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R E P O R T NO. 80
HISTORICAL SECTION (G.S.)
ARMY HEADQUARTERS

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AUTHORITY: DHD 3-12
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DATE: **DEC 3 1986**

6 Feb 59

Proposed Despatch of a Canadian Force
to the Falkland Islands, 1942

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1. This report is a preliminary account of the action, largely military, which followed a British request in 1942 that the Canadian Government consider the despatch of a Canadian Force to ensure the security of the Falkland Islands. It is not exhaustive in scope but gives briefly the reasons for Canada's decision to refuse this request.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE FALKLAND ISLANDS

2. For purposes of background, some description of the Falkland Islands is necessary, and this has been done under headings as appropriate.

(a) History

The Falkland Islands, a Crown Colony of Great Britain, are located in the South Atlantic Ocean. They:

....were discovered on the 14 August 1592 by the Englishman John Davis in the Desire, one of the vessels of the squadron sent to the Pacific under Cavendish...Captain Strong in the Welfare sailed through between the two principle islands in 1690 and called the passage...the Falkland Sound in memory of a well-known Royalist...Lord Falkland...killed...in 1643.

(Colonial Reports - Annual: No.1932:
Annual Report on the Social and Economic
Progress of the people of the FALKLAND
ISLANDS 1938 (H.M. Stationery Office,
London, 1940) p. 3)

Through the centuries there have been conflicting claims to the islands by France, Great Britain, Spain and the Argentine.

The Argentine's claim to the islands was based on the founding of a colony in the Falklands in 1829 by settlers enjoying the nominal protection of the Republic of Buenos Aires. The first settlement on the islands was established on East Falkland Island by the French in 1764. In the following year the British took possession of West Falkland Island. The Spaniards, jealous of interference by other nations in this part of the world, bought out the French interests, and in 1770 forcibly ejected the British from West Falkland. This action on the part of Spain led the two countries to the verge of war. In 1771, however, the settlement was restored to the British, but was voluntarily abandoned in 1774. Early in the nineteenth century the Spaniards abandoned their settlements, and the islands remained without formal occupation until the Argentine settlers arrived in 1829. The Argentinians thought fit to seize vessels belonging to the United States' fishing fleet, and the settlement suffered from an American punitive expedition in 1831. In 1833, Great Britain, which had never relaxed its claim to the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands, expelled the few Argentine soldiers and colonists, and resumed occupation which has been maintained ever since.

(Ibid, p. 3)

Prior to the opening of the Panama Canal, the Falkland Islands lay on the main sea route from Europe, through the Straits of Magellan to the west coast of South America, and in the days of sail frequently harboured vessels which had been worsted in the struggle to round Cape Horn. On the 8 December 1914, they were the scene of the naval battle in which Sir F.C. Doveton Sturdee defeated and destroyed the German Squadron under Admiral Graf von Spee.

(Ibid, p. 4)

(b) Geography

The Falkland Islands lie in the South Atlantic Ocean some 300 miles east and somewhat to the north of the Straits of Magellan between 51° and 53° south latitude and 57° and 62° west longitude. In addition to the two main islands, known as the East and West Falklands, the group comprises about 200 smaller islands clustered around them.

(Ibid, p. 2)

The....two main islands [are] each of about two thousand square miles. The coastline is low, rocky, and very indented with sounds and bays, which form good harbours for light craft. Landing places are restricted by the great quantity of kelp seaweed round the coasts. The hinterland consists of large tracts of treeless moorland interspersed with bogs. There are many outcrops of rock and boulders and ridges of rocky hills, some over one thousand feet.

(C.M.H.Q. 3/F. 1./1: "War Cabinet: Ad hoc sub-committee on Defence Arrangements for the Indian Ocean area: Falkland Islands," 17 Feb 42, Appx "A" to Annex) [312.013(D8)].

The only town is Stanley, the capital, situated at the north-east corner of the group on East Falkland.

(c) Climate

The climate of the Falkland Islands is characterized by the same seasonal variations as in England, but the annual range of temperature is smaller.

The annual range of temperature is approximately 40° Fahrenheit in January, and 27° F in July. Snow averages 53 days in a year, and falls every month except January. There are strong winds often of gale force.

