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Directorate of History

National Defence Headquarters

Ottawa, Canada

K1A 0K2

July 1986

REPORT NO. 43
HISTORICAL SECTION (G.S.)
ARMY HEADQUARTERS

Training of the 4th and 5th Armoured Divisions
in the United Kingdom, October 1941 – July 1944

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14 Sep 51

Training of the 4th and 5th Canadian Armoured Divisions
in the United Kingdom, October 1941 – July 1944

1. The object of this report is to give a brief account of the training of 4 and 5 Cdn Armd Divs from the time of their arrival in the United Kingdom until their respective departures for the Mediterranean and France. For the sake of clarity the two Divisions are treated separately and since the arrival of 5 Cdn Armd Div preceded that of 4 Cdn Armd Div by several months, this Division is dealt with first.

ARRIVAL OF 5 CDN ARMD DIV, OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 1941

2. In accordance with the wish of the War Office arrangements were made for the dispatch of 5 Cdn Armd Div overseas in the autumn of 1941. Due to shipping shortages the force was moved in two main flights, one leaving Halifax 9 Oct and arriving at Liverpool 18 Oct, the other being transported, 13-22 Nov 41, from the same port but landing partly at Liverpool, partly at Glasgow.¹ In the first flight were H.Q. 2 Cdn Armd Bde, 3 and 5 Cdn Armd Regts, 4 Cdn A.Tk Regt, 1 Fd Sqn R.C.E., Perth R. (Mot), 5 Cdn Div Fd Pk and 5 Cdn Div Ord Wksp. With the second flight came H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Div, H.Q. 1 Cdn Armd Bde, 1 Cdn Armd Car Regt, 2, 6, 9, and 10 Cdn Armd Regts, H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Div Support Group, 17 Fd Regt R.C.A., 10 Fd Sqn and 4 Fd Pk Sqn R.C.E., Signals², C.B. Highrs, Westmr R. (Mot), and Medical units. In addition there arrived with two different convoys the divisional Army Service Corps and 5 L.A.A. Regt R.C.A. Of the two main groups, i.e. flights 1 and 2, the majority

¹ One unit of the first flight, 4 Cdn A.Tk Regt, also went to Glasgow.

² Signals for the Support Group were furnished by No. 2 (Support Group) Sqn, 1 Armd Div Sigs, R.C.C.S. (G.O. 88/41).

of the first was stationed in the Hungerford area, the other at Aldershot. (Hist Offr, C.M.H.Q., Report No. 54, paras 4, 6, 8, 9 and 24).

EQUIPMENT SITUATION AND EARLY TRAINING, DECEMBER 1941 – JANUARY 1943

3. As an innovation, 5 Cdn Armd Div was placed under C.M.H.Q. until such time as its training had advanced sufficiently to enable it to take an operational role in the defence of the United Kingdom. By 24 Jun 42 it was considered that high enough standard had been reached for the formation to undertake training on a divisional basis, so it passed under First Canadian Army. (W.D., A. & Q., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Div, 24 Jun 42).

4. Originally it had been intended to equip 5 Cdn Armd Div with Canadian-made Ram tanks but due to delay in production it was impossible to provide even a training scale (Preliminary Narrative, The History of the Canadian Military Forces Overseas, 1941-42, Chap IX, paras 85-94). The deficiency had therefore to be made good by U.S. – type equipment and on 7 Feb 42 the division received 40 General Lee M3 (Medium) and five General Stuart (Light) tanks. Both types resembled the Ram sufficiently that crews were able to learn the necessary maintenance and driving techniques. (Preliminary Overseas Narrative, Chap XII, para 127). Prior to this, however, training was started for the whole Division on 19 General Lee M3 (Medium) tanks issued during December 1941 to 2 Cdn Armd Bde at Hungerford, special emphasis being placed on crew and individual instruction, since the experience of armoured units which had arrived earlier in the country had shown the futility of collective training until a high standard of basic requirements had been mastered. Of the two formations, the training of 1 Cdn Armd Bde was the more advanced owing to the fact that it had been concentrated in Aldershot while 2 Cdn Armd Bde had been scattered. Hence, on 1 Apr 42 the armoured brigades exchanged locations so as to make up the lost ground. (Ibid, paras 127 and 128, and W.D., H.Q. 2 Cdn Armd Bde (later known as 5 Cdn Armd Bde), December 1942).

5. Although the basic training of the Division was complete by the end of March, there was still too little equipment available to make training as a formation possible. Despite this, the spirit of the Division was so good that on 9 Apr 42 Maj-Gen M.B. Burrows, G.O.C. 2 Armoured Group, in a report to H.Q. Armoured Corps praised it highly. (C.M.H.Q. File 2/5 Armd Div/1).

