdn Corps (1 and 2 Cdn Divs), plus 8 Armd Div and 21 and 25 Army Tk Bdes. Later it was also given 24 (Ind.) Guards Bde. The contending forces were thus approximately equal

in numbers.

COURSE OF THE EXERCISE

10. At 2000 hrs on 28 Sep the German Sixth Army was ordered to act as in para. 7 (above), and at 2200 hrs the Southern Army was ordered to move north against it. The Sixth Army was told that the roads would not be clear for it until 0100 hrs on the 29th. It actually crossed the start line MARCH - ELY - NEWMARKET - LIDGATE M 17 - WYCOMBE BROOK M 27 - STANSFIELD M 27 - BOXSTEAD M 26 - LONG MELFORD M 36 at 0600 hrs, with 2 Corps (with 9 Armd Div under command) on the right and 11 Corps (with 6 Armd Div under command) on the left.

11. The Southern Army Commander's appreciation of the situation had been to the effect that the enemy was likely to employ his armoured formations in a wide swing on his right through the NORTHAMPTON area; while he also recognized the importance of securing the relatively rugged area of the CHILTERNs. The Southern Army was therefore concentrated south of the THAMES with 8 Armd Div on the left ready to act against the enemy armoured divisions, while 5 Corps would be ready to act towards the line STONY STRATFORD - LUTON - ST. ALBANS, occupying the CHILTERNs. Cdn Corps had moved on 26 and 27 Sep from its normal station to a concentration area EAST GRINSTEAD - MARESFIELD - COWFOLD - CRAWLEY, with 2 Cdn Div in the western part of this area. Cdn Corps came under Southern Army at 2200 hrs 28 Sep; and the Army Commander, planning to utilize it as his "mass of manoeuvre", issued orders for it to move into the CHILTERNs (area PRINCE'S RISBOROUGH - MAIDENHEAD - READING) when these had been secured. The Canadians would then be ready to move in any direction as the situation might demand.

12. In accordance with these arrangements, 5 Corps moved at 2300 hrs 28 Sep, and 8 Armd Div at 0115 hrs and Cdn Corps at 0600 hrs 29 Sep. The movement made rapid progress and in the course of the morning 8 Armd Div occupied the BICESTER area, while 5 Corps made good the general line FENNY STRATFORD - LUTON - ST. ALBANS,

with 48 Div on the left, 3 Div in the centre and 4 Div on the right. By moving promptly and rapidly Southern Army had obtained an initial advantage, but there was a considerable gap between 8 Armd Div and the left flank of 5 Corps. There was contact between advanced elements of the two opposing forces from early in the day; and in the afternoon 54 Div supported by elements of 6 Armd Div attacked the British 4 Div in the ST. ALBANS - LUTON area successfully, establishing a salient (LEAGRAVE - ASHRIDGE - HARPENDEN) which 4 Div failed to recover.

13. REGROUPING OF SOUTHERN ARMY. The Southern Army Commander, whose chief concern was the danger presented by the possibility of a manoeuvre by the swift cruiser tanks of 9 Armd Div¹ which threatened his left, issued orders at 1710 hrs 29 Sep for a regrouping of his forces. 2 Cdn Div was taken from Cdn Corps and ordered into Army Reserve in a concentration area between THAME and WALLINGFORD, with a view to availability for dealing with the threat from 9 Armd Div. 4 Div was placed under Cdn Corps, and the latter was ordered to take over from 5 Corps the front eastward from LEE (L 3423), south-east of WENDOVER.

14. The Southern Army Commander's handling of his mass of manoeuvre was criticized at the subsequent conference by the C.-in-C. Home Forces, who suggested that instead of committing it on the right in this manner he should have placed Cdn Corps and 25 Army Tk Bde on his left and manoeuvred on that flank, where the ground was more open.

