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# Stepping in New Directions

## The Canadian Army's Observer Program in the Asia-Pacific Region, 1944-45

ANDREW L. BROWN

*Abstract: In early 1944, and in anticipation of a government decision to commit ground forces to the war against Japan, the Canadian army launched a program that sent officers to the Asia-Pacific region to observe Allied operations. The observer program was well underway when, in November 1944, the Canadian government ordered the army to prepare a division to serve under American command in the Pacific theatre. The observer program helped the army deal with two significant challenges: learning how to fight a largely unfamiliar enemy in a tropical environment, and learning how to operate as part of an American force.*

IN EARLY 1944, the Canadian government began to consider committing military forces to the war against Japan.<sup>1</sup> Several months of deliberation ensued before the cabinet decided that Canada should indeed play a role in the Pacific theatre, once the war against Germany had concluded. That September, when Canada hosted the Octagon Conference of Allied leaders in Quebec City, Prime Minister W.L. Mackenzie King advised British and American authorities of Canada's desire to contribute armed forces, including an army formation, to the Pacific theatre. Over the next three months, Canadian officials worked out what each of the services would commit. For the army, this amounted to a contingent of 30,000

<sup>1</sup> At the time, Canada already had a small presence in Southeast Asia. The RCAF's 413 (Coastal Reconnaissance) Squadron had been operating out of Ceylon since 1942. Also, numerous Canadians served on attachment, on an individual basis, to British forces in Southeast Asia, mostly RCAF personnel serving with the RAF.

soldiers for operations under American command. The commitment constituted a watershed in that it represented a first step away from the imperial military system.

Ever since 1899, when Canada sent troops to South Africa, the dominion's army had fought its wars alongside British forces. Indeed, after the Boer War, the Canadian army, like its counterparts in Australia and New Zealand, organised, equipped, and trained on the British model. Those efforts yielded compatibility that allowed Canadian and other dominion forces to fit into a larger British army in 1914, and again in 1939, creating imperial armies whose constituent national contingents spoke a common military language, shared a familiar regimental culture, used the same doctrine, and relied on common systems of supply.<sup>2</sup> The 1944 decisions to send Canadian troops to the Pacific and to place them under American command, therefore, brought new and significant challenges. First, the Canadians needed to acquaint themselves with a largely unfamiliar enemy and an equally unfamiliar operating environment. Then, once the decision had been made to fight alongside the Americans, the Canadians had to figure out how to operate with US forces, which spoke a different military language, shared none of the same regimental culture, used a foreign military doctrine, and relied on a unique system of supply. How, then, did the Canadian army go about meeting these challenges? Senior Canadian officers decided that the army should start by stepping into the region and witnessing first-hand how allies did business there. So, starting in early 1944, and until the war ended, the army sent officers to the Asia-Pacific region to observe Allied operations.

<sup>2</sup> See Douglas E. Delaney, *The Imperial Army Project: Britain and the Land Forces of the Dominions and India, 1902-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

To date, the observer program has received little scholarly attention.<sup>3</sup> This article explores why and how the program was run, addressing in four parts the question of how Canadian military authorities sought to prepare a ground contingent for service with American forces in the Pacific. The first part explains how the army anticipated the government's decision to commit forces to the war against Japan. Until September 1944, it was not clear whether Canadians would be despatched to the Pacific to fight as part of American or British Commonwealth formations. Planning accordingly, Canadian military authorities took prudent action to prepare for all eventualities, attaching officers to American and British Commonwealth forces to observe combat operations in the Asia-Pacific region. The second part explains the government's decision to commit ground forces to the Pacific theatre under American command, situating the observer program within the strategic context of Canada's war against Japan. The third part describes the observer program and what it accomplished. Nearly ninety officers, mostly captains and majors plus a few lieutenant-colonels, occupied staff and regimental positions and gained first-hand experience in tropical warfare. Responding to explicit information requirements from the army's leadership, the attached officers wrote detailed reports that helped to build an expertise that the army badly needed. These same officers eventually constituted a cadre of knowledgeable individuals that the army could use as trainers or as staff and regimental officers. Finally, the last part briefly explains how the army began to raise a contingent for integration with US forces in the Pacific theatre. In short, this article describes how from early 1944 to August 1945, the army conducted an observer program that attached officers to

<sup>3</sup> C.P. Stacey briefly discusses the observers in *Six Years of War: The Army in Canada, Britain and the Pacific* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence and the Queen's Printer, 1955), 507-10. Robert Farquharson dedicates a short chapter to the observers who served in Southeast Asia Command, with very tactical descriptions of their experiences, in *For Your Tomorrow: Canadians and the Burma Campaign, 1941-1945* (Victoria: Trafford Publishing, 2004), 199-208. John Blaxland mentions that Canada attached officers to US and Commonwealth forces in the Pacific theatre, in *Strategic Cousins: Australian and Canadian Expeditionary Forces and the British and American Empires* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 93-94. Douglas Delaney briefly describes how in 1944-45 Canada attached officers to allied forces in the Pacific so that the army could gain practical experience before deploying a contingent to the theatre. See Delaney, *The Imperial Army Project*, 293-94.

allied forces in the Asia-Pacific region, to build the expertise needed for raising a Canadian contingent for the war against Japan, and to determine how best to integrate Canadian troops into whichever national military forces they were attached.

### THE GENESIS OF THE OBSERVER PROGRAM

The observer program grew out of the army's anticipation of a political decision to commit forces to the war against Japan. In late May 1943, the head of Canada's Joint Staff Mission in Washington, Major-General Maurice Pope, first proposed sending officers to observe Allied operations against the Japanese. After hearing Churchill's guarantee to the United States Congress on 19 May that Britain would offer her full support in the war against Japan once Germany was defeated, Pope wrote to Lieutenant-General Kenneth Stuart, the Chief of the General Staff (CGS), to suggest some prudent planning. Reasoning with acute foresight that Ottawa, too, might eventually wish to take part in the campaign against Japan, Pope recommended dispatching observers to the Australian and New Zealand armies, a measure that he stated would "put us in possession of first-hand knowledge of fighting conditions in an area in which some day we may be called upon to fight."<sup>4</sup> At first, there was little interest or response. But five months later, when Pope visited Stuart in Ottawa, the latter indicated that not only might it be a good idea to send observers to the Pacific, there might even be merit in collaborating with the American army in the region, an idea that Stuart intended to explore.<sup>5</sup> Later that month, after reflecting on Stuart's comments, Pope suggested that, even though it might be some time before Ottawa decides to fight in the Pacific, the Canadian army should observe upcoming US operations. "[O]ur Army", as Pope put it, "has no experience what[so]ever in fighting in tropical regions." Pope proposed attaching a group of observers to American army units and formations, not just to Commonwealth

<sup>4</sup> Library and Archives Canada (LAC), MG 27 IIIF4 vol. 1, Pope to CGS, 24 May 1943.

<sup>5</sup> Government of Canada, Department of National Defence, Directorate of History and Heritage (DHH), 314.009 (D51) Cdn Army Observers (May 43-Nov 44), Pope to CGS, 5 November 1943.



