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# **Public Opinion and National Prestige The Politics of Canadian Army Participation in the Invasion of Sicily, 1942-1943**

**Brandey Barton**

**T**he participation of Canadian troops in the Sicilian campaign of July and August 1943 marked a distinctive shift in Canada's war policy, and significantly influenced the employment of the army until the end of hostilities in May 1945. Advocates of Canadian participation in the campaign argued that the overseas army, which had been on garrison duty in Britain since 1939, needed to gain combat experience. Yet it was largely due to political reasons and concerns with prestige rather than military necessity that prompted the Canadian government to bring increasing, and ultimately effective, pressure to bear on the British government to include a Canadian infantry division and tank brigade in Operation "Husky" – the invasion of Sicily.

Prior to 1943, the government's main concern had been to avoid any circumstances that might lead to overseas conscription.<sup>1</sup> The heavy casualties that might make overseas conscription necessary could only be the result of sustained action by the land forces. For that reason Mackenzie King, the Canadian prime minister, had been content not to push the senior Allied powers, especially Britain, to find combat roles for the Canadian Army which was in position to defend the British Isles. King had been happy not to participate at all in the strategic deliberations of the great powers. When Sir Robert Borden, Canada's conservative prime minister during the First World War, had in 1917-1918 demanded a Canadian voice in British strategy, the price had

been increased military commitments and the imposition of conscription that severely divided the country.<sup>2</sup> King desperately wanted to avoid a repeat of that situation.

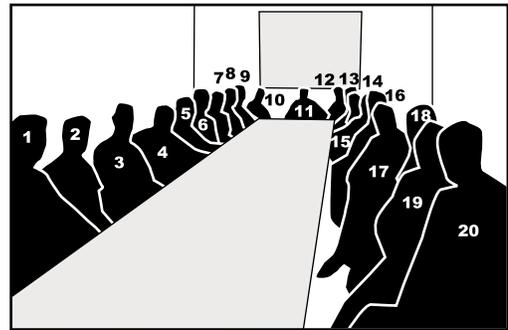
By the fall of 1942 the army had been in Britain for three years. The danger of an Axis invasion of the British Isles had long past, and the only serious combat the army had seen in Europe was the disastrous single day assault on Dieppe on 19 August 1942.<sup>3</sup> General A.G.L. McNaughton, the commander of the army, was not greatly concerned by the lack of combat experience. His primary objective was to make sure the Canadian army was not broken up, and remained as a united, national formation for the final assault on Germany. By the fall of 1942, many disagreed with this policy. The United States had only entered the war at the end of 1941, over two years after Canada, and yet its army was already fighting in the Pacific and preparing for large-scale operations in Europe. Many Canadians, including influential journalists, were asking why Canada's army was not more active.<sup>4</sup> J.L. Ralston, the minister of National Defence, and many senior army officers, other than McNaughton, were also keen for early action by any means possible. They were concerned about the morale of the troops in England, and feared that Canada's army might in fact miss out on any substantial share in combat, which would be a crippling blow to the reputation of the armed forces, and to Canada's international influence.



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Winston Churchill and the British Chiefs of Staff meet with Mackenzie King and the Canadian War Cabinet:

1. J.L. Ilsley; 2. Sir J. Martin; 3. Lord Leathers; 4. Churchill; 5. Field Marshal Sir Alan Brooke, Chief of the Imperial General Staff (Br.); 6. Admiral Sir A. Cunningham, Chief of the Naval Staff (Br.); 7. Air Chief Marshal Sir C. Portal, Chief of the Air Staff (Br.); 8. Field Marshal J. Dill; 9. General Sir Hastings Ismay; 10. Air Marshal R. Leckie, Chief of the Air Staff (Cdn.); General M.A. Pope; 12. Lieutenant-General J.C. Murchie, Chief of the General Staff (Cdn.); 13. Vice Admiral G.C. Jones, Chief of the Naval Staff (Cdn.); 14. Louis St. Laurent; 15. C.G. Power; 16. T.A. Crerar; 17. Mackenzie King; 18. A.D.P. Heeney; 19. J.L. Ralston; 20. Angus L. Macdonald.



Ralston and Lieutenant-General Kenneth Stuart, chief of the general staff, put the need for early employment of any substantial part of the army directly to General Alan F. Brooke, Chief of Imperial General Staff (CIGS),<sup>1</sup> during a visit to the United Kingdom in October 1942.<sup>5</sup> Ralston asked Brooke to make sure Churchill understood that “there were no strings on the employment of the Canadian Army” and “that the Government of Canada wished it to be used where it would make the greatest contribution.”<sup>6</sup> Before meeting with Brooke, Ralston and Stuart met privately with Vincent Massey, the Canadian High Commissioner, to make sure that the Canadian government’s senior representative in Britain was fully prepared to cooperate in the effort to persuade the British to find employment for the army in 1943.<sup>7</sup> It is particularly significant that the minister of National Defence and the chief

of the general staff went to Massey and General Brooke *before* they had explained to General McNaughton that they were pushing for an active role for *any* part of the Canadian Army. Normally, McNaughton, as the commander of the Canadian Army in Britain would have been closely associated with any such appeal.