15. As it was, during the remainder of the exercise Cdn Corps (consisting now of 1 Cdn Div and 4 Div) operated in the northern end of the CHILTERNs. Corps H.Q. closed at HEADLEY COURT (its

1. This div was equipped with Covenanter (formerly called cruiser Mk V) tanks. 6 and 8 Armd Divs had "I" tanks (Matildas and Valentines) in lieu of cruisers. As noted in previous reports, the cruiser is faster but less heavily protected than the infantry tank.

normal station near LEATHERHEAD) at 2100 hrs 29 Sep, and opened at CASTLEFIELD SCHOOL, HIGH WYCOMBE (290124).

16. At this stage the situation appeared to be favourable for the German Sixth Army. It had begun well in the LUTON area; and on the other flank the British 8 Armd Div, separated by some miles from the left of 5 Corps, was exposed to joint action by 6 and 9 Armd Divs. In these circumstances the Director (the C.-in-C. Home Forces), with a view to redressing the balance, ordered 24 Gds Ind Bde Gp to concentrate in the SEVENOAKS - CROOKHAM HILL Q 86 - OXTED area, south of LONDON, and the Southern Army Commander was informed that this formation might come under his command.

17. In the course of the following day, however, the general situation assumed a quite different appearance.

18. EVENTS ON 30 SEPTEMBER. After taking over the 4 Div front the Canadian Corps Commander ordered a counter-attack to restore the situation in front of LUTON. This was delivered at daylight on 30 Sep by 1 Cdn Div and was successful in straightening out the salient (para. 12, above), restoring the original front line by 1300 hrs. A further attack delivered in the late afternoon and designed to roll the enemy back towards STEVENAGE found 54 Div strongly posted and made little progress.

19. 2 Cdn Div was ordered to move forward and fill the gap existing between 48 Div and 8 Armd Div, coming under the command of 5 Corps.

20. Although the Southern Army Commander was still attempting (mistakenly, in the Director's view) to strike on his right and hold on his left, it was on his left that the decisive events of the day took place. Here the German Army Commander failed to use the opportunity which was presented to him for a combined attack by 6 and 9 Armd Divs against 8 Armd Div. 4 Armd Div attacked 8 Armd Div from the north, but it found the latter in well concealed positions and after suffering severely was compelled to withdraw to reform. On this day 8 Armd Div assumed a static role with

good results. Its heavy "I" tanks, well posted, acted to all intents and purposes as armoured pill-boxes, and "shot up" the lighter cruisers as they advanced.

21. During the afternoon of this day the writer saw the end of a heavy tank encounter immediately north of BICESTER, in which units of 9 Armd Div had lost heavily; the road at CAVERSFIELD was full of Covenant tanks flying the red-and-yellow flags denoting "out of action". Another thrust at BRACKLEY, where 8 and 9 Armd Div tanks had watched each other across the OUSE for some time, had a similar result.

22. General BROOKE suggested subsequently that 8 Armd Div ought to have been dealt with by air and artillery action, bombing and shelling it out of its strong position.

23. Meanwhile, 6 Armd Div had been utilized, not against 8 Armd Div, but (after more than one change of plan) on the other side of the gap, against the left flank of 48 Div, in what the C.-in-C. Home Forces described as a "bad attack". Moving east on two roads, it encountered 48 Div well posted in anti-tank localities, and supported by 21 and 25 Army Tk Bdes. After suffering heavily, it was withdrawn on the orders of the Chief Umpire by the routes by which it had advanced. During the night, moreover, it was attacked in harbour by the infantry of 48 Div and harried out of its position.

24. The events of this day had thus greatly improved the British position. The enemy's two armoured divisions had been greatly reduced in strength without accomplishing anything; while 8 Armd Div had had only 10% of casualties, and it and 2 Cdn Div (which was now about 10 miles behind the centre of the British front) were well placed for a counterstroke.

25. EVENTS ON 1 OCTOBER. The Southern Army plan for 1 Oct (as formulated at a conference at H.Q. Cdn Corps at 2030 hrs 30

Sep) was for a general advance all along the line (though the Army Commander still retained his predilection for a main effort on the front of Cdn Corps, on the right). Cdn Corps, with 4 Div on the right, was to make good the line STEVENAGE - BARTON-IN-THE-CLAY. 2 Cdn Div, preceded by the two Army Tk Bdes, was to move forward on the right flank of 8 Armd Div, which was to attack towards NORTHAMPTON.