Australian troops return from a patrol, New Guinea, November 1943. Anticipating a decision from Ottawa to participate in the war against Japan, Canadian army officials considered that Canadian troops ought to learn from their Commonwealth cousins about operating in the Pacific region. [Australian War Memorial 016195]

formations as he had previously suggested. Such an effort, “would gain us valuable experience which might well stand us in good stead in the days [and decisions] to come.”<sup>6</sup>

Pope’s prodding proved effective. In early January 1944, the new CGS, John Murchie, accepted his recommendations and proposed to the Cabinet War Committee that Canada send two groups of officers to observe Allied operations against Japanese forces. The first group would be drawn from the Canadian Army Overseas (the expeditionary force in Europe), which would send officers to train and deploy with British or dominion forces in the South West Pacific and South East Asia. The second group, drawn from the home army in Canada, would join Australian, New Zealand, and American forces in the South West Pacific to participate in training and operations.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

The Cabinet War Committee accepted Murchie's recommendations.<sup>7</sup> Within days, the army received authority to attach soldiers to British Commonwealth and American forces in the Asian and Pacific theatres, although the committee emphasized that the deployments implied no government intent to commit forces to these regions. Military officials wasted no time. They immediately worked with the War Office to attach twenty officers to South East Asia Command (SEAC), mostly to the Fourteenth Army in Burma.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, Murchie directed Pope to initiate discussions with the US War Department and with the Australian and New Zealand military missions to do the same with their formations in the South West Pacific Area (SWPA). Murchie wanted ten officers to join the American forces, eight to join the Australian army, and two to join New Zealand's army. These twenty officers would train with Allied formations as they prepared for operations, followed by employment in deployed units and formations, for a total of four to six months. Most of the observers would be captains or majors, although a few could be lieutenant-colonels with staff experience.<sup>9</sup> Within days, Pope confirmed that he had made the requests to the Australian and New Zealand military missions. He also consulted with General George C. Marshall, the US Army Chief of Staff, who "saw no reason why our request could not be met" and who promised an official reply shortly.<sup>10</sup> Marshall was good to his word. He soon advised Pope that the War Department supported Canada's request, and he proposed that the Canadian officers first proceed to Hawaii to attend division-level jungle and amphibious training, after which they could join units proceeding on active operations.<sup>11</sup> The other allies were just as quick to help out. Australia advised that it could immediately take on the eight officers that the Canadians proposed for attachment, and New Zealand indicated that it would "gladly accept" two Canadian

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, Cabinet War Committee minutes, 12 January 1944, [http://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac\\_reel\\_c4876/111?r=0&s=4](http://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_c4876/111?r=0&s=4) (accessed 23 June 2017).

<sup>8</sup> Canada, Department of National Defence, Directorate of History and Heritage (DHH), Army Headquarters Historical Section Report No. 16, 15 July 1947 (this document, including Amendments No. 1 and 2, dated 7 January 1953, referred to hereafter as AHQ Report No. 16).

<sup>9</sup> DHH, 314.009 (D51) Cdn Army Observers (May 43-Nov 44), CGS to Pope, 5 February 1944.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, Pope to CGS, 10 February 1944.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, General G.C. Marshall to Pope, 12 February 44.



The Asia-Pacific Theatre.

officers, who would be attached to the 3rd New Zealand Division.<sup>12</sup> By 4 March 1944, the army had selected officers and began to deploy them to their respective to British, Australian, New Zealand, and American formations.

### **THE POLITICAL DECISION TO COMMIT FORCES TO THE PACIFIC THEATRE**

Meanwhile, during the first eight months of 1944, the Canadian government deliberated on what the Canadian army should do in the war against Japan and with whom it should do it. In January, the prime minister expressed in his diary a belief that Canada had an obligation to share the burden of fighting Japan, even if the public,

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, Pope to Cdn Army Staff, 21 February 1944.



outside of British Columbia, would not be enthusiastic.<sup>13</sup> Canada might also have to help defeat Japan to maintain standing with both the United States and Britain.<sup>14</sup> Canadian participation, as far as King saw it, was about buttressing the nation's reputation as a dependable ally, and not about any requirement for Canadian military assistance. No one was requesting help from Ottawa. Indeed, when King discussed the Pacific theatre with Pope seven months later, the general advised that any Canadian contribution should be made only for political reasons because "Canadian participation or non-participation would have no effect on the Pacific war."<sup>15</sup> In fact, Pope told King, Canada was "neither being asked nor were we wanted to take part in the fight against Japan." Still, by September, the government was committed to sending something to the Pacific, although it was not yet certain what they would send or with whom.

The latter decision was made mostly for reasons of national interest. The Canadian War Cabinet's decision to fight with the Americans was a departure from tradition, given the long practice of attaching Canadian formations to British forces. In fact, the army's reflexive impulse was to join the British campaign in South East Asia. In June 1944, when the Canadian Chiefs of Staff Committee first considered potential contributions to the war against Japan, the CGS defaulted instinctively to tradition, suggesting that "it might be logical to send a Canadian force to serve with the British in South East Asia" once the war in Europe had ended.<sup>16</sup> However, as even the service chiefs noted, "the natural tendency for Canadian forces to be employed in combination with British forces" would mean operating this time in a region of no importance to Ottawa. Canada had no interests in places like Burma or Singapore, but it did have an interest in maintaining good relations with the United States. So, despite close Commonwealth ties and decades of imperial military conditioning, national interest drove the decision as to where, and with whom, Canada ought to send her ground troops. In August

<sup>13</sup> W.L.M. King, *The Diaries of William Lyon Mackenzie King*, entry for 5 January 1944, Library and Archives Canada, <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/politics-government/prime-ministers/william-lyon-mackenzie-king/Pages/search.aspx>, (accessed 05 May 2017). Referred to hereafter as King diary.

<sup>14</sup> King diary, 12 January 1944.

<sup>15</sup> LAC, MG 27 IIF4 vol. 1 Maurice Arthur Pope fonds, Pope diary, 30 August 1944.

<sup>16</sup> DHH, 112.3M2009 (D79), Extracts from Minutes of 289th Meeting of Chiefs of Staff Committee, 7 June 1944.

1944, after having considered the matter in greater detail, Murchie advised Minister of National Defence James Ralston that, if the government committed ground forces to the war against Japan, they should go to the North Pacific. Murchie offered several reasons. To start, the Canadians could fight there without the jungle training required for operations in South East Asia or the South West Pacific. For reasons of prestige relative to the defeat at Hong Kong, Canadian troops should be part of the occupation of the Japanese homeland. And by the time Canadian forces could be ready to deploy, operations in South East Asia and the South West Pacific would likely be in the final consolidation phase, leaving only garrison duties for newcomers to perform, a dull chore that would hardly enhance Canadian standing. And finally, as a Pacific nation with interests in the North Pacific region, it would be good for Canada to be seen as having made a meaningful contribution there. Contributing directly to Japan's defeat could help open post war markets for Canada in Japan and China.<sup>17</sup>

The prime minister and the cabinet evidently accepted this rationale. King also considered that large segments of the Canadian public, particularly in French-speaking Canada, would likely perceive any plan to send the army to India, Burma or Singapore as slavish support for British imperial wars, which could pose problems for the Liberal government during the next election. In any event, and as King well knew, even the British believed that the final fighting against Japan would be in the North or Central Pacific, while the Americans derisively regarded efforts to reclaim Singapore and Burma as but “a side-show to save the British prestige.”<sup>18</sup> It was clear in Ottawa, then, that the army should fight in the North or Central Pacific, which meant operating in an American theatre.

Of course, Canada still consulted with British authorities before finally deciding what sort of contribution to offer. There was no need to incur unnecessary enmity, after all. On 27 June 1944, King advised Churchill that the Cabinet War Committee was leaning towards a deployment to the North Pacific.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, the Canadian Joint Staff Mission in London submitted to the British chiefs of

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, CGS to Minister of National Defence, 19 August 1944.

<sup>18</sup> King diary, 13 September 1944.

