

[ORIGINAL DRAFT CHAPTER FOR RCAC History]

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Chapter 16: The Early Cold War and Korea, 1945-1953

Introduction: The Cold War

Readers have already examined accounts of the First and Second World Wars and the parts played by them by units of the Royal Canadian Armoured Corps. These are well-defined conflicts: they have precise start and end dates, a readily identifiable enemy, and clear conclusions based on military achievements. The Cold War, and the Corps' role in it, has very different characteristics than the First and Second World Wars: the start and end dates are debatable, the nature of the enemy's motives and methods were obscure, and there was no decisive military conclusion. It would thus be easy to dismiss the events of the 1946-1990 period as a series of disconnected incidents in obscure parts of the Third World, or merely as a struggle between the Soviet and American superpowers which only slightly involved Canada.

Though at the time there appeared to be no connection between NATO's Central Region in Europe and UN peacekeeping operations in Cyprus and Sinai, we can now see obvious NATO and Canadian national security policy links between them. While the 1970 October Crisis appeared to hostage James Cross, the CBC, and civil rights activists to be "a bunch of kids trying to make a revolution", there were serious threats to the continued existence of Canada as a nation. And while it appeared to many that the Canadian Army's efforts to implement tactical nuclear warfighting doctrine was nothing short of folly, or at best justification of equipment purchase, the forging of a capable Canadian mailed fist was part of a successful effort to achieve Canadian Cold War objectives. The most important of these objectives was to deter war and thus preserve the security and prosperity of the Canadian people.

And what of that war which we worke so hard to prevent? The operations and training of the Corps during the Cold War, whether in the mud of Camp Gagetown and Meaford, on the wintry Alaskan Highway, in the Kimche-laced hills of Korea, in the Troodos Mountains in Cyprus, the desert wastes of Sinai, in the streets of Ottawa in 1970, and in the mist-shrouded land along the Weser River in West Germany, were all conducted under the

darkest shadow ever to fall across the population of this planet: the possibility of global warfare involving the mass use of thermonuclear weapons.

It would be useful to recall the nearly incomprehensible destructive power of these weapons. The American 10.4 megaton bomb tested at Eniwetok Atoll in 1952 blew a 200-foot deep and one mile-wide crater in the lagoon. The Soviet 59 megaton 'monster bomb' exploded on the Arctic island of Novaya Zemlya in October 1961 was even more potent. Such weapons were mounted on constantly-alerted missile delivery systems which could reach targets in Canada in 15 minutes if launched by submarine or from Cuba, and in 30 minutes if launched over the North Pole.

If war in the thermonuclear age was a frightening prospect, there was broad resolve in Canada and western allies that we could never surrender to the totalitarian system threatening the freedom of the western democracies. Left-wing protesters, scared into submission by Soviet nuclear might always provided two alternatives in their propaganda: suicide or surrender. Canada and the West chose a third alternative: to deter aggression and, if deterrence failed, to fight. The methods were different, and the timing was protracted over 40 years, but the spirit of resolve was the same as in the First and Second World Wars.

Fortunately there never was a need to fight on a large scale. However, this did not mean that the members of the Royal Canadian Armoured Corps did not participate in Cold War operations. The Cold War had several distinct attributes. The first, already mentioned, was the nuclear threat in its variety of forms, and the constant tension generated by the system of detrence in mutual assured destruction. There was also a perpetual atmosphere of crisis in which relatively minor disputes, known as 'brushfire wars', could escalate into confrontations between the Western nations and the Soviet Bloc always with a risk of producing nuclear involvement. In effect, the history of the Cold War is the history of a series of crises and their management.

The deployment of NATO conventional and nuclear deterrent forces throughout Europe with the heaviest concentration in West Germany, produced an armed stalemate. This situation prompted the Soviet leadership to use a variety of alternative means to pursue their objectives. These included a combination of espionage, propaganda, subversion, sabotage, international and local terrorism, low-level military harassment, Third World proxy wars, and political intimidation backed up with massive conventional and nuclear military forces. Events like space exploration, the Olympics, and even the Spassky-Fisher chess matches were considered extensions of the Cold War in this Manichean struggle.