26. During this day Cdn Corps continued to encounter stubborn resistance from 54 Div and its progress was slow. 1 Div, which the enemy had brought across from his right, was moved in to assist ~~assist~~ 54 Div, as was also the remnant of 6 Armd Div. In the course of the afternoon, however, 54 Div was nearly surrounded. The situation on this eastern sector of the front was decidedly confused, and the enemy's difficulties were increased by the fact that a Canadian battalion (the ROYAL 22e REGIMENT of 3 Cdn Inf Bde) had succeeded - thanks, I was told, to a road which was an enemy inter-formation boundary being inadequately guarded - in getting into HITCHIN, on its final objective, early in the day. Here this unit remained, and the writer saw it in possession during the afternoon, with the town overflowing with enemy transport and despatch riders which the R. 22e R. had captured as they attempted to pass through.

27. Lt.-Col. C.R.S. STEIN (who was acting as A.Q.M.G. at H.Q. Cdn Corps for this exercise) told me on 4 Oct that during the following night (1-2 Oct) the enemy brought up 25-pounders and fired into HITCHIN at point-blank range in an effort to evict the French-Canadians. The latter retaliated by hurling thunder-flashes among the gunners from the housetops. Nobody in HITCHIN can have got much sleep that night.

28. At the subsequent conference, the Chief Umpire (Lt.-Gen. B.L. MONTGOMERY, who commanded 3 Div in France during the campaign last year) criticized 2 Cdn Div, by implication, for missing an opportunity on 1 Oct. An energetic advance, he said, would have

enabled it to turn the flank of the enemy's 46 Div; but the advance was delayed (in part, at least, due to the division's reconnaissance battalion having been badly placed) and the line of WATLING STREET was not reached until 1900 hrs.

29. 9 Armd Div's task for 1 Oct had again been the destruction of 8 Armd Div; and in the day's encounter it again came off badly. It advanced south early in the morning without benefit of armoured-car reconnaissance (the result of a wireless failure); and partly through good luck, partly through good information from aircraft and from armoured cars, 8 Armd Div, advancing a little later, struck its right flank and rear. About 1130 hrs the writer passed the mobile H.Q. of 9 Armd Div (travelling in six armoured command vehicles) moving north-east on the BUCKINGHAM - STONY STRATFORD road. There were at this time British forces in both BECKINGHAM and STONY STRATFORD, as well as to the north and west; and it seemed unlikely that the H.Q. would escape capture. It did, however, get away over inferior roads to the eastward, and joined what was left of the Div's 27 Armd Bde. The remains of 9 Armd Div were still capable of helping to cover the withdrawal of the German Army which followed.

30. During 1 Oct the Guards made a brief appearance in the battle on the right of the British line. 24 Gds Bde had been brought through LONDON by way of the BLACKWALL TUNNEL to EPPING FOREST, and was now pushed northward to act against the enemy's left under command of Cdn Corps. It advanced rapidly, and had the good fortune to capture a map giving the position of H.Q. 11 Corps. A party of the SCOTS GUARDS was despatched to attack this H.Q. Although the lower floor of Advanced H.Q. was overrun by the raiders, reinforcements arrived in time to prevent the capture of the G.O.C., who was on the upper floor. Rear H.Q. was captured. As by this stage of the exercise it was clear that the advantage lay with the Southern Army, the Director, who had called this brigade into the picture to tip the scales towards that Army, ordered it to be withdrawn "to cover LONDON"; and it played no further part in the manoeuvres.

31. WITHDRAWAL OF GERMAN ARMY. The German Army was now gravely endangered; and at 1530 hrs on 1 Oct the Army Commander received orders "from the Commander of the Army Group in Holland" to withdraw to EAST ANGLIA. This withdrawal at first seemed likely to be an extremely difficult operation, but in the event it was executed with considerable success, the Army with the exception of certain elements which were especially deeply involved breaking contact during the night of 1/2 Oct and retiring with a view to taking up a new line CHELMSFORD - SAFFRON WALDEN - CAMBRIDGE.

