

NOTE

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THE 1st CANADIAN PARACHUTE BATTALION  
ORGANIZATION AND TRAINING  
(JULY 1942 - JUNE 1944)

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APPENDIX "A" (added 5 Dec 49)

FURTHER MATERIAL RELATING TO  
THE ORGANIZATION AND TRAINING OF  
THE 1st CANADIAN PARACHUTE BATTALION

BACKGROUND TO FORMATION OF UNIT
FORMATION AND EARLY TRAINING

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The 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion;  
Organization and Training, July 1942-June 1944

1. This report is an outline of the events leading up to the formation of the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion and its subsequent history to, but not including, its participation in the first phase of the Allied invasion of France (The part played by the Battalion in France is separately described in Report No. 139). Most of the material relating to the early training of the Battalion in Canada and the United States is not available overseas. The relevant files at C.M.H.Q., and the unit War Diary at Acton, have provided the chief sources of information.

BACKGROUND TO FORMATION OF UNIT (NOVEMBER 1940 - JULY 1942)

2. The use of airborne troops, with which the Russians originally experimented and which the Germans used with conspicuous success when they invaded the Low Countries in May, 1940, was first considered, from the point of view of application to the Canadian war effort, in November of that year. On 12 Nov, in a memorandum prepared at N.D.H.Q. for the Chief of the General Staff by Col. (now Maj.-Gen.) E.L.M. Burns, the advantages of this form of warfare were considered, and the opinion was expressed that: "Airborne troops are merely the most mobile form of land forces, and the fact that some of them land by parachute is due to the characteristics of the aeroplane" (C.M.H.Q. file 1/Para Tps/1: Memorandum by Col. E.L.M. Burns to C.G.S. 12 Nov 40). With respect to reported parachute training in the United Kingdom, the suggestion was made that Canada might make a contribution in this field.

3. The suggestion was forwarded to C.M.H.Q., in December, 1940, with the request that the views of the War Office be ascertained. British parachute troops were then being organized and one "special service battalion" was undergoing active training (*ibid*: Memorandum by Brigadier W.A. Pope, 6 Dec 40; Tel G.S. 3140, CANMILITRY to DEFENSOR, 16 Dec 40). The intention was to use these troops in the role formerly filled by Light Cavalry, "to seize bridge crossings, defiles and aerodromes well in advance of the slower-moving main body of the army" (Pope Memo). The War Office did not however visualize the use of these troops in large numbers, and it was not anticipated that there would be any request for provision of such personnel by Canada (*ibid*: Tel G.S. 3140, CANMILITRY to DEFENSOR, 16 Dec 40).

4. At a meeting held at C.M.H.Q. on 20 Dec 40, and attended by Lieut.-General A.G.L. McNaughton, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., G.O.C. 7 Corps, and Major-General H.D.G. Crerar, D.S.O., C.G.S., the question of training various categories of airborne troops was raised. The record of the meeting states:

General Crerar said that while he is agreeable to a proportion (say a platoon) in each infantry battalion being trained in this work, he is not in favour of training special airborne units unless the War Office make specific requests for them, which is unlikely....General McNaughton stated that he feels that the use of air-borne troops has distinct possibilities but, having



regard to the remarks of General Crerar and the scale of such units as proposed by the War Office, he is not prepared to press his views.

(First Cdn Army file P.A. 5-3-1:  
Memorandum by B.G.S., 21 Dec 40.)

There is nothing to indicate that any further development occurred for the ensuing eight months. The critical situation, both in the Atlantic and on the other war fronts, served to focus attention elsewhere during this period, and the official British attitude had suggested limitations on progress along the lines originally contemplated.

5. In August, 1941, by which time the prospects of offensive action against the enemy had brightened, the question of organizing Canadian Parachute Troops was raised again at N.D.H.Q. The advantages of organizing for this type of warfare were reviewed, as were the disadvantages - the latter being principally the problem of whether, considering the time, money and equipment involved, a Canadian contribution would be practicable. (C.M.H.Q. file 1/Para Tps/1: Tel G.S. 0493, DEFENSOR to CANMILITARY, 14 Aug 41). There was also the point that the Canadian Corps was not then complete, and its existing role did not require such specialized troops. In answer to an enquiry from N.D.H.Q. General McNaughton stated: "I do not advocate the establishment of any separate Para Tps in Cdn Forces" (*ibid*: Tel G.S. 1647, CANMILITARY to DEFENSOR, 19 Aug 41). In his view, the only justification for such special units would be: "(a) Probability of early and continued employment in special role (b) Need for specialized training on lines greatly different from regular units" (*ibid*). He thought that neither of these conditions existed at that time, and that if, at some future date, it was felt necessary to provide these troops, they could be selected from existing units and given the requisite training.

6. Two factors operated to bring about a revived interest in the possibility of organizing Canadian parachutists during the autumn of 1941 and the early part of 1942. By October, 1941, the War Office was considering a much more ambitious programme of airborne activity than had been originally contemplated, and, simultaneously with this development, the Royal Canadian Air Force began to anticipate a demand for co-operation with airborne troops. The War Office was now thinking in terms of an "Air Landing Brigade Group", with an additional parachute component of possibly three battalions (C.M.H.Q. file 1/A B Tps/1: War Office letter, 10 Oct 41, 20/Misc/2044 (S.D.4)). A force of 2,500 parachutists was to be formed and this number might be increased. The possibility of even an infantry division in a dual role as airborne troops was under examination (*ibid*: War Office letter, 29 Oct 41, 0164/6437/ (S.D.4)). Finally, on 1 Nov 41, the War Office decided to form an Airborne Division consisting of a Divisional H.Q. with R.A.F. Wing incorporated, a Parachute Brigade, an Air-landing Brigade Group and a Glider Battalion (a regiment of army glider pilots) (*ibid*: Memorandum on the Organization and Employment of the Airborne Division, by Major-General F.A.M. Browning, D.S.O., 24 Jan 42).

7. At the same time, R.C.A.F. Headquarters in Canada, with a view to ascertaining what equipment they might be expected to supply, had solicited information through the Air Officer Commanding, R.C.A.F. in Great Britain (C.M.H.Q. file 1/Para Tps/1: A.O.C., R.C.A.F. in Great Britain, to Senior Officer, C.M.H.Q., 24 Oct 41). The matter was referred to the Canadian Corps Commander once more and, while adhering substantially to the view









