It is fashionable for some analysts of the period to undermine the triumph of the West's successful but at times flawed Cold War efforts. They assert that it cannot be conclusively demonstrated whether deterrence "worked" or not, hence military force, particularly

conventional armoured and mechanized forces, had little or no utility. The common sense answer is obvious: the Soviet leadership chose at specific points in history not to initiate war against the West or otherwise interfere with the legitimate conduct of Western policies. Something affected these decisions. If it can be demonstrated that the West's armed forces (conventional and nuclear) played any part in these calculations, deterrence did in fact work. We have clear-cut examples: Suez 1956, Berlin 1958-61, Cuba 1962, Cyprus 1964, and the Operation RYAN crisis in November 1983. The members of the RCAC were players in the collective deterrent and crisis management efforts, both in Europe and the Third World. They should thus draw some satisfaction from their contribution to Alliance efforts to stave off Armageddon and preserve peace and security for the Canadian people.

The Transition to Peace

The vast Canadian military machine created in the crucible of the seven year long Second World War was dismantled almost overnight. Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King was not a fan of having large armies around and sought to provide Canada with a 'peace dividend': a vast welfare state with opportunity and ample employment for all. The two Canadian corps of the First Canadian Army and its independent tank brigades would leave the bulk of their kit in Western Europe for disposal. This included all of the tanks, most of the tank destroyers, and many of the armoured cars.

The Canadian Army would once again be split into a regular force and a reserve force. The national strategic concept was based on the mobilization of an army very similar in size to that generated during the Second World War. Consequently, the regular force was originally supposed to act as a training cadre for the projected huge reserve force. The training cadre was hardly larger than a brigade group. It had three light infantry battalions with no APCs (the Kangaroos were all scrapped), a towed artillery regiment, and two armoured regiments: the RCD (based at Camp Petawawa) and the Strathconas (located at Camp Sarcee in Calgary). The reserve force included some 25 regiments, though manning of the reserve force as a whole for this period does not appear to have exceeded 17% of authorized numbers.

The two regular regiments used some leftover RAM II's for a short time until 1948 when Canada purchased 294 M4A2E8 tanks, also known as the General Sherman Mk. III AY(British), and 32 M-24 Chaffees from the United States. After the RCD and Strathconas were re-equipped, the remaining vehicles were parceled out to the reserve units, usually four to six per unit. Some units were also equipped with war-built Staghound armoured cars for

the recon role. Other units even had Universal Carriers, though it is unclear what their employment was: tank surrogate? APC surrogate? The thinking of the day was that this array of vehicles would be used to maintain tank troop leading and maintenance skills. There does not appear to have been any larger plan to train at any level higher than squadron. Despite this humble existence, the Canadian Armoured Corps formally became the Royal Canadian Armoured Corps in 1946. A new cap badge was authorized. It depicted a mailed fist with four encircling arrows aimed at an objective and surmounted by the King's Crown.

The Corps' leadership, determined that there would not be a relapse to the pre-war state, converted the former AFV School at Camp Borden into a 'Brain Trust' of sorts. Armoured doctrine and technological innovations emanated from the Armoured School despite the limitations imposed by the equipment. Experienced officers and NCOs were hand picked for this duty for the survival of the Corps lay in its ability to be agile. Agility demanded good people who could mentor the next generation.

A similar plan unfolded at the Staff College in Kingston. It was critical that the Army retain the experience and lessons learned from the hard-fought war years. Experimental field formations were created by the Directorate of Military Training in consultation with the Armoured School so that the Army's future leaders understood the interplay between units and formations on the battlefield. Some of these paper formations influenced future Corps development: for example, the Staff College trained with a 'Divisional Regiment RCAC' a predecessor to the 1960s Light Armoured Regiment. This unit had M-24 Chaffee tanks, and APCs based on a light tank chassis and scout cars, as well as portable anti-tank weapons. Though Canada would not field such a formation for twenty years, the brain power was there to generate it in the late 1940s.

