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BY Ooe FOR DHIST,NDHQ

ARMY HEADQUARTERS

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The Royal Canadian Engineers in Germany,
1945-1958

1. The following report was prepared in response to a request received on 3 Mar 59 from the War Office, London, through the Office of the Chief Engineer, Army Headquarters. The Royal Engineers were then preparing "a short history covering the activities of the Corps in British Army of the Rhine from 1945-58". They requested, for inclusion with this history, "an account of the activities of Royal Canadian Engineer units serving in Germany during this period". The account which follows was supplied to the Office of the Chief Engineer on 30 Apr 59. (Correspondence will be found on H.Q. 1451-1/4, vol 3; Hist Sec file 3-3, vol 2).

2. The stationing of Canadian troops in Germany during the post-war years falls into two distinct periods: the first, when a Canadian force, including engineers, participated in the occupation of Germany from July 1945 to June 1946; the second, commencing with the arrival in Germany of the 27th Canadian Infantry Brigade Group in 1951 and continuing with subsequent rotation of brigades as part of the Canadian obligations under the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Engineer units have been included in the brigade groups since 1951.

THE CANADIAN ARMY OCCUPATION FORCE (C.A.O.F.).

3. On 11 Dec 44, the Canadian Government approved the participation of Canadian troops in the British Army of Occupation in Germany as a natural development from Canadian participation in military operations in North-West Europe. No undertaking would be given to furnish occupational forces for the whole period of military control in Germany, and the matter was to be reviewed prior to 31 Mar 46. On 15 Feb 46 Mr. Mackenzie King, the Prime Minister, announced that the withdrawal of Canadian troops from Germany would begin early in April and that the force should be back in Canada by September or October 1946. It may be noted that, unlike the United Kingdom, the United States, the Soviet Union, and France, Canada was not one of the Occupying Powers, nor was Canada a member of the Allied Control Commission. The greater part of the Canadian Army Overseas had been repatriated at the time of the announcement, and the maintenance of a small occupational force thousands of miles from home incurred costs out of all proportion to its size. Further, certain of the Allied European nations which were not in a position to supply contingents at the beginning of the occupation were able at the time of the announcement to share in occupation duties.

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Embarkation of the last component of the force was completed on 8 Jun 46. (1)

4. The force, numbering approximately 25,000 men, was the reconstituted 3rd Canadian Infantry Division. By 11 Jul 45, 3rd Canadian Infantry Division (C.A.O.F.), with headquarters at Bad Zwischenahn, had taken over an area in North-West Germany occupied by other Canadian formations since the capitulation. Brigades and units of the reorganized division, which came under command of 30th Corps District, bore the distinguishing prefix "2" before their respective numbers. (2)

5. Divisional engineer units arrived in Germany from the Netherlands during the first week of July. Units, and their locations, were as follows:-

- H.Q., R.C.E., 3rd Canadian Infantry Division (C.A.O.F.). BAD ZWISCHENAHN
- 2/3 Canadian Field Park Company (R.C.E.) (C.A.O.F.). ROSTRUP AIRFIELD
- 2/3 Canadian Division Bridging Platoon (R.C.E.) (C.A.O.F.). ROSTRUP AIRFIELD
- 2/6 Canadian Field Company (R.C.E.) (C.A.O.F.). LEER
- 2/16 Canadian Field Company (R.C.E.) (C.A.O.F.). VAREL
- 2/18 Canadian Field Company (R.C.E.) (C.A.O.F.). OLDENBURG (3)

6. The increment to the division included Engineer Works units which also arrived in Germany from the Netherlands during July and August. Units and locations were as under:-

- 1 Canadian C.R.E. Works (C.A.O.F.). OLDENBURG
- 1 Canadian Works Section (C.A.O.F.). AURICH
- 2 Canadian Works Section (C.A.O.F.). OSNABRUCK
- 1 Canadian Engineer Store Platoon (C.A.O.F.). BAD ZWISCHENAHN (4)

7. The Canadian occupation area contained the Land Oldenburg, Regierungsbezirke Aurich, and part of the Province of Hannover in the neighbourhood of Osnabruck. The larger towns in this area were Wilhelmshaven, Emden, Oldenburg, Delmenhorst, and Osnabruck. (5)

ENGINEER TASKS

8. The major tasks confronting the engineers were the restoration of communications, the construction of accommodation before winter set in, the destruction of German military installations, and the removal of minefields. (6)

The northern part of the Canadian area was low-lying, intersected by rivers and innumerable canals and drainage ditches. Many bridges, particularly over main water obstacles, had been destroyed, and a vast amount of work was required to clear debris, to construct bridges, to strengthen others, and to increase the headroom of existing ones to permit the navigation of the waterways. (7)

THE DIVISIONAL ENGINEERS

(a) H.Q., R.C.E.