Ralston’s view that the army might be sidelined seemed to gain weight when in November 1942 the US Army joined the British Army for Operation “Torch,” the large-scale invasion of north-western Africa.<sup>8</sup> Canada did not even receive prior notification of “Torch.” Mackenzie King was not particularly concerned by this. However, the situation changed in March 1943 when an urgent personal message from British Prime Minister Winston Churchill arrived explaining that Canada was to lose priority on trans-Atlantic shipping,

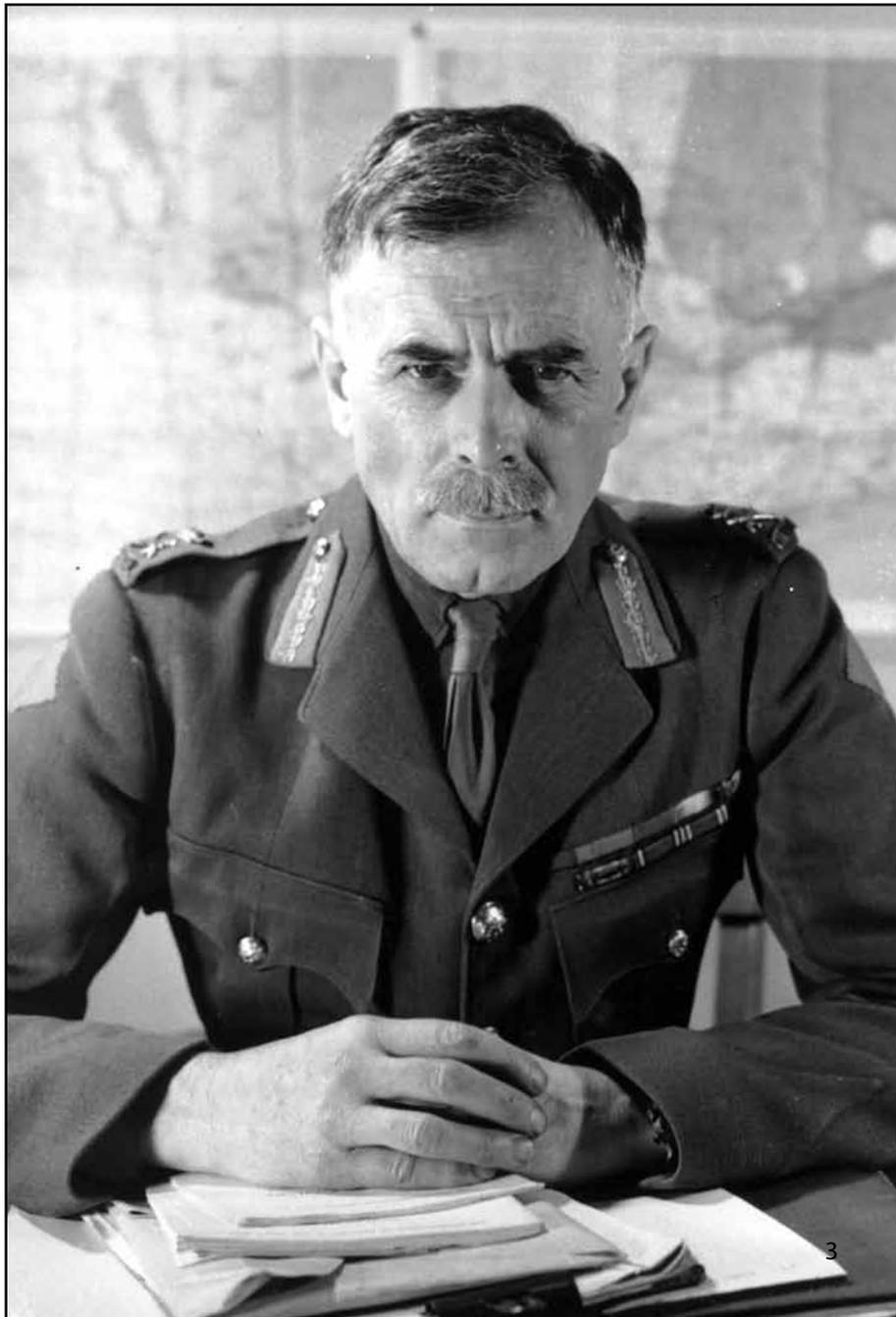
Churchill told King that because the Canadian Army would not be involved in major operations in the near future, the trans-Atlantic shipping that had been assigned to transport Canadian troops needed to complete the organization of the overseas army would instead be assigned to US Army Air Force personnel.<sup>9</sup> Ralston was furious and his view that the changed shipping priority indicated the need to ensure early action for any substantial part of the army won considerable support in Cabinet. King, in what his diary suggests was one of the more difficult decisions of his career, began to shift his support away from McNaughton's view that any major mission must be only for the whole of the army as a large national formation. The prime minister sent a message to Churchill urging that employment be found in the Mediterranean theatre for any part of the army.<sup>10</sup>