(Ibid)

The climate is healthy, but ordinary epidemic diseases, such as colds, occur in a virulent form.

(d) Population (1942)

The total population is about 2,000. Of these, 1,200 live in Stanley.

(Ibid)

There are smaller settlements of which Darwin, with a population of about 100 persons, is the most important.

(e) Natural Resources

The whole acreage of the Colony is divided into sheep farms. Apart from the production of wool, skins, and tallow, the Colony has no resources of value.

Everything required for defence measures must be imported. Existing accommodation is limited to billeting for about 1500 in the Stanley area. Permanent accommodation and a regular supply line will therefore be required for the maintenance of the garrison.

(Ibid)

(f) Communications and Transport

There are no roads except in the immediate vicinity of Stanley. Movement across country is difficult and can best be accomplished on horseback and, in certain areas, by track vehicles if the driver has local knowledge. In general, movement over long distances is quickest by sea.

(Ibid)

External communications are principally through Montevideo, a service being maintained by the Falkland Islands Company Steamer, Lafonia, 1,800 tons. Distance from Stanley to Montevideo is 1,000 miles. This ship also makes two voyages a year to South Georgia. The Government operates a wireless station at Stanley, no submarine cables exist. There are no inland telegraphs, but in Stanley there is a Government telephone system.

(D.C.G.S.(A) BDF "FORCE DONALD": G.S. Appreciation, 14 Jan 42, hereinafter referred to as G.S. Appreciation [Second], 14 Jan 42) [112.1(D28)].

(g) Government

At the head of the Government of the Colony is the Governor and Commander-in-Chief, who is advised by an Executive Council consisting of five official and two unofficial members. There is a Legislative Council composed of four official and four unofficial members, the latter being nominated by the Crown. There is no local Government in the Colony.

(Ibid)

(h) Local Defence (1942)

Information available is that the islands are defended by some 300 local volunteers who also man the three 6" coast defence guns. Their security depends mainly on the naval dispositions made by the United States fleet, in whose area of strategical responsibility they are.

(Ibid)

British information was more specific, and gave the strength of the force as one British officer, one British N.C.O., 10 local officers and 321 local other ranks. They had the following weapons:

Armament:

223 rifles;
3 Vickers machine guns;
2 Maxim machine guns;
8 Lewis guns;
9 Bren guns (in transit)

Fixed Defences: (all in the neighbourhood of Stanley)

Two 6" Naval B.L. guns;
One 4" Naval B.L. gun;
Two 12 pdr guns;
Two 3 pdr guns.

(C.M.H.Q. 3/F. 1./1: "War Cabinet:
Ad hoc sub-committee on Defence
Arrangements for the Indian Ocean Area:
Falkland Islands," 13 Feb 42, Appx "A"
to Annex) [312.013(D8)].

POLITICAL FACTORS LEADING TO THE BRITISH REQUEST

3. On 14 Jan 42 an invitation was received from the Prime Minister of Great Britain, Mr. Winston Churchill,* through the British High Commissioner in Ottawa, Mr Malcolm MacDonald, that the Canadian Government consider the despatch of a Canadian Force of one or two battalions and a battery of

*It may be noted that Mr. Churchill was in Washington at this time. He attended a meeting of the Combined Chiefs of Staff on 12 Jan 42. His message was received in Canada through the British Ambassador in Washington.

field artillery to ensure the security of the Falkland Islands. (The document containing the request is not to be found in the records of D.N.D., so that its terms cannot be specifically stated). It was felt by the Canadian General Staff that Mr. Churchill's request might have been based as much on political as on military grounds. Two appreciations of operational troops required initially to reinforce the present garrison were made by the Canadian General Staff on 14 Jan 42, and political factors were considered in both of these. The first states that "it may be pertinent to inquire as to the necessity of making special provision to guard against the Japanese establishing a submarine base in the Falkland Islands, when equally good facilities are readily available to them on the opposite and uninhabited coast of Patagonia" (D.C.G.S.(A) BDF "FORCE DONALD": G.S. Appreciation [First], 14 Jan 42) [112.1(D28)].