32. In the meantime the Southern Army Commander had planned a further attack for 2 Oct, consisting of a wheel to the eastward, pivoting on 4 Div; he thus finally came round to the idea of manoeuvring to his left. This attack was duly delivered, but except on the left where 8 Armd Div had considerable action with the enemy's armoured rear guards it proved in the main to be a blow in the air. On the 5 Corps front (where 5 Corps now had 8 Armd Div under command) 2 Cdn Div, with 25 Army Tk Bde under command, reached the line of the road BEDFORD - AMPHILL L 45 by 1130 hrs, and at 1400 hrs was directed to mop up in BEDFORD and subsequently to move forward and take over the high ground in square L 77 from 8 Armd Div. 3 Div, with 21 Army Tk Bde under command, had reached the line of the OUSE from BIGGLESWADE to SANDY L 66 by 1330 hrs. 48 Div was now in reserve.

33. In the southern sector 1 Cdn Div during the morning reached the line KING'S WALDEN - BARTON-IN-THE-CLAY. At midday the Cdn Corps Commander decided to concentrate the division and direct its advance on the line HITCHIN - BALDOCK - BENTINGFORD L 84. At 1635 hrs it was in the area HITCHIN - BIGGLESWADE. Early in the afternoon I visited H.Q. 1 Cdn Div, which had just opened at WELLSBURY HOUSE L 54 (west of HITCHIN), having moved thither from GOLDEN PARSONAGE L5032 (north of HEMEL HEMPSTEAD). The division at this time was still out of contact with the retreating enemy and General PEARCES was in the midst of issuing orders for further advance.

34. One important enemy formation had not succeeded in extricating itself. This was 54 Div, of which only "oddments" under the C.R.A. appear to have got clear away. Large parts of the division were surrounded by 1 Cdn Div and 4 Div, and there was "fierce guerilla fighting". On the afternoon of 2 Oct elements of 54 Div were still resisting, and the situation map for 1700 hrs shows a pocket of this formation, completely surrounded, holding out in the area immediately south of GREAT OFFLEY, between LUTON and HITCHIN. I was told by Lt.-Col. Stein that the G.O.C. 54 Div was captured by the CARLETON AND YORK REGT (3 Cdn Inf Bde) and that he was very reluctant to become a prisoner. At the subsequent conference the C.-in-C. congratulated 54 Div on its resistance, which, he said, had played a very important part in the successful withdrawal of the remainder of the German Army.

35. H.Q. Cdn Corps closed at HIGH WYCOMBE at 1800 hrs 2 Oct, and opened at ST. ALBANS 577263 at 1700 hrs. At 1900 hrs that day 1 Cdn Div's advanced H.Q. was at WELLBURY HOUSE (para. 33, above), and 4 Div's advanced H.Q. was near HARPENDEN 588518 (information from messages, C.M.H.Q. file 3/EX. BUMPER/1).

36. The exercise concluded at 0600 hrs on 3 Oct, before further operations could take place between the opposing main bodies.

GENERAL

37. The weather was exceptionally favourable during these manoeuvres, although the nights were cool. Only on 30 Sep did a little rain fall.

38. In these circumstances the exercise was probably enjoyed by the Canadian troops participating. The notes of the Field Censors (Home) on Canadian mail examined between 29 Sep and 12 Oct contain some references to this effect, including the comment of a soldier of 2 A.Tk Regt R.C.A., who observes "these Limeys don't fool when they are playing these games". Exercises of this sort, involving a change of scene and a break in routine, appear to be the next-best

thing to actual operations for overcoming boredom among the troops.

39. The newspapers reported afterwards that there had been nineteen fatal casualties among the troops involved in these manoeuvres. General McNaughton took note of this in a cable to OTTAWA (GS 2113, CANMILITRY to IMMEDIATE DEFENSOR 8 Oct 41, for C.G.S.) which informed N.D.H.Q. that there were no Canadians among the dead. Canadian casualties amounted to 9 seriously and 82 slightly injured. The Corps Commander considered that this fortunate result reflected the satisfactory state of discipline and training in the Corps.