The continued insistence of Ralston and Stuart that active employment be found for at least part of the Canadian forces and the support of the full government that King, however great his private misgivings, had provided since the shipping crisis in March, paid off on 23 April 1943. General Brooke asked General McNaughton if the Canadian Government would be willing to commit one infantry division and one tank brigade to Operation "Husky."<sup>11</sup> McNaughton sent a telegram to General Stuart requesting permission from the government for Canadian troops to participate in the operation. As a result of discussions by the War Committee and decisions it had previously reached, Mackenzie King gave his approval after reviewing McNaughton's telegram. King recorded in his diary that night that it was a shame that McNaughton's army was to be broken up but felt that what would be accomplished would more than offset the division of the army. Within 48 hours McNaughton was able to inform the CIGS that his government had authorized participation in the proposed operation.<sup>12</sup>

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General A.G.L. McNaughton, the commander of the army, was a proponent of keeping the army together to maintain its national character.

Shortly after midnight, 10 July 1943, Mackenzie King announced to his country that Canadian armed forces, along with those of Britain and the United States were "in the forefront of an attack which has as its ultimate objective the unconditional surrender of Italy and Germany." He continued, "All of Canada will be justifiably proud to know that units of the Canadian Army are a part of the Allied forces engaged in this attack."<sup>13</sup> The landing by the 1st Canadian Infantry Division on Pachino Beach marked "the beginning of a new phase of war"<sup>14</sup> for Canada's army, after four long years of waiting and training in the United Kingdom. Logical as it might seem that the prime minister should make this early announcement of a major national military initiative, he had in fact encountered enormous



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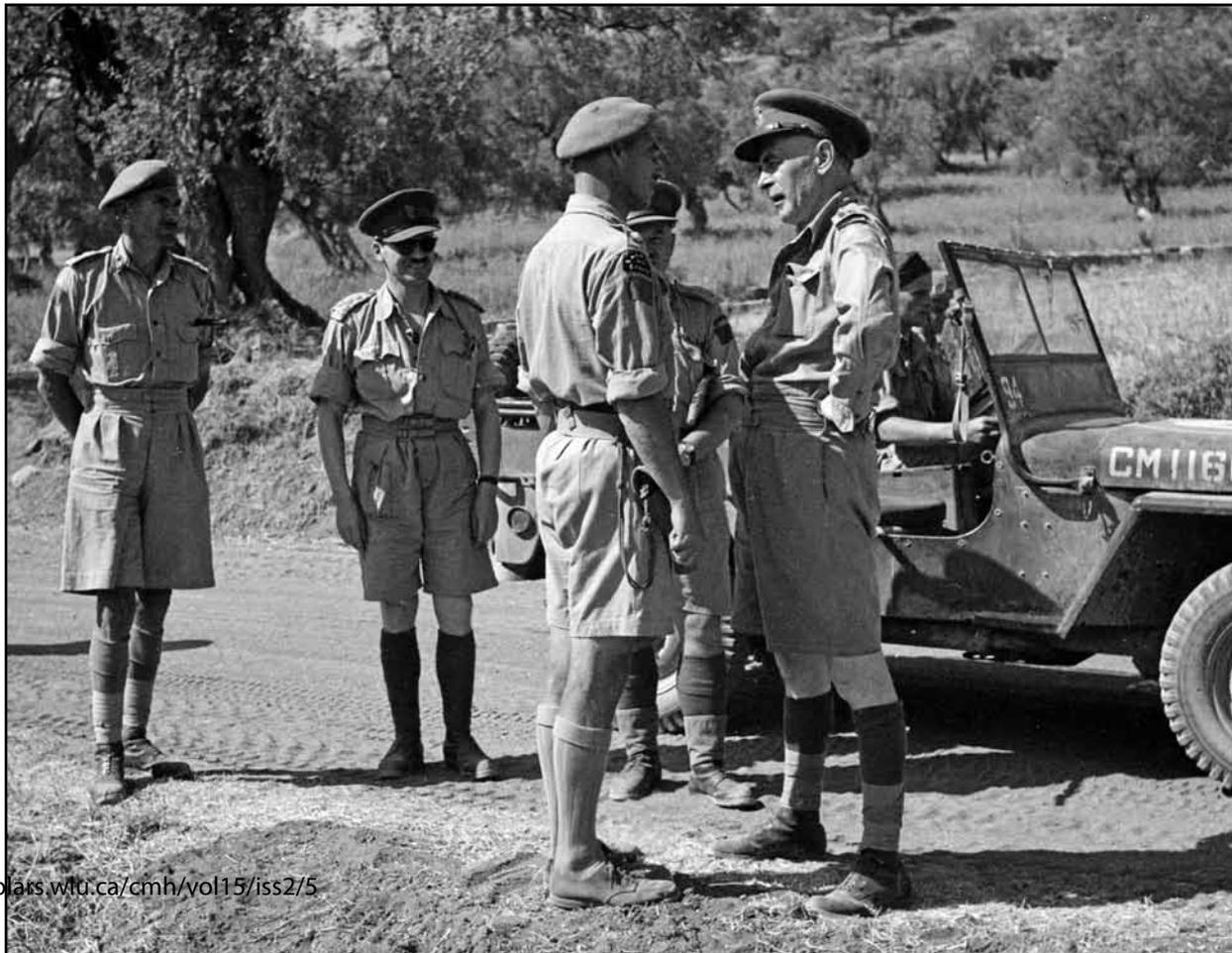
difficulties in receiving clearance to do so from the Allied high command.