9. The priority tasks facing the C.R.E., (Lt.-Col. H.W. Love, O.B.E.), left little time for training. A minimum of basic training under unit arrangements was all that could be accomplished. The C.R.E. was instrumental in setting up a Divisional Trade School near Delmenhorst to qualify men of all arms to Canadian Department of Labour standards for civil rehabilitation. In addition, the 30th Corps District Trades Training School, which opened on 1 Aug 45, was utilized to upgrade tradesmen to higher military trades groups. (8)

10. During August the C.R.E. arranged with the Senior Engineer Officer of the 86th German Corps for German sappers to be provided for the removal of demolished bridges, to assist in the construction of others, and for mine clearance in both the Canadian area and that of the 1st Polish Armoured Division. In the same month work began on improving and winterizing displaced persons' camps. During November all large accommodation tasks were turned over to the C.R.E. Works, leaving the field companies free for the more operational tasks of equipment bridging and demolitions. (9)

11. In December a proposal to construct an artificial ice rink was considered. An ice plant at Hamburg was released on the basis that it would be dismantled and moved to Jever for re-erection. It was to be re-installed in Hamburg by 1 Jun 45. Maj.-Gen. C. Vokes, G.O.C. 3rd Canadian Infantry Division (C.A.O.F.), was keen to have the rink for divisional hockey. On 8 December it was decided that the project was not feasible. The plant was 11 years old and it was improbable that it would stand dismantling and re-installation twice. Power requirements were not available from civil sources at Jever, and other generators could not readily be obtained. Ten thousand gallons of cooling water would have been required, which the existing system at Jever could not provide. Thus a large storage installation would have been needed. It would have been necessary to cut circulation piping to fit a hangar at Jever, and there was uncertainty as to the availability of skilled labour for pipe-fitting. Transport, in short supply, would have to be provided to move ten lineal miles of piping. Assuming that all these difficulties could be overcome, the time for dismantling and re-erection would have left less than two months for hockey. (10)

12. Sports, however, were not neglected. Despite the work-load, one half-day a week was devoted to sports, and inter-unit games of softball, volleyball and basketball were played. On 28 Aug 45 the O.C. 2/6 Fd Coy (Maj W. Kayes) took the divisional swimming team to the 30th Corps Swimming

Championships held in Nienburg. He, personally, won four of the championships, although no other Canadian placed. A combined hockey team made up of sappers and signallers was formed to play in Amsterdam. This team headed the Divisional Troops League, winning six games, tying two, and losing three. (11)

13. On 8 May 46 the handover of engineer tasks to the 52nd (Lowland) Division was completed, and on 14 May 46 H.Q., R.C.E. sailed from Cuxhaven for disbandment in England prior to return to Canada. (12)

(b) 2/6 Cdn Fd Coy (R.C.E.)

14. Initial tasks given to this unit in July included the maintenance of seven Bailey bridges and two Bailey Pontoon bridges, the dismantling of two Bailey bridges and the construction of two high-level Baileys, one at Nieuweschans on the Dutch border, the second on the road Leer-Papenburg over the Leda River. In August it was decided that this unit would erect a semi-permanent bridge which was to consist of Bailey spans on pile piers over the Ems River at Leerort. There was considerable work during August in lowering Bailey bridges on divisional routes to give level ramps, and in recovering bombs found buried six feet deep under these roads as demolition charges. (13)

15. The unit was heavily committed throughout the full period of occupation, chiefly on bridging tasks. Despite delays in securing materials for the semi-permanent bridge at Leerort and difficulties experienced with the pile-driver, work proceeded satisfactorily until the new year, when emergencies occurred. On 11 Jan 46 the Bailey Pontoon bridge at Leerort sank in a gale, and ice in the Leda River threatened the newly-constructed high-level bridge, as fenders had not as yet been provided. An ice-breaker was obtained to operate in the Leda River until weather conditions ameliorated. Then, on 19 January, a floating crane operated by civilians to salvage the sunken pontoon bridge was wrecked by a negligent operator. Nor did the semi-permanent bridge under construction on the Ems escape; during the night of 19 January ice broke three piles in one of the piers. Five others were snapped off four days later. The only route now open to 2/7 Canadian Reconnaissance Regiment was via Lingen, involving a long turn-around and considerable waste of time and transport. A ferry could not be operated until the ice had cleared early in February, when a Class 18 raft was put into operation. This did not operate for long. On 24 February a civilian barge was torn loose from its anchors by the tide and gale and driven into the moored raft, which sank and had to be replaced. (14)