<sup>19</sup> DHH, 112.3M2009 (D79), telegram from the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Ottawa) to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs (London), 27 June 1944.

staff a list of questions regarding how the war might progress after Germany's defeat. In response, the British cabinet's Joint Planning Staff produced an *aide memoire* that suggested deployment options for the dominion's forces after victory in Europe.<sup>20</sup> The British signalled that the war against Japan would probably continue for some time. In fact, they calculated, one full year after the defeat of Germany, 70 per cent of Britain's armed forces would still be needed to fight the Japanese. Any Canadian contribution would be "most welcome in view of the severe strain on British manpower" and perhaps Canada should commit two divisions.<sup>21</sup> Operations in the North Pacific, the British counselled, could begin in the summer of 1945 and, therefore, Canada should, as soon as possible, concentrate at home whatever forces it would commit so that they could prepare for operations while the government decided where exactly they should be sent.

That made sense, but the Canadians had their own motivations for deploying forces to the Pacific and came to their own conclusions. On 23 August, the CGS and the minister of national defence recommended to the Cabinet War Committee that any Canadian commitment should be designed to make a "fair and reasonable contribution based on Canadian capabilities" relative to British and American efforts, and not just to alleviate British manpower problems. Canadian troops, they argued, should operate in the North Pacific, which had geographic and political relevance to Canada, and they should definitely participate in the final assault on the Japanese homeland "as a means of avenging Hong Kong and restoring Canadian military prestige in the Far East." The force should comprise one division (with ancillary troops and reinforcements), not two as the British had proposed, because a division was the minimum-size contingent that could operate as a self-contained formation *and* remain visible as a distinct Canadian contribution. On 6 September, the Cabinet War Committee formally decided that Canada should indeed participate in the fight against Japan, with forces operating in

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, Summary—Aide Memoire on the Employment of Canadian Forces After the Defeat of Germany, 5 August 1944.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, Submission to Cabinet War Committee on Canadian Army Participation in the Pacific War and in the Army of Occupation in Germany, 23 August 1944.



Winston Churchill and W. L. Mackenzie King with Canadian cabinet ministers during the Octagon Conference, Quebec, September 1944. [Library and Archives Canada/William Lyon Mackenzie King fonds/co71095]

the North or Central Pacific regions.<sup>22</sup> Before the government made any commitments, however, final consultation with Britain would occur at the executive level, led personally by King, who decided to discuss Canada's thinking with Churchill.

The nature of the Canadian contingent was worked out amicably during the Octagon Conference in Quebec City. On 14 September, the Cabinet War Committee and the service chiefs of staff met with Churchill to discuss potential Canadian contributions. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir Alan Brooke, and the British service chiefs of staff also attended.<sup>23</sup> The Canadians told the British prime

<sup>22</sup> LAC, RG 2, vol. 5682, reel c-4876, Cabinet War Committee memorandum: Employment of Canadian Forces after European Hostilities, 13 September 1944, [http://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac\\_reel\\_c4876/1133?r=0&s=3](http://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_c4876/1133?r=0&s=3) (accessed 08 June 2017).

<sup>23</sup> King diary, 14 September 1944. Maurice Pope, who as King's new military staff officer was present, records the attendance of the British service chiefs in *Soldiers and Politicians: The Memoirs of Lt-Gen. Maurice A. Pope* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), 242.

minister what Canada had in mind, namely to contribute to operations in the North and Central Pacific, as far south as the Philippines, but explicitly not in India, Burma, or Singapore. Churchill reacted with indifference. He certainly desired no Canadian ground forces for British operations in South East Asia, not in late 1944 or 1945 anyway. The British campaign in Burma had turned favourably after the defensive battles of Imphal and Kohima earlier in the year, and the badly weakened Japanese army was withdrawing under strong British pressure. According to King's diary, "Churchill made it quite clear [that] there was no need for our Army at all in the Southern Pacific". The British prime minister was quite in agreement that Canada should contribute a token force to the war against Japan but stated that nothing more would be necessary. British disinterest in a substantial Canadian contingent for South East Asia aligned with Canadian disinterest in that particular region. Churchill had no problem with a Canadian contingent under American command either, although he did say that "he would have to speak to the President about the possibility of [Canada] making any contribution with the army." Even Britain, Churchill advised, was experiencing difficulty in obtaining American agreement to participation in the Pacific because "there [was] only a limited number of 'front seats' for the Japanese war."<sup>24</sup> The next day, the Canadian CGS, John Murchie, and Pope met with Marshall to present proposals on Canadian army contributions in the Pacific.<sup>25</sup>

The Americans accepted the idea of Canadian participation in principle. During an impromptu discussion with Roosevelt at Quebec, King indicated that his government was prepared to commit forces to the war against Japan. According to King's diary, the president replied that Canada "should have a token representation but indicated that nothing might be needed for some time."<sup>26</sup> And during the second plenary meeting of the Octagon Conference (attended by Roosevelt, Churchill, their top armed forces advisors, and the British secretary of state for foreign affairs), Churchill announced that Canada was seeking assurance in principle that its forces could participate in

<sup>24</sup> The National Archives (TNA) (United Kingdom), PREM 3/329/6, Octagon Conference Meeting with Canadian War Cabinet Committee 14 September 1944.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

<sup>26</sup> King diary, 14 September 1944.

operations against Japan, preferably in the North Pacific region.<sup>27</sup> The attendees agreed that such assurance should be given, although it was never a sure thing. Pope later recorded in his memoir that Commonwealth participation in the American-controlled Pacific theatre “proved to be the Conference’s most contentious item”, as the British chiefs of staff insisted, in the face of some American opposition, that they were determined to avenge Japan’s aggression.<sup>28</sup> In the end, the Americans agreed, the final report of the conference noting simply that “Canadian participation is accepted in principle.”<sup>29</sup>

The Canadian government still had to weigh a few more considerations before it could formally commit ground forces to the Pacific theatre. The Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) and Royal Canadian Navy proposals for Pacific operations required work, which took some time, as did plans for the eventual occupation of Germany. The finance minister also had to figure out how the government would pay for all of it during the fiscal year 1945-1946. Consequently, two months passed before Ottawa was able to authorize a division for service in the Pacific.<sup>30</sup> But, finally, on 20 November, the Cabinet War Committee ordered the army’s participation in the war against Japan. As proposed, a ground contingent comprised of one division with ancillary troops and reinforcements, for a total of up to 30,000 troops, would operate under American command and be organized and equipped in accordance with American tables of organization.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup> LAC, RG 24, vol. 20324, Record of Proceedings for the Quebec Conference (September 1944), 6.

<sup>28</sup> Pope, *Memoirs*, 243-44.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>30</sup> LAC, RG 2, vol. 5682, reel c-4876, minutes for Cabinet War Committee meetings, 22 September 1944, 5 October 1944, and 20 October 1944, [http://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac\\_reel\\_c4876/852?r=0&s=5](http://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_c4876/852?r=0&s=5) & [http://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac\\_reel\\_c4876/883?r=0&s=5](http://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_c4876/883?r=0&s=5) & [http://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac\\_reel\\_c4876/913?r=0&s=5](http://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_c4876/913?r=0&s=5) (accessed 8 June 2017).

<sup>31</sup> DHH, 112.3M2009 (D79), Summary of Cabinet Decisions Regarding Canadian Pacific Force, undated. On 11 October, the government approved the navy’s contribution, which was to include a variety of ships, from corvettes up to light fleet carriers and cruisers, manned by 13,412 personnel. This contingent was to serve with the Royal Navy in the Central Pacific. On 11 December, the government approved the RCAF contingent, which was to comprise twenty-two squadrons and operate with the RAF in the Pacific. C.P. Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments: the War Policies of Canada, 1939-1945* (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1970), 60. Also, LAC, RG 2, vol. 5682, reel C-4876, Cabinet War Committee minutes, 11 December 1944 [http://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac\\_reel\\_c4876/947?r=0&s=3](http://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_c4876/947?r=0&s=3) (accessed 27 June 2017).





