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Directorate of History
National Defence Headquarters
Ottawa, Canada
K1A 0K2

July 1986

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CANCELLED

Triplicate

29
31 May 41

Visit to Units of the CANADIAN FORESTRY CORPS,
Scotland.
Notes on the History and Work of this Corps.

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Date: _____

NOV 13 1986

Canadian Military Headquarters,
2 Cockspur Street, S.W.1,
London, ENGLAND.

The Director,
Historical Section,
General Staff,
National Defence Headquarters,
Ottawa, CANADA.

1. A further report is presented. This report concerns a visit recently made by me to a number of units of the CANADIAN FORESTRY CORPS now at work in Scotland. In addition to reporting the results of my observations during this tour, it contains a brief summary of the development of this Corps, based mainly on reading of C.M.H.Q. files, and designed to supply the Official Historian with an outline which may save him some time and trouble in dealing with this subject.
2. Captain W.G. ABEL, Public Relations Officer, C.M.H.Q., had arranged a Press visit to the Canadian Forestry Corps beginning on 14 May 41, and I considered that this would be a useful opportunity for me to see something of the work of this Corps. With the approval of the S.G.C., C.M.H.Q., therefore, I joined the party and accompanied it on its round of visits. During the tour I also found an opportunity of visiting (in company with Lieut. AUDRAIN, the official photographer) the detachment of No. 1 TUNWELLING COMPANY, R.C.E., which is now at work on a special task near KINGUSSIE. The work of this detachment will be the subject of a subsequent separate report. As its activities are secret, the newspapermen of the party did not visit it.

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VISITS TO FORESTRY UNITS

3. The Press party, which was conducted by Capt. Abel and accompanied by Lt. Audrain, consisted in the beginning of Mr. ROSS MUNRO, who as mentioned in earlier reports is an accredited and uniformed Canadian War Correspondent and ordinarily represents the CANADIAN PRESS at Headquarters, Canadian Corps; Mr. JOHN BIRD, of the Winnipeg TRIBUNE, representing the SOUTHERN PAPERS; Mr. NORMAN FRENCH, representing the TIMBER TRADES JOURNAL; and Messrs. R.J. WILMOT and A.E. ALTHERR, representing the CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION. The group left HUSTON STATION by train on the evening of 13 May 41 and arrived at BLAIR ATHOLL about 0800 hrs the following morning.

4. BLAIR ATHOLL is a most charming stone-built village in GLEN GARRY. Up this valley pass both the main road and the line of the L.M.S. Railway to INVERNESS, with considerable mountains rising on either side. A few miles below is the forbidding PASS OF KILLIECRANKIE, the scene of the memorable action of 1689 in which CLAVERHOUSE ("Bonnie Dundee") lost his life and the plug-bayonet proved its inefficiency. Close to the village is BLAIR CASTLE, the seat of the DUKE OF ATHOLL, but now, we were told, full of evacuated children.

5. BLAIR ATHOLL was the first station of the Headquarters, Canadian Forestry Corps, in the present war. The Technical Equipment and Supply Section, and the Transport Section, C.F.C., still are located at this point; and in addition No. 5 Company, C.F.C., is stationed here and has its mill and quarters on the outskirts of the village.

6. At the railway station we were met by Captain J.F. MACFARLANE, Staff Captain, H.Q., C.F.C., who accompanied us throughout our tour. He conducted the party to the Atholl Arms Hotel, where after breakfast we were received by Brigadier-General J.B. WHITE, D.S.O., E.D., the Officer Commanding Canadian Forestry Corps, who was accompanied by Lt.-Col. C.B.F. JONES, C.F.C., Assistant Director

of Timber Operations. The General treated us with great kindness and outlined to us the circuit which he had arranged for the party, beginning with a day in the vicinity of BLAIR ATHOLL, followed by a day in the ABOYNE region (DORRIDE), a day in the NAIEN region, and finally a day devoted to H., C.F.C., and the companies in its vicinity. We began the programme almost immediately, with a visit to No. 5 Company, C.F.C.