CONFERENCE

40. The writer was present at the conference on the exercise, which took place at the Staff College, CAMBERLEY, on 10 Oct. The comments made by the speakers on this occasion have been drawn upon in preparing the above narrative; and the writer's report upon the conference is attached as Appendix "A".

C.S.

(C.P. Stacey) Major,
Historical Officer (S.D.2), C.M.H.Q.

S/Ex. Bumper/1

MEMORANDUMB.G.S.Conference on Exercise "BUMPER"

1. I attended the conference on Exercise "BUMPER", held at the Staff College, CAMBERLEY, at 0930 hrs on 10 Oct 41.
2. The conference consisted of a day-to-day narrative of the exercise presented by the Chief Umpire (Lt.-Gen. B.L. MONTGOMERY) followed by comments by the C.-in-C. Home Forces, who spoke for about an hour. Both speakers dealt primarily with the armoured formations.
3. The Chief Umpire directed attention to certain missed opportunities. He particularly mentioned the handling of 6 Armd Div on 30 Sep, when instead of being directed into the gap existing between the "British" 8 Armd and 48 Divs and employed against 8 Armd Div in co-operation with 9 Armd Div, it was used in an attack against the flank of 48 Div which failed. This was the turning-point of the exercise. On the following day, 2 Cdn Div, which had been moved into the gap just mentioned, had an opportunity for an effective stroke at the flank of the "enemy" 48 Div, but this was lost through delay in delivering the attack.
4. The C.-in-C. said that the exercise had three main objects : (a) to give commanders, including Army Commanders, the opportunity of handling large forces; (b) to test the organization with a view to possible action across the Channel; and (c), from his own point of view, to try the experiment of "picking up a whole Command" and using it as a striking force to destroy an enemy lodgement in this country.
5. The C.-in-C. congratulated the three "very young" armoured divisions participating in the exercise on their performance, but suggested that now that their organization and training were complete it was necessary to work on the manner of employing them.
6. Satisfactory Results. Among the satisfactory features of the exercise he mentioned the progress made in motorised movement. Despite the great number of men and vehicles involved there was little congestion. Concealment in general was good.
7. He gave figures on tank breakdown casualties. The "I" tanks went about 200 miles, the cruisers about 300. Casualties were as follows : Matildas, 11%; Valentines, 4%; Churchills (which went about 150 miles), 17% - rather less than had been expected in present circumstances; Covenanters, 6%.
8. Criticisms. The C.-in-C., in addition to criticizing the grouping of the opposing forces in detail, said that H.Qs., both of Corps and Armies, had been too far back. He urged the commanders of these formations to be in "a room by themselves" and not to "sit on top of their staffs" where they would be "befogged by rumours".
9. In connection with the passing of information, the C.-in-C. said "We never get any better". He particularly stressed the importance of keeping in touch with formations on flanks.
10. Every Corps H.Q. must be able to handle armoured divisions, and special organization plans are now being made with this in

view.

11. All the attacks in this exercise lacked co-ordination; it was "brigade-group work all through". Too much has been made of the brigade group. It is all right up to a point, but after that point what is required is a co-ordinated divisional attack with the artillery under divisional control and working to a plan. In this exercise, demolitions also were carried out without co-ordination.

12. The divisions in this exercise worked on frontages extended in a manner impossible in actual operations. There was no necessity for this.

13. Air Support. On the air aspect, the C.-in-C. mentioned the following points. (A) Don't use your air support "in penny packets". (B) The fighter appears to present a serious menace to troops and transport on the move. (C) The Air Support Control should be at Army H.Q. if this is as far forward as it ought to be. It does not follow, however, that it should not be sent to some lower formation's H.Q. if the main weight of air support is being directed to this formation's area.

14. Administration. Objectives were laid down in this exercise without regard to such matters as the location of permanent supply depots. There had also been a tendency to "over-insure" in administrative matters, forgetting that large local resources would be available in this country. Unit administration was not good: the troops got too many cold meals.

15. The C.-in-C. observed that the Chemical Warfare aspect had been on the whole neglected, and the C.S.Os. 2 (CW) too little consulted. Experts considered that the use of gas would be useful to the Germans in such an operation as was envisaged in this exercise.

C.S.

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10 Oct 41.