Japanese troops land off the west coast of British North Borneo, January 1941. Canadian military officials recognized as early as May 1943 that the Canadian army should increase its familiarity with Japanese forces and with the Asia-Pacific theatre. [Australian War Memorial 127907]

By the end of November 1944, then, it was clear that the army faced two major challenges. The first was preparing to fight a largely unfamiliar enemy in equally unfamiliar terrain and climate conditions. Notwithstanding the gallant but hopeless defence of Hong Kong in December 1941, the Canadian army had no experience fighting the Japanese. Clearly, it had to gain corporate knowledge of Japanese tactics and equipment, as well as their strengths and weaknesses relative to its own forces. The Canadians had to learn how to fight in the climate and terrain of the Pacific region, plain and simple. Planners also had to consider how well suited Canadian equipment was for the theatre, what kit should be shed and what had to be



December 1943. US soldiers aboard landing craft prepare for disembarkation as they approach the inhospitable shores near Arawe, New Britain. With Ottawa's decision to commit a ground contingent to fight under American command, planners had to figure out how to integrate a Canadian division into the unfamiliar American military system. [Australian War Memorial 016329]

procured, how tactical sustainment would occur, how the medical system should be tailored to local conditions, how to contend with Pacific-theatre wastage rates, and countless other details.

The army's second major challenge was figuring out how to integrate a division into the American military system. After all, the American military differed from the British army, the mould in which the Canadian army had been deliberately cast. For example, American forces used a dissimilar staff structure. Whereas Canadian staffs were structured on the British model, with G (operations and intelligence), A (personnel administration), and Q (quartermaster/logistics) branches, the Americans used the continental system of numbered branches—G1 (personnel), G2 (intelligence), G3 (operations) and G4 (logistics). The two armies also used different terminology. Canadians used “war establishments” to describe the constitution of units and formations, while Americans used “tables of organization and equipment” (TO&E). What Canadians called an infantry *brigade*, the Americans called an infantry *regiment*. Furthermore, Canada maintained a different system of non-commissioned ranks that did not equate cleanly with the American



rank structure. Command arrangements would have to be worked out too. Would American and Canadian officers be empowered to issue legally binding orders to subordinate soldiers in each other's militaries? Would disciplinary powers be granted? Should measures be established to ensure an American commander could not compel a Canadian formation to conduct an operation that Ottawa would not approve? Canada, the other dominions, and Britain had long since settled amongst themselves such matters of interoperability, at first simply through conventions formed over years of cooperation and, after 1933, with "Visiting Forces" legislation that formally articulated command relationships when forces of the British Empire operated together. Significantly, the countries' reciprocal Visiting Forces Acts confirmed that national contingent commanders had the right to refer orders to their governments, a vital provision for ensuring that contingents could not be forced to act outside of their nations' interests.<sup>32</sup> But Canada had no such standing arrangements with the United States. These interoperability issues and myriad other details had to be identified and reconciled if a Canadian formation was to integrate efficiently into the American system.

In fact, at the time, Canada's Australian cousins were experiencing challenges integrating their army with American forces in the South West Pacific Area (SWPA), under the supreme command of General Douglas MacArthur, partly because the armies had different cultures, structures, and methods, and partly because of MacArthur's reluctance to integrate foreign forces with American troops. For example, incompatible supply systems caused friction between the two armies. After the campaign in Papua, American planners felt that they should not rely on a mixed American-Australian supply system, which had proven unsuited to American requirements and practices.<sup>33</sup> Also, when in April 1942 MacArthur assumed the position of Supreme Commander SWPA, he refused to allow any Australian officers to serve in his headquarters' senior staff billets.<sup>34</sup> Then, in

<sup>32</sup> Britain passed its Visiting Forces Act in 1933. Canada and South Africa passed reciprocal legislation later that year, and Australia and New Zealand passed Visiting Forces Acts in 1939. Delaney, *The Imperial Army Project*, 198.

<sup>33</sup> Jeffrey Grey, *The Australian Army* (South Melbourne, Australia: Oxford University Press, 2001), 142.

<sup>34</sup> On Australian frictions with American forces in SWPA, see Gavin Long *The Final Campaigns* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1963), Appendix 1 (Command Problems, S.W.P.A. 1942-1945), 590-99.

February 1943, he placed under his direct command all American ground forces (Task Force Alamo), ensuring that the SWPA's Allied Land Forces component, which was commanded by Australian General Sir Thomas Blamey, included no American formations. From 1944 to 1945, American and Australian armies operated in widely separate areas, with American forces receiving abundant supplies while Australian troops were left wanting for many essentials. Such a situation would not likely have occurred, had MacArthur taken senior Australian officers on his staff. Naturally, the short shrift given Australian ground forces caused animosity, not the least with Blamey.

Such issues had implications for Canada. Clearly, the Canadian army had to make every effort to integrate smoothly and efficiently with the Americans. But while working with the Americans brought challenges, the Canadian army's senior leadership saw those challenges coming. As early as 27 May 1943, Pope recorded that he had learned from Lieutenant-General Vernon Sturdee, the chief of Australia's military mission in Washington, that "the Australians no longer owned their own country, implying, of course, that the US Army is in charge."<sup>35</sup> Sturdee also informed Pope that General Douglas MacArthur maintained "a distinct anti-British bias", which may have indicated a distaste for the British army standards adhered to in the Dominion armies. There were no real surprises when it came to problems of interoperability with the Americans. By the time the government was ready in September 1944 to signal Canada's desire to join the fight against Japan, the army had for months been collecting information to help planners make it happen.

#### **PREPARING THE ARMY FOR THE WAR AGAINST JAPAN: THE OBSERVER PROGRAM**

The observer program commenced in early 1944, shortly after the Canadian government first floated the idea of sending troops to fight Japan. Before they departed for the Asia-Pacific region, the observers received detailed instructions on what they were to learn and gather. For the officers joining American forces, their orders emphasized not only collecting information about the Pacific theatre, but also information relevant to preparing a Canadian

<sup>35</sup> LAC, MG 27 HIF4 vol. 1, War Diary entry for 27 May 1943.

contingent for operations alongside US forces and, accordingly, how Canadian organization and equipment should be modified.<sup>36</sup> Each officer was to “observe closely the functions of his own special arm in all its phases”, paying close attention to methods of training and conditioning soldiers for the Pacific theatre, tactics employed in the theatre’s unique terrain types (“jungle, hilly and mountainous, coral islands”), and the planning and conduct of amphibious operations. In addition, all officers were to observe the maintenance of forces, such as how the Americans sustained units with ammunition, fuel, and supplies, and how US forces tailored medical plans to the environment. Those observers with staff training were also to pay close attention to unique American staff procedures. Finally, the instructions directed the observers to submit written reports consisting of two parts, “common to all arms” and “special to arms”, the latter to include detailed information on training. Observers employed as staff officers were also to include a third section on staff considerations. All were to submit reports after the training period, and again after operational employment.

The observer program certainly met the goal of providing the Canadian army with a compendium of up-to-date knowledge and lessons from the campaign against Japan. The first observers left for the Pacific theatre in late February 1944, when ten officers joined the 27th US Infantry Division at Hawaii for three months of training, as Marshall had proposed. Then, in June, they sailed with the division when it deployed to support the United States Marine Corps (USMC) in the Mariana Islands, and they participated in operations at Saipan. From there, two officers returned to Canada—one with dengue fever—while the remainder continued on to the South West Pacific Area for operations in New Guinea.<sup>37</sup> As directed, the observers transmitted their hard-won knowledge back to army planners by submitting detailed reports. These submissions provided the army with testimonial accounts of Japanese tactics, the challenges of operating in the Asia-Pacific theatre, and how the allies prepared their forces for operations. Individual reports gradually made their way back to Canada where the army collated them. Several groups

<sup>36</sup> DHH, 314.009 (D51) Cdn Army Observers (Nov 44-Jul 45), Memorandum to Officers Proceeding on Attachment to US Forces of Pacific Ocean Areas or Southwest Pacific Area, 5 January 1945.