6. In contrast to the difficulties encountered by the armoured brigades, the training of the divisional support group had been relatively simple as its units were more or less fully equipped (Preliminary Overseas Narrative, Chap XII, para 128). But by the beginning of May 1942 the situation of the two armoured brigades had considerably improved and on the 8th of that month Maj-Gen E.W. Sansom, G.O.C. 5 Cdn Armd Div, was able to report to C.M.H.Q. that the Division had 33 Rams Mark 1, 47 Lees, eight Stuarts, eight 8M2A4 and four A.A. light tanks. Consequently, during the second half of May 2 Cdn Armd Bde was able to carry out a short exercise. (C.M.H.Q. File 4/Progress 1/4: Reports, G.O.C. 5 Cdn Armd Div to Senior Officer, C.M.H.Q., 8 May – 26 Jun 42). It was after this, on 24 Jun, that the Division passed under command First Canadian Army. From then on until 5 Oct, when its equipment was nearly complete, exercises of greater scope and with more and more units of the Division training together became possible. (C.M.H.Q. File 4/Progress/11: Canmilitary to Defensor, July-October 1942). Furthermore, since on 10 Aug 42 it had moved from Aldershot to Sussex, better ground for training in manoeuvre was available (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Div, August 1942, Appx 10). Hence, during the week ending 12 Sep 42, a number of minor exercises were carried out by various units of the division in co-operation with other arms (W.D., H.Q. 1 & 2 Cdn Armd Bdes, September 1942). The following month, and throughout November and December, training became more intense and special attention was paid to practice in day and night approaches, harbouring, convoy discipline, camouflage, river crossings and wireless communication (C.M.H.Q. File 4/Progress/11: Canmilitary to Defensor, September-December 1942).

CHANGE OF COMMAND AND SECOND TRAINING PERIOD, JANUARY-OCTOBER 1943

7. On 16 Jan 43 Maj-Gen C.R.S. Stein replaced General Sansom as G.O.C. 5 Cdn Armd Div, the latter being promoted to the rank of Lieutenant-General and taking over 2 Cdn Corps (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Div, 16 Jan 43). The change in command was shortly followed by one in organization, and on 25 Jan 43 in accordance with C.M.H.Q. Adm Order No. 2, 10 Jan 43, the Division was put upon a new establishment so as to bring it into line with that of the British (C.M.H.Q. File 4/Progress/11: Canmilitary to Defensor, 25 Jan 43). The upshot was that 2 Cdn Armd Bde became known as 5 Cdn Armd Bde; and 1 Cdn Armd Bde, which was broken up, was replaced by 11 Cdn Inf Bde. For details, see Historical Officer, C.M.H.Q., Report No. 168, paras 27 and 28). Finally, on 16 Feb 43, the reorganized Division came under 2 Cdn Corps, with which it remained until its departure for the Mediterranean (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Div, February 1943, Appx 14: 5 Cdn Armd Div Message 0162, 14 Feb 43).

8. Although the Division had exercised in skeleton form on “RAM III”, 8-11 Jun 42, “MARCONI”, 16 Sep 42, and “MAPLE 9”, 9 Oct 42 (Ibid, June, September and October 1942), it was only after its transfer to 2 Cdn Corps that all the component parts first operated together as a division. Into this period falls the formation’s most important and rigorous training. Much of this took the form of exercises specially designed to bring out certain specific tactical lessons. Of the “SPARTAN”, 27 Feb – 12 Mar 43, was not only the first but the largest in which the Division participated. In it 5 Cdn Armd Div and other formations were employed in an offensive role involving long and fast moves. Since the Division had never been fully exercised together before going into these large-scale manoeuvres, and since H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps itself had only been very recently organized, it is not surprising that the results were not wholly satisfactory. The three principal lessons learned as far as the armoured units were concerned were (1) the dire necessity of seizing bridges and other important communication points before enemy demolitions could render them useless, (2) the value of proper traffic control and (3) the danger of committing armour to action without infantry support. On the whole the exercise was marred, not only for 2 Cdn Corps, but for First Cdn Army, by faulty appreciation of topography, administrative and tactical mistakes, traffic bottle necks, inadequate bridging plans and frequent breakdown of communications. ((HS) 545.033: G.H.Q., Exercise “SPARTAN”, Narrative of Events & Comments by C.-in-C. Home Forces, March 1943; see also Historical Officer, C.M.H.Q., Report No. 94, paras 13, 37, 41, 43 and 51-53).

