

REPORT NO. 60
HISTORICAL SECTION (G.S.)
ARMY HEADQUARTERS

1 Apr 53

Movement and Operations of 11 Cdn

Inf Bde Gp, Italy, 9 Apr - 5 May 44

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1. The purpose of this report is to relate briefly the movement and operations of the 11th Canadian Infantry Brigade Group in the period during which it was under the Command of the 2nd New Zealand Division, from 9 Apr 44 until 5 May 44.
2. The first winter offensive in Italy ended 23 Mar 44 when the 2nd New Zealand Corps abandoned its attack on Monte Cassino. This was followed by a regrouping of Allied Forces in Italy for the purpose of launching a new offensive which began in May 1944. During the regrouping and build up, the main weight of the Eighth Army was shifted to the left flank near Cassino, between the United States Fifth Army on the left and the Apennine Mountains on the right. A complete general account of these preparations and of the overall situation on the Italian front during the period under discussion may be found in Operation of British, Indian and Dominion Forces in Italy, Part II, Section A, Chapter 1, paras 4-19 and Section B, Chapter 1. (Ops of Brit..Forces in Italy, Part II, Section B, Chap 1, para 1)

3. In the days (1-9 Apr 44) immediately preceding the move of 11 Cdn Inf Bde to under command 13 Corps and thence, ultimately, to under command 2 NZ Div, the Brigade was located in the general area of Casalnuovo, MR 9235, under command 5 Cdn Armd Div. Several exercises had just been completed when on 9 Apr the Brigade started back into the line as a brigade group under 4 Brit Inf Div. (W.D., H.Q. 11 Cdn Inf Bde, 1-9 Apr 44)

11 CDN INF BDE IN THE LINE

4. At 0930 hrs, 9 Apr, units of 11 Cdn Inf Bde began an uneventful move to their new area. Whilst en route it was learned that a battalion of Italian troops, the Bafile Battalion, was to be added to the Canadian formation, the main units of which were the Princess Louise Fusiliers (support group), the Perth Regiment, the Cape Breton Highlanders, the Irish Regiment of Canada, the Westminster Regiment and the 17th Field Regiment R.C.A. The Italian battalion was composed mostly of sailors from the Italian fleet who volunteered for land duty after surrendering their ship at Malta (W.D., Westmr R., 12 Apr 44). It was combined with the Westminsters and the whole designated Corbould Force (from the name of the Westminster C.O.). As part of the great regrouping programme the Brigade Group assumed a relief role. Together with their new-found allies the Canadians took over a two-brigade front of over 9000 yards, relieving 12 Brit Inf Bde and Preston Force.¹ More specifically the group was charged with the responsibility of holding the vital ground in the Mount Cifalco sector

(MR 8728) near Cassino. (W.D., H.Q. 11 Cdn Inf Bde, 9-10 Apr 44 and Appendix 10: 11 Cdn Inf Bde Op Instr No. 2)

5. On 11 Apr 44 Brigadier T.E. Snow, commander of 11 Cdn Inf Bde, led personnel of his headquarters to their new area between Vallerotonda and S. Elia Fiumerapido, MR 911271. While under command of 4 Brit Div, the Canadians gradually took over in the line, having 28 Inf Bde on their left and the 6 N.Z. Bde on the right. Then, on 15 Apr, command of the sector was relinquished by the British division and taken over by 2 NZ Div. The unit changeovers took place under cover of darkness. On the night 11/12 Apr Perth R. relieved the 2nd Royal Fusiliers in the center of the Brigade's sector north of S. Elia, MR 888274. Going in on the right, the same night, Corbould force completed the relief of Preston Force by 0500 hrs. This composite force was then located north of Vallerotonda, MR 929279. The next night, 12/13 Apr, C.B. Highrs took over on the left from the Royal West Kent Regiment in the general area MR 8529 - 8729, northwest of S. Elia. On the night of 13/14 Apr 11 Cdn Indep M.G. Coy took over from the Northumberland Fusiliers at MR 911249 south of S. Elia and Vallerotonda. The Ir R.C. remained in reserve in a counter-attack role at MR 909252. (All W.Ds., 11-14 Apr 44)

6. On 15 Apr the enemy situation on the 11 Cdn Inf Bde front was known only vaguely. On the left in front of the C.B. Highrs' and part of the Perths' positions it was presumed that the S.S. Doehla Mountain Brigade held the line. Opposite the right of the Canadian sector it was thought that the 5th Mountain Division was still in position. For several days it appeared that the

