

NOTE

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REPORT NO. 33  
HISTORICAL SECTION (G.S.)  
ARMY HEADQUARTERS

16 December 1949

“Z” Force in Iceland: An account of the despatch of Canadian Troops to Iceland and their subsequent operations there.

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Reference Maps: Iceland, G.S.G.S. 4104, 1:250,000<sup>1</sup>

1. The following account deals with the activities of "Z" Force, Canadian Army from the time of its despatch to Iceland on 10 Jun 40, until its departure from that island on 28 Apr 41. For the complete story of "Z" Force, it will be necessary for the reader to consult the Preliminary Narrative (Overseas), Chapter Seven and the Preliminary Narrative (Canada), Chapter Eight, which deal with the policy governing the use of Canadian troops in Iceland until July 1940.

TOPOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

2. Iceland is an island lying in the North Atlantic Ocean approximately midway between Bergen, Norway and Cape Farewell, Greenland, and just reaching the Arctic Circle at its northern extremity. It is roughly oval in shape, broken in the north-west by a peninsula projecting from the main portion of the island. It has a total area of 40,437 square miles and a coast line of about 3,730 miles in length. With the exception of the portion, extending from Karl on the south-west tip eastward to Hornafjörður, the coast line is deeply indented with fiords which, in nearly every case, have precipitous sides. The area of lowlands is comparatively small, being only one fourteenth of the whole. The bulk of these are located in the south and south-west, where there is a fairly continuous belt. The heads of the fiords, and some distance from there inland, are also low lying in many cases. Apart from this, the coastal regions are very rough and mountainous. The central part is a high plateau, level for the most part, and is either a volcanic desert, or glacier covered. The largest glacier is Vatnajökul in the south, which has an area of 3,300 square miles. Iceland is the most volcanic region in the world and consequently, presents very curious contrasts. It has been described as the "land of frost and fire", for during the many eruptions which have occurred throughout its history, the strange phenomenon of molten lava bursting through layers of solid ice has been seen. Geysers and hot springs abound, and much use is made of them for heating. (Enarsson, Vigras Iceland Land of Forst and Fire, Canadian Geographical Journal, July 1940, and (H.S.) 112.1 (D27): Iceland Forces)

3. Since this report deals with the occupation of Iceland with a view to defending it against German attack, attention is paid to those topographical features which had a direct bearing on the operational planning. The two possible forms of attack were by sea landings, or by air landings. It was recognized that seaborne forces could affect lodgements fairly easily on the south-west lowlands, and in many of the fiords. Although the south-west area possessed the most numerous

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<sup>1</sup> In the spelling of place names, the icelandic characters edh and thorn, have been rendered by dh and th, respectively.

and suitable landing places, it was the easiest to defend, because here, communications were best, and mobility least restricted. There was no continuous road around the island. There was a gap from Kalfafell in the south, to Oddstadir in the north, in which there were only a series of very indifferent bridle paths completely impassable to motor vehicles. The so-called motor roads became, in many cases, blocked in the winter. This was especially true of the roads from Reykjavik to the neighbouring communities of Hvalfjörður and Hafnarfjörður. Consequently, it was feared that sea landings could take place undetected at many points along the coast. ((H.S.) 112.1 (D27): Report No. 1 by Brigadier G. Lammie, M.C., Comd Tps Iceland)

4. Areas suitable for landing light aeroplanes were numerous, but those capable of taking heavy aircraft, comparatively few. The fiords and lakes provided ample quiet water for seaplane landings, and these were plentiful. The most important lake, because of its proximity to Reykjavik, the capital, was Thingvallavatn. Seaplane landings in the fiords would be just as difficult to detect as would be sea landings in the same areas, and for the same reasons. Thus the terrain and surrounding waters of Iceland made an airborne invasion quite possible. (Ibid)

5. In spite of the high latitude in which Iceland lies, the climate is surprisingly mild. This is due to the fact that the Gulf Stream reaches its shores, and exercises a considerable moderating influence. The climate is naturally a maritime one in the coastal areas, and consequently, is damp and wet, making for considerable hardship for troops living in tented encampments. As Iceland lies in an area in which low pressures prevail, the weather is very changeable and stormy. The conditions on the high central plateau are continental, and it is often extremely cold; but as this area is uninhabited, it is relatively unimportant. The winter means for the coastal areas are 31° to 32° and the summer from 40° to 50°, the north and east being colder than the south and west. ((H.S.)112.1(D27): Iceland, General description) As an example of the weather encountered during the stay of Canadian troops in Iceland, it is noted that out of a total of 318 days they spent on the island, it rained or snowed on 119 of them, i.e. there was rain or snow every 2.6 days. (W.D., H.Q. "Z" Force, June to October 1940; W.D., C.H. of O. (M.G.) November 1940 to April 1941)

#### THE CHANGE IN POLICY, JULY 1940

6. The change and development in the policy, which governed the movement of Canadian troops to Iceland during 1940, has been dealt with very fully in Chapter Seven of the Preliminary Narrative (Overseas), and Chapter Eight of the Preliminary Narrative (Canada), and a search through N.D.H.Q. files on Iceland has revealed nothing that might be added. However, Mr. Winston Churchill in Their Finest Hour, discloses a situation which must have had considerable bearing on the final decision regarding the employment of Canadian Troops in Iceland. It will be noted in Chapter Seven, Preliminary Narrative (Overseas), that, in a telegram from Mr. Massey, dated 13 Jul 40, he stated that the War Office agreed that "Canada should not be further pressed to undertake the garrisoning of Iceland". (Preliminary Narrative (Overseas) Chap Seven, para 37) Mr. Churchill has now revealed that on 7 Jul he wrote to the Secretary of State for War as follows:

You shared my astonishment yesterday at the statement made to us by General McNaughton that the whole of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division was destined for Iceland. It would surely be a very great mistake to allow these fine troops to be employed in so distant a theatre. Apparently the first three battalions have already gone there. No one was told anything about this. We require two Canadian divisions to work as a Corps as soon as possible. (Churchill, Winston, The Second World War, Their Finest Hour, Chap 13, p. 26)

He then goes on to suggest very strongly that second-line Territorial troops be despatched from Britain. This would seem to account for the “reversal of War Office Policy” mentioned in Chapter Seven.

#### DESPATCH OF FIRST FLIGHT “Z” FORCE AND EARLY OPERATIONS

7. On 4 Jun 40, Brigadier L.F. Page, D.S.O., D.O.C. M.D. No. 7, received a telephone call from the A.G. who ordered him to report to Ottawa immediately. He did so on 5 Jun, and was told that he had been appointed to command a Canadian force that was being sent to Iceland to assist the British in the occupation of the island. (Personal Diary, Brigadier Page, 4-5 Jun 40) Brigadier Page’s command was called “Z” Force, and consisted originally of a skeleton brigade staff and one battalion, R. Regt C., commanded by Lt-Col G. Headley Bashere, E.D. Major C.A. Lyndon was appointed Brigade Major and Lieut L.F. Bonnell, Brigade Intelligence Officer. The force boarded the “Empress of Australia” on 9 Jun. On the next day, a special reconnaissance party consisting of Lt-Col P. Hennessey, D.S.O., M.C., R.C.A.S.C., S/L H.H.C. Rutledge, R.C.A.F. and Capt R.E. Wilkins, R.C.E., embarked on the same ship. The loading was completed, and the “Empress of Australia” left Halifax at 1300 hours, 10 Jun. (W.D., H.Q. “Z” Force, 9-10 Jun 40, and Appx IV, Instr C.G.S. to Brig Page, 6 Jun 40)

8. Apart from seasickness caused by rough seas on the second day out, the voyage was without incident until after dropping anchor in Reykjavik harbour, at 1800 hours, 16 Jun. It was originally intended to leave the troops on board overnight, but a report from an R.A.F. flying boat, that a German submarine had been sighted near Reykjavik, caused a change in plans, and disembarkation began at 2200 hours, and was complete at 0100 hrs, 17 Jun. Great assistance was rendered by the British Force, who supplied transport, canvas and blankets. The troops were sent to an area near the wireless station about two miles from Reykjavik, and all canvas was erected by midnight. Lieut Bonnell attempted to arrange accommodation for “Z” Force H.Q. in Reykjavik, but was unsuccessful. The headquarters therefore, remained on board ship for the time being. (W.D., H.Q. “Z” Force, 16-17 Jun 40)

9. As a preliminary move, “B” Coy R. Regt C. took over positions in Reykjavik from 1/6 D.W.R. on 18 Jun. (Ibid, 18 Jun 40) On 19 Jun, Brigadier Page completed an appreciation, and got it off to Canada (Personal Diary, Brigadier Page, 17-19 Jun 40) He indicated that, after the arrival of the advanced portion of “Z” Forces, the troops, and their location, were as follows:

#### Military Forces (Own own)

(a) The present military forces in ICELAND consist of:-

One Rifle Bn (Canadian)  
Three Rifle Bns (British)  
Two A.A. 3" Guns  
Two 3.7 Howitzers  
Four 2 pdrs Pom-Poms  
Two 4" C.D. Guns  
Ancillary Troops including A.M.P.C.<sup>2</sup> personnel

(b) These troops are at present disposed as follows:

(i) REYKJAVIK: One Inf Bn (Canadian)  
Two Inf Bns (less three Coys)  
One Bty Pom Poms  
Two 3" A.A. Guns  
Two 3.7 Howitzers  
Medical Details  
Ancillary Troops  
Base Details

For defence of town and docks and for garrison duties.