9. After "SPARTAN" and up to the end of June 1943 more training was carried out within the Division. The highlights were Exercises "GUNBUSTER I", 28 Apr 43-5 May 43, a test in the tactical handling of armoured divisional artillery, and "FLANKEM" 11-12 May 43, to practice armoured regiments in tactical moves ((HS) 219C1.009(D72): Exercises "GUNBUSTER I & II" by 2 Cdn Corps; W.D., G.S., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Div, 12 Apr 44; and C.M.H.Q. File 4/Progress/11: Canmilitary to Defensor, 3 and 17 May 43).

10. From the beginning of July to the middle of October 5 Cdn Armd Div participated in a series of schemes five of which saw the whole formation exercising together. The first phase of this involved a divisional move, 3-5 Jul 43, to Eastern Command for a six-weeks sojourn in Norfolk. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Div, July 1943 and Appx 3). There a number of minor exercises were carried out until 26-28 Jul 43, when a considerable portion of the Division took part in a major scheme, "HARDTACK". This put the Division in the role of a counter-attacking force to meet and enemy landing, and was designed to test troops in harbouring at night, obtaining information and forcing lightly-held river crossings. It was also intended to practice the infantry brigade in forming a pivot and to employ both it and the armoured brigade in attack. During this exercise the motor battalion gained experience in taking over ground won and was in turn relieved by the infantry brigade. ((HS) 212C1.(D24): Exercises "HARDTACK" etc; also W.D., G.S., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Div, April 1943, Appx 26) "HARDTACK" was followed by "GRIZZLY I", 1-4 Aug 43, a full-scale divisional exercise to practice the employment of the reconnaissance regiment in advance to contact with an enemy, to provide experience in passing information, and to practice methods of overcoming obstacles and the proper use of armour and infantry in attack (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, July 1943, Appx 18). The next month the Division embarked upon "SNAFFLE", 7-11 Aug 43, an exercise of particular interest as the opposing troops were those of the 1st Polish Armoured Division. This time the scheme was intended to accustom the reconnaissance regiment in delaying the enemy, to carry out an approach march by the infantry and armoured brigades and to wind up with a clash. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Div, August 1943, Appx 3).

11. A few days after the conclusion of “SNAFFLE”, 5 Cdn Armd Div moved south to Hampshire in Exercise “ATTACK”, 13-20 Aug 43, in order to prepare for “HARLEQUIN”, 25 Aug – 15 Sep 43 (C.M.H.Q. File 4/Progress/11: Canmilitary to Defensor, 23 Aug 43; and W.D., G.S., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Div, August 1943, Appx 18). This exercise, which was to test arrangements for moving a large force through concentration and assembly areas in England to embarkation points, involved several Canadian formations, including 4 Cdn Armd Bde, so that 5 Cdn Armd Div only took up part of the allotted time ((HS) 12C1.(D32): Exercise “HARLEQUIN”). “DITTO” 9-12 Oct 43, was the last tactical exercise done by the Division in the U.K. and saw its employment in the preparation and execution of a deliberate attack. The primary aim was to practice the use of reconnaissance elements in obtaining, by force if necessary, adequate information on opposing troops, exploitation, and liaison between assault troops and engineers. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 5 Cdn Armd Div, 12 Oct 43).

12. Its training in the U.K. complete, 5 Cdn Armd Div was concentrated in Sussex and on 14 Oct 43 was alerted for “TIMBERWOLF”, the move which was to take it to the Mediterranean. On 18 Oct, while preparations were still under way, Maj-Gen Stein relinquished command owing to ill health and Brigadier R.O.G. Morton, C.R.A., took over temporary command. On 22 Oct 43 word was received that the Division would come under 1 Cdn Corps as soon as “TIMBERWOLF” began. On 26 Oct 43 the move commenced and the succeeding day, 27 Oct 43, the entire Division sailed from Liverpool. (Ibid, October 1943).

ARRIVAL OF 4 CDN ARMD DIV, AUGUST-NOVEMBER 1942

13. In accordance with the policy set forth by the Canadian Army programme for 1942, 4 Cdn Inf Div was converted, during the first months of the year into 4 Cdn Armd Div. Maj-Gen F.F. Worthington was appointed G.O.C. (Preliminary Overseas Narrative, Chap XIV, paras 150 and 151).

14. Since Ram tanks were coming off the assembly line early in 1942, 4 Cdn Armd Div had an advantage that its predecessor had not enjoyed, and was able to do more effective training in Canada. (Ibid, para 153).