<sup>37</sup> AHQ Report No. 16.

of officers also produced joint reports with concise, informative descriptions of particular regions or campaigns. While it is impossible and unnecessary to condense here the rich body of expertise the observers produced, it is worthwhile to describe, at least in broad strokes, the type of knowledge they captured.

The first group of attachments to American forces produced a very useful joint report on their observations and experiences during the battle of Saipan.<sup>38</sup> Their thirty-six-page statement, plus appendices, contained a wealth of information that army planners would have surely found helpful. The report discussed in detail the tactical environment and how Canadian equipment and practices in such conditions would either be sufficient or require adjustment. Regarding equipment, for example, the officers used both American and Canadian boots and determined that the latter were better. Standard Canadian wool socks, worn continuously for days at a time, performed better than US light wool or cotton socks. Personal insect nets were essential, as were two water bottles per soldier, and the US canteen and canteen cup were far superior to the Canadian water bottle and could easily be fit to Canadian web gear. The Canadian anklet was “worthless.” The observers also recommended getting rid of Canadian entrenching tools and ground sheets (they “would be entirely useless”) and replacing them with the US model-1943 entrenching tool and the USMC poncho. And while the Americans had no equivalent to the Canadian army’s Bren Universal Carrier—a vehicle that would have proven useful in Saipan for ferrying ammunition to soldiers under fire—Canadian battalions, the observers recommended, should outfit some of their carriers with flame throwers, an essential weapon for the theatre. For training, the observers collectively agreed “that all the drills as taught at the Canadian School of Infantry could be used to good advantage against the Jap[ane]s[e]”. The report also discussed in detail, amongst other things, American tactics and how various arms supported the infantry, and the employment of reconnaissance troops, artillery, and communications. Authorities in Canada received the Saipan report with enthusiasm, reproducing and distributing it to all lieutenants-colonel in Canada holding command positions “so that the excellent lessons brought out may be applied

<sup>38</sup> DHH, 322.009 Observers Reports on CWPA Attachments 1944-45, Report of Canadian Officers Attached to 27th Infantry Division, United States Army, for the Saipan Operation, 15 June to 9 July 1944, dated 28 September 44.



Observer Deployment Locations.

where indicated to tr[ainin]g” and “to get all off[ice]rs thinking about possible future op[er]ation[s] in the Pacific.”<sup>39</sup>

Indeed, the observer program proved so worthwhile that Ottawa soon expanded it and continued to collect useful information. By late November, when the first-deployed group of observer officers returned to Canada, the army wanted to attach another thirty officers to American forces in the Pacific.<sup>40</sup> This time, Canada arranged with the US Army to send three groups of ten officers, departing in one-month intervals, for a month of training and two months of operational duty. Each group consisted of captains and majors, led by a lieutenant-colonel.<sup>41</sup> The first group participated in landings on the Zamboanga Peninsula (Mindanao Island), and on 9 April 1945 took part in landings in the Sulu Archipelago.<sup>42</sup> The second and third groups were

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, Report of Canadian Officers Attached to 27th Infantry Division, Saipan Cdn Report, undated.

<sup>40</sup> DHH, 314.009 (D51) Cdn Army Observers (Nov 44-Jul 45), Colonel A.J. Creighton (for CGS) to Commander Canadian Army Staff in Washington, 28 November 1944.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, Letson to Marshall, 30 November 1944.

<sup>42</sup> AHQ Report No. 16.

attached to formations of the 10th US Army. They participated in the assault on Okinawa, with seven officers attached to the USMC's III Amphibious Corps,<sup>43</sup> ten officers to the US Army's XXIV Corps, and three to the 2nd Marine Division.<sup>44</sup> These latter three profited from opportunities to study staff branches—two studied “G1, G2, G3 (our A, I and G)”, and one studied “G4 (our Q and Ord[nance])”.<sup>45</sup>

Once again the observers fed useful recommendations back to army headquarters. For example, Major R.R. Munroe reported that American forces had learned to deal with problematic Japanese pill boxes by deploying smoke to cover the forward movement of tanks that, once close enough, could engage with flamethrowers.<sup>46</sup> In fact, he noted, the Marine divisions had replaced the .50 calibre bow guns in their Sherman tanks with flamethrowers. Furthermore, the Americans did not normally use tanks en masse in the Pacific theatre, choosing instead to use armour mainly in direct support of the infantry. American infantry tactics closely approximated Canadian practices, although the Marines found it necessary to concentrate machine guns very far forward, especially when consolidating at night, to stop enemy infiltration and mass suicide attacks. Also, if the Canadian army decided to adopt American infantry weapons—which Munro recommended, so that the American supply system could be used—it would take two to three weeks for Canadian troops to master using them. As for staff organization, Munro reported, the Canadian system should be adapted to its American counterpart, merely by renaming the sections and possibly by adding a chief of staff or assistant division commander who could step up to command in the event the division commander became a casualty.<sup>47</sup> That was all well and good, but Canadian military authorities felt compelled to send more officers for staff training in the United States. In all, some sixteen Canadian officers passed through American staff schools for training on operations in the Pacific.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Two of these officers were subsequently wounded in action.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> DHH 171.009 (D137), Major R.R. Munro, Report on Attachment to US Armed Forces Pacific Ocean Areas 27 Feb – 9 Jun 45, undated.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, Major R.R. Munroe, Report on Attachment to US Armed Forces, 9 June 1945.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> AHQ Report No.16.



New Guinea, March 1944. Australian troops demonstrate how to cross a fast-moving river by forming a human chain with their rifles. Ten Canadian officers deployed to New Guinea in mid-1944 to participate in operations with the 5th Australian Division. [Australian War Memorial 016720]

In mid-March 1945, Canada arranged to send one last batch of observers to American forces in the Pacific. That month, the army made a third and final request to the War Department to accept Canadian officers on attachment. This time, Canada wanted to send five staff officers and ten regimental officers. The War Department agreed to accommodate the staff officers at the end of April and the regimental officers in early June.<sup>49</sup> The five staff officers proceeded to Okinawa in May, where fighting was ongoing. They visited several formations and produced detailed reports on American staff procedure. In June, the ten regimental officers also deployed to Okinawa, where they joined units of the 10th Army. One of the officers, Captain J.E. Hilliker of the Intelligence Corps, was injured while participating in an attempt to capture a Japanese general and his staff.<sup>50</sup> When these officers concluded their tours, the army had a cohort of fifty-five officers with experience operating with American units and formations.

<sup>49</sup> DHH, 314.009 (D51) Cdn Army Observers (Nov 44-Jul 45), Brigadier-General A.J. McFarland to Letson, 28 March 1945.

<sup>50</sup> AHQ Report No. 16.