(ii) HVALFJORDUR: Two 4" C.D. Guns  
Two Coys of Inf

This place is the proposed site of the naval base.

(iii) AKUREYRT: One Pln Inf

This place is the second largest town on the island and affords good sea or land plane base facilities.

(iv) SEYDISFJORDUR: One Pln Inf

This is the terminus of the submarine cable and in this area it is considered there are suitable locations for both sea and land plane bases. A reconnaissance is at present being carried out.

(v) EYRARBAKKI: One Pln

An excellent site for an aerodrome in this area.

(vi) HAFNARFJORDUR: One Bn Inf

A very possible landing place from sea.

(W.D., H.Q. "Z" Force, June 1940: Appreciation Brigadier Page, 18 Jun 40)

As a result, the O.C. "Z" Force recommended increases as below:

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<sup>2</sup> From subsequent reference to A.M.P.C. personnel in W.D., H.Q. "Z" Force, it appears that this term refers to provost personnel or Corps of Military Police in the British Army.

Two rifle battalions  
Two machine gun battalions  
One battery 3.7-in howitzers  
Twelve heavy anti-aircraft guns  
Two batteries each of two 6-in coast defence guns  
Six searchlights

He considered that the terrain of Iceland was very favourable to machine gun defence tactics, and hence urged the inclusion of a rather high proportion of this type of unit. (Ibid)

10. The air defence of Iceland was non-existent at this time. Two aircraft, a "Sunderland"<sup>3</sup> and a "Walrus"<sup>4</sup> were actually there, but quite useless for air fighting. In fact, in the absence of any prepared landing grounds, it would have been difficult to organize an effective airforce with any speed. The most likely areas for landing fields were in the vicinity of Akureyri on the north coast, Eskifjörður and Reykjavik in the south-west. Although these areas were not immediately suitable for regular landing operations, they could be used by an enemy who was prepared to "crash land" in the early stages. Consequently, they had to be either defended from air landing attack, or rendered completely useless by obstructions, or demolitions. It was felt that if the latter policy was adopted, German sympathizers, of whom there were a good number in Iceland, could easily repair the damage, and therefore it would be better to try and defend these areas with troops on the ground. (Ibid)

11. The main base area around Reykjavik, together with Hvalfjörður and Hafnarfjörður was considered to be most vital, and must be denied to the enemy at costs. This raised the problem of finding sufficient troops to guard all the possible landing strips, and at the same time adequately securing the main base. It was of course, incapable of complete solution, and Brigadier Page decided that his best course was to try to do both tasks as well as he could, with that force he had available. (Ibid)

12. In line with the above decision, "D" Coy R. Regt C. moved to Hafnarfjörður on 19 Jun, to take over a portion of its defence from 1/7 D.W.R. They were quartered in a fish drying shed, which must have been preferable to being under canvas in the continuous rain, but only just. On 20 Jun, "Z" Force Headquarters moved to the Borg Hotel in Reykjavik. Word was received from Canada that two more Canadian battalions, including one machine gun unit, would sail for Iceland on 25 Jun. At a conference with Brigadier G. Lammie, M.C., Commander of the British "Alabaster" Force, it was decided that R. Regt C. would take over the Kaldadharnes area inland from Eyrarbakki, the new Canadian rifle battalion, the Hafnerfjörður area, and that the machine gun battalion would cover both Kaldadharnes and Reykjavik. A warning order<sup>5</sup> was issued to the R. Regt C. preparing them for their move to Kaldadharnes, and outlining the principal tasks. (W.D., H.Q. "Z" Force, 19-20 Jun 40, and Appx V, Warning Order, 20 Jun 40)

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<sup>3</sup> A four-engined long range patrol flying boat.

<sup>4</sup> An obsolescent Fleet Air Arm amphibian.

<sup>5</sup> This warning order was largely an operation instruction, and from a notation made apparently by the diarist, was considered to be "Z" Force Operation Instruction No. 1.

13. In accordance with "Alabaster" Operation Instruction No, 4, H.Q. "Z" Force issued its own Operation Instruction No. 2, detailing the move of R. Regt C. to the Kaldadharnes area on 25 Jun. This instruction also outlined the responsibilities which R. Regt C. would take over in its new area. One company was to provide working parties for the proposed aerodrome site at Kaldadharnes, and the battalion was to prepare defensive positions in the nearby Kotströnd area, to oppose any enemy advance towards Reykjavik and finally, to establish a guard over the power plant near Asgardhur. "D" Coy was ordered to remain with 1/7 D.W.R. in Hafnarfjörður. The following administrative instructions were to go into force after the move: one motor ambulance from No. 160 Fd Amb, R.A.M.C. would be attached to R. Regt C., hospital cases would be evacuated to No. 50 Gen Hosp, R.A.M.C., and 14 days' rations for the whole unit would be drawn from the D.I.D. of "Alabaster", and held at battalion headquarters for use in an emergency only. (*Ibid*, Appx V, Op Instr No. 2, 24 Jun 40)

14. By 2130 hours, 26 Jun, R. Regt C., with the assistance of the R.A.S.C., completed the move to the Kaldadharnes area. As a preliminary distribution, "B" Coy was established at Kaldadharnes, and the remainder of the battalion, with battalion headquarters, were located at Hveragerdi. On 27 Jun, work on the various defensive positions within the battalion area was begun. These were the company areas as indicated above, and a locality at Kamar on the main road from Reykjavik to Hveragerdi, where a platoon was placed. Lt-Col Basher made a reconnaissance of the Selfoss and Hjalli areas on the same day, and it was decided to set up defences in these places with men from "Z" Coy. On 28 Jun, the A.Tk Pl was ordered to occupy Asgardhur<sup>6</sup> for the purpose of securing the power station located there. On the next day, the A.Tk Pl proceeded as ordered, and a platoon from "C" Coy took up positions on the hills overlooking Hjalli. (W.Ds., H.Q. "Z" Force and R. Regt C.

15. On 27 Jun, Brigadier Page agreed with Brigadier Lammie, that due to the scattered nature of the defended localities on the island, units of "Z" Force should communicate directly with "Alabaster" in all cases of emergency. On the same day, Maj-Gen H.D. Curtiss, C.B., D.S.O., M.C. arrived in Iceland to take command of "Alabaster". During the remainder of the month, the Royal Regiment continued work on the various projects as outlined above. More men were despatched to assist "B" Coy in its task of aerodrome construction at Kaldadharnes, Heavy rain and the lack of sufficient water proof clothing caused a temporary halt on 28 Jun, in the work on the Kamar positions. (*Ibid*, 27-30 Jun 40)

16. "Z" Force Operation Instruction No. 3 was issued on 29 Jun, detailing the occupation of Heimaey<sup>7</sup> in the Vestmannaeyjar<sup>7</sup> group; just off the south coast (W.D., H.Q. "Z" Force, 29 Jun 40). Operation Instruction No. 3 was in the nature of a warning order. No move was to be made until receipt of the code word "VIM" from H.Q. "Z" Force. The tasks were detailed as follows:

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<sup>6</sup> There is some confusion regarding the location of this power station. "Z" Force Op Instr No. 1 and R. Regt C. Op Instr No. 1 both specifically refer to Asgardhur as its position. However, W.D., H.Q. "Z" Force and W.D., R. Regt C. state that a power station at Ljosifoos is to be protected, and that the A.Tk Pl of the R. Regt C. actually went there. It has been impossible to find Ljosifoos on any of the available maps of Iceland, but there is a Ljosafoss located about two and a half miles north of Asgardhur which may be the place mentioned. Power stations are not indicated on the maps seen. Since foss is Icelandic for waterfall, it may well be that Ljosafoss is the location of the power station.

<sup>7</sup> Ey and eyjar are the Icelandic words for island and islands respectively.



- (a) Defend the Island against hostile landing.
- (b) Ensure, without interfering with rights of the inhabitants that the many shipping craft in the harbour cannot be used by the enemy for further operations against the mainland.
- (c) Report immediately the passage of all ships and aircraft to "Alabaster".