4. The second appreciation contained the following:

The objects of providing a Canadian garrison seem to be frankly stated in the telegram from the British Ambassador to Washington, viz:

- (a) To deal with a possible Japanese raid.
- (b) To keep Argentina off the Islands.
- (c) To obviate the necessity of asking that U.S. troops take over.

(D.C.G.S.(A) BDF "FORCE DONALD": G.S. Appreciation [Second], 14 Jan 42) [112.1(D28)].

5. On receipt of the appreciations, the Chief of the General Staff, Lt-Gen K. Stuart, sent a telegram to the Military Attaché at the Canadian Legation in Washington (Maj C.M. Drury) to find out from Lt-Gen Sir H.C. Wemyss, of the British Army Staff at Washington, or from Field-Marshal Sir John Dill, Head of the British Joint Staff Mission at Washington, what lay behind the request:

See General Wemyss first thing in morning and find out what he or Dill know about request from Churchill for Canada to supply a garrison for Falkland Islands. We question need for such a garrison in view remote possibility of attack and difficult nature of country and absolute lack of resources but very difficult to refuse such a request. Find out whether request received Staff consideration and whether it is appreciated that supplies must come from Montevideo one thousand miles away and that accommodation will have to be constructed and all materials imported before troops arrive.

(D.C.G.S.(A) BDF "FORCE DONALD": Tel G.S. 18, C.G.S. to Military Attache Washington, 14 Jan 42) [112.1(D28)].

6. The reply received on 15 Jan 42 confirmed that political, as well as military factors, were indeed involved:

Following is summary of conversation between Sir John Dill, General Wemyss and Major Drury. Request for Garrison of Falkland Islands originated by Chiefs of Staff Committee in London and desired U.S. to provide a garrison because of the possibility that Japanese might seize islands and either hold them or offer them to Argentina. British Chiefs of Staff Washington concurred in view that greater local defense was necessary but felt that U.S. could not be asked to provide in view of her Pan American commitments which would oblige her to offer to let Argentina provide the garrison. Chiefs of Staff accordingly advised Prime Minister to address request to Canada. In view of possibility that U.S. might endeavour to placate Argentina at the forthcoming Pan American Conference by offering her the Falkland Islands which Argentina has long desired Chiefs of Staff feel it would be desirable to be able to assure the U.S. that adequate provision had been made for their defense should the question be raised in the near future.

(D.C.G.S.(A) BDF "FORCE DONALD": Tel X19 MA 66 15/1, Military Attache Washington to C.G.S., 15 Jan 42) [112.1(D28)].

THE CANADIAN APPRECIATION

7. A brief appreciation was made by the Canadian General Staff on 14 Jan 42 with the object of assessing "so far as the limited information immediately available permitted, the strength and organization of the force which should be provided, in the event of the Government deciding

to accept this new commitment" (D.C.G.S.(A) BDF "FORCE DONALD": G.S. Appreciation [First], 14 Jan 42) [112.1(D28)].

8. It was noted from the Committee of Imperial Defence document No. 470-C of July 1938 that the forms and scales of attack laid down for the Falkland Islands approximated those defined by the Canadian Chiefs of Staff for eastern Canadian ports, namely;

.....bombardment raid by cruisers, bombardment attack by armed merchant vessels, attack by raiding parties landed from war and/or merchant vessels and occasional light raids by aircraft from naval ships (other than carriers) or from armed merchant vessels. While the fact cannot immediately be confirmed, it is likely that the above-stated forms and scales have since been increased to include bombardment by a ship of the line and attack by aircraft from carriers. In any event, the Falkland Islands are as much exposed to these forms of attack as are Trinidad and Bermuda, in respect of which such forms have been laid down"

(Ibid)

9. It was considered impracticable to attempt to guard every natural harbour in the islands, of which there were a great number, and "in view of the fact that the area of East Falkland and West Falkland and their adjacent islands measure some 4600 square miles and that there are no road communications available" (Ibid), it was suggested that defence be limited to Stanley and possibly Darwin Harbour, a hamlet of 100 people.