New Guinea, 6 September 1944. Canadian observers with the Australian and American forces in the Pacific area. On the left is Captain R.M. Baldwin, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. On the right, Captain L. Archibald, the Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada. [Australian War Memorial 075673]

The officers on attachment to the New Zealand and Australian armies gained valuable experience too. In mid-March 1944, two officers departed for Nisnon Island (the Green Islands) for service with the 3rd New Zealand Division. But, when the division was withdrawn and slated for disbandment, they soon found themselves moving on to join eight other Canadians on attachment with the 6th Australian Division.<sup>51</sup> In June, all ten officers flew to New Guinea where they joined brigades of the 5th Australian Division for about a month of mopping-up operations. They returned to Australia in July and participated in training with the 6th and 9th Divisions. Shortly after, they availed themselves of an opportunity to acquire combat experience with a party of Australian observers joining US forces. In September, with their Australian colleagues, the ten Canadians reported to the American Trade Winds Task Force at New Guinea, where they joined units of the 3rd US Infantry Division in time to

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, and DHH, 314.009 (D51) Cdn Army Observers (May 43-Nov 44), Canadian Joint Staff Washington message, 18 April 1944.



participate in operations on Morotai Island. The party returned to Canada in November.<sup>52</sup>

Meanwhile, the officers sent to British forces in South East Asia Command gained experience fighting the Japanese in Burma's exceptionally difficult jungle conditions. Their orders emphasized that they were to collect information "of great benefit" to any future operations the army might undertake against Japan.<sup>53</sup> They were to produce reports periodically, as circumstances allowed, but preferably on a monthly basis, and submit them directly to Canadian Military Headquarters in London. The army was particularly interested in how training in South East Asia Command differed from Canadian practices and called for information on special weapons and equipment, jungle tactics, conditioning programs, and physical fitness regimes. The observers were also to pay attention to factors of interest for each arm of the army, and to advise on administrative points relevant to future planning. Finally, the instructions encouraged officers to provide narrative accounts of the operations they participated in.

This group of twenty officers, which later expanded to twenty-three,<sup>54</sup> deployed from July 1944 to January 1945 under the leadership of Lieutenant-Colonel George Spencer (a permanent force combat engineer who retired in 1971 as a major-general). Their deployment occurred during three months of monsoon conditions and over two months of dry season. Upon arrival in India, the officers dispersed to various training units for a month of acclimatization and theatre indoctrination. Then, they spent four months in Burma serving in units and formations of the 15th Indian Corps, 14th Army. To conclude their tour, the officers visited units in India for three weeks.<sup>55</sup> While on operations in Burma, they performed a wide range of duties.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>52</sup> AHQ Report No. 16.

<sup>53</sup> DHH, Robert H. Farquharson fonds, box 3, Duncanson file, Lieutenant-General Stuart to officers proceeding on attachment to SEAC, 7 June 1944.

<sup>54</sup> Two infantry lieutenants joined the tour in mid-August, and one infantry major arrived in India in mid-November and remained in theatre until mid-April 1945. DHH, 171.009 (D51), Consolidated Report of Canadian Army Officers Attached to South East Asia Command, Appendix A, 12 February 1945.

<sup>55</sup> DHH, 171.009 (D51), Consolidated Report of Canadian Army Officers Attached to South East Asia Command, 12 February 1945 (referred to hereafter as Consolidated SEAC Report). Also, DHH Robert H. Farquharson fonds, Major-General (retired) George Spencer to Robert Farquharson, 20 November 2001.

<sup>56</sup> The reports can be found in DHH, 171.009 (D51). The Duncanson report is in the Farquharson fonds.

For example, Spencer served in the 11th East African Division as the formation's administration staff officer; Major C.V.B. Corbet served in the headquarters of the 123rd Indian Infantry Brigade, where he was responsible for coordinating tactical air support; Major A.A. Duncanson served with the 4th battalion of the Royal West Kent regiment on operations, and for about ten days commanded a company after the sub-unit's commander was wounded in battle, and later acted as the unit's second-in-command for a week; Captain M.N. Bow served as a company second-in-command with the 9th battalion of the York and Lancaster Regiment during combat operations, and later served with the 6th battalion of the "Oxford and Bucks" Light Infantry on the Arakan front; Captain E.H.A. Carson was attached to the 302 Field Regiment for operations on the Chindwin Front; and so on. Of course, by the time these officers returned to Canada in January 1945, the government had committed to attaching the Canadian contingent to American forces. Nonetheless, the officers believed that they had captured information that would be useful to the army's future efforts, noting in their collective post-tour statement that "Although the Report has been produced as a result of experience in SOUTH EAST ASIA COMMAND it is felt that the majority of the points raised apply equally to other Theatres of War where the JAPANESE Enemy is to be found."<sup>57</sup>

Canadian Military Headquarters in London, which received individual reports from the officers attached to South East Asia Command, consolidated the most relevant findings into a report called the CMHQ Far Eastern Warfare Digest. For example, Digest No. 3, produced in February 1945, focused on the planning and conduct of tropical operations. It provided narrative accounts of the tactical challenges of operating in the jungle environment, and lent insight into administrative considerations that probably seemed novel to Canadian planners. The report showed, for instance, that mules were essential for transport services and that units had detailed animal allotments (although one respects that mules were not entirely new to the Canadian army, which had some experience using them in Sicily and Italy). Ground lines of communication were highly vulnerable to enemy disruption, so all troops, regardless of trade, had to be trained and ready to fight in defensive roles. The enemy's lines of communication were equally vulnerable, and therefore units

<sup>57</sup> Consolidated SEAC Report.

had to be ready to exploit opportunities. As Major H.D.P. Tighe reported from the 53rd Indian Infantry Brigade, “it is now an almost automatic drill that whenever and wherever we come into contact with a main pos[iti]on of the enemy[,] a force [of ours] ranging from a co[mpan]y to a b[riga]de is sent around to a flank to get in the rear of the enemy and sit astride his L[ine] of C[ommunication].” Major C.P. Keely reported from the 25th Indian Division that, during rest periods, units spent much time practicing “watermanship”, a matter of considerable importance because of the strong, tidally-influenced river currents that made loaded watercraft difficult to handle. Watermanship training included teaching all soldiers to swim, learning how to handle boats and outboard motors, practicing improvised crossing of water obstacles, and—probably new and unusual to most Canadians—“teaching mules to swim and practicing loading, transporting and unloading mules from all types of craft.” The Digest included as appendices ten detailed reports submitted by individual officers, providing readers the opportunity to delve deeper into particular operations or planning considerations of interest.<sup>58</sup>

In December 1944, near the end of the observers’ mission to South East Asia Command, Spencer assembled the men in New Delhi to gather input for a consolidated report that must also have been informative for planning a Canadian deployment to the Pacific theatre.<sup>59</sup> With information gleaned from nearly two-dozen officers, the report provided a wealth of information on fighting the Japanese in jungle conditions, from a distinctly Canadian army perspective. For example, a section on training listed competencies that the army needed to consider, including a thorough knowledge of Japanese tactics and habits, a high standard of “junglecraft”, and an appreciation that all operations must be anchored by firm bases employing “all around defences.” The report emphasized that there were no rear areas in jungle warfare and therefore all soldiers, regardless of corps, must be trained to fight. The authors estimated that the army needed at least two months to train soldiers for jungle warfare, if they already had battle experience, and at least three months if they did not. They also recommended specific training subjects for each of the

<sup>58</sup> DHH, 171.009 (D55), CMHQ Far Eastern Warfare Digest No. 3, 22 February 1945.

