CANSOFCOM EDUCATION & RESEARCH CENTRE

THE CANADIAN SPECIAL AIR SERVICE COMPANY

COLONEL (RETIRED) BERND HORN, PhD

THE CANSOFCOM EDUCATION & RESEARCH CENTRE

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4. Record CANSOFCOM's classified history;
5. Coordinate the publication of CANSOF educational material; and
6. Support CANSOFCOM's "up and out" Communication Strategy.

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FOREWORD

It is with great pleasure that I introduce *The Canadian Special Air Service Company*, which represents our latest monograph in the Canadian Special Operations Forces Command (CANSOFCOM) Education and Research Centre (ERC) series. This publication is another step toward capturing and promulgating the history of Canada's special operations experiences. After all, SOF culture is rooted in, and takes strength from, the achievements of those individuals and organizations that laid the foundation for special operations in Canada.

In this monograph, Dr. Bernd Horn provides a detailed account of the Canadian Special Air Service Company's short and extremely interesting history, which captures the historic resistance to SOF organizations, and also the innovative, resilient efforts of those attempting to create them. The Canadian Special Air Service Company is a distinct SOF entity that, although ephemeral in its existence, demonstrates the continuing spark within the Canadian military to maintain a special component. Specifically, the Canadian Air Service Company was representative of an organization of intrepid individuals within the institution who not only sought additional challenge but who were also able to rise to the demands of those special organizations.

As always, our intent at the ERC is to provide interesting educational material that will assist individuals in the Command, as well as those external to it, learn more about human behaviour, special operations, and military theory and practice. I hope you find this publication informative and of value to your operational role. In addition, it is intended to spark discussion, reflection and debate. Please do not hesitate to contact the ERC should you have comments or topics that you would like to see addressed as part of the CANSOFCOM monograph series.

Dr. Emily Spencer
Series Editor and Director CANSOFCOM ERC

THE CANADIAN SPECIAL AIR SERVICE COMPANY

Admiral Bill McRaven, a former commander of the United States Special Operations Command, has stated that we are currently living in the "Golden Age of SOF [Special Operations Forces]."[1] Undeniably, most people recognize the acronym of SOF and can list a number of highly publicized units, such as "SEALs," "Delta," "SAS," and "JTF 2" to name a few. However, an understanding of those historical organizations that are part of the national SOF legacy is much rarer. In fact, many, if not most, even within the Canadian SOF community, are unaware of the Canadian Special Air Service Company (Cdn SAS Coy), which took its name from its much more famous and well-known British exemplar.

This lack of recognition is not surprising. After all, the organization had an almost ephemeral existence, being created in 1948 and vanishing into oblivion a year later. Furthermore, the understanding of SOF and special operations has evolved dramatically from its contemporary inception and practice in World War II (WWII) to the current day. And, finally, the creation of the Cdn SAS Coy is surrounded by a degree of perfidy. Originally, the Army staff officers who pushed for the organization and the capability it represented packaged the sub-unit as a very benevolent organization centred on aid to the civil authority and assistance to the general public; in reality it was closer to the tip of the spear.

Interestingly, the contradictory description of its role should have raised red flags with anyone with an understanding of military history due to the chosen name, which based on its WWII namesake clearly implied a commando warfighting focus. But, it did not. Nonetheless, the true nature of intent became clearly obvious once the government granted authority for its creation. At that

point a fundamental, if not contentious, shift in its orientation became evident – one that was never fully resolved prior to the sub-unit's demise.

The cessation of hostilities in the spring of 1945 not only brought WWII to an end, but also closed the chapter on Canada's premiere airborne unit, namely the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion.[2] The airborne unit was formally disbanded on 30 September 1945, and no immediate plans were made for its replacement. The long costly global struggle had taken its toll and a debt-ridden and war-weary government was intent on a post-war army which was anything but extravagant. Moreover, senior military commanders foresaw no role for paratroopers or any form of special operations in the post-war Canadian military.