16. Work on the semi-permanent bridge was abandoned in March. It was then known that the Canadians were leaving Germany, and that the relieving formation would not require a route at this point. As a result 2/6 Cdn Fd Coy took over demolition tasks from 2/16 Cdn Fd Coy in the Leer area. On 23 Apr 46, 2/6 Fd Coy was disbanded in England. (15)

(c) 2/16 Cdn Fd Coy (R.C.E.)

17. During the earlier part of the occupation this unit was largely committed on road maintenance and on accommodation which included the Canadian General Hospital at Sande and barrack construction at Sengwarden. In addition, there were in the Oldenburg area approximately 25,000 displaced persons whose accommodation was a continuing problem. During November, C.R.E. Works accepted responsibility for accommodation, thus freeing the field company for demolition tasks. These included the destruction of German bunkers, fortifications, batteries, and the radar towers at Norden. 2/16 Cdn Fd Coy sailed from Cuxhaven on 8 May 46, and was disbanded in England two days later. (16)

(d) 2/18 Cdn Fd Coy (R.C.E.)

18. Responsibility for mine clearance fell largely to this unit, the task being finished by the end of October. During this month the company also constructed accommodation for 2/9 Canadian Infantry Brigade and for displaced persons in 17 camps. In addition the unit surfaced Rostrup Airfield. During November accommodation projects were handed over to C.R.E. Works, enabling 2/18 Fd Coy to construct an airstrip at Bad Zwischenahn during December and to detach a platoon to assist 2/6 Fd Coy in bridging operations during January. The company was the first of the divisional engineers to leave Germany, embarking at Cuxhaven on 23 Mar 46, and disbanding in England two days later. (17)

(e) 2/3 Cdn Fd Pk Coy (R.C.E.)

19. This unit along with 2/3 Cdn Div Br Pl, spent the earlier period of occupation in checking stores, and in repairing boats. Its work was limited by difficulties in obtaining materials for the workshops, especially lumber. Personnel of the unit were usefully employed at the Divisional Trade School, which was administered by the field park company. Despite this, the unit was the least committed of the divisional engineers. The company left Germany from Cuxhaven on 24 Apr 46 for disbandment in England. (18)

THE WORKS INCREMENT

20. The tasks of 1 Cdn C.R.E. Wks and the works sections can be classed broadly as the provision of accommodation for all divisional troops, former prisoners of war, and displaced persons, the maintenance of all roads in the area required for military traffic, the improvement of roads, and the requisitioning and control of all engineer stores available and required in the area. Initially, labour and material shortages hampered work considerably. Most of the main roads were in fair shape for single-lane traffic but required a good deal of work to make them two-way and keep their surface throughout the winter months. Secondary roads were falling apart and no stone or transport was available for even first-aid repairs. A stores dump was set up at Bad Zwischenahn during July, but it was not until October that the first releases of materials began to arrive in response to requisitions.

21. It was necessary to organize local labour groups but German Engineer Companies were not up to strength and were short of tools. Tools were obtained and released to Germans during November, and also to displaced persons to speed up repairs to their winter accommodation.

22. Difficulties were encountered arising from non-production of huts, stoves, and other materials at local factories. What was produced was often of poor quality, but representations to Military Government by the C.R.E. (Lt.-Col. R.E. Wilkins) rectified this situation to a large extent. In addition, there were ever present problems in providing supervisors for the many tasks on hand.

23. When materials became available, work on accommodation and road projects proceeded satisfactorily. Amenities were provided in the form of Officers' and Other Ranks' Clubs in Oldenburg, and a Curling Rink at Oldenburg airport was completed during January. During April, C.R.E. (Wks), 1st Corps, took over remaining commitments. All Canadian works units left Germany for disbandment in England during April 1946.(19)

CANADIAN PARTICIPATION IN THE INTEGRATED FORCES OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION

24. An indication that Canada proposed to make a contribution to the Integrated Forces of NATO, which were being established in Europe, was contained in the speech from the throne at the opening of the Canadian Parliament in January 1951. On 4 May 51 the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Brooke Claxton) announced in the House of Commons that, to fulfil this obligation, a new formation known as the 27th Canadian Infantry Brigade Group would be recruited. The brigade, which included an independent field squadron R.C.E., arrived in Germany during November and December 1951, was placed under command of British Army of the Rhine (B.A.O.R.), and was located in the vicinity of Hannover in the British sector of Germany.(20)

58th Independent Field Squadron, R.C.E.