(W.D., H.Q. "Z" Force, June 1940: App V., "Z" Force Op Instr No. 3, 29 Jun 40)

On 1 Jul, one platoon from "C" Coy took up a position covering the bridge at Selfoss (W.D., Regt .C., 1 Jul 40). On the same day, codeword "VIM" was received by R. Regt C., and the C.O. R. Regt C. chose No. 16 Pl, under Lieut C. Wilkinson, for the task of occupying Heimaey. A battalion instruction directed that Lieut Wilkinson, would be responsible for making his own arrangements to carry out the tasks as out-lined in "Z" Force Operation Instruction No. 3, and further pointed out the necessity of forming a boarding party to examine all craft entering the harbour in order to search for, and confiscate all materials of war that might be on such craft, (W.D., R. Regt C., 1 Jul 40 and Appx IX, Op Instr No. 2, 29 Jun 40)

17. On 5 Jul, as ordered, Lieut Wilkinson embarked with his platoon, and proceeded to set up platoon headquarters in Kaupstadhur on Heimaey (W.D., R. Regt C., 5 Jul 40). After reconnaissance, and a period of settling down, he detailed the following posts and duties: guards at platoon headquarters, the telephone exchange, the lighthouse and the harbour, a roving patrol in the general area, and a boarding party standing by to examine ships. All these posts were in the vicinity of Kaupstadhur. W.D., R. Regt C., Appx 1, No. 16 Pl Order, 15 Jul 40) No. 16 Pl remained in occupation of Heimaey until relieved by the British on 21 Sep. (W.D., R. Regt C., 21 Sep 40)

18. On 3 Jul, Lt-Col Basher received instruction from "Z" Force to withdraw "D" Coy from Hafnarfjörður on 5 Jul and allot them to the defence of the aerodrome under construction near Kaldadharnes, relieving the company of 1/7 D.W.R., then in occupation. An entry in the War Diary, R. Regt C., dated 3 Jul, mentions a platoon stationed in Eyrarbakki to guard the harbour. As this is the first indication that any Canadian troops were there, it is difficult to say just when they went. However, it is likely that it coincided with the, move of R. Regt C. into the Hveragerdi - Kaldadharnes area. (*Ibid*, 3 Jul 40)

19. Brigadier Page visited the regiment on 4 Jul, and held a conference with Lt-Col Basher. As a result of this, "D" Coy took over "C" Coy's commitments, and "A" and "C" Coy concentrated in the Hveragerdi area as a mobile reserve, while No. 10 Pl from "B" Coy, took over the defences of the Kaldadharnes aerodrome on the same date. Apparently, a party of troops from the R. Regt C. had been on guard over the "Walrus" aircraft, which had been stranded with engine trouble, for the Royal Navy officer in charge informed the Royals on 4 Jul, that he hoped that the aircraft would be ready to fly by 10 Jul, and that the guard would not be needed after that date.<sup>8</sup> R. Regt C. did not make any further moves before the arrival of the remainder of "Z" Force on 7 Jul, (W, D, R. Regt C., 4-7 Jul 40)

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<sup>8</sup> The first mention of this is in W.D., R. Regt C. 4 Jul 40. It does not state where this aircraft was; merely that it was "50 miles from B.H.Q.", nor does it say what sub-unit found the guard for it.

20. To summarize, the positions occupied by "Z" Force on 7 Jul were:

H.Q. "Z" Force, in the Borg Hotel, Reykjavik

B.H.Q. R. Regt C., Hveragerdi

"A" Coy, R. Regt C., Hveragerdi (mobile reserve)

"B" Coy, R., Regt C., Platoon at Kaldadarnes

Platoon at Eyrarbakki<sup>9</sup>

Platoon, guard on Kaldadharnes aerodrome

"C" Coy, R. Regt C., Hveragerdi (mobile reserve)

"D" Coy, R. Regt C., Platoon, Heimsey

Platoon, Kambar

Platoon, Selfoss

H.Q. Coy, R. Regt C., A.Tk P1., Asgardhur (Ljdosafoss) remainder, Hveragerdi  
Party, guarding Walrus aircraft.<sup>10</sup>

#### COMPLETION OF "Z" FORCE'S MOVEMENT

21. On 7 Jul, at 0800 hours, the "Empress of Australia" arrived in Reykjavik harbour with the remainder of "Z" Force. This consisted of three officers and four other ranks for "Z" Force H.Q. Staff, a brigade signal section and two battalions - Fus M.R. and C.H. of O. (M.G.). On disembarkation, the units moved into staging camps "A" & "B" which had been set up about a mile from Reykjavik. The pipers of the Camerons created a considerable impression as they marched through the streets of Reykjavik. These were the last Canadian units that were sent to Iceland, and apart from a few details, "Z" Force was now complete. (W.Ds., H.Q. "Z" Force, Fus M.R. and C.H. of O. (M.G.) 7 Jul 40)

22. As the division of Iceland into sectors is first mentioned in "Z" Force, Operation Order No. 2, 5 Jul 40, it is necessary to digress for a moment and describe them. It is logical to assume that such a division had been made immediately after the occupation of the island by the British; but as the only available source of information on the extent of the sectors is the Operation Order mentioned above, and a marked map of Iceland attached to the personal diary of Brigadier Page, it is impossible to say when they were decided on. The whole of the country was divided into four areas called North-East, South-West, Southern and Central Sectors (for the exact extent of these sectors see Appx "A" to this Report). (Personal Diary, Brigadier Page, Attached Map, Iceland G.S.G.S. 4105; W.D., H.Q. "Z" Force, July 1940: Appx VII, O.O. No. 2, 5 Jul 41)

23. On 8 Jul, Brigadier Page attended a conference with the G.O.C. "Alabaster", at which a new disposition of "Z" Force was discussed. It was decided to depart somewhat from the plan proposed on 20 Jun (see para 12). The following tasks and allotments were agreed on for "Z" Force: Fus M.R. were to take over R. Regt C's positions, less the platoon on Heimaey, and be responsible for the Southern Sector; R. Regt C. and "Z" Force Sig Sec, were to move to Alafoss

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<sup>9</sup> This is an assumption, as the diary does not say what company supplied the platoon. "B" Coy is the most likely one because it was closer to Eyrarbakki than any of the others.

<sup>10</sup> (See footnote "8")

and form the nucleus of a mobile reserve for the Southern Sector; and C.H. of O. (M.G.) were to establish their battalion headquarters and one company at Kollafjörður, also as part of the mobile reserve, and place their remaining three companies in support of 147 Brit Inf Bde, two located in the Reykjavik area, and one at Hafnarfjörður. These moves were to be completed by 2230 hours, 10 Jul. "Z" Force Operation Order No. 4., confirming the above dispositions was issued to the Canadian units on 9 Jul. (W.D.1 H.Q. "Z" Force, 8 Jul and Appx VII, O.O. No. 4, 9 Jul 40)

24. Fus M.R., under command of Lt-Col P. Grenier, began moving to the Southern Sector on 9 Jul. "A" Coy proceeded to the Hveragerdi area, and began the take over from R. Regt C. (W.D., Fus M.R. 9 Jul 40) The remainder of the battalion followed, and was complete in its new dispositions by 0400 hours, 11 Jul. The location of all the companies is not clearly stated, but it may be assumed-that Fus M.R. took over all the positions formerly held by R. Regt C's (para 20). This assumption is further confirmed in R. Regt C's account of its relief by Fus M.R., which states that all the outlying positions were relieved (W.D., R. Regt C., 10 Jul 40)<sup>11</sup>

25. R. Regt C. despatched "A" Coy to Alafoss as an advance party, to prepare the camp for the battalion on 8 Jul (ibid, 8 Jul 40), and the battalion move was finished at 0600 hours on 11 Jul. Delays were caused by the lack of sufficient transport, for as noted above, no vehicles came with the second flight of "Z" Force. (Ibid, 10-11 Jul 40)

26. On 10 Jul, C.H. of O. (M.G.). command by Lt-Col G.H. Rogers, left staging Camp "B" at Reykjavik, and established company areas as ordered by "Z" Force H.Q. No. 1 Coy (less No. 4 Pl) went to Hafnarfjörður in support of 1/7 D.W.R., No. 2 Coy was selected for the mobile reserve, and went to Kollafjörður, No. 3 Coy was attached to 1/6 D.W.R. near Reykjavik, and No. 4 Coy with 1/5 D.W.R. on the Grotta peninsula A slight change from the original plan, saw No.4 Pl of No. 1 Coy placed with "D" Coy, Fus M.R. for the defence of the airstrip near Kaldadharnes, The Camerons then settled down to construct defensive works and gun positions, and to try and make themselves as comfortable as possible. (W.D., C.H. of O. (M.G. 10 Jul 40)

27. It must be noted that all three units had a reinforcement company with them. These companies were not given a special operational role, but were to operate as their name implies. "Z" Force, now complete, was in the following locations, as of early morning 11 Jul 40:

- "Z" Force H.Q., Borg Hotel, Reykjavik
- "Z" Force H.Q. Sig Sec, Alafoss
- R. Regt C., concentrated area Alafoss, mobile reserve
- Fus M.R., responsible for the defence of the Southern Sector
  - Bn H.Q., Hveragerdi
  - H.Q. Coy, area Hveragerdi
  - "A" Coy; area Hveragerdi
  - "B" Coy, area Hveragerdi-Kotströnd
  - "C" Coy area Hveragerdi-Kotströnd

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<sup>11</sup> A marked map attached to the July volume of the War Diary of the C.H. of O. (M.G.) shows the dispositions of "Z" Force on 10 Jul. No unit is shown in Eyrarbakki. An order on 9 Jul 40 instructed Fus M.R. to set up a coast watching station in Eyrarbakki (W.D., H.Q. "Z" Force, Appx VI, Op Instr No.7, 9 Jul 40) It would appear than, that either R. Regt C. had ceased to occupy Eyrnbakki after 7 Jul, or Fus M.R. were not originally intended to have troops there.

"D" Coy area Kaidaharnes, aerodrome defence  
Reinforcement Coy, Hvoragerdi  
Platoons at; Kamar, Selfoss, Hjalli and Asgardhur (it is not clear from which  
company these platoons came)

C.H. of O. (M.G.)