As the countdown to Operation "Husky" proceeded and plans were finalized, General Stuart informed Canadian military authorities in London that the government wished to provide as much information as possible about operations in Sicily to the Canadian public as soon as was feasible.<sup>15</sup> King was anxious that the participation of Canadian forces in "Husky" be known by the public immediately since involvement in an operation of this magnitude was long in coming and important to the Canadian war effort. The resulting Sicilian crisis, a crisis on the prestige front as Massey referred to it,<sup>16</sup> was a complicated affair, spanning many days and embroiling military and political authorities on three continents.

On 7 July, with the invasion of Sicily only days away, National Defence Headquarters (NDHQ) in Ottawa received from the Canadian Joint Staff (CJS) Washington advance copies of the announcements to be released after the operation began.<sup>17</sup> From his headquarters in Algiers, North Africa, General Eisenhower, commander-in-chief

of Allied Forces, proposed three announcements: (a) a communique for general release, (b) an *avis* to the people of France and, (c) a proclamation to the Italian people. The immediate reaction of both Ralston and Mackenzie King was that the drafts were "thoroughly objectionable" because they made no mention of Canada.<sup>18</sup> Lester B. Pearson, then a senior official with the Canadian legation in Washington and a key player in the crisis, later recalled that the response of his government, "was swift and decisive, references to Anglo-American forces [had to] be changed to American-British-Canadian forces."<sup>19</sup> The original proclamation to the Italian people began "on behalf of the governments of the United States and Great Britain, the Allied Forces are occupying Italian territory" and the *avis*, which mentioned only "the Anglo-American forces,"<sup>20</sup> were unacceptable. National Defence Headquarters requested that Canadian Military Headquarters (CMHQ) in London and the CJS in Washington discuss the matter with their British and American colleagues and request that references to Canada and Canadian forces be included. NDHQ made these inquiries in both Washington and London since the announcements regarding the landings were to be released in

General McNaughton (right) talks to Major D.E. Walker, while Major-General Guy Simonds, commander of 1st Canadian Infantry Division (left) and Brigadier Walford look on, Sicily, 20 August 1943.



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Prime Minister Mackenzie King, Air Marshal Lloyd S. Breadner, Mrs. Winston Churchill, Vice-Admiral Percy W. Nelles and Lieutenant-General Kenneth Stuart at the Quebec Conference, August 1943.

both Allied capitals.<sup>21</sup> The CJS replied on 8 July that the British Joint Staff Mission (BJS) recommended that Eisenhower should not make the broadcast of the proclamation and instead that the announcement should be made by the British prime minister and American president. In addition, the CJS reported that BJS had transmitted the Canadian concerns to the British high command in London. Eisenhower was then notified by the British Joint Staff Mission that the announcements should be released in Canada as well as Washington and London.<sup>22</sup> A telegram from Canadian Joint Staff Washington to National Defence Headquarters dated 9 July confirmed that the instructions had been sent to Eisenhower.<sup>23</sup>

