

NOTE

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Directorate of History
National Defence Headquarters
Ottawa, Canada
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12 Nov 41

Visit of Minister of National Defence
and Chief of the General Staff to the
Canadian Army Overseas, October, 1941.

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by Col for DHist NDHQ

Date: NOV 13 1986

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

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

1. A further report is presented. This deals with the recent visit of Colonel the Hon. J.L. RALSTON, C.M.G., D.S.O., Minister of National Defence, Canada, and Major-General H.D.G. CRERAR, D.S.O., Chief of the General Staff, Canada, to the Canadian Army in the United Kingdom during the month of October, 1941.
2. Colonel Ralston and General Crerar arrived in Britain by air on 13 Oct 41, accompanied by Lt.-Col. G.S. CURRIE, D.S.O., I.C., Executive Assistant to the Minister, and Lt.-Col. E.L. CAMERON, C.M.S.C. The party left LONDON on the return journey on 28 Oct 41, but it is understood that some days' delay ensued before they actually embarked for Canada.
3. This visit illustrates the manner in which the existence of the trans-Atlantic "Bomber Ferry" has facilitated rapid trips to Britain by Canadian notables in connection with the war effort. Beginning with the flight of the Hon. Ian MACKENZIE in June last, a succession of Ministers and high officers have come from Canada by these means. The late Colonel Clyde SCOTT, who accompanied Mr. Mackenzie, mentioned to me on 1 Jul 41 that their flight, from NEWFOUNDLAND to Britain, lasted only nine hours and fifteen minutes.
4. The increasing number of bombing-planes of North American manufacture which are being flown to Britain renders it a relatively

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simple matter to accommodate a certain number of important persons proceeding to Britain from Canada. Accommodation westbound is naturally more limited, being primarily designed for the transport of ferry pilots. Latterly difficulty has arisen in connection with the despatch of urgent mail to Canada by bomber, and C.N.R. departments are strictly rationed in this matter.

THE MINISTER'S ACTIVITIES

5. During his short stay the Minister, in addition to engaging in a series of conferences at Canadian Military Headquarters in the course of which a great deal of public business was done, contrived to see a great deal of the Canadian Army in the United Kingdom. A brief sketch of his contacts with the Canadian troops follows.
6. On 16 Oct the Minister visited 1 Cdn Army Tank Bde in the quarters in the HINDHEAD area into which this formation had moved earlier in the month. On the same day he visited the Corps Field Survey Company and Corps Headquarters.
7. On 18 Oct the Minister, accompanied by Generals McNAUGHTON, CRERAR, and MONTAGUE, visited Canadian Base Units. The visitors spent the whole day in the Base Units area, visited many establishments (including BRANSHOTT Hospital, operated by 15 Cdn Gen Hosp, a number of Holding Units, and the Canadian Training School) and witnessed various demonstrations.
8. On 22 Oct the Minister began a round of visits to divisions of Cdn Corps with an inspection of 5 Cdn Div at ALDERSHOT. The whole day was again spent in inspecting parades and viewing demonstrations; and the programme concluded with the beating of retreat by the massed bands of the Division on STANHOPE PARADE. The programme appears to have been similar, in general, to that arranged for the visit of Their Majesties The King and Queen (see Report No. 46).

9. VISIT TO SECOND CANADIAN DIVISION. On 23 Oct the Minister and the C.G.S. visited 2 Cdn Div (then still commanded by General ODLUM). This division had returned, a little more than a week before, to the sector held by it on the South Coast for some weeks during the past summer. This sector extends from NEWHAVEN in the west to RYE in the east (cf. Report No. 41). The writer was present during this visit. The division's dispositions are, in general, the same as during July and August. It is under command of 4 Corps, pending the complete relief of the latter by Cdn Corps.

10. During the morning the party visited the combined Naval and Military battle headquarters for the NEWHAVEN region. Situated on the outskirts of the town, this is shared by the Royal Navy and the military command of the strong fixed defences of the area. It consists of a system of tunnels 65 feet below ground level. Work is still in progress on construction, but the headquarters is occupied. We saw the R.D.F. plotting-room, in which a map shows the movements of vessels in the Channel. This room is "manned" by members of the W.R.N.S.

11. The official party lunched on BRAGHY HEAD, and afterwards visited the REDOUBT on the front at EASTBOURNE, an old brick work, probably of the Napoleonic period, which is now held by part of the BLACK WATCH (ROYAL HIGHLAND REGIMENT) OF CANADA. General McNAUGHTON accompanied the Minister and the C.G.S. during their afternoon inspections.