Bn H.Q. and H.Q. Coy, near Kollafjörður  
No. 1 Coy (less No.4 Pl), Hafnarfjörður  
No. 2 Coy, Kollafjörður  
No. 3-Coy, Reykjavik  
No. 4,Coy, Grotta Peninsula  
Reinforcement Coy, Kollafjörður

28. The next moves involving units of "Z" Force were concerned with the setting up of coast watching stations, observation and defensive posts in the Thingvellir area, and patrolling generally, in the South-West Sector. "Z" Force Operation Instruction No. 7, dated 9 Jul 40, was issued to Fus M.R., directing them to established coast watching stations on the south coast immediately, at Vik, Eyrarbakki and Strandarkirkja, (W.D., H.Q. "Z" Force. July 1940: Appx VI, Op Instr No. 7, 9 Jul 40) Possibly due to the lack of transport, it appears that nothing was done until 15 Jul, when a reconnaissance was made of the Vik area. There is no further mention of this matter until 23 Jul, when Fus M.R. reported to "Z" Force H.Q. that posts had been established at Vik and Eyrarbakki , (W. D., Fus M.R., 15 and 28 Jul 40). Strandarkirkja is not referred to at all.

29. In furtherance of the original plan of trying to watch all likely landing places as far as possible, R. Regt C. was ordered to establish observation and defensive positions overlooking the Thingvellir area. Headquarters "Z" Force, detailed this task as follows:

R. REGT C. will detail 1 Pln. to establish watching posts at prominent points overlooking PINGVELLIR Village and surrounding country and lake.

Preparations will be made to block REYKJAVIK PINGVELLIR road at point where it passes through deep cut behind PINGVELLIR Village.

Road block will be established at bend in road, at point where road descends into this cut. Recce will be made with a view of determining advisability and possibility of establishing road block at road junction immediately north of PINGVELLIR Village.

Observation will be established on trails leading out of PINGVELLIR Lake along west and north-west shore line.

Move of Pln from battalion area will take place at 0800 hours, 12 Jul, 1940.

(W D., H.Q), "Z" Force, July 1940: Appx VI, Op Instr No. 8, 12 Jul 40)

At 0030 hours on 12 Jul, a platoon from "D" Coy moved off to take up its position at Thingvellir. After arrival, work was begun on defences and road blocks, as had been detailed. On the same



will stand by with all baggage, amn, supplies etc, ready for immediate loading. Military M.T. earmarked for Force Reserve will move to its concentration area.

- (c) On information being received that the enemy is landing the following message will be issued:-

Code Word - CAESAR

- (d) Action. All tps will take up battle stations. Force Reserve will load up baggage, stores and await orders.

(Ibid)

31. An amendment to Operation Order No. 2 on 18 Jul gave further details of the action to be taken on receipt of Code word "JULIUS". Troops engaged on essential work were to continue such work, while the remainder were to stand by on 15 minutes' notice to occupy battle positions. Battle headquarters were to be staffed on a skeleton basis, road blocks were to be manned, control points established to control civilian and refugee traffic, final preparations for demolitions of bridges and petrol stores were to be carried out, civilian transport required for the Force Reserve was to be impressed and sent to its concentration area, the Force Reserve was to stand by with vehicles loaded, ready to move on 30 minutes notice, and all civilian telephone exchanges at unit or formation headquarters were to be secured. (Ibid, Admt No. 1, 18 Jul 40)

32. To implement the initial stages of the action detailed in Operation Order No. 2. Operation Instruction No, 10 was issued on 16 Jul. In this instruction, certain officers of R. Regt C., and C.H. of O. (M.G.) were ordered to carry out a series of reconnaissances in order to familiarize themselves with the ground over which they might have to attack in event of invasion. Company commanders were to acquaint themselves with:

- (i) The REYKJYVIK defences and all counter attack routes thereto.
- (ii) The HAFNARFJORDUR defences and all counter attack routes thereto.
- (iii) The HVALFJORDUR defences and all counter attack routes thereto.
- (iv) The ZIG-ZAG HILL and KALDADHARNES defences and counter attack against enemy advancing from EYRABBAKKI, STOKKSEYRI and VIK areas.

(W.D., H.Q. "Z" Force, July 1940: Appx VI, Op Instr No. 10, 16 Jul 40)

Commanding Officers and second-in-commands were to carry out a special reconnaissance of the route Borgarnes, Stadhur, Blönduos, with the particular task of deciding on defensive lines to be established to cover the road junction five miles south of Stadhur, and the road junction 25 miles north-east of Borgarnes, These positions were to be completely laid out, and sketch maps sent to "Z" Force H.Q. In addition, R. Regt C. was ordered to carry out daily patrols of that portion of the south-west sector north of Borgarfjörður, to include Olafsvik, Stykkisholmur, Bordeyri and

Skardh,<sup>12</sup> if road conditions made it possible to reach then. (Ibid) The role of “Z” Force was then, to secure the Southern Sector with Fus M.R., thicken up the defences of Hafnarfjörður and Reykjavik with three companies of the C.H. of O. (M.G.), and be prepared to counter-attack an enemy penetration into either the Southern or South-West Sectors.

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<sup>12</sup> Skardh appears, both as written, and as Skardhastodh on the various maps of Iceland seen. The “Z” Force H.Q. War Diary uses Skardhsstodh; but since Iceland, G.S.G.S; 4104 1:250,000 shows Skardh, the latter spelling is used.

33. Three more operation instructions were issued by "Z" Force H.Q. in July. No. 11 dealt with measures designed to increase anti-gas efficiency. No. 12 detailed the support which could be expected from No. 701 Sqn Fleet Air Arm, which had recently arrived in Iceland. This squadron was prepared to carry out limited army co-operation work in the event of an enemy landing, and assist the northern patrol of R, Regt C., if required.<sup>13</sup> No. 13 gave detailed instructions regarding the methods of destroying, or rendering useless, the petrol dumps on the island. (Ibid, Op Instrs Nos 11, 12 and 13, 19 and 25 Jul 40)

34. In accordance with Operation Instruction No.10, commanding officers and company commanders of R, Regt C. and C.H. of O. (M.G.) began their reconnaissance on 16 and 18 Jul, respectively. On 21-23 Jul, Lt-Col Basher and Lt-Col Rogers made a survey of the roads and ground from Alafoss to Stadhur and Blönduos. During the remainder of the month, R, Regt C. were engaged in the construction of defences, and the testing of large concrete water pipes as tank obstacles. In the absence of tanks, carriers were used to conduct the trials. Even these comparatively light vehicles were not stopped by the pipes, which tended to crack and crumble under the strain. (W.D., R, Regt C., 16-31 Jul 40)

35. A certain amount of excitement was caused in the Fus M.R. area when an unidentified aircraft was reported over the Kaldadharnes positions late on 19 Jul. A stand-to was ordered, but since the aircraft turned out to be British, the alert was short lived. (W.D., Fus M.R., 19 Jul 40) Beyond continuance of their reconnaissance of the battalion area, and further work on the Kaldadharnes aerodrome there was nothing further to report from Fus M.R. for July. (Ibid, 20-31 Jul 40).

36. C.H. of O. (M.G.) were generally engaged in completing the construction of machine gun emplacements, and carrying out trials of communications between battalion headquarters and the detached companies. On 30 Jul, a signals test was hold. The results were not very satisfactory, as the distances were too great for the "D-3" field telephone,<sup>14</sup> and the continuous rain caused numerous short circuits in the lines. (W.D., C.H. of O. (M.G.), 17-30 Jul 40)

37. On 6 Aug, an incident occurred at the Vik coast watching station manned by Fus M.R. in which one of the men on duty was shot at, and slightly wounded. An investigation was conducted by Lt-Col Grenier, a G.S.O. III from "Alabaster" and the Intelligence Officer of "Z" Force H.Q., and on 9 Aug, they reported that in view of the lack of any positive evidence of hostile action, the shooting must be considered merely a "case of nerves", W.Ds., H.Q. "Z" Force and Fus M.R., 6-9 Aug 40)

38. There were no further changes in location of the units of "Z" Force during the period up to the end of October, when the bulk of the force left Iceland, There were, however, changes in sector areas, sector commanders, and details of tasks to be performed in case of invasion. On 14 Aug, Operation Order No. 7, without changing the sectors previously detailed, conveyed to

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<sup>13</sup> No. 701 Sqn was equipped with "Walrus" aircraft, which would automatically limit its usefulness as an army co-operation unit.

<sup>14</sup> The "D-3" telephone was an obsolete field telephone replaced by the "D-5" during the Second World War.



units in the Southern Sector, the decision to base defensive planning on the retention of forward defended localities backed up by a mobile striking force. The forward defended localities were defined as the coast line. These, together with the Kaldadharnes aerodrome, and the line of the Ölfusa river from Alvidhra to Audhsholt were to be held at all costs. Brigadier Page was designated officer commanding the Southern Sector as well as the force mobile reserve. Artillery allotted to the Southern Sector was weak at this time but was later built up as more guns arrived in Iceland. On 14 Aug, it, consisted of one section of 25-prs and one section of heavy anti-aircraft guns, both British. The securing of the Olfusa river line and the coast line in the Southern Sector was the responsibility of Fus M.R. (W.D., H.Q. "Z" Force, August 1940: Appx VII, O.O. No. 7, 14 Aug 40)

39. On 16 Aug, H.Q. "Z" Force moved from the Borg Hotel in Reykjavik to a school house in Bruarland near Alafoss (W.D., H.Q. "Z" Force, 16 Aug 40). R. Regt C. began construction of two new defensive works on 17 Aug: a coast-watching station at Gafunes, and a tank trap at the junction of the Kollafjödthur and Thingvellir roads (W.D., R. Regt C., 17 Aug 40). On the same date, C.H. of O. (M.G.) reported the completion of a battle headquarters for the battalion (W.D., C.H. of O. (M.G.), 17 Aug 40). Work on defensive positions was continued in all battalion areas throughout August, and constituted the main operational activities for that month. (W.Ds., H.Q. "Z" Force and units, August 1940).