On 7 July, Vincent Massey had received early confirmation that the proclamation to the Italian people was to be made by Churchill and Roosevelt, not Eisenhower. Massey reported to Canada that the proposed text read: "At this moment the combined armed forces of the United States and Great Britain are under command of General Eisenhower..."<sup>24</sup> Massey also explained that for reasons of military security it was difficult to mention Canadian participation in the operation. However, Canadian concerns were

sympathetically received by British authorities and every effort was to be made to find a suitable solution.<sup>25</sup>

On 8 July the United States War Department informed the Canadian Joint Staff in Washington that authorization had been given by Eisenhower's headquarters stating that Eisenhower had agreed that King could make reference to the participation of Canadian troops in Operation "Husky" 24 hours after the landings started. The British War Office informed CMHQ on 9 July that to prevent any aid from being given to the enemy, no announcement regarding the participation of Canadian forces could be made at the time of the landings.<sup>26</sup> As a result, King believed that the British were being unnecessarily difficult.<sup>27</sup> However, Mackenzie King was wrong about the British, as Massey felt that distinct progress was being made and recorded in his diary that he was confident Canada would be mentioned in the communiqués and the proclamation.<sup>28</sup>

On 8 July King informed Massey that if it were not possible to mention Canadian forces for security reasons, then the proclamation should refer to only "Allied Forces." Additionally, if the proclamation was to be issued by Churchill and



Photograph by J.H. Smith, LAC PA 163059

Colonel J.L. Ralston, Minister of National Defence, talking to General P.J. Montague and Vincent Massey at Hendon airport after flying in from Italy, 4 October 1944.

Roosevelt then King felt he should be included with the British prime minister and American president in the announcement. King requested that the text of the agreed upon proclamation be available in Canada for simultaneous release by the Canadian prime minister. He stressed to Massey, "the importance of the Prime Minister being in a position to inform Canadians that their forces are at last in action."<sup>29</sup> This strong statement indicates the extent to which Massey's report of 7 July, from British sources, regarding Eisenhower's security concerns about mentioning Canada, had left King with the impression that the British were not helping to exert enough pressure on Eisenhower. King, in fact, was convinced that the British were the main problem.

For this reason, King turned to the US president, appealing for his personal intervention in an evening phone call on 8 July. This was an unusual initiative, of the kind reserved for critical issues touching on fundamental national interests, and is compelling proof of the importance King attached to the recognition of Canada's military effort. King reached the White House and spoke with Harry Hopkins, the president's trusted aide, who was then in the middle of dinner with Roosevelt.<sup>30</sup> The prime minister arranged with Hopkins for Lester B. Pearson, the minister counselor

of the Canadian Legation in Washington, to meet with the president at once to discuss the situation. Pearson saw Roosevelt at 2140 hours that evening and reported to Ottawa shortly thereafter that both Hopkins and the president were "most friendly and sympathetic" regarding the Canadian situation. The two understood that any mention of "armed forces" in statements regarding "Husky" that did not refer to Canadian forces alongside British-American forces would be objectionable to Canada. Pearson reported that after some thought Roosevelt agreed specific mention of Canada was the preferable course of action and that he would take the necessary steps to ensure Canadians were, indeed, included in any statement made about the launch of the operation.<sup>31</sup> Later that same evening King sent a telegram to Massey outlining what was discussed between Pearson and Roosevelt in Washington. He told Massey that the president had assured Pearson that there would be plenty of time to consider the Canadian point of view and make the necessary changes.<sup>32</sup> The implication of King's message was that in sharp contrast to the British the Americans were being extraordinarily helpful.

In fact, British authorities had already taken significant action in response to Massey's complaints. The War Office in London had

telegraphed Eisenhower informing him that the British chiefs of staff had arranged for the Canadians to be mentioned in the Churchill-Roosevelt proclamation and that it was assumed similar mention of the Canadians would be made in the *avis* to the French.<sup>33</sup> On 9 July NDHQ received a telegram from Canadian Joint Staff Washington confirming that “Canadian participation in ‘Husky’ [was] to be mentioned in joint message from President and Prime Minister to the Italian people.” The telegram further stated: “assume that Canadians will be mentioned by name in the *avis*...to the people of Metropolitan France.”<sup>34</sup> In his telegram to King on 9 July, Massey confirmed that he had seen telegrams exchanged between London and Washington and that the proclamation issued by Roosevelt and Churchill would read the “combined forces of the United States, Great Britain and Canada.” However, Massey reiterated to Mackenzie King that for military reasons the Combined Chiefs of Staff were reluctant to mention the presence of Canadians during an early stage of the operation. They had only agreed to do so because of the special circumstances King outlined in his telegram of 8 July.<sup>35</sup> King’s reply to Massey revealed that he was not impressed with Massey’s telegram. He did acknowledge the efforts that were being made to change the wording of the *avis* and the proclamation. However, one paragraph of King’s telegram clearly reflected his mood:

