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Canadian Forces in Bermuda and St. Lucia, 1914-1919

1. Further assistance to Britain was afforded by Canada in the West Indies. The first request, made by the Army Council on 19 August 1914, was for a battalion to replace the British garrison in Bermuda; the second, made by the Secretary of State for the Colonies on 13 January 1915, was for artillery personnel to man guns at St. Lucia, one of the Windward Islands. (Colonel A. Fortescue Duguid, The Canadian Forces in the Great War..., (Ottawa, 1938), 70, 162.) This Report is a preliminary account of Canadian activities on both these islands.

BERMUDA

2. The Royal Canadian Regiment replaced the 2nd Lincolnshire at Hamilton, Bermuda, on 14 September, 1914, after sailing from Halifax on the Canada, under escort of H.M.C.S. Niobe, three days earlier. Thus the R.C.R. -- the only infantry in the Permanent Force -- having volunteered for this service, were the first troops from Canada to serve overseas in the First World War. It was hoped that "such a move would in the near future be a step nearer the battlefield which [was] the desire of all ranks." (Ibid., 70-71. Letter, Comd. 6th Div. to Secretary Militia Council, 22 Aug 16, P.A.R.C. file C 150, Vol. 1.)

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3. On arrival in Bermuda it became evident that a contingent of 400 men of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (C.E.F.) which had joined the battalion at Halifax from Valcartier (having volunteered for service with the R.C.R.) had not been attested. They were asked in Bermuda to enlist in the Regiment for three years at Permanent Force (P.F.) rates of pay; not unnaturally, the men refused (Tel., G.O.C. Bermuda [Lieut.-General Sir G.M. Bullock] to A.G., Ottawa, 29 Sep 14, P.A.R.C. file C 150, Vol. 2). This was a matter of serious embarrassment to the Department in Ottawa. The Chief of the General Staff stated, "if we give way altogether, we shall be a laughing stock; on the other hand we cannot retain the men against their will." (Ibid. Letter C.G.S. to A.G., 29 Sep 14.) "The men should have been enlisted before sending them to Bermuda. Evidently someone has blundered." (Ibid., letter A. & P.M.G. to D.M., 30 Sep 14.)

4. A message was sent from Ottawa to the effect that recruits refusing to serve at P.F. rates of pay were to be returned to Canada. At Halifax they were to be given the opportunity of enlistment in the C.E.F. Those who declined would be sent home. (Ibid., tel. A.G. to G.O.C. Bermuda, 6 Oct 14.) The communication did not cause the men to change their minds. In all 386 still would not enlist without overseas pay. Canada was thereupon asked to charter a ship for their replacement. (Ibid., tel G.O.C. Bermuda to ^{A.G.}~~Adjutant General~~, 8 Oct 14.) To this end steps were taken to raise other recruits in Canada and to furnish a vessel, but the matter was happily settled by the Privy Council (the Governor General, H.R.H. the Duke of Connaught, was Honorary Colonel of the Regiment

which sanctioned pay and allowances at overseas rates to all ranks of the R.C.R. from the date of embarkation. (Ibid., tel A.G. to G.O.C. Bermuda, 24 Oct 14.) These difficulties having been adjusted, the battalion settled down to guard duties and training.

5. In January the Commanding Officer, certifying that "all ranks of the Royal Canadian Regiment have offered their services for Active Service abroad," asked that the unit might be sent to the front. (Letter, C.O., R.C.R. to D.A.A. & Q.M.G. (Bermuda), 22 Jan 15, "Units of Canadian Active Militia offering their services for Overseas European War", file 593-1-29, Vol. 3). In Council, the C.G.S. supported the request without success, and by the middle of the year there was some discontent in the unit because of continued garrison duty. (Letter, C.G.S. to Prime Minister's office, 17 Mar 15, Gwatkin correspondence, drawer EE 86. Letter G.O.C. Bermuda to Secretary, Militia Council, 11 Jun 15, P.A.R.C. file C150, Vol. 4)

6. On 12 August, however, the C.G.S. was finally successful; the R.C.R. was relieved by the 38th Battalion C.E.F.,* (which had been raised in Ottawa), and proceeded to England for the Western Front. (Letter, C.G.S. to A.G., 21 Jul 15, file 683-16-3. Duguid, Canadian Forces in the Great War, 71, 450.) As early as February, 1916, the G.O.C. Bermuda reported that the new battalion showed excellent spirit, all ranks being anxious to get to the

*The reason for the selection of the 38th Battalion to relieve the R.C.R. cannot be established. All our files, and those of P.A.R.C., dealing with Bermuda, have been searched without success.

front, and he stated they would be fit for this during the first half of April. (Letter, G.O.C. Bermuda to Secretary Militia Council, 18 Feb 16, "Request of 38th Battalion C.E.F. to be allowed to proceed to the front", file 683-16-12.)