Continental Defence

The first five years of the Cold War produced a great effort between Canada and the United States in continental defence. The wartime Permanent Joint Board on Defence (PJBD), which consisted of Canadian and American military and diplomatic representatives, functioned as a clearing house for joint operations and facilities. The advent of the Atomic Bomb and the intercontinental means to deliver it redoubled continental defence planning efforts. Consequently, the highly secret Military Cooperation Committee was created in 1946. The MCC was the link between the Canadian joint planners and the American joint

planners. Its product was the Canada-US Basic Security Plan. The Basic Security Plan was designed to examine every facet of the defence of North America.

Intelligence and future analysis conducted by the MCC indicated that there was serious potential in wartime for the Soviets to use a portion of its eight airborne divisions to seize the Second World War air staging routes in the northwest and northeast. From these sites, Soviet copies of the B-29 nuclear bomber, called the TU-4 BULL, and replicas of the V-2 ballistic missile could then operate against strategic targets in the industrialized southern part of the continent.

Canada and the United States created several mobile striking forces. The Canadian Mobile Striking Force essentially was the bulk of the regular Canadian Army. Specifically designed for Arctic operations, the MSF was an air-portable infantry formation that could be broken down into sub-units. Because of the wide territory the MSF would have to handle, it could not cover everything. One primary target was the Northwest Staging Route, a series of airfields that paralleled the Alaska-Canadian (ALCAN) Highway, an improved two-lane road when went from Edmonton to Fairbanks.

Planning for the defence of the ALCAN Highway was handled by Western Command. The plan assumed that part of the MSF would be employed along the Highway, probably to deploy by parachute and glider to disrupt any lodgements that had been identified by the B-25 Mitchell tactical support squadrons. The Strathconas were tasked to move along the Highway as far north as possible, make contact with the enemy as he was moving south, observe and delay him until engineers could blow most of the one hundred-plus bridges and culverts. B-25's were to have be FAC'd in to disrupt any build up and movement.

By the mid-1950s it became clear that intercontinental jet bomber would make such a move by the enemy obsolete. Be that as it may, the Militia units of Western Command and the Strathconas had a task which they could train to and maintain recce skills. The use of armoured units in delay operations was a part of the Staff College syllabus and the ALCAN defence made a good case study: even Canada's Normandy adversary, the infamous SS General Kurt Meyer, was brought in to consult with the syndicates from his prison cell in Dorchester, New Brunswick!

NATO

By 1948 it was clear to Canadian and other Western policymakers that the United Nations had failed as a guarantour of world peace and security. This organization became a cynical forum for the Soviets Union to use against their 'Capitalist Running Dog'

adversaries. Communism was on the march: there were covert campaigns and subversive activities germinating in the newly-freed countries of Western Europe. Stalin would not let humanitarian aid into Eastern Europe. There were prolonged debates over the fate of occupied Germany and in particular, the city of Berlin. In 1948 there was a Soviet-led and supported coup d'etat in Czechoslovakia. Later in 1948, the Soviets moved tanks onto the Berlin access routes and the Berlin Blockade was on, only to be relieved by the massive Berlin Airlift. It was in this environment that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was born in 1949.

The NATO military alliance included Canada, who had a stake in the new peace and had a growing confidence as a player in international affairs after the success of the Second World War. The only way peace could be kept in Europe was to deter the Soviet Union. That meant creating a standing military force in peacetime, deploying it to Europe, and maintaining it as long as necessary. The planning stages of such a force were well under way when Communist forces invaded South Korea in 1950. The West saw this as a feint to draw resources away from Europe, so the NATO deterrent force deployment was accelerated in 1951.