¹ This was a British force consisting of 4 Recce Regt, one Bn 28 Inf Bde and Det No. 2 Sp Gp 2 N.F., commanded by Lt Col Preston, O.C. 4 Recce Regt (W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt, April 1944, Appx 11, 4 Br Div O.O. No. 4)

enemy was unaware of the change in that sector, since Arabic and French propaganda leaflets were still being dropped. Vigorous enemy patrol activity was interpreted to mean that they were as uncertain of the identity of their opponents as were the Canadians of theirs. (W.D., H.Q. 11 Cdn Inf Bde, April 1944, Appendix 16: Intelligence Summary No. 1, 15 Apr 44) Because of the almost complete absence of enemy air interference against the Canadians, troops were warned against complacency in this matter. It was pointed out that on the Fifth Army front, just to the west, the Luftwaffe were quite active and therefore good camouflage and concealment were of the utmost importance. (W.D., C.B. Highrs, April 1944, Appendix 1: Part 1 Order No. 13, 3 Apr 44)

7. Since it was not considered feasible to carry out a counter-attack in the area, the policy was to hold tenaciously all platoon localities with no thought of withdrawal. Artillery and mortars were employed extensively in counter-mortar tasks and an anti-tank battery covered the main and, probably, only approach for enemy armour down the Belmonte Valley. In the event of an enemy threat to the vital ground of the brigade sector, the reserve battalion was ready to move forward. From mid-April until early May the lot of the Brigade was one of ceaseless patrol activity. Brigade Headquarters issued instructions saying that an aggressive patrol policy would be pursued. "No-Man's-Land" had to be dominated and forays made deep into enemy territory. (W.D., 11 Cdn Inf Bde, April 1944, Appendix 10: 11 Cdn Inf Bde Ops Insr No. 2)

8. The ground² entrusted to the care of the Brigade consisted of bare, high, steep hills and

deep gullies, dominated on three sides by an enemy who enjoyed excellent observation. But there was little need to remind the infantrymen that they must be constantly alert, no need to remind them of the realities of life as they then lived it. The reminders were everywhere at hand.

All about was the desolation of war; now revealed in all its misery and waste by the warm spring sunshine; now hidden by the darkness of night, when little groups of men sought each other out in a deadly game of hide-and-seek - probing, ambushing, seeking to establish each others identity, positions and activities; and yet, seldom really coming to grips. Hardly a day passed without a casualty³ somewhere in the Brigade Group, as yet another reminder of the grim business at hand. Shelling and mortaring, although of varying intensity, was continuous and accounted for most of the casualties. The Brigade Headquarters' diarist noted that enemy shelling concentrated on supply routes, roads and town. The jeephead, between Vallerotonda and S. Elia (road junction, approx MR 918268), particularly, received frequent shelling. Twice, on 23 and 24 Apr, enemy aircraft appeared overhead but were driven off, sustaining some casualties, it was thought. (W.D., H.Q. 11 Cdn Inf Bde, 19-24 Apr 44 and Appendix 10: ...Ops Instr...)

9. Cover from fire and observation was most difficult to obtain. Strict camouflage practices and a minimum of movement, especially by day, were imperative. As one unit diarist put it, the pattern of activity for both Canadians and the enemy was much the same, "...sleep in the morning, warm things up in the afternoon and work all night." Still, the Mt. Cifalco sector remained relatively quiet. For the most part patrols made little contact with the enemy, although they frequently did locate enemy positions which were found not to be continuously occupied.

From time to time enemy mortar and machine gun positions were observed and engaged as targets. (All W.Ds., 14-30 Apr 44)

10. After about a week in the line activity began slowly to increase. On 20 Apr a Perth patrol suffered an unpleasant surprise while investigating some buildings. Just when it seemed that there were no enemy in the vicinity the patrol was fired on. The officer leading the group was killed and one of his men wounded. Next night, 21/22 Apr, the C.B. Highrs relieved the Perths, who then assumed the counter-attack role as reserve regiment. On 21 Apr the Westminsters, who enjoyed a more casualty-free stay in the line than the other units, had the honour of taking the first prisoner, who was "detained" when a German patrol ventured too close to the Canadians. The Germans reciprocated two days later (23 Apr) when they attacked an Ir R.C. two-man post, killing one soldier and capturing the other. Thus the enemy succeeded in identifying their Canadian adversaries ((H.S.) Report No. 20, para 69, p. 31, and W.D., Ir R.C., 23 Apr 44). At this time the flanking formations were relieved. 5 New Zealand Infantry Brigade took over on the left from 28 Brit Inf Bde and on the right 2nd Independent Parachute Brigade relieved 6 NZ Inf Bde. Relief for 11 Cdn Inf Bde Group was then not long in coming. On 24 and 25 Apr members of the 12th South African Brigade began their liaison visits to Canadian headquarters in preparation for the forthcoming takeover. (All W.Ds., 20-25 Apr 44)