7. As both the R.C.R. and the 38th Battalion were English-speaking, it was decided in Ottawa that a French-Canadian battalion should next be garrisoned at Bermuda. (Letter, Acting A.G. to C.G.S. 15 Nov 17, P.A.R.C. file C 150, Vol. 5.) The 57th Battalion, stationed at Quebec, was invited to go and volunteered; but as it was badly under strength, the C.G.S. ruled, "one thing is certain, the 57th ought not to be sent... until it is up to strength and efficient." (Minute C.G.S. to D.M., 8 Apr 16, file 686-16-3.) The 163rd Battalion, a French-speaking unit at Montreal, had the required strength, and was then asked; it accepted, taking over from the 38th towards the end of May 1916. (Ibid., letter Acting A.G. to Mobn., 8 May 16).

8. On 27 November 1916 the British re-assumed garrison duties; a garrison battalion of the East Yorkshire Regiment relieved the Canadian unit. The ship which brought the British to Bermuda returned with the 163rd Battalion to England, where it was used to reinforce French-Canadian battalions at the front. (Letter, War Office to Governor General, 11 Oct 16, P.A.R.C. file C 150, Vol. 6. Letter, Carson to War Office, 2 Nov 16, O.S.M. file 8-5-108.)

ST. LUCIA

9. In the Windward Islands, No. 6 Company of

the Royal Canadian Garrison Artillery, totalling 123 all ranks, disembarked at Port Castries, St. Lucia, April 1915, and served there until May, 1919. The Canadians did not relieve a British garrison, but took over as a war measure two forts on either side of the harbour entrance to Port Castries which had not been occupied since 1907. During those eight years an almost impenetrable forest of tropical trees and vines had sprung up, so that extensive clearing was necessary before the positions could again be occupied. Malaria was prevalent at first, but by 1918 the clearing of brush, the construction of drains, and the oiling of swamps had brought the disease under control. (Canadian Forces in the Great War, 162-3. Lt-Col. A.G. Harris, "The Occupation of St. Lucia by Canadian Troops", EE 112, folder 2, 1-2.)

10. At the outbreak of war there were no guns on the island. Four French 14-centimetre pieces were borrowed from Martinique. These had been mounted by French troops before the unit's arrival. In addition to these, the Canadians mounted two British 6-inch guns from Bermuda between April and July, 1915. No further additions were made. Until the end of the war the main task was to man these guns. (Canadian Forces in the Great War, 162-3. "The Occupation of St. Lucia"..., ibid.)

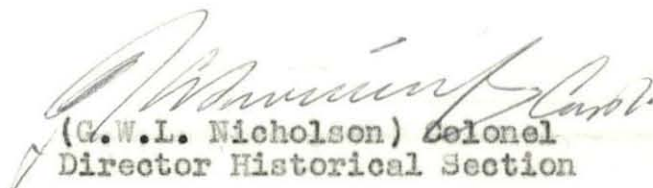
11. An unusual duty which fell to the lot of the gunners was to provide an examination service. A 70-ton steam pinnace, the S.S. Vigilant which arrived 20 August 1915, was procured in Trinidad. In the absence of naval personnel No. 6 Company furnished an officer and crew. The work consisted of seeing that no contraband

nor suspicious characters were on board ships entering or passing the harbour. A customs officer accompanied the army officer on each occasion, (Report by Lt.-Col. Dean, 29 Mar 16, "St. Lucia Detachment", P.A.R.C. file 1645-13, Vol. 4. "Report of meeting held at Government House, St. Lucia, 31 July 1915", H.Q. File S. 3799.)

12. Still more unusual was the task of mine sweeping which was imposed on the crew of the Vigilant from April 1917. After five days' instruction by a visiting British naval officer, the entrance to the harbour was swept once a week. ("The Occupation of St. Lucia...", ibid., 3. Sir Charles Lucas, The Empire at War, Vol. 2, (London, 1923), 403.)

13. The average strength of the unit, due to gradual increases, was 250 all ranks including attached engineer, medical and other services. The sappers were there to set up searchlights and improve accommodation. In all, 439 all ranks saw service in St. Lucia (five of whom died of sickness). (Canadian Forces in the Great War, 162-3. "The Occupation of St. Lucia...", ibid., 7, 13.)

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


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