The main RCAC effort during the Cold War years was in Europe where Canadian armoured units contributed to the NATO Integrated Force, later known as the Sword and Shield force. Canada chose to commit a division to NATO's Central Region as part of a mixed conventional-nuclear collective defence effort to deter the crushing number of Soviet divisions kept at the ready east of the Iron Curtain. Due to a number of procedural problems, the Korean commitment (25 Brigade) and policy decisions, one third of the division was committed to Europe in peacetime instead of the whole formation. Some thought was given to providing a Canadian armoured division of one armoured brigade and one motorized brigade because of the smaller number of personnel in such an organization, but this was vetoed by Army HQ in part due to the fact that no Main Battle Tank had been selected to replace the Shermans and the Chaffees that were on hand.

The first formation to arrive in Europe was 27 Canadian Infantry Brigade Group. A total force formation consisting of Militia and Regular personnel, 27 Brigade's armoured element consisted of 'C' Sqn RCD which was in part based on what were called 'Y' Troops. These were composite units of Militia personnel which were in turn formed into C Sqn. Initially 27 Brigade was located in Hanover, and then it moved to permanent camps near Soest. It worked under I(British) Corps, usually as part of a British division. The armoured regiment belonging to the Canadian Brigade Group in Germany was 'stabled' at Iserlohn in Fort Beausejour.

This unit was originally equipped with the Centurion Mk.III tank in 1952. The decision to equip the RCAC with Centurion was the product of much Anglo-American-Canadian wrangling. The Army's first choice for re-equipping the RCAC (regular and Militia) were three division's worth of the American M-48, with the M-47 as a back up. Technical and production problems prevented delivery of the vehicles in the 1951-52 time frame that was required and the order was canceled. Eyes then turned to focus on Centurion, which had by this time developed an outstanding reputation in Korea: even the Americans were contemplating an order totaling 1000 vehicles.

The situation then moved into the political ether. Larger issues relating to Britain's war time debt to Canada were drawn in. The British were desperate for hard currency and the Canadian government worked out an arrangement so that Canada-built F-86 fighters would be given to the Royal Air Force, Canada would buy Centurions, and the British would then buy naval weapons from Canada. Negotiations started for 280 Centurions. Note that this figure appears to have been pulled out of thin air.

The Army, represented by Brigadier Bob Moncel, approached the British and indicated that the actual requirement was for 420 Centurions: 20 for 27 Brigade, 140 for two armoured regiments and training facilities in Canada, and 120 was a war stock. The bureaucrats in the Department of Defence Production hastily signed a deal for 47 tanks. British officers then told their Canadian counterparts that if more orders were not forthcoming, production plants would close. This prompted a Canadian re-assessment.

The British-born and trained CGS, Lieutenant-General Guy Simonds, then concluded that 850 Centurions were now required for the Canadian Army: 609 for two infantry divisions plus an armoured brigade plus a Militia armoured division, and 241 as war stocks. The CGS recommended that the first batch of 300 should be acquired now, and the rest later. The final number was 347 and financial problems prevented further acquisitions. The acquired vehicle was the Mk. V version of the Centurion.

In the wake of the Centurion acquisition, Simonds reorganized the Army. There were now four brigade groups and a division HQ. The basic combat organization of each brigade group consisted of three motorized infantry battalions, an armoured squadron, and a towed artillery regiment. Though Simonds and others felt otherwise, doctrine for armour employment in the 1950s was wedded to the notion that the infantry in West Germany would fight a covering force battle forward of the built up area of the Ruhr and prevent the Soviet hordes from crossing the Rhine until NATO could fully mobilize. The Centurion squadron would therefore support the infantry, which would be in near-static defensive positions. Most of the early NATO exercises in which 27 Brigade were involved with, like 'Hold Fast' (1952) and 'Javelin V' (1953) revolved around these concepts.

Korea

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