10. Defence against contemplated raids could adequately be provided by one infantry battalion (less one company) at Stanley, with one company at Darwin Harbour. Perhaps with recent events in Hong Kong in mind, it was suggested that "the remoteness of the islands is such that in the event of attack relief could not arrive for a matter

of several weeks and as it would not be prudent to repeat in this case the old story of sending a boy on a man's errandthe garrison, if provided should not be less than two battalions and attached troops" (Ibid). With the advantages of hindsight, we may now perhaps question the advisability of reinforcing outposts of this kind in the circumstances which then existed.

11. So far as composition of the attached troops was concerned, it was noted that a battery of field artillery had been requested. As the possibility of air attack existed, anti-aircraft defence was also necessary. Hutted accommodation would be essential, requiring future maintenance. There was a need for a R.C.A.S.C. supply detachment, and for one furnished by R.C.O.C. to handle supplies received at intervals. A hospital would be required. The force would therefore comprise:

- Force H.Q. (Approximately an Inf Bde H.Q.)
- One or two infantry battalions
- One field battery
- One heavy A.A. detachment
- One light A.A. detachment
- One engineers' construction unit
- One R.C.A.S.C. detachment
- One R.C.O.C. detachment
- One R.C.A.M.C. hospital detachment

(Ibid)

12. The second appreciation made by the General Staff on 14 Jan 42 envisaged that the object of an enemy raid could be "to interfere with the free flow of traffic round Cape Horn, or to establish for themselves a submarine refuelling base. The assistance of Germany in such a venture, if undertaken, would no doubt be forthcoming" (D.C.G.S.(A) BDF "FORCE DONALD": G.S. Appreciation [Second], 14 Jan 42) [112.1(D28)]. It was categorically stated, after studying current Japanese

operations "that a force of two battalions, with a battery of field guns, could not hold the Falkland Islands if the Axis Powers decide to attack them with a view to their capture" (Ibid). This was foreseen as a most unlikely event as "it is difficult to see what temporary use the Axis Powers could make of these islands which would justify the great risk which would be involved in any expedition having their capture as its object. The use would be temporary, as any enemy force landed there would be in a much more precarious position than our own defending troops..". It was therefore concluded that an "attack by any strong landing force is a very remote possibility, and....the Falkland Islands are more likely to be subjected to nuisance raids only" (Ibid). Consequently, one battalion, with a battery of field guns, would provide a sufficiently large garrison to deal with what appeared to be the real objects, which were largely political:

- (a) To deal with a possible Japanese raid
- (b) To keep Argentina off the islands
- (c) To obviate the necessity of asking that U.S. Troops take over.

(Ibid)

THE BRITISH APPRECIATION

13. A War Office appreciation had also been made, again with the object of assessing the strength and composition of the garrison required. This appreciation was given to Canadian Military Headquarters in London with the sanction of the C.I.G.S. for possible assistance in preliminary planning, but with the proviso that it be understood that the appreciation had not as yet been approved by the Chiefs of Staff. Extracts from this appreciation were sent by

telegram to Ottawa on 26 Jan 42 (D.C.G.S.(A) BDF "FORCE DONALD": Tel G.S. 293, Canmiltry to Defensor, 26 Jan 42) [112.1(D28)].

14. The British conception of defending the islands was based on:

- (a) keeping Stanley as an operational naval base
- (b) to deny [the] islands to [the] enemy for use as naval bases.
- (c) to protect vulnerable installations at Stanley from damage by enemy action

(Ibid)

15. The scale of attack was estimated "as [a] raiding force of one cruiser and two armed merchant cruisers carrying [a] landing force of 600 - 700 men, also probable small number of aircraft" (Ibid). It was considered that "development of defences should be carried out by stages with [the] ultimate aim [of defending] the islands against a major assault" (Ibid). In view of the contemplated scale of attack, the hazardous landing places with difficult communications therefrom, and existing limitations of accommodation, it was stated that "the immediate defence programme should be based on the defence of Stanley" (Ibid).

The British appreciation suggested that the initial reinforcement should therefore be:

- One Infantry Battalion
- One Section, Field Company RE
- One M.G. Company
- One Signals Section
- One Army Troops Company R.E., (less electrical Section), for constructional work
- One Pioneer Company of four sections.

The total would be made up to "1,500 by additional personnel that may be required to man modern warning equipment if

provided," (Ibid) and billeting for this number was stated to be available in Stanley as a temporary measure.