The objection...to associating the Prime Minister of Canada with the Proclamation does not impress us. This...does not accord with President’s statement...that there would be ample time to have consideration given to our views in preparation of Proclamation to the Italian people.<sup>36</sup>

Shortly after midnight on 10 July, Eisenhower’s communique was issued from Allied Headquarters in Algiers announcing the start of operations in Sicily but it made reference only to “Allied Forces.”<sup>37</sup> Only ten minutes later, however, King received word at his residence that a flash had come from the War

Department in Washington beginning, “British-United States-Canadian forces have launched an attack on Sicily.”<sup>38</sup> Lester Pearson on his way home heard a similar report on the radio in Washington stating: “British, American, (pause) and Canadian troops have commenced landing operations in Sicily.”<sup>39</sup> This announcement from the War Department in Washington came as a surprise since Eisenhower’s communique had referred only to “Allied Forces.” Nonetheless, it is important to note that the *avis* to the French people made reference to the participation of Canadian forces.<sup>40</sup> Upon hearing about the radio broadcast from Washington, Prime Minister King decided he could issue his own statement to the country. He arranged for the statement to be given to the press immediately and at 0800 hours read his statement on the radio:<sup>41</sup> “All Canada will be justifiably proud to know that units of the Canadian Army are a part of the allied force engaged in the attack.”<sup>42</sup>

Vincent Massey, on the morning of 10 July, heard the announcement of the Sicilian landing,



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J.L. Ralston, Minister of National Defence, shaking hands with W.L. Mackenzie King after proposing a toast to “Our Leader” at a banquet celebrating Mr. King’s 25th anniversary as leader of the Liberal Party of Canada, 7 August 1944.



Mackenzie King, Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt pose for a photograph during the Quebec Conference, August 1943.

ended and “it would have been one of those fatal omissions that nothing could make good.”<sup>45</sup>

On Monday morning, 12 July, Mackenzie King announced to the Canadian House of Commons that operations in Sicily had commenced and that Canadians were indeed participating. King also assured the House that since the outbreak of the war the government had insisted Canadian forces, whether in whole or in part, should be used when and where they could make the best contribution.<sup>46</sup> On 13 July the prime minister and the minister of National Defence, were questioned in the House about whether the inclusion of Canadian troops in Sicily meant that the army had been broken up. Ralston replied by reiterating what he had said previously in the House on 13 May 1943: “It has always been and still is our policy that the Canadian army in whole or in part is available to be used wherever and for whatever task would best serve the common cause.”<sup>47</sup>

which gave full recognition to the participation of Canadian troops, and felt that the wording of the announcement was largely due to the efforts of his office over the previous days.<sup>43</sup> Mackenzie King, on the other hand, believed that were it not for his late night phone call to the White House, Canadians would not have been mentioned in any of the statements announcing the beginning of “Husky.” As he wrote in his diary, “So much for Britain.”<sup>44</sup> King, renowned for his caution, calculation and reserve, was so deeply upset that he could not contain his indignation. Upon returning to Kingsmere, his country estate, on 10 July, he found that the Governor General and Princess Alice were visiting. Before they left, King told them about the exchange of telegrams and the efforts that his government had gone to, to get consent from the British to announce Canadian participation in the “Husky” operation. King explained how quickly the American president had agreed to the mention of Canadian troops and that he (King), “would have been wholly discredited...had [he] not taken the stand [he] did at midnight.” King freely drew extreme conclusions: “...had no announcement come about Canadians participating from their own government, [his] political career would have”

In the House on 14 July the minister was asked if he could reveal the name of the commanding officer of the Canadian forces in Sicily. Ralston replied that for reasons of security, he could not provide that kind of information until Eisenhower gave permission to do so. R.B. Hanson, leader of the Opposition protested that “It is a remarkable situation, because I have read in the press the names of all the allied commanders and Canada is just not in that picture...I hope there is a Canadian commander of some prominence and standing...”<sup>48</sup> Ralston corrected Hanson, reminding the members that none of the names of the Allied divisional or even corps commanders had been released.<sup>49</sup>

This was typical of Ralston’s normally cautious public statements. Uncharacteristically, however, he then let some of his frustration show: “I do not want to add fuel to the flame of public desire, but I must say that sometimes I am irked at the security regulations which it is necessary to enforce.”<sup>50</sup> More unusually still, Mr. King then proceeded to vent more fully and stated that he had made his announcement to the Canadian people Friday night in spite of being asked

not to make any mention of Canadian forces participating in “Husky” until late Saturday.<sup>51</sup> King continued to show his anger in the House the next day, and in fact related the full details of what he saw as a sordid slight against Canada by Britain in contrast to the help he received from Washington.<sup>52</sup>