25. The squadron arrived in Germany 22 Nov 51 and was quartered in Hameln with 26 Field Engineer Regiment, R.E. Here, on the Weser River, good facilities for engineer training existed, including a wet-bridging area. The unit embarked on intensive training which continued until the time for rotation came in 1953.

26. Training during 1952 was carried out at first on the unit level. Unit exercises were followed by brigade exercises held later in the year. There was a corps exercise in August, and in September a joint Army and Air Force exercise. At a Bridge Camp held at Hameln by 26 Fd Engr Regt, R.E., the squadron obtained good knowledge of standard widened Bailey bridges, floating Bailey bridges, Class 50/60 rafts, and F.B.E. bridges. This knowledge was put to the test at a "bridging gallop" designed to exercise 26 Fd Engr Regt R.E. and 58 Indep Fd Sqn R.C.E. in the planning, organization, and control of

bridging and rafting operations. The unit carried out range practices three times during the year, once at Wolfenbüttel, and twice at Sennelager. In addition, individual training requirements were met at courses provided by the R.E. The unit also conducted courses in mine warfare and demolitions for Canadian infantry units. (21)

27. The second year followed a similar pattern. Married men served in Germany for a one-year period, single men for two. Replacement personnel were subjected to similar hard training. For the single men, the second year succeeded in raising individual standards, and emphasized the training lessons of the first year. The monotony of training, however, was broken by one emergency.

28. In the early morning of Sunday, 1 Feb 53, a northerly gale swept down the North Sea, piling up the shallow sea waters against the West coast of the Netherlands. It was a time of spring tides, and the waters in the estuaries of the Rhine and the Maas were at a particularly high level due to rain and melting snow in their upper reaches. These three circumstances, happening together, overwhelmed the dykes around the Dutch coast. The gale lashed the sea into pounding waves which swept over the dykes, and barns, sheds, even houses, were simply swept away. People were killed in the collapsing houses and others, who temporarily escaped, died later of cold and exposure. Cattle, tethered in their stalls, were without hope of rescue, and drowned.

29. It was decided that army assistance from Germany could best be rendered by the engineers. 58 Indep Fd Sqn sent one troop by road to work under 38 Corps Engineer Regiment, R.E. Equipped with folding boats, small tugs and power floats, the troop was detailed to Middelharnis on the island of Overflakke. Arriving in darkness and a driving snowstorm on the night of 8 February, they found that the town was surrounded by water except for the raised dyke-roads. All through the next day dead cattle were recovered. Since there was some risk of typhus, the men wore oilskins and rubber gloves. Cattle were found floating under beams, in lofts, one bloated carcass being recovered from a child's bedroom. On 11 Feb 53 a DUKW was obtained, its winch proving very useful. Cold biting winds and rough water gave much discomfort, but the morale of the men was high. The only animal encountered which resented rescue was a small pup which had survived by gorging itself on dead cattle in an isolated barn. The bitten arm of the rescuer began to swell and required treatment. Work proceeded until 17 February, when more than 350 dead cows had been hauled out. Two girls, who were still alive, had been rescued. The Dutch had not forgotten the liberation of their country by Canadians. On leaving Holland, the troop commander was told, "What you have done has been a very great help, but most of all to see your Canadian trucks arrive here when our morale was so low, meant everything." (22)

30. In less grim times the squadron had a good sports record. It produced the winner of the Brigade Sten Gun Competition 1952 and won the Brigade Pistol Match held in June of that year. The unit won the Regimental Cup for basketball in 1953, also having a first and second at the annual Athletics Meet of 27 Cdn Inf Bde in the same year. In addition, two sappers of the squadron won in their divisions at the Brigade Boxing Finals in 1953.

31. 58 Indep Fd Sqn left Germany on 3 Dec 53 for Canada. (23)

2nd Field Squadron, R.C.E.

32. This squadron, which relieved 58 Indep Fd Sqn, proceeded to Germany with 1 Cdn Inf Bde Gp and moved into newly-built brigade accommodation at Werl in the Soest area of North-West Germany on 25 Nov 53. Despite the move, bridging was still carried out during annual Bridge Camps with the R.E. at Hameln, and rafting and watermanship facilities were readily available at the Mohne See in the neighbourhood of Werl. Training was similar to that carried out by 58 Indep Fd Sqn and was equally intensive. Dependents were now permitted to accompany married men, and personnel of the unit remained in Germany for two years, sailing for Canada on 28 Nov 55. (24)

1st Field Squadron, R.C.E.