PROPOSED COMPOSITION OF THE FORCE

16. In Canada, planning proceeded on the composition of the force, based on Canadian General Staff appreciations dated 14 Jan 42.

17. On 16 Jan 42, the V.C.G.S., Maj-Gen M. Pope, in a memorandum to the A.C.G.S., Brigadier R.B. Gibson, saw the need for only one battalion, with attached troops, and requested a meeting of Directors concerned to discuss the organization and despatch of the proposed force. In this memorandum he stated "...request may have been based as much on political as military grounds. In these circumstances, and unless a view to the contrary is received ...we should plan on a force of one battalion and attached troops and not two battalions etc. as alternatively provided for in my appreciation of 14 Jan 42 hereunder" (D.C.G.S.(A) BDF "FORCE DONALD": H.Q.S. 8916, memo, V.C.G.S. to A.C.G.S., 16 Jan 42) [112.1(D28)].

18. A meeting of Directors, held at National Defence Headquarters on 17 Jan 42 under the chairmanship of Brigadier Gibson, proposed the following composition for the force:

- One Infantry Battalion
- One Field Battery, R.C.A.
- One A.A. Troop (Type H), R.C.A. (four 3.7" guns)
- One A.A. Battery (Type L), R.C.A. (eight 40 mm. guns)
- One R.C. Sigs. Section
- One Section of a Field Company, R.C.E.
- One Supply Depot, R.C.A.S.C.

One Hospital, R.C.A.M.C.
One Detachment, R.C.O.C.

(D.C.G.S.(A) BDF "FORCE DONALD":
"Directive No. 1: In regard to the
despatch of a Special Canadian Force
for Falkland Islands": D.S.D. to
Directors, 17 Jan 42) [112.1(D28)].

There would be a small Force Headquarters, the composition of which was still undecided, and as it was anticipated that accommodation would have to be constructed, it was proposed that the force would move as an advance party to be followed by the movement of the main party (Ibid).

19. One Construction Company R.C.E. would proceed with the advance party and was to return to Canada on the completion of construction of accommodation (Ibid).

20. The composition of the force suggested in the War Office's appreciation, received 26 Jan 42, differed mainly from the proposed Canadian composition by substituting a M.G. Company for the field battery, and by making no provision for A.A. guns. The A.C.G.S. queried the British proposal in a memorandum of 30 Jan 42 to the V.C.G.S.:

...In view of:

- (a) available coast artillery,
- (b) limited area to be defended,
- (c) nature of ground

the M.G. Coy, should take the place of the Fd. Bty. proposed in your instructions. Do you concur, please?

No provision for A.A. guns is made in the War Office Appreciation. In view of the possibility of air attack, it appears essential that some A.A. Protection should be provided. I suggest that we should inform Troopers [address used in telegrams to War Office] that in our view four 3.7" and eight 40mm. Bofors guns must be released to accompany this force if it is despatched, and that we

base our plans on the assumption that the personnel to man these guns will accompany the Force.

(D.C.G.S.(A) BDF "FORCE DONALD":
Memo, A.C.G.S. to V.C.G.S., 30 Jan 42)
[112.1(D28)].

21. The V.C.G.S. felt that a field battery rather than a M.G. Company should be included, as an infantry battalion was already a M.G. unit, albeit a light M.G. unit. He entirely agreed that the force should include A.A. units as proposed. The C.G.S. concurred with the V.C.G.S. in both matters, and the War Office was informed accordingly through C.M.H.Q. (H.Q.S. 8916: Tel G.S.D. 229, Defensor to Canmiltry, 31 Jan 42).

22. The final British Defence Plan, approved by the Chiefs of Staff on 25 Feb 42, included the anti-aircraft protection deemed essential by the Canadians, consisting of four heavy anti-aircraft guns and eight light anti-aircraft guns.

The ultimate garrison was to be:

One Infantry battalion
One battery light artillery in pack
One section field company, engineers
One machine gun company
Detachments, engineers, signals,
ancillary troops as may be necessary.

(C.M.H.Q. 3/F.1/1: "War Cabinet:
Ad hoc sub-committee on Defence
Arrangements for the Indian Ocean
area: Falkland Islands": 17 Feb 42,
Annex) [312.013(D8)].