King wrote in his diary that night that, “it was really unbelievable that with all Canada has done in this war for Britain, that our position should have been so completely and deliberately overlooked by the British...”<sup>53</sup> Both Vincent Massey and Lieutenant-Colonel C.P. Stacey, then the head of the army’s overseas historical section and privy to high-level information, recorded in their diaries on 16 July that King’s statement in the House which had blamed the British had caused quite a stir at CMHQ in London. Military authorities there thought that the British War Office had been fully cooperative and had made every effort on the behalf of Canadians, as had the Americans, to convince Eisenhower to mention the Canadian forces. Stacey went even further, suggesting that there was the possibility that Canadian relations with the British would suffer as a result.<sup>54</sup> King’s attack on British military authorities was certainly an embarrassment to Canadian military authorities. Churchill, upon hearing of King’s statement was livid.<sup>55</sup>

Malcolm MacDonald, the British High Commissioner in Canada, recorded that many people in Canada wrongly believed that once Canadian troops were finally participating in action, the British authorities had tried to prevent the news of their participation from reaching the public. He believed that Mackenzie King’s false perception of events and his statement in the House of Commons had fostered this belief.<sup>56</sup> Like Stacey, MacDonald was also worried about the effect on Anglo-Canadian relations.<sup>57</sup> Winston Churchill, in a telegram to King on 17 July, told the Canadian prime minister that reports of his suggestion that Canada got better treatment from the United States than from Britain made for “painful reading.”<sup>58</sup> He expressed his unhappiness that King had felt slighted but reiterated that the Canadians were receiving ample press coverage in the London papers.<sup>59</sup> Churchill also informed King that he had given the War Office instructions

to release the name of the Canadian commander and that it had not been done up until that point because no commanders of any nationality had been named except for army commanders and higher. Churchill did admit that perhaps an exception should have been made for the Canadians because of the long period that they had been waiting to see action, but at the same time, asked King to understand how difficult it was to keep everything straight.<sup>60</sup>

The situation deteriorated further the following day when Churchill received the full text of Mackenzie King’s outburst in the House. Churchill wrote to King that he could not accept the position in which King had put him. He was to be questioned about King’s statement in the British Parliament the following Tuesday. Churchill then asked the Canadian prime minister for suggestions about how he should answer the questions in Parliament.<sup>61</sup> King did not reply directly to Churchill but instead asked MacDonald what Churchill meant when he said he could not accept the position. When MacDonald replied with the obvious answer, that Churchill could not accept the suggestion the British authorities had opposed mentioning Canadian forces, King became angry.<sup>62</sup> King informed MacDonald that if Churchill gave a statement in parliament he would dissolve the Canadian parliament and call an election. If that were not enough, King argued he would not fight the election on that one issue alone, but rather on the, “treatment of Canada by the British government, which had frequently forgotten

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Churchill and King shake hands during happier times.

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that Canada was a Dominion.” He suggested that, “on matters of importance to Canada, [the British] had ignored Canada’s rights as a free member of the Commonwealth...” and that, “he had sometimes permitted himself...to be ignored as no Canadian Prime Minister should be...”<sup>63</sup> That he had let himself be ignored was one matter, but King was not prepared to stand idly by while Canadian soldiers were put in a position of inferiority when compared with their British and American counterparts. That King would suggest the British sometimes forgot Canada was a Dominion is interesting. Since the outbreak of the war, the Canadian government and military authorities had been fighting to assert Canadian independence and ensure that they remained in control over Canadian troops. This episode suggests volumes about the confused status of not only the Canadian Army but the country as well.

As King continued to rage, Malcolm MacDonald pointed out that he had read all the relevant correspondence and reported that London’s attitude towards the Canadian situation had been “as unexceptional as Washington’s.” In fact, the two governments had actually cooperated in sending instructions to Eisenhower’s headquarters to carry out the request that mention be made of Canadian participation in the communiques about the start of operations in Sicily.<sup>64</sup> MacDonald further suggested that the Canadian prime minister had misunderstood the attitude of the British authorities and as a result had been quite unfair to them, because in reality, the British had been just as cooperative as the Americans. MacDonald told King that in all likelihood, the time difference between Ottawa and London (as opposed to between Ottawa and Washington) was the probable reason for the perceived slowness of answers coming out of London.