15. Plans for the dispatch of the Division to the U.K. having been completed, the headquarters advance party sailed from Halifax on 21 Jul 42 and by 10 Aug 42 had opened divisional headquarters at Aldershot³. (Ibid, para 154). Subsequently there arrived, on 17 Aug 42, H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div Support Group, 15 Cdn Fd Regt and 8 Cdn L.A.A. Regt. After this came the first flight proper, including H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, plus 28 and 29 Cdn Armd Regts and Lake Sup R. It embarked at Halifax on 22 Aug and seven days later reached Glasgow. (Ibid, paras 155 and 157; W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, August and September 1942). On arrival in the U.K., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div and Headquarters of the Support Group were quartered at Aldershot and the other units in localities nearby (Preliminary Overseas Narrative, Chap XIV, para 158). The second flight did not leave Halifax until 29 Sep 42 and reached Glasgow 7 Oct 42. In this were H.Q. 3 Cdn Armd Bde, H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde, 21, 22, and 25 Cdn Armd Regts, divisional Signals, Army Service Corps, Ordnance and Medical units. The third and final flight, made up of 27 Cdn Armd Regt, the Irish Regiment of Canada and the Princess Louise Fusiliers, reached the U.K. on 4 Nov 42. Like their predecessor, the majority of both the second and third flights were stationed at Aldershot and a joining localities. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, October and November 1942; see also Preliminary Overseas Narrative, Chap XIV, para 159).

EQUIPMENT AND INITIAL TRAINING, OCTOBER 1942 – JANUARY 1943

16. Once the greater part of the Division had reached the U.K., a training instruction was issued on 8 Oct 42 to cover the period 15 Oct 42 – 15 Feb 43. Collective training was to be completed to troop level, while training on “B” vehicles was to be carried through to regimental level. Headquarters of formations were to be

trained sufficiently to enable them to handle their units in the more advanced instruction to follow. Pending the arrival of tanks, a training scale of universal carriers was issued to the armoured regiments and H.Q. Squadron. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, October 1942, Appx 6: 4 Cdn Armd Trg Instruction No. 10, period 15 Oct 42 – 15 Feb 43). These measures having been taken, on 22 Oct 42 the Division came under First Canadian Army (C.M.H.Q. File 4/Progress/11: Canmilitary to Defensor, 22 Oct 42).

17. Since the training of 4 Cdn Armd Div when it arrived in England was more advanced than had been that of 5 Cdn Armd Div, six weeks were sufficient for 4 Cdn Armd Div to complete the more elementary stages of its training. After 23 Nov 42, when 27 Rams Mark II were received, 4 Cdn Armd Bde carried out a defended river crossing exercise. (C.M.H.Q. File 4/Progress/11: Canmilitary to Defensor, November and December 1942). From then on until 10 Feb 43, by which date the Division was almost completely equipped, a steady flow of tanks and carriers enabled the armoured brigades to carry out full scale exercises, particular attention being paid to day and night harbouring. (Ibid, , November and December 1942 and January 1943; also W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, December 1942 and January 1943). Together with 5 Cdn Armd Div, 4 Cdn Armd Div was brought into line with the British organization and effective 11 Jan 43, 3 Cdn Armd Bde was broken up and replaced by 10 Cdn Inf Bde (C.M.H.Q. Admin Order No. 2, Appx “D”, January 1943; also Historical Officer, C.M.H.Q. Report No. 168, para 28).

SECOND TRAINING PERIOD, JANUARY 1943 – JULY 1944

18. Shortly after this change over to the new organization, the greater part of the Division moved from Aldershot. Divisional H.Q. remained behind, but on 16 Jan 43 4 Cdn Armd Bde went to Hove, Sussex, and 10 Cdn Inf Bde to Headley, Surrey. (W.D., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Bde and H.Q. 10 Cdn Inf Bde, February 1943). Two months

³ 5 Cdn A.Tk Regt, 6 Cdn Fd Park Sqn and 8 and 9 Fd Sqns, R.C.E. arrived 12 Jun 42. (Preliminary Overseas Narrative, Chap XIV, para 156).

later, 18 Mar 43, 4 Cdn Armd Div came under command of 2 Cdn Corps (W.D., G.S., H.Q., 4 Cdn Armd Div, March 1943, Appx 14).