Thus one battery of light artillery was approved in place of the field battery, and the M.G. company was retained. However, no action was taken to change the proposed Canadian composition (even if this had been felt necessary) since it had been decided not to send the force when the finally approved Defence Plan was received.

MAINTENANCE OF THE FORCE

23. Because of the isolated location of the Falkland Islands and the lack of natural resources, the question of supplying the proposed force immediately sprang to mind together with the problem of responsibility. A telegram was sent to the War Office asking if responsibility for supply and replenishment would be assumed by the British (D.C.G.S.(A) BDF "FORCE DONALD": Tel GSD 158, Defensor to Canmiltry, 23 Jan 42) [112.1(D28)].

24. While awaiting decision on this point, information was sought on multifarious matters of supply, in order that preliminary planning could go forward in the event that Canada was to assume responsibility for maintenance. The list is too exhaustive to include in detail, but inevitably, questions included the availability of local supplies of food both on the islands and on the mainland, petrol and oil reserves, scale of issue for vehicles, ammunition and equipment, and their reserves, availability of local accommodation, existing and potential water supply sources, electric power characteristics and availability, and whether or not local tradesmen and labourers were available to assist in construction. (Ibid)

25. Many of the answers were known on 26 Jan 42. No fuel resources were at hand locally and it would be necessary to import this commodity. Only carriers could be used outside Stanley, so that a high proportion of track vehicles would be included. Billetting was available as a temporary measure, but the construction of accommodation

for all purposes was an early necessity. Prefabricated huts were recommended as all materials must be imported. Water for 1500 was available but piping was needed. Electric power could be provided for lighting, but wiring, bulbs and accessories were required. "Very little local labour" existed, so that the force would have to find its "own constructional personnel." (D.C.G.S.(A) BDF "FORCE DONALD": Tel GS 293, Canmiltry to Defensor, 26 Jan 42) [112.1(D28)].

26. Information was received from London on 23 Feb 42 that from the shipping point of view, it would matter little who maintained the force, as its location would be equally difficult from the United Kingdom or North America. It was, however, considered "desirable for administrative responsibility to follow operational responsibility", and should Canada produce the garrison it was "thought desirable for Canada to carry out maintenance". (D.C.G.S.(A) BDF "FORCE DONALD": Tel GS 663, Canmiltry to Defensor, 23 Feb 42) [112.1(D28)].

THE AMERICAN ATTITUDE

27. The British considered it imperative to determine the American attitude towards sending Canadian troops to the Falkland Islands, we have already seen that the Pan American commitments of the United States might have obliged her to offer to let Argentina provide the garrison. There was the further possibility that the United States might endeavour to placate Argentina at the forthcoming Pan American Conference by offering her the Falkland Islands,

long claimed by that country. Further, the islands were in the American sphere of naval responsibility.

28. On 11 Feb 42 a letter was received by the Canadian Prime Minister (Mr Mackenzie King) from the United Kingdom High Commissioner which resolved these doubts. The United States had no objections to the proposed Canadian force being sent to the Falkland Islands.

With reference to Sir Patrick Duff's* letter of the 13th January, I write to let you know that His Majesty's Ambassador at Washington [Lord Halifax] has now had an opportunity of mentioning to President Roosevelt the possibility of the despatch of Canadian troops to the Falkland Islands.

President Roosevelt stated to Lord Halifax that so far as he was concerned there was no objection at all and he thought it would be all right if the despatch of Canadian troops could be kept quiet until a few weeks after the movement had been completed. President Roosevelt suggested the matter could then be presented as a part of a general policy by which United Kingdom and Dominion troops garrisoned some island posts and the United States others.

In a telegram which I have received from the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs I have been instructed to express the hope of the United Kingdom Government that the Canadian Government will now agree to undertake the commitment suggested to them, and that they will in that case authorize the National Defence authorities concerned to arrange the necessary details with the War Office direct.

If the Canadian Government do agree, the United Kingdom Government propose in due course to let President Roosevelt know what has been done.

(H.Q.S. 8916: United Kingdom High Commissioner to Prime Minister, 11 Feb 42)

*Deputy United Kingdom High Commissioner.