40. The roles of the mobile reserve were detailed further in Operation Order No. 8, which replaced Operation Order No. 2, and was issued on 22 Aug. As noted above (para 37), Brigadier Page remained in command of the troops in the Southern Sector, and of the mobile forces in the South-West Sector. The following were the tasks of the mobile reserve (of which the main body was R. Regt C.):

(a) Force Reserve will be prepared to operate offensively against any enemy threat from direction of:-

- (i) Hunafloi
- (ii) Kaldadharaes

and to counter attack against any enemy penetration in the REYKJAVIK - HAFNARFJORDUR area.

(b) Possible assembly areas to which the Force Reserve might be ordered to move embussed are:-

- Vicinity  
in case (i) N.E. point of BORGARFJORDUR
- Vicinity  
in case (ii) Vicinity SANDSKEID
- Vicinity REYKIR

(c) In the event of a threat to REYKJAVIK or HAFNARFJORDUR the Force Reserve will probably be moved in to vicinity VATNSENDI Wireless Station hill.

Apart from the movement of an embussed adv gd to secure the VATNSENDI position, this move would probably be carried out across country on foot.

- (d) Recce of above assembly positions and of important tactical positions in their vicinity will be carried out.
- (e) Force Reserve will be responsible for patrolling that part of the S.W. Sector NORTH of the BORGARFJORDUR.

(W.D. H.Q. "Z" Force, August 1940: Appx VIII, O.O. No. 8, 22 Aug 40)

41. Word was received on 15 Aug that a squadron, of Fairey "Battle"<sup>15</sup> aircraft would be sent to Iceland. (W.D., C.H. of O. (M.G.) 15 Aug 40) On 27 Aug, the landing strip at Kaldadharnes having been completed, No. 98 Sqn, R.A.F., arrived with its "Battles". Thus, the month of August closed with slightly more adequate air support available. (W.D., Fus M.R., 27 Aug 40)

42. On 2 Sep, a mobile R.A.F. wireless station was attached to "Z" Force H.Q. in order to set up communications with No. 98 Sqn, and so make air support more effective, (W.D., H.Q. "Z" Force, 2 Sep 40) Movements of German convoys from Denmark, and embarkation of German troops in Norway were reported to "Alabaster" on 7 Sep. Since the state of the tides at this season was favourable for attempted landings, a special degree of vigilance, especially at the hour of the rising tide and at dawn, was ordered for all units in Iceland. A certain amount of tension and excitement was introduced into an otherwise monotonous round of duties. This state of emergency only lasted until 9 Sep, at which time it was considered that the German movements were not directed towards Iceland. (Ibid, 7 and 9 Sep 40)

43. A rescue party, sent out on 14 Sep to search for the crew and passengers of a "Battle" aircraft which had been forced down, helped to relieve the daily routine. This aircraft had been on a reconnaissance flight with the G.S.O. I of "Alabaster", and had been discovered on the ground just south of Hofsjökul, and about 50 miles from the road leading to Vik. As there was no one to be seen around the machine, it was concluded that the occupants had started to walk out. (Ibid, 14 Sep 40) On orders from H.Q. "Z" Force, R. Regt C. despatched a rescue arty (ibid, Appx VII, Op Instrs Nos 15 and 16, 14 Sep 40). Maj B.S. McCool was placed in charge of a group of 18 all ranks, and it set out at about 1500 hours, 14 Sep. They proceeded to Sandafell by motor transport, and, on the next day, moved from there on foot with pack horses. After about three hours' marching along the Thjorsa Valleys, they met the crew of the aircraft on the side of Skumstungnaheidhi,<sup>16</sup> and brought them back to Sandafell; from where they were returned to their units by transport, Maj McCool's party remained behind carrying out salvage operations. They then destroyed the stranded aircraft and returned to Selfoss on 20 Sep. (W.D., H.Q. "Z" Force, September 1940: Report by Maj McCool, 21 Sep 40) Maj-Gen Curtiss visited R. Regt C. on 20 Sep, and congratulated Lt-Col Basher on the fine job performed by Maj McCool and his men (W.D., R. Regt C., 20 Sep 40).

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<sup>15</sup> The Fairey "Battle" was a single engined light bomber, obsolescent in 1940

<sup>16</sup> Major McCool refers to Skumstungnur as the place where his party found the crew of the wrecked "Battle"; but since Skumstungnur is not shown on any of the available maps of Iceland, and Skumstungnaheidhi appears in its deduced location, the latter name is used.

44. Some minor changes occurred in the locations of sub-units of "Z" Force during September. The platoon on duty at Thingvollir was relieved, and their duties taken over by a daily patrol sent out by R. Regt C. (*Ibid*) On 19 Sep, the Royals' platoon on Heimaey was relieved a platoon of 1/5 West-Yorks Regt. (W.D. H.Q. "Z" Force, September 1940: Appx VII, Op Instr No. 18, 19 Sep). In line with the policy of handling over coast watching duties to the Royal Navy, the Fus M.R. troops at Vik were relieved by Royal Marines on 11 Sep. A platoon of the Fusiliers was established at Baldurshagi by the same date, and on 27 Sep a platoon from "D" Coy of the same unit was placed on guard over the Vatnsendi wireless station. The only changes involving C.H. of O. (M.G.) were the move of H.Q. Coy and Battalion Headquarters to Red House Hill in Reykjavik on 22 and 28 Sep, respectively. (W.D., C.H. of O. (M.G.), 22 and 28 Sep 40)

45. Operation Order No. 9, issued to all units of "Z" Force on 27 Sep, detailed changes in sector areas and commanders, and assigned a new role to "Z" Force. The sectors were now known as the North-Eastern (Akureyri) Sector, the Central Sector, the South-Western (Reykjavik) Sector, and the Western (Borgarnes) Sector (for boundaries of sectors, see Appx "B" to this report). Brigadier Page ceased to be a sector commander, and took over an enlarged mobile reserve, This consisted of the following:

- H.Q. "Z" Force
- One troop, No. 273 Fd Bty R.A.
- R. Regt C.
- Fus M.R. (less one company)
- No. 2 Coy, C.H. of O. (M.G.)
- One Sec, No. 294 Fd Coy, R.E.
- One Coy, No. 160 Fd Amb R.A.M.C.
- Detachment, Div Pro Coy
- Detachment R.A.S.C. (Sufficient to lift one battalion)

One company of Fus M.R. was placed under the South-West Sector commander, and the three companies of the Camerons (Nos 1, 3 and 4), which had been attached to 147 Brit Inf Bde, remained with that formation. The general tasks of the Force Reserve were given. These were to be prepared to operate offensively against any enemy threat from the direction of Hunafloi or Kaldadharnes, and to counter-attack against any enemy penetrations in the Reykjavik Hafnarfjörður area.

(W.D. H.Q; "Z" Force, September 1940: Appx VIII, O.O. No. 8, 22 Sep 40). This order resulted in the concentration of Fus M.R., less "B" Coy, at Baldurshagi. "B" Coy went to Hveragerdhi, and was probably the company under command of the South-West Sector, though this company is not specifically mentioned. (W.D., Fus M.R., 14, Oct 40)

46. The above order was the last one that affected "Z" Force before the departure of the main body near the end of October. All the defensive works that had been detailed, were completed early in the month, and the troops settled down to await their relief by a British force. (W.Ds., H.Q. "Z" Force and units, October 1940) On 20 Oct, Movement Order No, 1 was issued, giving

the necessary instructions for the withdrawal of the bulk of "Z" Force from Iceland, and its replacement by 70 Brit Inf Bde. The actual date of the relief was not given at this time, because it was not known precisely when the British brigade would arrive. (W.D., H.Q. "Z" Force, October 1940: Appx VII, Mov Order No. 1, 20 Oct 40) On 24 Oct, the ships carrying 70 Brit Inf Bde arrived in Reykjavik harbour, and the take-over began. (W.D., H.Q. "Z" Force, 24 Oct 40) Embarkation commenced on 26 Oct, when Fus M.R. went on board the S.S. "Antonia", with their baggage. R. Regt C. and "Z" Force Sig Sec embarked on the S.S. "Empress of Australia" on 28 Oct, and Brigadier Page after saying good-bye to Maj-Gen Curtiss and C.H. of O. (M.G.), went aboard with his staff on 30 Oct. The next day, at 1030 hours, the ships weighed anchor and put out for the U.K., leaving behind in Iceland, C.H., of O. (M.G.), a small ordnance detachment and elements of an L.A.D. (W.D., H.Q. "Z" Force, 24, 26, 28, 30 and 31 Oct 40)

47. The operational story of Canadian troops in Iceland is now concerned solely with C.H. of O. M.G. until 28 Apr 41, when they too departed. After the arrival of 70 Brit Inf Bde; certain changes took place in the disposition of the Camerons, No. 4 Pl, which had been assisting in the defence of Kaldadharnes aerodrome, was returned to No. 1 Coy at Hafnarfjörður on 2 Nov. This change was short lived however, and the platoon went back to Kaldadharnes on 5 Nov, as No. 98 Sqn R.A.F. considered their guns to be an essential part of the defences of the air field. (W.D., C.H. of O. (M.G.), 2 and 5 Nov 40) On 15 Nov, the C.H. of O. (M.G.) was disposed as follows:

B.H.Q. Near Red House Hill, south part of Reykjavik  
H.Q. Coy, Near Red House Hill, south part of Reykjavik  
No. 1 Coy (less No. 4 Pl), Hafnarfjörður  
No: 4 Pl, Kaldadharnes aerodrome  
No. 2 Coy (less a detachment), near Alafoss with mobile reserve  
Detachment No. 2 Coy, "Fort Cameron" at east end of Kollafjörður, manning a coast watching station  
No. 3 Coy, Central part of Reykjavik  
No.4 Coy, Grotta Peninsula

(W.D., C.H. of O. (M.G.) Appx V. Detailed sketches of Coy posns, 15 Nov 40)<sup>17</sup>

48. On 17 Nov, the coast watching station on Kollafjörður maintained by No. 2 Coy was relieved by 11 D.L.I. (*ibid*, 17 Nov). No. 2 and 3 Coys exchanged places on 18 Nov, No. 2 Coy taking over No. 3 Coy's positions in Reykjavik, and No. 3 Coy replacing No. 2 Coy in Alafoss (*ibid*, 18 Nov 40). Next day No. 3 Coy embarked for Budhareyri in the North-Eastern Sector, on the east coast of Iceland (*ibid*, 16 Nov and 19 Dec 40). Road communications were non-existent, and No. 3 Coy became isolated from the remainder of the battalion. Flights of German aircraft over the island on 3 Nov and 16 Dec provided a measure of excitement, but no hostile action was taken by the aircraft, and the anti-aircraft defences were unsuccessful in their attempts to bring them down (*ibid*, 3 Nov and 16 Dec 40).

49. January, the first month of 1941 passed with little of interest to report. There were no changes in dispositions, and the Camerons had to be content with their job of watching and

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<sup>17</sup> Sketch maps showing C.H. of O. (M.G.) company positions in great detail are attached to C.H. of O. (M.G.) W.D. of November 1940 as Appx V.

waiting. Work on construction of cement machine-gun emplacements, and wiring of positions were the only tasks of an operational nature carried out during the month (*ibid*, Jan 41). February brought much the same activities as January, with the exception of a few lively moments on the 9th, when an enemy aircraft appeared over the island, and engaged British troops at Selfoss. A stand-to was ordered, and when the aircraft came over the Kaldadharnes aerodrome, No. 2 Sec of No. 4 Pl opened fire. The rear gunner of the aircraft retaliated scoring near misses around No.2 Sec's post. No casualties were caused, and the aircraft flew on, apparently unhurt. This would appear to be the first occasion on which the Camerons were in action against the Germans in the Second World War. (*Ibid*, 9 Feb 41)

50. The only movement that occurred during March was the interchange of company positions by No. 1 and 4 Coys on the 10th (*ibid*, 10 Mar 41) A Focke-Wulf "Condor"<sup>18</sup> appeared over Iceland on 30 Mar, and although it circled around for some time, the defences were unable to bring it down (*ibid*, 30 Mar 41). Evidence of increased German anti-shipping activity were apparent in the pieces of wrecked ships that were washed up on the coast during the month. Survivors from the Icelandic trawler "Reykjavik" were picked up by a British warship and returned to Iceland. However, no hostile action was directed against the island itself. (*Ibid*, 3, 5, 13, 21, 22, 24 and 30 Mar 41)

51. April 1941 witnessed the withdrawal of the last Canadian troops in Iceland. On the 9<sup>th</sup>, the advance party of 1/9 Manch (M.G.) arrived to relieve the C.H. of O. (M.G.) "C" Coy of the Manchesters proceeded directly to Budhareyri to take over from No. 3 Coy of the Camerons. (*Ibid* 9 Apr 41) This hand-over took place on 13 Apr, and No. 3 Coy left on the same date, arriving in Reykjavik on the 14th (*ibid*, 13 and 14 Apr 41). On 14 Apr, the C.H. of O. (M.G.) began providing a working party of 60 men daily for work on an aerodrome that had been started at Vatnsmyri, near Reykjavik (*ibid*, 14 Apr 41). This was the only task undertaken by the regiment during the month, and all ranks were kept busy packing up for the move out of Iceland. At last, the final day arrived. The balance of 1/9 Manch came ashore on 27 Apr, and took over from the Canadians. At 1800 hours, on the same day, the Camerons began loading, and everything was on board by 0010 hours 28 Apr. (*Ibid*, 7 Apr 40) At 0600 hours, the S.S. "Royal Scotsman" and the S.S. "Royal Ulsterman" left the anchorage, and by 1740 hours, Reykjavik faded from the view of the Canadian troops on board. (*Ibid*, 28 Apr 40)

## SUPPLY AND MAINTENANCE PROBLEMS

52. The supply and maintenance problems of the occupation forces in Iceland presented very great difficulties; virtually everything had to be shipped in by sea. This included building material for huts, for there were no suitable trees in the country from which to procure lumber. Accommodation from civilian sources was not available, and the severity of the climate precluded troops living in tents, or in the open, for any length of time. There was not even sufficient wood to be had for tent floors. After the necessary supplies had reached the island the problems were still not solved. The two main harbours, Reykjavik and Hafnarfjörður, had no unloading equipment, and the task had to be performed by large working parties using the ship's winches and cranes. The consequent delays in the clearing of ships is described in one of Brigadier Page's weekly reports:

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<sup>18</sup> The Focke-Wulf "Condor" was a four-engined, long-range patrol bomber used by the German Airforce for anti-shipping raids and reconnaissance.

3. As pointed out in my cable Z58 of 3 Aug I cannot help but feel that the situation out here as regards accommodation is becoming increasingly pressing.
4. The S.S. TREGARTHEN the first of the four ships to arrive, is still in process of being unloaded and it may take another three days to clear her.
5. The STONEPOOL and DRACOLA are lying off and cannot get berth at the quayside, and the fourth ship is expected any day.  
It would appear that material for huts has been loaded in bulk with the result that until all ships are off loaded, sufficient materials will not be available to commence building operations.
6. From my previous appreciations I stated that unloading would not be completed before 10 Oct, but I am afraid I may have been optimistic. British convoys keep arriving and the docks are very congested.
7. There are three bottlenecks in the vase organization here.
  - (a) Dock facilities: There is only room for three ships to off load at a time -- two at REYKJAVIK and one at HAFNARFJORDUR and no cranes or lifting gear on the decks. All lifting has to be done by ships winches.
  - (b) Docks personnel: There is only one Docks Section at present out here which means a great shortage of winchmen and checkers. A few winchmen have been found in the R. Regt C. who have been employed.
  - (c) Transport: There is a definite shortage of transport for moving materials from the quayside. This situation is improving somewhat now, but the type of vehicle for moving loose lumber is not available and all work is having to be done by 30 cwt and six very indifferent civilian trucks.

(W.D., H.Q. "Z" Force, August 1940: Appx IV, Weekly Report, 5 Aug 40)

Emphasis should be laid on the statement made by Brigadier Page that all four ships would have to be unloaded before beginning building operations. It appears that the ships were loaded in such a way, that not even one hut could be constructed, until all the stores were landed. The British were justifiably reluctant to allot more unloading space to "Z" Force, because many of their ships were carrying operational stores, which were naturally required as soon as possible. This, however, did not solve the Canadian problem, and the matter became daily more urgent, as it was considered imperative to have all the troops housed by 1 Sep. (W.D., H.Q. "Z" Force, August 1940: letter Brigadier Page to Gen Curtiss, 4 Aug 40)

53. As an approach to a solution of the Canadians hutting problem, the British authorities in Iceland stated that they were prepared to recommend provision of sufficient Nissen huts to house C.H. of O. (M.G.). Brigadier Page cabled Ottawa on 3 Aug that he was in favour of this, and

further urged that the other two battalions be sent from Iceland immediately, to avoid a "repetition of SALISBURY PLAIN". (W.D., H.Q. "Z" Force, August 1940: Appx VI, Cable Z-58 to DEFENSOR, 3 Aug 40). Acceptance of Nissen huts promised to offer relief in two ways: Nissen huts could be far more quickly erected than the Yukon pattern then being shipped from Canada, and tactical necessity dictated that British ships carrying such huts would be unloaded first; because of the war-like stores they held in addition (*ibid*). On 5 Aug, approval was given by Ottawa to accept any Nissen huts that the British had to offer, (*ibid*, Appx V, Engrs 1249, 4 Aug 40), and on 6 Aug, three huts were obtained. Erection of these began at once, and they were allotted one to each battalion for use as drying rooms. (*Ibid*, Narrative, 6 Aug 40) It should be noted that the problem of erecting Yukon huts was further complicated by the absence of any plans or bills of materials. N.D.H.Q. suggested that a sufficient assortment of stores might be found on board S.S. "Stonepool" (still awaiting berthing space), and that "Z" Force should improvise their own design for the huts (Engrs 1249, *op cit*).