<sup>59</sup> DHH, Robert H. Farquharson fonds, box 3, Major-General Spencer file, Spencer to Farquharson, 10 July 2001.

armoured, artillery, and engineer corps. And, because of the heavy reliance on aerial photography in jungle operations, all officers down to company-command level, plus all intelligence officers, required a course on air photographic interpretation.<sup>60</sup>

The report also provided much valuable information on more mundane, but still quite important, planning considerations. All Army Service Corps officers required training in the employment of animal transport and porters. The authors even included examples of detailed mule loading tables. Animal management required special training in grooming and clipping, the treatment of diseases and minor injuries, saddlery and saddling, and, of course, march discipline. All soldiers required instruction on anti-malarial and anti-scrub typhus precautions, and on first-aid for jungle conditions where heat and sanitation issues posed serious threats. The authors also strongly emphasized the importance of implementing troop welfare arrangements. The stress and feelings of isolation that are so much a part of prolonged jungle operations called for “an organization which endeavours to reproduce the comforts of home.” Therefore, rest and leave centres should be run by Canadian agencies, and canteens should stock Canadian supplies, not the inferior and costly local stuff that could be difficult to procure. Keeping the troops informed was also of great importance, so the authors advised that production of a daily news sheet for distribution to all units “is considered to be most important.”<sup>61</sup>

Greater detail on most lessons could be found in the individual observer reports. Of course, basic military wisdom holds that there is much benefit in learning from others’ hard-won lessons and, in this regard, the individual reports provided important lessons the allies had learned through their own hard experience. For example, few things were more important than sanitation, health, and hygiene in South East Asia.<sup>62</sup> Anything less than the most rigorous standards in health and cleanliness resulted in “dyhorrea, dysentery, disease—and alarming casualties.” Routine administrative matters like latrine construction merited close attention, and related details, such as fly-proofing measures and periodic cleansing by burning oil, were critically important. Similarly, the malaria threat demanded that the

<sup>60</sup> Consolidated SEAC Report.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> DHH, 171.009 (D55), Captain M.N. Bow, Second Report, 20 August 1944.



New Guinea, August 1942. Australian soldiers washing and boiling their uniforms. As the Canadian observers learned from the allies, rigorous sanitation, health and hygiene measures were vital to an army's effectiveness in the tropical environment. [Australian War Memorial 026351]

chain of command ruthlessly enforce anti-malaria regimes. Captain M.N. Bow reported while on attachment with the 6th Battalion, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, that “[w]hole b[attalio]ns have had to be moved to rest areas from the front line because of unduly high disease casualties.”<sup>63</sup> The observers reported on innovative combat techniques too. For example, British forces learned to trap Japanese soldiers in their bunkers with artillery fire long enough for aircraft to bomb the structures.<sup>64</sup>

The Canadian observers gradually formed a cadre that the army was determined to use to help prepare forces for operations in the Pacific. In October 1944, the general staff ruled that the Canadian-based officers, who had been in the first group attached to Australian, New Zealand, and American forces, would not be permitted to deploy to Europe.<sup>65</sup> The general staff informed Pacific Command that “It has been decided [that] in view of the fact that these Officers have

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, Captain M.N. Bow, Third Report, 15 October 1944.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, Major C.V.B. Corbet, Report on attachment to SEAC, 22 December 1944.

<sup>65</sup> DHH, 322.009 (D51), Brigadier A.C. Spencer to GOC-in-C Pacific Command, 27 October 1944.

received valuable experience in methods of warfare used in that area [the Pacific theatre], their knowledge could at present be utilized to better advantage in Canada than overseas.” Pacific Command was to employ them appropriately, preferably as instructors in home defence units or in training establishments. Similarly, the officers on attachment to South East Asia Command, who had been drawn from the Canadian Army Overseas, returned to Canada as instructors, although five who had been staff-trained first completed an attachment to Canadian forces in Northwest Europe.<sup>66</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel Spencer, for example, deployed to Belgium immediately after his tour in South East Asia Command, but, by May 1945, he was back in Canada, serving as a staff officer in the newly established Canadian Army Pacific Force (CAPF), which had started assembling in Brockville, Ontario.<sup>67</sup>

In June 1945, the army counted those who had served with Commonwealth or American forces in the Asia-Pacific region and ascertained that there were at least ninety-five such officers, including sixty-two with regimental experience and thirty-three with staff experience.<sup>68</sup> Of these, records show that eighty-eight came from the observer program. The rest were officers who had deployed to the Pacific for other, individual reasons. Adding to the cadre of officers with expertise in the fight against Japan were at least twenty soldiers who had attended American, Australian, and British staff courses related to the Pacific theatre. The army deemed that all these officers comprised a “nucleus” of personnel available to assist in training and preparing a contingent for service in the Pacific. Table 1 depicts all observer deployments that occurred over the program’s duration.

### **BUILDING THE CANADIAN ARMY PACIFIC FORCE**

In mid-May 1945, with Germany’s surrender only a few days old, the Canadian army started to build a ground force for operations against Japan, a campaign that Canada and its allies predicted would last

<sup>66</sup> AHQ Report No. 16.

<sup>67</sup> DHH, Robert H. Farquharson fonds, box 3, Spencer to Farquharson, 20 November 2001.

<sup>68</sup> AHQ Report No. 16.

<b>Table 1. Observer Depolyments</b>	
<b>Attachments to American Forces (Pacific Theatre)</b>	
10 officers	February 1944, individuals deployed for up to eleven months (Mariana Islands, Saipan, and South West Pacific Area)
10 officers	February 1945, for approximately three months (Philippines)
10 officers	February 1945, for approximately three months (Okinawa)
10 officers	February 1945, for approximately three months (Okinawa)
5 officers	May 1945, for approximately three months (Okinawa)
10 officers	June 1945, for approximately three months (Okinawa)
<b>Attachments to Australian Forces (Pacific Theatre)</b>	
8 officers	March 1944 – November 1944 (South West Pacific Area; these officers joined US forces in September for the Morotai expedition)
<b>Attachments to New Zealand Forces (Pacific Theatre)</b>	
2 officers	March 1944 (South West Pacific Area; in August 1944, these officers joined the group with Australian forces)
<b>Attachments to British Forces (Pacific Theatre)</b>	
20 officers	July 1944 – January 1945 (India and Burma)
2 officers	August 1944 – January 1945 (India and Burma)
1 officers	November 1944 – April 1945 (India and Burma)
<i>Source: Adapted from AHQ Report No. 16.</i>	

another eighteen months.<sup>69</sup> At that time, Canada and the US reached a final agreement that the Canadian army contribution would comprise an infantry division, reinforced with a tank battalion.<sup>70</sup> The force would organize itself on the pattern of the US Army and would use American equipment, but not American uniforms. It would also be sustained with American logistics services. And, before deploying,

<sup>69</sup> The US and Britain agreed during the Octagon Conference that they would seek to conclude the war with Japan within eighteen months of Germany's defeat. LAC, RG24, volume 20324, Record of Proceedings for the Quebec Conference (September 1944), 81. In late February 1945, Churchill advised King that the major allies had agreed during discussions at Malta and Yalta that the planning date for the end of the war against Japan was eighteen months after Germany surrendered. LAC, RG 24, volume 20324, 951.023 (D13) Malta and Yalta Discussions 1945, Churchill to King, 27 February 1945.

<sup>70</sup> AHQ Report No. 16. Provision of the tank battalion listed in DHH 112.3M2009 (D79), CGS memorandum: Mobilization Plans—Pacific Force, 24 May 1945.



the contingent would train in the US under American supervision. All told, the force was to include 30,000 troops, including a pool of 9,000 reinforcements that would provide three-months' worth of replacements, based on American wastage rates.<sup>71</sup> To fill the contingent's ranks, the army sought trained and experienced volunteers. The general staff hoped to draw most of them from the battle-hardened units in Europe, with the incentive that those accepted to the new force would have the highest priority for return to Canada, where they would receive thirty days of leave. Meanwhile, the army immediately dispatched a group of planners to Washington to work with the War Department in integrating the Canadian force. Colonel W.A. Bean, one of the officers with operational experience in the Pacific (but not with the observer program), led the team.<sup>72</sup> In late July 1945, Bean submitted to National Defence Headquarters (NDHQ) a draft plan that proposed in detail how the contingent should be organized, trained, and maintained before deployment, how it should be maintained in theatre, and how reinforcements should be trained and pushed forward.<sup>73</sup>