33. On arrival with 2 Cdn Inf Bde Gp, the squadron moved into the Werl area on 6 Nov 55 preparatory to taking over from 2 Fd Sqn. Training followed the pattern of preceding units, advantage being taken of the milder European winters to carry out year-round training.

34. 1 Fd Sqn had an excellent sports record. In 1956, the squadron won the 2 Cdn Inf Bde Gp basketball championship and cross-country run. It also won the Sten Gun Competition at the Brigade Skill-at-Arms Meet, narrowly missing first place in the whole competition. In November 1956, matched against 17 R.E. units, the unit won the 1 C.C.R.E. Inter Squadron Small-Bore Competition. The following year, at the annual Bridge Camp, Hameln, the Inter-Squadron Regatta was won by 1 Fd Sqn. The squadron basketball team had another successful season. It won the brigade basketball championship, the basketball championship at the B.A.O.R., R.E. games, and lost in the finals of the British Army basketball championship in England. In 1957, for the second time, the unit won the Sten Gun Competition at the Brigade Skill-at-Arms Meet.

35. The unit left Germany during October 1957, after being relieved by 4 Fd Sqn R.C.E., which arrived with 4 Cdn Inf Bde Gp. (25)

31 Canadian Works Section, R.C.E.

36. Accommodation for the first incoming Canadian brigade in 1951 was allocated in ex-German barracks of permanent construction situated at Hannover, Hohne, and Hameln. The intention of B.A.O.R. was, however, to construct a new brigade camp in the area of Soest, the brigade to remain in accommodation in the Hannover area until the new camp was ready. Works units of the R.E. were already operating in the Hannover area and, as this service was to continue, there was no immediate requirement for a Canadian works service unit as such. H.Q., B.A.O.R. however, requested that Canadian personnel should take over works services in the new brigade area. They should be available as soon as possible to assist in the planning, layout, supervision of construction, and interpretation of Canadian requirements for this project. By so doing, they

would be able to learn the R.E. works system, preparatory to assuming responsibility at Soest. (26)

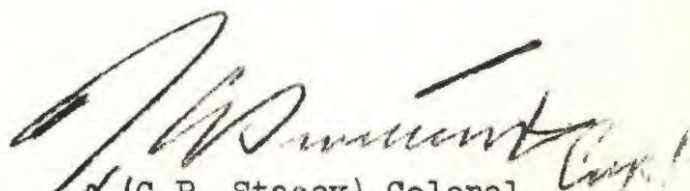
37. The Base Advance Party of the brigade included a works team of the R.C.E. to carry out these tasks. (27) On 6 Mar 52, 31 Cdn Wks Sec R.C.E. was formed from this team. It was located at Bad Oeynhausen with H.Q., B.A.O.R. (28) During March 1952 sites for the new brigade camp were inspected in the Soest area. Four sites were agreed upon, at Deilinghofen, Enkesen-im-Klei, Brandholz, and Werlerwald, and B.A.O.R. requisitioned the necessary land. On 13 May 52, 31 Cdn Wks Sec moved to Soest, and worked under C.R.E. Paderborn, R.E. Work on accommodation plans started in May and continued through June. Clearance of trees began, during the course of which pre-historic barrows were opened in the Werlerwald. Excavations were completed by Dr. Beck of the Munster Museum; he found stone weapons, implements, and pieces of pottery 4000 years old, dating from the early Stone Age. (29)

38. In September, the sports fields were completed, and work on the roads and buildings started. German contractors performed the work under the supervision of Canadian engineers. During the winter, frost delayed the pouring of concrete but by using steam construction continued. On 10 Nov 53 the camps were opened in time for occupation by the relieving brigade. (30)

39. Married quarters, schools and churches followed at three sites: Werl, Soest, and Hemer. In the same year the German firm of Linde at Düsseldorf built hockey-rinks at each of the four camp sites to Canadian specifications. No major technical difficulties were encountered. (31)

40. By 1957 work was generally restricted to maintenance, and 31 Cdn Wks Sec was reduced to nil strength on 31 July. Works personnel were absorbed into the establishment of 2 Canadian Infantry Brigade Group, as an increment, to continue to do maintenance. (32)

41. This Report was compiled by Capt. J.A. Swettenham, R.C.E.


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