54. The offer of Nissen huts from the British had in no way solved the problem of what to do with the cargoes on the Canadian ships. A previous arrangement had been made between Ottawa and London, whereby all stores surplus to "Z" Force would be taken over by "Alabaster". Brigadier Page was informed of this in a cable received 30 Jul. (W.D., H.Q. "Z" Force, July 1940: Cable Tpt 1423, 29 Jul 40) He held a conference with the C.R.E. "Alabaster" and the R.E. representative from the War Office, at which this disposition of surplus stores was discussed. The C.R.E. "Alabaster" pointed out that as the bulk of these stores were of no use to him, and that there was a complete lack of covered storage space, he did not want to accept them, and offered the counter proposal that the ships be re-routed to Britain. Brigade Page agreed to this, and informed N.D.H.Q. on 6 Aug. (W.D., H.Q. "Z" Force, August 1940: Appx VI, Cable Z-60, 6 Aug 40) N.D.H.Q. replied immediately, but failed to ease the situation. It was simply stated that, "situation you describe is incomprehensible here", and went on to direct that the Naval Authorities be consulted, and their recommendations be forwarded to the Naval Staff in Ottawa. (W.D., H.Q. "Z" Force, August 1940: Appx V, Cable Tpt 1451 7 Aug 40)

55. In consequence of this rather disturbing message from Canada, Brigadier Page arranged a conference on 8 Aug. The following were present:

Capt Stokes, R.N., Senior Naval Staff Officer  
Cmdr Randall, D.S.O., R.N., Naval Transport Officer  
Col Temple, A.A. & Q.M.G., "Alabaster"  
Lt-Col Hayeraft, C.R.E., "Alabaster"  
Maj Mason, M.T.O., "Alabaster"  
Lieut Watts, R.E., Representative from the War Office

The question of cargoes and their disposal was again taken up, and Brigadier Page made the recommendations to the Navy as he had been instructed to do in cable, Tpt 1451. The British once more pointed out that their cargoes would have to take precedence on account of their operational nature, and that they were unwilling to accept the Canadian surplus for the reasons they had advanced before. The naval authorities cabled the naval staff at Ottawa recommending re-routing cargoes to Britain, and on 11 Aug, they received an answer accepting this proposal.

Two days later, Brigadier Page was given confirmation from N.D.H.Q., clearing up this matter, at last. (W.D., H.Q. "Z" Force, August 1940: Appx IV, Weekly Report, 13 Aug 40)

56. As noted in para 8 above, the, original British offer of Nissen huts was on a scale sufficient to house the C.H. of O. (M.G.) However, now that it had been decided not to off-load the Canadian cargoes in Iceland, it became necessary to consider supplying the whole of "Z" Force. Brigadier Page discussed this with the A.A. and Q.M.G. of "Alabaster", and was assured that, sufficient Nissen huts would be erected by the end of September, but on 15 Aug, at a conference held at "Alabaster" H.Q. the C.R.E. stated that it would be possible to erect only two thirds of the necessary huts by the promised date. In view of this, Brigadier Page decided to unload S.S. "Stonepool" in order to make up the remaining third of accommodation. Meanwhile, "Z" Force, had discovered that the plans for the Yukon huts had been sent to C.M.H.Q., who notified "Z" Force that these plans would be retained in London. It was therefore, determined to go ahead without them, and to improvise as well as possible. (W.D., H.Q. "Z" Force, August 1940: Weekly Report, 19 Aug 40)

57. On 16 Sep, Brigadier Page informed N.D.H.Q. that all of "Z" Force was then under cover of some sort, and that sufficient Nissen huts would be completed for two thirds of his personnel by the end of the month (Weekly Report, op cit, 16 Sep 40). Delay in the arrival of huts however, held up building, and on the 29 Sep, the situation was that one company of R. Regt C. and two companies of Fus M.R. still lacked huts. (Ibid, 29 Sep 40) By 12 Oct, Nissen hut erection on a two thirds scale was completed. This, added to the Yukon pattern huts that had come from the S.S. "Stonepool", completed sufficient winter accommodation for "Z" Force approximately four months after the initial landing. (Ibid, 12 Oct 40)

58. The very great difficulties in berthing, although affecting hutting primarily, was reflected in other directions as well. This was particularly noticeable in regard to transport and vehicles generally. The first battalion to land, R. Regt C., brought its own transport on board the "Empress of Australia". This had to be sent ashore by lighter, as the ship's draught was too great for the depth of water at the quayside (W.D., H.Q. "Z" Force, 16 Jun 40). Unloading the "Empress" took five days, which was comparatively fast (ibid, 21 Jun 40). The second flight of "Z" Force, which arrived on 7 Jul, was not so fortunate. No vehicles were sent with them. Movement of troops was hampered because R. Regt C. was in a different part of the island, and required its own transport in case of operational emergency. The British gave all possible aid with their own vehicles, but it was found necessary to hire civilian trucks; a very unsatisfactory arrangement. (Ibid, 7 Jul 40) Transport problems continued to plague the Canadians until the arrival of the S.S. "Tregarthen" on 27 Jul (ibid, 27 Jul 40), and even then were not immediately alleviated, since this ship was 16 days in being unloaded (ibid, 12 Aug 40). The following two instances illustrate the difficulties encountered in landing vehicles: while unloading a 30-cwt lorry from S.S. "Tregarthen", the sling-8 broke., and the vehicle was smashed beyond repair (ibid, Weekly Report, 30 Jul 40), and later, when S.S. "Wearwood" arrived on 6 Aug with tractors aboard, it was discovered that the "Tregarthen" had the only tackle capable of handling them. Fortunately that vessel was still in Iceland (Weekly Report, op cit, 13 Aug 40)

59. Certain items of equipment, unobtainable in Canada were supplied by the British Ordnance Depot. These included a number of Bren Carriers, Bren guns, Mortars and Boyes



anti-tank rifles. There was a general shortage of such stores due to the situation that prevailed in Britain during the summer of 1940, so that their issue was gradual. The last Boyes anti-tank rifles were received by 9 Sep. (W.D., H.Q. "Z" Force, 22 Jul, 7 Aug and Weekly Report, 9 Sep 40) British Tropical coats<sup>19</sup> were found to be superior to the Canadian sheepskin coats in the conditions of almost continuous wet, and some were obtained from "Alabaster" (*ibid*, Weekly Report, 12 Oct 40). On 4 Aug, the commander of "Z" Force was informed that no more ordnance stores would come from Canada, because of a shortage of shipping, and that all future supplies were to be obtained from the B.O.D. of "Alabaster" (W.D., H.Q. "Z" Force, August 1940: Appx V, Cable EQUIP 9-51, 31 Aug 40).

60. To avoid duplication in the handling of stores, Brigadier Page recommended that the British Ordnance facilities be used, and R.C.O.C. personnel be sent out to set up a Canadian section in the B.O.D. (Weekly Report, *op cit*, 8 Jul 40) This was agreed to, and on 6 Aug, two officers and ten other ranks R.C.O.C. arrived in Iceland to do this job, and in addition, to form a small L.A.D. The L.A.D was particularly useful as the British one was being overworked, and the poor nature of the roads on the island made for much additional maintenance on vehicles. (*ibid*, 13 Aug 40)

61. Medical Treatment was supplied in the initial stages by the medical officers who were on establishment of the three battalions of "Z" Force. Further care, which included hospitalization, was provided by the British. Authority was given by N.D.H.Q. on 22 Jul, to hand over all surplus medical stores to AD.M.S. "Alabaster" (W.D., H.Q. "Z" Force, 22 Jul 40).

62. The necessity of providing certain articles of special equipment raised further problems, Brigadier Page pointed out that a steel tent peg about three feet long was required, because of the hardness of the ground, and the great strength of the winds prevalent in Iceland. (*ibid*, Weekly Report, 2 Jul 40) Whether these were supplied or not is not recorded. Waterproof clothing was an obvious need in view of the extreme wetness of the climate. At this period, the Canadian soldier was provided with a groundsheet and a gas cape, both of which were waterproof. The groundsheet however, was unsuitable for working in, and use of the gas cape was not permitted, as it was to be held in readiness for a gas attack. It became necessary, when the men had to cease working on account of the rain, to make a local purchase of 100 oilskin coats for working parties. (W.D., H.Q. "Z" Force, 5 Jul 40) The supply of comforts for the troops was complicated by the same factors that applied to the shipping of all goods to Iceland, and will be discussed under the heading of morale.

## TRAINING

63. During the early part of the Canadian stay in Iceland, it was not possible to carry out any serious training. This was a matter of very grave importance, as many of the troops arrived without previous instruction in their weapons. (Weekly Report, *op cit*., 23 Jul 40) The constant fatigues required by the lack of proper machinery for unloading ships, and the necessity of employing large numbers of troops on defensive works and aerodrome construction, made it impossible to institute a satisfactory training program. Even if the troops had been free from these duties, the weather would have been a great deterrent. This situation continued through

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<sup>19</sup> Tropical is a trade name for an insulating material developed in Britain and similar to Kapok.

