

NOTE

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Directorate of History
National Defence Headquarters
Ottawa, Canada
K1A 0K2

July 1986

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DECLASSIFIED
Authority DHD 3-3
By ADG for DHist NDHQ
Date NOV 9 1979

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22 Jan 41

Visit to WELWYN;
Sketch of Canadian Medical Establishments
in the United Kingdom;
Further on the wartime aspect of the
English countryside.

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

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

Sir,

I have the honour to present a
further report.

2. This report deals in the main with a visit to the Medical Branch, Canadian Military Headquarters, at Digswell Place, WELWYN, and attempts to provide (on the basis of interviews on that occasion, supplemented at some points by examination of the Medical Branch war diary) a sketch of the Canadian medical establishments in this country as they exist at the present time. Annexed are some further observations on the wartime aspect of the English countryside (cf. my earlier report No. 4, 10 Jan. 41).

VISIT TO MEDICAL BRANCH, C.M.H.Q.

3. On 18 Jan. I had a convenient opportunity of visiting the Medical Branch, C.M.H.Q., in company with Major J.M. ANDERSON, R.C.A., who is conducting a survey of the civil staff at this Headquarters. I drove with him to Welwyn and spent the morning there, returning to Cockspur Street about 1400 hrs. During the morning I had interviews with Colonel R.M. LUTON, M.C., Deputy Director, Medical Services (formerly called Senior Medical Officer) and with Miss E.P. PENSE, R.R.C., Matron-in-Chief, both of whom gave me information about the hospitals and other establishments of the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps in this country.

4. The Medical Branch, Canadian Military Headquarters, is now located at DIGSWELL PLACE, WELWYN, Hertfordshire, to the north of London and not far from HATFIELD. Digswell Place is the residence of Colonel and Mrs. Maitland, who have lent it to Canada to house the D.D.M.S. and his staff. The building is given free of rent and rates, the Canadian military authorities supplying heat and light. A number of the stenographers of the branch are accommodated in the house without charge; the remainder of the staff are in billets nearby. Mrs. Maitland caters for the staff at a very moderate rate. It is clear that the Maitlands have been most generous; but Mrs. Maitland (to whom I was introduced) says that this is only a

fair return for the hospitality which their three children are receiving in Canada. Relations between the Branch and the Maitlands are most cordial, and Colonel LUTON is evidently sorry to contemplate the possibility that the growth of his staff may force him to seek larger quarters elsewhere.

5. The Medical Branch was originally located in the Sun Life Building. Here however it was on the top floor of the building, and when heavy bombing began the Senior Officer (Major-General Montague) ordered it out at short notice, with a view to the safety of the staff. On 20 Sept. 1940 it moved to HITCHAM PLACE, BURNHAM, BUCKS (near TAPLOW). On 29 Oct. it moved again to Digswell Place. (On these moves, see War Diary of Medical Branch, C.M.H.Q., under appropriate dates.) Even at Welwyn there has been occasional bombing, due perhaps to the proximity of Hatfield Aerodrome.

CANADIAN HOSPITAL ARRANGEMENTS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

6. From conversation with Colonel Luton and Miss Pense, supplemented by later reference to the War Diary of the Branch, I have compiled the following list of the Canadian hospitals and similar establishments at present operating in the United Kingdom.

Three General Hospitals:

(No. 1) At COLESHILL, near BIRMINGHAM.

(No. 5) At CLIVENEN, near TAPLOW, BUCKS, not far from MAIDENHEAD.

(No. 15) At BRAMSHOTT, HANTS, not far from BORDON.

One Neurological Hospital:

(No. 1) At HACKWOOD PARK, near BASINGSTOKE, HANTS.

One Casualty Clearing Station:

(No. 4) At PIXHOLME, DORKING, SURREY.

One Convalescent Depot:

(No. 1) At DOLPHIN CAMP, BRIXHAM, DEVON.

One Canadian Officers' Convalescent Home:

At GARNONS, HEREFORD.

7. The following additional information about some of these establishments may be useful.

8. Of the General Hospitals, that at COLESHILL is the newest. Various references in the Medical Branch Diary show that for the purposes of this hospital the R.C.A.M.C. took over MARSTON GREEN EMERGENCY HOSPITAL (which evidently was not quite finished) from the British authorities. The TAPLOW hospital was constructed on the ASTOR estate at Cliveden through the generosity of the Canadian Red Cross Society. One wing of Cliveden itself is used as a residence for night sisters. At BRAMSHOTT the R.C.A.M.C. took over a British military hospital which was under construction. Lt.-Col. McCarter visited Bramshott recently and was much impressed. He mentioned that though built for 600 beds the hospital now actually houses 707. Bramshott appears to be the most "popular" hospital, with a high reputation for efficiency; though Taplow is more of a "show place".