The contingent quickly began to take shape during the late spring of 1945. The infantry division took on the title 6th Canadian Division and, in June, the ground force officially became the Canadian Army Pacific Force (CAPF). The CAPF commander-designate, Major-General Bert Hoffmeister, who had been commanding the 5th Canadian Armoured Division since March 1944, first in Italy and then in Northwest Europe, landed in Ottawa on 13 June and immediately set to work with his key staff. Meanwhile, the army made plans to send 200 officers and 1,200 non-commissioned officers to the US for training on American weapons, so that they could in turn act as an instructional cadre for the rest of the CAPF when it

<sup>71</sup> DHH, 112.3M2009 (D79), CGS memorandum: Mobilization Plans—Pacific Force, 24 May 1945.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* Bean graduated from the US Army Staff College in April 1944, where he had impressed the Commandant enough to earn a recommendation to serve with an American joint command for a six-month stint, which Canada permitted. Starting in June 1944, Bean served with American forces in the Southwest Pacific and was with the 1st US Marine Division during its assault in September on Peleliu Island, east of the Philippines. DHH, 314.009 (D51) Cdn Army Observers (May 43–Nov 44), Colonel A.J. McFarland (Secretary to the US Joint Chiefs of Staff) to Pope, 13 May 1944, and McFarland to Pope, 20 June 1944.

<sup>73</sup> DHH, 112.3M2009 (D79), Canadian Planning Team Draft Outline Plan, 28 July 1945.





Major-General Bert M. Hoffmeister, who had commanded the 5th Canadian Armoured Division in Europe, took command of the Canadian Army Pacific Force in June 1945. [© Government of Canada. Reproduced with the permission of Library and Archives Canada (2018). Source: Library and Archives Canada/Department of National Defence fonds/e010786512]

arrived stateside.<sup>74</sup> By late June, a CAPF training plan was in place. The regime would start in mid-July, when soldiers reported for duty at nine locations across Canada. At these locations they would learn about the enemy and commence training on American weapons. Then, the entire force would assemble at Camp Breckinridge in Kentucky

<sup>74</sup> Douglas E. Delaney, *The Soldiers' General: Bert Hoffmeister at War* (Vancouver, UBC Press: 2005), 222-23.



In this staged photo, soldiers model the CAPF's shoulder patch. [© Government of Canada. Reproduced with the permission of Library and Archives Canada (2018). Source: Library and Archives Canada/Department of National Defence fonds/eo10750446]

for training that would progress from the individual to divisional level.<sup>75</sup> All training was to be complete by mid-December.<sup>76</sup>

As planned, the 6th Canadian Division was constructed on the model of a standard US infantry division. The CAPF respected American practices of employing certain ranks at certain levels of command. So, an infantry “regiment” (or brigade in Canadian parlance) would generally be commanded by a colonel instead of a brigadier (although the first designated regimental commanders

<sup>75</sup> AHQ Report No. 16.

<sup>76</sup> DHH, 112.3M2009 (D79), CGS Memorandum, Outline Plan for CAPF, 3 August 1945.

were all brigadiers). A company (or squadron or battery) could be commanded by a captain (as in the American practice) or a major.<sup>77</sup> Nomenclature for the division's formations and units had to comply with American conventions too. Each regiment would have three numbered battalions (first, second, and third). Hoffmeister, who wanted to maintain some Canadian tradition, arranged to give each numbered battalion a regimental affiliation based on the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Division model. Therefore, the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Regiment would comprise the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion (the Royal Canadian Regiment), the 2nd Canadian Infantry Battalion (the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment), and the 3rd Canadian Infantry Battalion (the 48th Highlanders). This arrangement allowed the division to retain the regimental relationships that were a significant part of Canadian army culture. Meanwhile, commanders and staffs had to familiarize themselves with US staff procedure. In July, the Royal Military College in Kingston held a five-day orientation course for commanders and staffs on American staff procedure and organization. Another was planned for August.<sup>78</sup>

Efforts to raise the CAPF abruptly halted when, on 14 August, Japan surrendered unconditionally after the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. For several weeks, all activity paused while the army waited to see if the peace would hold. By the end of the month though, it was clear that hostilities would not resume and the CAPF began to disband. It took until 10 October before all troops who had deployed to the US were back in Canada, and the army formally disbanded the CAPF's units by 1 November.<sup>79</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In anticipation of the government decision to commit ground forces in the war against Japan, the Canadian army began to send officers to the Asia-Pacific region in early 1944 in order to observe the ongoing operations of Allied forces in the area. In all, eighty-

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, CGS memorandum: Mobilization Plans—Pacific Force, 24 May 1945. This directive allowed that brigadiers “may be used” to command a regiment and that the TO&E for company, squadron or battery command would reflect “captain or major”.

<sup>78</sup> AHQ Report No. 16.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

eight soldiers eventually deployed, with explicit direction to gather information on the enemy and on how the allies trained and fought. These officers were part of a deliberate national effort to determine how, where, and with whom a Canadian division would deploy to the Pacific. Once the government decided in September 1944 to deploy a ground contingent with US forces in the Pacific, additional officers deployed on attachment to American fighting units and formations, not only to gain operational experience, but also to familiarize the Canadian army with American forces, equipment, and procedures. Ultimately, the observer program helped the army deal with two significant challenges: learning how to fight a largely unfamiliar enemy in a tropical environment as well as how to operate as part of an American force.

Although the war ended before the CAPF was able to deploy, the observer program has historical significance for several reasons. First, the deployment of officers to operational units fighting the Japanese constituted the Canadian army's first step towards the contribution it hoped to make in the invasion of Japan. This first step included operational, often hazardous, duty by dozens of Canadian officers who joined allied forces and participated in hard-slogging campaigns in Burma and the Pacific region. The records consulted for this article show that several officers were wounded, but, more important was the useful information they sent back to Canadian military authorities. These officer's reports informed the organization, training, equipment, and staffing of the CAPF in 1945.

Second, the observer program constituted another sort of first step: the beginning of the Canadian army's close relationship with American forces. Canada's close strategic defence relationship with its continental neighbour had only begun in earnest with the Ogdensburg Agreement (1940) that created the Permanent Joint Board of Defence and initiated collaboration on the defence of North America. But, notwithstanding contributions to the celebrated First Special Service Force and to the brief operation at Kiska, the Canadian army had not yet started to operate with American forces on any large scale. The plan to send a Canadian division to fight with American forces posed challenges for an army whose culture was rooted firmly in British traditions and practices. It forced Canadian military authorities to consider how a British-modeled formation from Canada could integrate into the American system. Adjusting to the American military was bound to be somewhat awkward, so attaching

officers to US forces on operations made good sense. Canadian army leadership was determined to make the integration succeed, and even rebuffed a British proposal, made to Ottawa shortly before the war in the Pacific ended, for the 6th Canadian Division to form part of an American-equipped British Commonwealth corps for the assault on Japan.<sup>80</sup>

Finally, the observer program and the formation of the CAPF was, in the end, a step away from the imperial military family. Indeed, as Douglas Delaney shows, 1945 marked both the peak and the end of the “imperial army project” as Canada and her cousin dominions began to detach themselves from the British pole and gravitate towards the United States, ending four decades of close cooperation with the British army.<sup>81</sup> Ultimately, the observer program resulted from sound and early political and military anticipation that Canada would have to define its role as an ally after Germany’s defeat. Indeed, the program was designed to enable the army to support the government’s policy of asserting Canada’s role in the world, by contributing substantively to allied operations against Japan after the defeat of Germany. Although Canada’s army did little fighting in the Asia-Pacific region, preparations were well underway to send 30,000 volunteers to fight with the CAPF when the war ended, quite unexpectedly.

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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<sup>80</sup> AHQ Report No. 16.

<sup>81</sup> Delaney, *The Imperial Army Project*, 305.