7. This Company was the first company of the C.F.C. to arrive in the United Kingdom. It arrived on the S.S. "Pasteur", along with the Headquarters, C.F.C., as part of T.C. 8, which as noted in my Report No. 1 disembarked on 25 Dec 40.

FORESTRY CORPS OPERATIONS IN AND NEAR BLAIR ATHOLL

8. Our first visit was to No. 5 Company's sawmill, which is situated just west of the village of BLAIR ATHOLL and on the north side of the BLAIR ATHOLL - DALHINNIE road. This is a situation of really astonishing beauty. The men of this company work against a magnificent background of Highland scenery; just above them to the north is the FOREST OF ATHOLL, in the lower skirts of which their loggers are at work; in the distance to the north and east are the splendid snow-covered peaks of BEN VRACKIE and BEINN A'GHLO; while close at hand the turrets of BLAIR CASTLE rise among the trees. I found myself wishing that a painter was at hand to depict the Canadian foresters at work before this tremendous back-drop; for no photograph could do justice to the scene.

9. The mill building is sided with log slabs. As this sawmill is of standard type (Lt.-Col. JONES explained to me that the C.F.C. has adopted the principle of making its mills, as far as possible, all precisely similar, with interchangeable parts) a description of it will serve to describe the mills used by the Corps in general. The officers of the C.F.C. emphasize that fact that the mills were

ordered in accordance with the Corps' own design, and that they have been set up by the units themselves.

10. The power unit is a 180-horse-power International Diesel motor which drives all the mill's machinery, though the company also operates one or two small "re-saw" mills which have their own power-plants. The "headsaw", the saw which makes the first cut in the logs, is circular, as indeed are nearly all the saws in use by the C.F.C. Beyond the headsaw is an "edger" for removing the untrimmed edges of the rough lumber, and beyond this a pair of small saws which serve to cut the boards to the length required. At the far end of the mill is a "re-saw" for working small pieces which otherwise would be wasted, and as just noted there are other re-saws outside the main mill altogether. All the machinery mentioned was brought from Canada.

11. At the west end of the mill building is a "log-pond" or "tank" filled with water, into which the logs are tipped for washing. This is the more essential as they get very muddy while being dragged along the tracks from the "bush", and pick up many substances likely to injure the saws. From the pond they are carried up into the mill on an endless chain, and in due time are clamped to the power-operated "saw-bench" which feeds them into the headsaw.

12. The timber dealt with by the C.F.C. appears to be mainly Scots Pine and Larch. At BLAIR ATHOLL, however, we saw some exceptionally large sticks of Douglas Fir (possibly saved up for our visit) which were as much as 53 inches in diameter. I was told that this timber had been about 55 years old when it was cut. I watched some of these very thick logs pass through the mill. Their diameter was too great for the headsaw; and after it had made its cut the sawyer and his mates had to finish the job with axes, which they did with great expertness. No. 5 Company was recruited in the region of PONT ASENUR, Ontario, and the saw team in this mill had worked together in a mill there in civil life. I was told

that there were many such cases in the C.F.C.

13. No. 5 Company is especially fortunate in one respect. An open grove of trees between the mill and the road affords good cover for its piles of sawn lumber. Such piles are in ordinary circumstances very difficult to camouflage, and one might expect them to appear a tempting target to an enemy airman. This is the only case which I saw during this tour where the lumber-piles could be said to be effectively concealed.

14. A further advantage afforded by the situation of No. 5 Company is the fact that both road and rail transport for its sawn lumber are available practically beside the mill. Lt.-Col. Jones remarked however that he would be better pleased if the British authorities made ^{greater} use of these facilities to remove the lumber, instead of letting it accumulate at the spot where it is produced.

15. We next visited No. 5 Company's camp ("Black Island Camp") which is located a short distance west of the mill and on the opposite side of the road, between the GARRY River and the railway. This was formerly a summer camp for the SCOTTISH HORSE, and is subject to the disadvantage of being very exposed, the huts being completely in the open with no vestige of cover. The huts are now being protected from bomb-blast by a locally-devised expedient: each hut being surrounded by a sort of double stockade of slabs enclosing a mixture of sand and sawdust. The huts are heated very effectively by Quebec heaters, 600 of which, we were told, were brought by the Corps from Canada. We visited the sick-bay, where the only patients were three men with cases of trench-mouth, and were taken over an unfinished Medical Reception Depot, designed to serve two companies, which will evidently be a very commodious and well-equipped establishment.