June, July and part of August. Before 19 Aug, some individual training was carried out, but only on a very small scale. (Ibid, 30 Jul, 13 Aug and 19 Aug 40) On 3 Aug, a determined attempt was made to begin tactical training with troops. Brigadier Page was not in favour of this, as he felt that priority should be given to the unloading of material for the erection huts. The G.O.C. "Alabaster" considered that the danger of invasion made training most essential, and accordingly, the exercise was ordered. It proved to be abortive, for the weather took a hand, and after the troops had got well soaked in rain and wind of gale proportions, the exercise was cancelled. (Ibid, 5 Aug 40)

64. By 26 Aug, the decision to re-route all but one of the Canadian ships to the U.K. had been made (see para 55), and in consequence, some troops were released for training. All units had been able to improvise ranges, and small arms firing, including anti-tank rifle and mortar practice, was being regularly carried out. (Ibid, 26 Aug 40) An exercise involving a sea-borne landing, and movement of the mobile reserve to meet it, was planned for 28 Aug, Once more, the weather intervened; and a high wind made the projected landing impossible. However, the motor transport carried out its part of the exercise as training for the drivers. (W.D., H.Q. "Z" Force, 28 Aug 40) Brigadier Page was nevertheless still not satisfied with the numbers available for instruction. He hoped that the situation would improve considerably after the S.S. "Stonopool" had been unloaded. (Weekly Report, op cit, 1 Sep 40)

65. Individual training continued, and for the third time, on 4 Sep, a scheme involving troops was attempted. This time the weather was good, and the exercise was completed. It consisted of combined operation training with 98 Sqn R.A.F. Various methods of communication from ground to air, including wireless, were tried out, and drills for the defence of convoys against air attack were practised. (Ibid, 9 Sep 40) A second intercommunication exercise with the R.A.F. was carried out on 9 Sep, and a great improvement was noted. On 11 Sep, it was decided to test the air force in its ability to find and engage a convoy of vehicles in the area from Hvalfjardhur to the north. Gales effectively grounded the aircraft, but the convoy move was undertaken to gain experience for the ground forces. These consisted of:

- One Section R.A.
- Reconnaissance Party R.E.
- Detachment "Z" Force Sig Sec
- One Company R. Regt C.
- One Platoon Machine guns, C.H. of O. (M.G.)
- One Section of 160 Fd Amb R.A.M.C.

They travelled from Alafoss to Borgarnes under very trying conditions. Brigadier Page wrote:

The last half of the journey was carried out over trails and through mountainous country and under weather conditions that can only be described as atrocious.

The wind velocity was estimated at 80 m.p.h. at times and one station wagon was blown off the road.



paid to the British forces, especially for the help they rendered in supplying instructors for carrier driving and mortar training (W.D., R. Regt C., 22 Jul and 21 Sep 40).

69. Training for the Camerons during the period November 1940 to April 1941 took place along the same lines as before. At the most, it was only possible to have one company take part in mobile operations at the same time, since three companies were assigned to fixed defensive tasks. Training for these companies was restricted mainly to weapon training and range work. (W.D., C.H. of O. (M.G.), November 1940 to April 1941) However, it was found possible to take one platoon at a time away from its positions in order to practise going into action from a road convoy, and the rapid occupation of a pre-determined area (ibid, 5 Nov and 15 Dec 40). Occasional route marches were held on a sub-unit basis in order to give the men some exercise (ibid, 5 and 22 Jan 41). Some training on a higher level was arranged, and during December 1940 and January 1941, Lt-Col Rogers attended a tactical exercise without troops at the Force Tactical School (ibid, December 1940 and January 1941). A scheme involving the defence of the Selfoss area was held on 24 Feb. All companies took part, but only No. 4 P1 operated in a mobile role (ibid, 24 Feb 41).

70. A certain number of men were able to take courses in England. On 8 Mar, eight other ranks returned from the Machine Gun Course at Netheravon (ibid, 8 Mar 41). Canadian assistance to the British was also given. A Vickers gun course was organized and given by the Camerons for four officers and 18 other ranks of "Alabaster" Force from 10 Mar to 2 Apr (ibid, 10 Mar and 2 Apr 41). In addition, the Camerons experimented with, and developed, a satisfactory anti-aircraft mount for their guns. These were mounted by the platoon in defence on the Kaldadharnes aerodrome. (ibid, 26 Mar 41), Training activities came to a halt in April, as all the time was taken up by packing and handling over positions to 1/9 Manch. To sum up, much useful training was carried out by the C.H. of O. (M.G.) during their stay as the lone Canadian unit in Iceland. The primarily defensive nature of their tasks however, limited the opportunities of carrying out mobile exercises just as it had done for the bulk of "Z" Force while it was on occupational duties in the northern island.

#### MORALE AND RELATIONS WITH THE INHABITANTS

71. The relationship that exists between an occupying garrison and the local inhabitants, is always bound to have a marked effect on the morale of the troops, especially when such occupation is carried out in a country which lacks many amenities, and possesses a comparatively unpleasant climate. These two subjects may therefore, be discussed together.

72. The question of the morale of the Canadian troops sent to Iceland was one fraught with potential difficulties and trouble. It is generally recognized that Canadian volunteer soldiers in time of war do not as a rule take very kindly to a sedentary garrison life. Friendly relations with the local citizens can do much to relieve the boredom naturally resulting from a watching and waiting role. When "Z" Force arrived in Iceland, it was realized that the Canadian troops were going into a country that had been occupied its permission. The bulk of the inhabitants were known to be indifferent, but there were certain individuals who had definite German sympathies. There were too, residents of German nationality, whose reactions were not predictable. The

above situation resulted in somewhat strained relations between the island authorities and the military forces, more noticeable however, in Reykjavik, than elsewhere. Some improvement occurred after the landing of Canadian troops. This was mainly due to the fact that there is a large Icelandic colony in Canada, and mutual acquaintances were found amongst the population of Iceland. (W.D., H.Q. June 1940: "Z" Force, Appreciation by Brigadier Page, 18 Jun 40)

73. An incident which occurred on 23 Jul, gives some indication of the initial reaction of the Icelandic authorities towards the occupying soldiery. Brigadier Page describes the results of his subsequent investigation as follows:

The Civil Police had laid clown some rule that girls were not allowed to be seen out with troops. While the actual regulation seemed very vague and beyond enforcement, it now appears it was intended to apply only to very young girls, and that the police had been called upon to make such a ruling because of absolute lack of parental control over youth on the Island.

Some of our troops were talking to some girls near the football grounds when a civilian police motor patrol arrived. The girls ran away and in the ensuing excitement a stone broke a window of the car, While I am of the opinion that this was done by one of our men, it has been impossible to identify him.

Later a rumour circulated that one of our men had been put in the police cells and a body of the troops arrived at the Police H.Q. intent on a jail delivery. This was prevented by the good work of the sergeant of the Canadian police piquet and when the troops were assured that no Canadian was in jail they went back to camp quietly.

I called on the Chief of Police this morning and expressed my regrets at the incident and offered to pay for the damage. I advised him, however, very strongly, against trying to handle Canadian troops with his own men, and further advised him to notify us of any trouble, and we would attend to it with our own Military Police.

It is not expected that such incidents will occur in the new area, where the inhabitants are more friendly and where police restrictions are not in force.

(W.D., H.Q. "Z" Force, June 1940: Weekly Report, 24 Jun 40)

As Brigadier Page hoped, no further incident of this nature was reported throughout the remainder of the Canadians' stay in Iceland. There is no evidence to show whether or not the official ban on girls mixing with troops was ever rescinded. (W.Ds., H.Q. "Z" Force and units, June to October 40, and C.H. of O. (M.G.), November 40 to April 41) There is evidence that, as late as October, a certain section of the population was not in favour of fraternizing with the occupation forces. On 5 Oct, an article appeared in the local press advising their readers not to associate with soldiers more than necessary. (W.D.s, H.Q. "Z" Force, 5 Oct 40) It might be argued from this, that some Icelanders were becoming more friendly than was thought proper.

74. Meanwhile the platoon of R. Regt C. that was stationed on Heimaey, experienced a more co-operative attitude from the civilians. On their departure, the mayor wrote a very flattering letter to Maj-Gen Curtiss in which he said:

It was with somewhat mixed feelings we greeted the soldiers of the British Empire when they arrived to the Westman Isles some time ago, and I trust you will understand that from our point of view.

Now, when they are leaving I feel becoming to express my high regard for the correct and gentleman-like behaviour of the soldiers under the able leadership of Lieut. C. Wilkinson. We could not ask for better men and better officers.

(W.D., R. Regt C., October 40: Appx IV, Letter from Mayor of Westmannaeyjar Islands, 19 Sep 40)

It would appear that the good relations maintained between the Canadians and the population of Heimaey Island, were due mostly to the efforts of the platoon commander, Lt Wilkison, and his men. In this regard Brigadier Page wrote:

As a side light to this the Mayor at the time of the arrival of the Canadian detachment was very pro Nazi but has since removed from his office the picture of Hitler and has become quite pro British.

(Weekly Report, op cit, 29 Sep 40)

75. Some further light is thrown on the state of civilian feeling by Maj McCool, R. Regt C., in his report on the rescue of the crew of the stranded "Battle" aircraft. (see para 43) Maj McCool made a special note of the high degree of co-operation afforded his party by one Icelander. He states:

I would like to point out that Herra Pall Stefanson was most anxious to co-operate in every way. ... In connection with the account I would like further to point out that no charge was made for provision of sleeping quarters, including rooms for officers for the entire party, and also that a voluntary offer was made to reduce the total cost by deduction of the approximate value of rations supplied to Icelanders. Under the circumstances it was decided not to take advantage of this offer, but it is mentioned merely to point out the attitude of at least some of the Icelanders.

(Report, Maj McCool, op cit, 21 Sep 40)

76. In arriving at an estimate of the state of morale of troops anywhere, discipline and the incidence of crime are two of the main indicators which must be taken into account. Throughout Brigadier Page's weekly reports, he records that discipline was satisfactory and that there was no serious crime. (Weekly Reports, op cit, June - October 1940) He expresses concern, however regarding what he considered too many cases of drunkenness. He felt that this was due to the lack of a good beer in the canteens, and the potency of the native drink called "Black Death". The