9. Hackwood Park, Basingstoke, which houses No. 1 Neurological Hospital, is the residence of Lord CAMROSE. Colonel Luton showed me a photograph of the Convalescent Depot at Brixham. Here the patients are accommodated in small "chalets" or cabins taking one or two men each.

ADEQUACY OF HOSPITAL ACCOMMODATION

10. I had heard some doubts expressed on the adequacy of Canadian hospital accommodation in this country. (In particular, I heard Lt.-Col. A.M. Brown, the O. i/c Records, remark the other day that the present accommodation would not be ade-

quate for an epidemic, let alone the onset of active military operations.) I mentioned the question to Colonel Luton, and gathered from his reply that the present accommodation, while not actually taxed by existing conditions, is working fairly close to capacity. This, of course, is an unhealthy season of the year. Colonel Luton pointed out two difficulties in the way of rapid expansion: the extreme difficulty of obtaining accommodation of any sort in this country at present, and the shortage of labour for construction purposes. The latter factor is now hindering the development of the Coleshill hospital. The accommodation difficulty has lately stood in the way of the desire of the Canadian authorities to move additional troops to this country.

11. I presume that in the event of an accommodation crisis every effort would be made to expand the three general hospitals to a basis of 1200 beds each. I note, furthermore, that the Medical Branch diary for November 1940 (see entries for 19 and 28 Nov.) refers to a proposal of the D.D.M.S. for establishment of another 600-bed hospital, which it is felt will be necessary. At the moment, as noted above, Bramshott Hospital has 700-710 beds available. This is theoretically a 1200-bed hospital and will presumably be expanded to this full extent as means permit. The Coleshill and Taplow Hospitals are 600-bed establishments; the latter I gather has its full accommodation now available, the former while already handling a good many patients may not yet be able to accommodate its entire quota. The Neurological Hospital, I am told, has about 100 beds now available, and will probably be increased to 200. The Convalescent Depot has 220 beds at present. I am further assured that the British Emergency Medical Service organization is not working to capacity and would be available to help the R.C.A.M.C. in case of need.

FURTHER NOTES ON THE WARTIME ASPECT OF THE ENGLISH COUNTRYSIDE

12. In my Report No. 4 I made some remarks on the manner in which the war has affected the countryside between London and Bordon. This drive to Welwyn gave me opportunities for observation on the main arteries leading north from the capital. Here defensive precautions are even more in evidence. Many preparations have been made for blocking the modern by-pass roads in this region. Anti-tank obstacles of various kinds (and evidently varying grades of effectiveness) are in place at many points. Pillboxes and sandbagged posts are numerous, and there is a great deal of barbed wire. One of the most curious manifestations is road-blocks formed of old motor-cars. At one point two old traction-engines had been utilized for the same purpose. Great pains have been taken to make open spaces impracticable for aeroplane landings; in this area the usual expedient is wires strung on light poles. At frequent intervals similar wires are suspended across the roads from somewhat heavier standards; the object again being to prevent these wide straight thoroughfares from being utilized by the enemy for landing troop-carrying aircraft. These preparations are monuments to the feverish defensive activity of the spring and summer of 1940; but constant efforts are still being made to remind the public that invasion is still a possibility.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient servant,

(Sgd.) C.P. Stacey

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

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Addendum to Report No. 7
(dated 22 Jan 41)

DECLASSIFIED
Authority DHD 3-3
by for DHist NDHQ
Date NOV 9 1979

25 Mar 41

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

1. The following addendum is presented for attachment to Report No. 7, dealing with Canadian medical establishments in the United Kingdom.
2. Early in March, 1941, the Medical Branch, C.M.H.Q., returned from WELWYN to LONDON, and is now established in British Columbia House, Lower Regent Street, only a short distance from the Sun Life Building. (I understand that the Assistant Principal Chaplains (P. and R.C.) are also to be given accommodation in this building, thus making room for the expansion of the Judge Advocate-General's Branch in the Sun Life Building).
3. Colonel and Mrs. Maitland have offered DIGSWELL PLACE, WELWYN, to Canada, rent-free, as a Convalescent Home for nursing sisters, and a home for sisters on leave. Authority for its acceptance for this purpose has been received from Ottawa.
4. With reference to para. 6, it should be noted that No. 4 Casualty Clearing Station is a unit of Canadian Corps; the other establishments mentioned are under C.M.H.Q., with the exception of the Canadian Officers' Convalescent Home, which is not a recognized military unit though a medical officer is assigned to duty there. This establishment is a private benefaction of Mrs. VINCENT MASSEY.
5. Colonel LUTON has been promoted Brigadier, effective 19 Feb 41.

(Sgd.) C.P. Stacey

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

(Copied in Historical Section, Jul 43.)