16. In the afternoon we visited the other side of the company's operations - the work of felling and logging. It should be explained that a Canadian Forestry Company is designed to be a self-contained organization for the production of lumber, from the stage at which

the tree is felled to that at which the finished lumber is ready for use in building. It follows that the company works in two main sections, one "in the bush", felling the trees and moving the logs out, and one in the mill, turning the logs into lumber.

WAR ESTABLISHMENT, FORESTRY COMPANY

17. It is convenient at this point to describe the War Establishment of a Forestry Company, C.F.C. The ~~Provisional~~ Establishment (CDN/IV/1942/12A/1, dated 30 ~~Nov~~ 41) provides for a total of 194 all ranks, of whom six are officers: one Major as Commanding Officer, one Captain as Second in Command, one Adjutant, and three Subalterns "for Timber operations". Of these last, one normally is in charge in the bush, one in charge of the mill, and one is technical officer. There are 12 Sergeants, of whom two are Mill Foremen and five Bush Foremen, one a Blacksmith, one a M.T. Sergeant, one a Sergeant Cook, and two Assistant Instructors. It is not necessary or desirable to rehearse all the details here, as the Official Historian will have all War Establishments easily available to him; but it may be noted that the list of rank and file includes the following tradesmen: 2 Millwrights; 2 Sawyers, Forestry; 1 Electrician; 3 Motor Mechanics, one of whom is a Corporal; 1 Carpenter; 1 Plumber; 1 Shoemaker; and 1 Tailor. Among the mass of non-tradesmen, the following groups are conspicuous: 20 Logmakers, 30 Rollers and Chainmen, 10 Road Cutters, 14 Drivers I.C. (Internal Construction).

18. It will be noted that a Forestry Company is a singularly self-contained unit, a community complete in itself, almost like a medieval village; and the officers of the C.F.C. are tremendously proud of this aspect of their corps, and like to call attention to the number of handymen in its ranks and the fact that it is difficult to provide a task which a Forestry Company cannot find men to do.

19. In the FOREST OF ATHOLL a few hundred yards above the mill we saw Scots Pine being felled with axe, saw and wedge, and the heavy logs being dragged out to the edge of the woods by "cats" - caterpillar tractors - equipped with winches. When more open ground was reached the logs were taken over by sulkies - heavy two-wheeled contrivances, also drawn by caterpillar tractors, to which the logs are fastened by wire ropes for dragging to the mill. Photographs taken by Lieut. AUDRAIN and Capt. ABEL illustrate this equipment and procedure, as well as many other phases of the work.

20. At another felling-site, somewhat to the east towards GLEN TILT, we saw a "side-jammer" or "jack-ladder", not unlike a pair of dockyard sheer-legs, lately erected for loading logs on to lorries. Near the summit of GALLOWS HILL, overlooking BLAIR CASTLE, we saw one man of the company engaged in "high-rigging" (i.e., trimming and topping a tree while it still stands).

21. Later in the afternoon we visited the establishment of the Technical Equipment and Supply Section, C.F.C., located alongside the railway not far from No. 5 Company's mill. This section is commanded by Major W.S.M. HERRCHMER. We saw the warehouse in which spares are kept, a large wooden building constructed by the Corps. We then passed on to the new transport garage nearby, a slab-sided building with a concrete floor, now nearly completed and likewise entirely built by the C.F.C. A vulcanizing shop is adjacent.

PRESE CONFERENCE

22. Before dinner General WHITE held a sort of informal "press conference" for the correspondents, to give them an opportunity of asking questions, and I attended.

23. Comparing the work of the Canadian Forestry Corps in the present war with that done in the first Great War, the general pointed out that the C.F.C is now a combatant unit, which was not then the case. He also recalled that whereas in the last war many horses were employed, so far in the present one the Corps has used none, while internal combustion engines have replaced steam as mill