29. The Minister of National Defence (Col. J.L. Ralston) was informed of this by the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr N.A. Robertson) on 12 Feb 42:

I am enclosing, for your information, copy of a letter of February 11th from the United Kingdom High Commissioner to the Prime Minister, reporting that the President of the United States sees no objection to the despatch of Canadian troops to the Falkland Islands, and enquiring whether, in these circumstances, the Canadian Government would now be willing to undertake the commitment suggested in Mr. Churchill's message, which the Prime Minister received under cover of Sir Patrick Duff's letter of January 13th.

(H.Q.S. 8916: Secretary of State for External Affairs to Minister of National Defence, 12 Feb 42)

MILITARY CONSIDERATIONS PRECLUDING THE
DESPATCH OF CANADIAN TROOPS

30. Canada's decision to refuse the British request was based on military considerations. That these considerations may be fully understood it is necessary to review the disposition of Canadian forces at the time, and the plans for 1942. In January 1942 Canadian troops were deployed as follows:

United Kingdom

HQ Canadian Corps
1st Division
2nd Division
3rd Division
5th (Armoured) Division
1st (Canadian) Anti-Tank Brigade

Canada

4th Division

6th Division

31. The Army Programme for 1942 called for a further armoured division (to be formed by the conversion of the 4th Division) to become the 4th (Armoured) Division, together with an Army Tank Brigade. Both these formations were, after training, to be despatched overseas as armoured components of the Canadian force in the United Kingdom. (H.Q.S. 20-1-9, vol 3: C.G.S. to Minister of National Defence, 18 Nov 41)

32. The three battalions required by the Army Tank Brigade, which became the 2nd Army Tank Brigade, were furnished by the 6th Division. This division was then at approximately half strength, so that seven new infantry battalions were required to replace units withdrawn from the division and to provide for other urgent requirements in Canada. (D.C.G.S.(A) BDF "FORCE DONALD": C.G.S. to Minister of National Defence, 18 Feb 42) [112.1(D28)].

33. The C.G.S. considered that the proposed infantry battalion for the Falkland Islands could not be withdrawn

- (a) from the 4th (Armoured) Division or the 2nd Army Tank Brigade without disrupting the Army Programme for 1942
- (b) from the infantry battalions remaining with the 6th Division without adversely

affecting defence dispositions in Canada. The seven new infantry battalions were being mobilized and it would be some months before they would be trained sufficiently to relieve a unit on operational duty (Ibid).

34. The C.G.S. had advocated a year before that two divisions, in addition to the coastal garrisons, and part of an armoured division be maintained in Canada for home defence. There was a tacit understanding with the United States that Canada would hold a reserve of approximately two divisions at home (H.Q.S. 20-1-9, vol 3; C.G.S. to Minister of National Defence, 18 Nov 41). The plan for 1942, involving as it did the conversion of the 4th Division to an Armoured Division, the formation of the 2nd Army Tank Brigade, and their subsequent despatch overseas did not materially affect this. Until trained, these formations would constitute part of the General Reserve in Canada. The 6th Division however, was below strength, and was weakened still further by the army programme for the forthcoming year (Ibid).

35. It will therefore be seen that the despatch of an infantry battalion was not opportune at this time as it could not be provided without disrupting the overseas programme or home defence. This fact, coupled with the difficulties of maintaining a force in such a remote place, led the C.G.S. to recommend that from the military point of view, the force should not be despatched. His submission to the Minister of National Defence read:

4. I have considered the appreciation prepared by the War Office on the defence of the Falkland Islands and am of the opinion that the minimum force required to defend PORT STANLEY would be:-

One battalion of infantry (to be increased to two when accommodation had been constructed.)

One field battery, R.C.A.

Anti-aircraft detachments to man four 3.7" and eight 40 mm. A.A. guns.

One Construction Coy. R.C.E. (to return to Canada when construction completed, leaving one section of a Fd. Coy. R.C.E. with Force)

R.D.F. personnel with equipment
R.C.A.S.C. Supply detachment
R.C.O.C. detachment
One Hospital, R.C.A.M.C.