11. As April drew to a close there was a further heightening of activity along the sector. On 28 Apr one of the heaviest mortar bombardments, estimated at over 400 bombs fell in the Valvori-Cicora sector, including the Westminsters' "A" Coy area. The Germans, on their side,

showed an increasing interest in the activities and whereabouts of Canadian units. On the 28th, an enemy patrol, in approximately platoon strength, attacked 16 platoon, C.B. Highrs, but withdrew after a brief fire fight and inflicting three casualties. Our own patrols became more aggressive in their search for information. On the night 29/30 Apr, one Ir R.C. patrol, as proof of its boldness entered Valleluce, an enemy area, and brought back the cross from the Church. They also had the satisfaction of reporting that 17 Fd Regt's shoot of the previous day had been successful.

12. Then it was May. Soon it would be time to leave the line again - but not before more casualties were suffered. On 4 May, possibly provoked by an aggressive "C" Coy patrol from the C.B. Highrs, the enemy fired over 500 bombs and shells. This came as a sequel to a short, sharp fire-fight in which the patrol sustained a few casualties. With this as a parting gesture the 11 Cdn Inf Bde retired from the line 5 May 44, relieved by the South Africans, and went into reserve in the Capua and Caserta areas.

13. There remains little more of the story to tell. Training and instructional programmes were carried out at the Brigade rest and training camp⁴ and by the reserve battalion. The supply problem was formidable. It involved the transfer of loads from 15 cwts and jeeps, to mules and thence finally by man-pack up to company positions, all done under cover of darkness. (W.Ds., All units, April 1944 and W.D., H.Q. 11 Cdn Inf Bde April 1944 Appendix 18: 11 Cdn Inf Bde Adm Instr No. 2, 28 Apr 44)

14. In connection with the supply problem "Inferno" Track and "Hove" Dump are of some interest, since two Canadian formations, 1 Cdn Armd Bde and 11 Cdn Inf Bde, were for a time dependant thereon. Inferno Track came into being as a supply route when French forces found that the North Road route⁵ from Acquafondata, MR 9626, to S. Elia, MR 890265, was too open to enemy observation and fire. French engineers built a narrow, twisting, treacherous road following, in part, a former river course. In places there was a gradient of one in five, in other spots the road - sometimes single lane, sometimes double - ran between huge cliffs or again along the edge of sheer drops of five or six hundred feet. Here and there camouflage nets hid the more exposed portions of the road from prying German eyes. Traffic was restricted to small vehicles, jeeps and 15 cwts, which passed to and fro under strict control. Sometimes the track widened into areas where troops in transit could harbour temporarily. There was room too for a casualty clearing station, a water point, a recovery post and at the "fighting end" of Inferno, an important supply dump. This was "Hove" Dump, MR 910248, established in a sandy-bottomed, 100 foot wide stretch. From this point, forward units drew petrol, ammunition and supplies which were carried by a mule and man-pack relay system. As the Ir R.C. diarist described it, "this is the most picturesque front but the hardest to supply". (W.D., 12 Cdn Armd Regt, 5 Apr 44; W.D., Ir R.C. 13 and 15 Apr 44; H.S. Report No. 55, para 36; and Canadian Military Photographs, Public Relations Branch, Hist Sec File Nos. 6071-6075)

CONCLUSION

15. During the period under discussion 11 Cdn Inf Bde Group played a useful but unspectacular holding role, relieving and being relieved by other groups as a great striking force was being concentrated for the offensive which led to the capture of Rome.

16. This report was prepared by Lt. C.A. Larson.

(C.P. Stacey) Colonel

Director Historical Section

Casualty Statistics

Infantry Units - 11 Cdn Inf Bde

(9 Apr - 5 May 44)

DATE	UNIT	KILLED		WOUNDED		P.W.		TOTAL	
		Offr	OR	Offr	OR	Offr	OR	Offr	OR
9 Apr - 5 May 44	C.B. Highrs	-	2	2	29	-	-	2	31
9 Apr - 5 May 44	Ir R.C.	1	5	-	33	-	1	1	39
9 Apr - 5 May 44	Perth R.	1	10	-	26	-	-	1	36
9 Apr - 5 May 44	Westmr R.	-	6	-	9	-	-	-	15
		2	23	2	97	-	1	4	121
		Total casualties - all ranks 125							

(H.S.) 133.065 (D 346-9),
Casualties - Italian Campaign,
3 Sep 43 - 8 May 45