The next day, after having a chance to cool down, King agreed to write a draft response for Churchill and told MacDonald he no longer wished to call an election if Churchill made an unsatisfactory statement in the British Parliament. Churchill found King’s statement too long, but in his message to Parliament proposed that no one in particular was to blame for the misunderstanding and that the matter was officially closed.<sup>65</sup>

The incident publicly showed Mackenzie King at his worst. He was clearly wrong about the attitude of the British and could have done serious harm to the Anglo-Canadian relationship.<sup>66</sup> Malcolm MacDonald believed King never would have called a general election but the incident made MacDonald realize the seriousness of the situation and that irritation at the treatment of Canada was widespread among ministers and citizens of the country.<sup>67</sup> Massey, in addition, believed that King’s annoyance at the situation was derived from a number of incidents in the previous months which had disrupted Anglo-Canadian relations and because it was *only* a last minute intervention in both Washington and London that led to the mention of Canadians in the Churchill-Roosevelt proclamation. Massey felt the situation was exasperated by the Canadian prime minister’s hyper-sensitivity about Anglo-Canadian relations whereas the British prime minister was insensitive. The entire situation could have been avoided, Massey felt, if only someone conscious of the Canadian sentiment had reviewed the proclamation and pointed out the omission of Canada.<sup>68</sup> In a message to Winston Churchill on 19 July, although he never apologized to the British prime minister, King did acknowledge that the British had indeed agreed to the mention of Canadian forces.<sup>69</sup>

In the end, Mackenzie King supported McNaughton for as long as he could but public opinion and the fear of overseas conscription eventually got the better of him. Clearly, it was an agonizing decision to support Ralston, who had no qualms about overseas conscription, rather than McNaughton who was determined to avoid it. King’s reluctance to make such a decision, and the enormous strains on him, were evident in the mixed messages he sent about what he wanted for the Canadian Army and what he saw as Canada’s place in the higher direction of the war. The full extent of the strain he bore, and the over-riding importance he had finally come to attach to early action for the army, was clearly evident in his thoroughly uncharacteristic public outbursts in Parliament in July 1943, and his unwillingness to make amends with Churchill even days later, when normally anger would have cooled. It was a particularly remarkable incident because King was the exact reverse of a passionate leader; invariably he was able to contain his emotions in the service of larger and

longer term political interests. In the matter of war fighting, King had long been convinced that his, and his government's, interests were best served by publicly promoting his warm friendship with Churchill, whose popularity in Canada was enormous. Privately, King's relationship with Churchill was very different as their confrontations over recognition of the Royal Canadian Navy's leading part in the Battle of the Atlantic and the creation of Royal Canadian Air Force overseas units and formations shows.<sup>70</sup>

Ultimately, despite the important requirement for combat experience, 1st Canadian Division and, subsequently, I Canadian Corps were sent to the Mediterranean for very different reasons, rooted in domestic politics and questions of national prestige. The government so forcefully pushed for action that it did what Mackenzie King had always been exceedingly reluctant to do – dictate on what were arguably purely military matters to senior Allied commanders. Sending the division to Sicily also meant removing a British division that had already begun training. Sending a corps, including an armoured division, to Italy, moreover, meant establishing an additional headquarters where one was not needed nor wanted.<sup>71</sup> This is, of course, not to say that the Canadian Army performed poorly as a result of its government's actions. On the contrary, the army lived up to the reputation it had established during the First World War; this, rather paradoxically, was in fact the ultimate reason why General McNaughton had wanted the army to remain intact.

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### Notes

1. C.P. Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments: The War Policies of Canada 1939-1945* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1970), p.3.
2. *Ibid.*, p.5.
3. C.P. Stacey, *Six Years of War: The Army in Canada, Britain and the Pacific* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1957), p.340.
4. G.W.L. Nicholson, *The Canadians in Italy 1939-1945* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1957), p.20.
5. Alex Danchev and Daniel Todman, eds., *War Diaries 1939-1945: Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2001), p.329.
6. Nicholson, p.22.
7. *Vincent Massey Papers*, 15 October 1942, University of Toronto Archives [UT Archives], B87-0082, Box 311.
8. Stacey, *Six Years of War*, p.310.
9. Dominions Secretary to Secretary of State for External Affairs, London, Telegram 56, 14 March 1943, *Documents on Canadian External Relations*, pp.328-329.
10. Secretary of State for External Affairs to Dominions Secretary, Ottawa, Telegram 47, 17 March 1943, *Documents on Canadian External Relations*, pp.330-331.
11. Danchev and Todman, eds., p.396.
12. Nicholson, p.3. See also James B. Conacher, "Canadian Participation in the Sicilian Campaign," Unpublished PhD Thesis, Harvard 1949, p.10a, in *James B. Conacher Personal Papers*, U of T Archives, B2005-0011, Box 016. Conacher was originally in the Canadian Army Signal Corps during the Second World War but in 1944 was transferred to the Historical Section where he worked as an historical officer under the direction of C.P. Stacey.
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14. "King States Army in Front," *Globe and Mail*, Toronto, 10 July 1943, Vol. C, No. 29,195, p.2.
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