5. The administrative and supply requirements present great difficulty. All food and supplies including fuel would require to be imported. The maintenance of supplies of all kinds from Canada would involve transportation problems of considerable magnitude. While billeting is available at Stanley as a temporary expedient, accommodation would have to be constructed for the whole Force and all materials and construction personnel would have to be supplied from Canada.
6. I consider that protection against air attack is imperative for a force in this isolated station and that the Force should not be despatched unless such protection is available. At the present time, however, neither A.A. guns nor R.D.F. equipment are available in Canada without depleting our present minimum requirements.
7. We have recently called upon the infantry of the 6th Division to make available the three battalions of the 2nd Army Tank Brigade. I do not consider that we should disrupt our present plans for completing the Army Programme for 1942 by withdrawing units from the 4th (Armd.) Div. or the 2nd Army Tank Brigade. Nor do I consider, in the light of the deterioration of the situation in the Pacific, that we can withdraw for the proposed duty any of the remaining infantry battalions of the 6th Division without adversely affecting our defence dispositions in Canada.
8. It is true that you have recently authorized the mobilization of seven new infantry battalions to replace the units withdrawn from the 6th Division and to provide for other urgent requirements in Canada. But the mobilization of these units has only commenced and it will be a matter of some months before their training will have progressed sufficiently to enable them to relieve any of the battalions now

9. In these circumstances I do not recommend the despatch of this force from a military point of view. If the commitment were accepted, trained personnel could only be provided by withdrawing units now training to complete the overseas Army Programme and by depleting our home defences of equipment that is urgently required in Canada. I consider that the completion of our overseas Programme at the earliest possible date will contribute more to the main war effort than the undertaking of this isolated commitment.

(D.C.G.S.(A) BDF "FORCE DONALD";
C.G.S. to Minister of National
Defence, 18 Feb 42) [H.S. 112.1(D28)].

THE FINAL DECISION

36. The War Committee of Cabinet met on 26 Feb 42. "It was agreed that the Canadian Government could not assume this commitment, and that the United Kingdom should be informed accordingly". (H.Q.S. 8916: Minister of National Defence to C.G.S. 27 Feb 42).

37. On that day the C.G.S. drafted a telegram communicating this decision, for the British authorities:

Reference....Telegram....from the Prime Minister of Great Britain to the United Kingdom High Commissioner. While fully appreciating desirability of strengthening defences of Falkland Islands, after careful review of overseas commitments already agreed upon and military requirements in Canada under present conditions, Canadian Government considers that Canadian troops could only be made available for despatch to Falkland Islands by withdrawing units and personnel from formations training for early despatch overseas to complete Canadian Army Programme. We feel that completion at earliest possible date of balanced Canadian Force in United Kingdom will contribute more to common war effort than diversion for this isolated commitment.

(H.Q.S. 8916: C.G.S. to Minister of National Defence, 26 Feb 42).

38. The decision was not, however, notified until 11 Mar 42, when a reply to the request from the United Kingdom was finally made to the High Commissioner for the United Kingdom; the Secretary of State for External Affairs wrote:

the despatch of Canadian Troops to the Falkland Islands, and to inform you that, after a careful review of overseas commitments already agreed upon and military requirements in Canada under present conditions, the War Committee have concluded that Canada is not in a position to provide the personnel and equipment which the defence of the Falkland Islands against estimated scales of attacks would require.

(H.Q.S. 8916: Secretary of State for External Affairs to High Commissioner for the United Kingdom, 11 Mar 42).

CONCLUSION

39. The force of the Canadian stand was apparently appreciated by the United Kingdom. There is no available evidence to indicate that the matter was pursued further with the Canadian Government.

40. In spite of the silence of the documents, it is worth noting that this request to garrison the Falkland Islands was received only three weeks after the fall of Hong Kong to the Japanese on Christmas Day 1941. Two Canadian battalions, which had landed in that colony on 16 Nov 41 to reinforce the garrison there at the request of the British, were lost either as battle casualties or prisoners-of-war. It is perhaps a fair assumption that the atmosphere created by the result of a similar request for help at Hong Kong may have affected the Canadian decision in the case of the Falkland Islands.

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

J.A. Swettenham
(C.P. Stacey) Colonel
Director Historical Section