19. Like 5 Cdn Armd Div, 4 Cdn Armd Div spent considerable time on exercises within the Division before attempting anything on a greater scale. Consequently, the summer of 1943 was devoted to a number of schemes to step up the general efficiency of the component units of the formation. The most outstanding of these were "HOTSPUR II", 6 Apr 43, to study the action of an armoured squadron and attached troops in seizing a pivot of manoeuvre and to practice deployment from a line of march; "BRICKBAT", 28 Apr 43, carried out by 4 Cdn Armd Bde, to provide brigade H.Q. with experience in R.T. procedure, the use of codes and the exercise of command during an operation; and finally "HOTSPUR III", 4 May 43. The aim of this last exercise was to test the action of an armoured squadron in an advance to a pivot of manoeuvre in the face of light resistance, to study the subsequent disposition of a squadron on the objective and to practice an infantry company in taking over from the squadron. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, April and May 1943; C.M.H.Q. File 4/Progress/11, Canmilitary to Defensor, April and May 1943). Not until 15 May 43 did a large part of the Division operate together. The occasion for this was Exercise "QUATTUOR" when a study was made of various methods of breaking into and overrunning a strongly-held enemy position, the employment of all arms and the use of flame-throwers en masse as a close assault weapon in conjunction with armour, so as to fill in the gap between tanks and infantry. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 15 May 43, Appx 18). While this exercise was taking place the greater part of 4 Cdn Armd Div Arty was on "GUNBUSTER II", 14-20 May 43, an exercise similar to "GUNBUSTER I". (Ibid and Appx 16).

20. A month after "QUATTUOR" there followed two minor exercises of some note, "COUGAR II", 24-25 Jun 43, and "COUGAR III", 1-2 Jul 43, the first to practice the reconnaissance regiment in the role of advance guard to the armoured division, the second in that of a rear guard in retreat. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, June and July 1943). During August the usual unit training continued, but in the week ending 25 Aug 43 part of the Division, as has been seen, participated in "HARLEQUIN", 25 Aug 43 ((HS) 12C1. (D32): Exercise "HARLEQUIN").

21. It was after this, 4 Sep 43, that the formation moved north to Norfolk. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, September 1943, Appx 7). There the Division, less 4 Cdn Armd Bde, carried out exercise "TAKEX I", 25-28 Sep 43, to practice the withdrawal of an armoured division covering a main force. (Ibid, September 1943, Appx 33). The following month, 1 Oct 43, 4 Cdn Armd Div again moved, its headquarters going to Suffolk and the rest of the formation being distributed between that county, Norfolk and Northampton. (Ibid, 1 Oct 43 and Appx 5). From 22 to 24 Oct 43 the Division performed a full-scale exercise against a controlled enemy with special emphasis on the employment of the armoured reconnaissance regiment, the crossing of obstacles, and a full scale attack by an armoured division on a semi-prepared position. Known as "GRIZZLY II", this exercise was conducted under the direction of 2 Cdn Corps. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 2 Cdn Corps, October 1943, Appx 29). This was followed by "BRIDOON", 2-5 Nov 43, a two-sided scheme, after the fashion of "SNAFFLE", conducted by Eastern Command to practice 4 Cdn Armd Div against 9 (Brit) Armd Div in a full scale exercise involving various phases of battle ((HS) 212C1.(D36): Exercise "BRIDOON"). "BRIDOON" completed, 4 Cdn Armd Div moved back to Sussex, where further minor exercises within the Division were carried out, stress being laid on harbouring and communication schemes (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, December 1943 and January 1944).

22. Early in 1944 Maj-Gen Worthington relinquished command and on 26 Feb Maj-Gen G. Kitching succeeded as G.O.C. 4 Cdn Armd Div. (Ibid, 26 Feb 44). Throughout the next four months intensive training went on and, amongst other relatively small but important exercises in May 1944, 4 Cdn Armd Bde and 10 Cdn Inf Bde twice undertook river assault crossings in conjunction with the engineers (C.M.H.Q. File 4/Progress/11/2: Cannilitary to Defensor, 3 and 10 May 44). By this time not only was the training of the Division almost complete, but by 16 May 44 a steady flow of new equipment from 4 Feb 44 on had brought it up to its operational War Establishment. (W.D., A. & Q., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 4-5, 11 and 14 Feb, 24 Mar, 5 and 9 Apr, and 16 May 44). On 30 Jun 44, the Division went back to First Cdn Army, and after a brief but unexpected and disappointing delay, the whole formation left Coldharbour, Sussex, on 18 Jul 44 for France. (W.D., G.S., H.Q. 4 Cdn Armd Div, 18 Jul 44).

22. This report was written by Lt. H.D. Martin.

for (C.P. Stacey) Colonel

Director Historical Section