12. At PEVERISEY CASTLE the party visited the REGIMENT DE MAISON-NEUVE, who make this ancient structure their battle headquarters (see Report No. 41). The Minister and the C.G.S. climbed to a high point of the castle ruins and looked out across the neighbouring flats and the Channel. The regiment's C.O. explained that the Martello towers, which are numerous on this part of the coast, were incorporated in his defensive system.

13. Driving eastward along the coast, inspecting the successive units disposed here as explained in Report No. 41, HASTINGS CASTLE

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was reached. This ruin, situated on a high rock overlooking the town and the Channel, is held by a detachment of the ROYAL HAMILTON LIGHT INFANTRY. The Minister made a short speech to these men, presenting the good wishes of "the folks back home", saying that he realized how hard it was to be forced to wait for action, and thanking them for the manner in which they had maintained efficiency. Canada, he assured them, would back them to the limit.

14. In the picturesque and historic village of WINCHELSEA, the Minister inspected the H.L. company of the ROYAL REGIMENT OF CANADA. The party then drove on, passing Henry VIII's castle of CAMBER, into RYE. Here the ESSEX SCOTTISH were inspected, and the Minister made another short speech on the same lines as that mentioned above.

15. The writer left the party at this point to return to LONDON, but it is understood that the Minister and the C.G.S. visited 8 Cdn Army Fd Regt and 8 Cdn Recce Bn before returning to H.Q. 2 Cdn Div for dinner and to pass the night.

15. On 24 Oct the Minister and the C.G.S. proceeded to H.Q. 1 Cdn Div, met the senior officers of the division, and attended the presentation of colours to the SASKATOON LIGHT INFANTRY (I.G.) by H.M. The Queen, as already described in Report No. 50.

16. On the night of 22 Oct, the Minister had dined at "A" Mess, H.Q. Cdn Corps.

17. The Minister had also found time to travel to LIVERPOOL on 17 Oct to meet the Canadian troops arriving on T.C. 14. He visited the transports and addressed the men, saying (as reported in The Times, 21 Oct 41), "Your immediate job is to buttress the defences of this island, but you will also train and prepare to serve whenever and wherever you are needed, and you certainly will be needed."

18. On the afternoon of 14 Oct the Minister met representatives of the British Press at a press conference at the Ministry of Information, sketched the Canadian war effort, and answered questions. He mentioned that the total strength of the Canadian Active Army was

about 234,000. Questioned on the matter of man-power, he said that volunteers were coming forward in good numbers "but we could take more".

CONFERENCES AT C.M.H.Q.

19. A variety of important matters were discussed with senior officers of the Canadian Army Overseas during Colonel Ralston's visit. The following items for discussion are listed in an agenda¹ prepared at H.Q. Cdn Corps and bearing the date 28 Sep 41 :

I. ORGANIZATION. (a) H.Q. Cdn Corps. (b) C.M.H.Q. (c) Composition Cdn Corps. (d) Special Units proposed - (i) Air Support Control; (ii) Radio Location Unit; (iii) R.C.A.F. Wing H.Q. (e) Policy re provision of additional Railway and Forestry units. (f) Reorganization of Base Units. (g) Establishments of Permanent Medical Installations.

II. ADMINISTRATION. (a) Age Limits of Officers for Retirement. (b) Policy for Promotion of Officers. (c) Trades Pay. (d) Designation of Cdn Army (Overseas). (e) Jurisdiction of Claims Commission.

III. SUPPLY, REPAIR AND MAINTENANCE. (a) Policy of supply of weapons, ammunition, clothing, M.T. and A.F.Vs. (b) Provision of Base Area Ordnance Installations.

IV. FINANCIAL. (a) Capitation Rates.

20. No attempt is made at the present time to record the results of these conferences. In many cases, however, it should be possible to deal with them in subsequent Reports.

21. The file of weekly General Reports for the Canadian Corps (4/PROGRESS/2) indicates that the Corps Commander took part in conferences with the Minister at C.M.H.Q. on 15, 21 and 25 Oct.

CINEMA FILMS

22. The newly organized Canadian Army Film Unit, which operates under the Public Relations Section of "G" Branch, C.M.H.Q., made a

¹ See C.M.H.Q. file 42/VISITS/7 ("Visits of Hon. J.L. Ralston, Minister of National Defence").

cinema record of the public aspects of this visit. It includes interesting "shots" of the reception of T.C. 14 at LIVERPOOL, and of Colonel Halston addressing the troops.

23. From this time forward it may be assumed that there will be considerably more adequate cinema coverage of Canadian events in the United Kingdom than has been provided so far. The films made will have very considerable historical interest, and their proper preservation is a matter requiring attention.

C.B.S.

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