Notwithstanding the military's achievements during the war, the Canadian Government had but two requirements for its peace-time army. Firstly, it was to consist of a representative group of all arms of the service. Secondly, its primary purpose was to provide a small but highly trained and skilled professional force, which in time of conflict could expand and train the citizen soldiers who would fight that war.[3] Within this framework paratroopers and any form of special operations had limited relevance. Not surprisingly, little concern was shown for the potential loss of Canada's hard earned airborne or special operations experience.[4] In this austere climate of "minimum peace-time obligations," the fate of Canada's airborne soldiers was dubious at best.[5] The training of new paratroopers, at the Canadian Parachute Training Centre in Shilo, had ceased as early as May 1945.[6] The school itself faced a tenuous future. Its survival hung in the air pending the final decision on the structure of the post-war army.

Nevertheless, the parachute school, largely on its own initiative, worked to keep abreast of airborne developments and attempted

to perpetuate the links with American and British airborne units which had been forged in the furnace of World War II. The efforts of individuals such as Major George Flint, the Commanding Officer of the airborne training centre, became instrumental in maintaining a degree of airborne expertise. He selectively culled the ranks of the disbanding 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion and chose the best from the pool of personnel who had decided to remain in the Active Force to act as instructors and staff for his training establishment. "No one knew what we were supposed to do," recalled Lieutenant Bob Firlotte, one of the individuals hand-picked to serve at the training centre, "and we received absolutely no direction from Army Headquarters."[7] However, Flint and his staff filled the vacuum. Lieutenant Ken Arril, the Officer Commanding the Technical Tactical Investigation Section (TTIS) in 1945-1946, stated that he was primarily focused on making contacts and keeping up to date with the latest airborne developments.[8] These prescient efforts were soon to be rewarded.

The perpetuation of links with Canada's closest allies, as well as the importance of staying abreast of the latest tactical developments in modern warfare, specifically air-transportability, provided the breath of life that Flint and other airborne advocates were looking for. A 1947 National Defence Headquarters (NDHQ) study revealed that British peacetime policy was based on training and equipping all infantry formations to be air-transportable.[9] Furthermore, closer discussions revealed that both the Americans and the British would welcome an Airborne Establishment in Canada that would be capable of "filling in the gaps in their knowledge." These "gaps" included the problem of standardization of equipment between Britain and the United States, and the need for experimental research into cold weather conditions. To the Allies, Canada was seen as the ideal intermediary for both.[10]

It was not lost on the Canadian study team that cooperation with its closest defence partners would allow Canada to benefit from an exchange of information on the latest defence developments and doctrine. For the airborne advocates, a test facility was not a parachute unit, but it would allow the Canadian military to stay in the game. During the interim period, NDHQ considered various configurations for an airborne research and development centre and/or parachute training school. In the end, for the sake of efficiency of manpower and resources, National Defence Headquarters decided that both entities should be incorporated into a single Canadian Joint Army/Air Training Centre. As a result, on 15 August 1947, NDHQ authorized the formation of the Joint Air School (JAS), in Rivers, Manitoba.[11]

For the airborne advocates the JAS became the "foot in the door." The military command now entrusted the Joint Air School with the retention of skills required for airborne operations, for both the Army and the RCAF. Its specific mandate included:

1. Research in Airportability of Army personnel and equipment;

2. User Trials of equipment, especially under cold weather conditions;

3. Limited Development and Assessment of Airborne equipment; and

4. Training of Paratroop volunteers; training in Airportability of personnel and equipment; training in maintenance of air; advanced training of Glider pilots in exercises with troops; and training in some of the uses of light aircraft.[12]

More important, the JAS, which was later officially renamed the Canadian Joint Air Training Centre (CJATC), provided the seed from which airborne or other organizations could grow.[13]

This potential opportunity soon became evident. Once the permanent structure of the Army was established in 1947, the impetus for expanding capability began to stir within the Joint Air School. The growth manifested itself in the form of a proposal supported by Army Headquarters in Ottawa, in May 1947, for a Canadian Special Air Service Company.[14] This organization was to be an integral sub-unit of the Army component of the JAS. Its purpose was defined in June of the same year as: filling a need to perform Army, inter-service, and public duties such as Army/Air tactical research and development; demonstrations to assist with Army/Air training; Airborne Firefighting; Search and Rescue; and Aid to the Civil Power.[15] Its development, however, was surreptitious.

The initial proposal prescribed a clearly defined role. The Army, which sponsored the establishment of the fledgling organization, portrayed the Cdn SAS Coy's inherent mobility as a definite asset to the public at large for domestic operations. A military assessment eloquently expressed the benefit of the unique sub-unit in terms of its potential benefit to the public. It explained that the specially trained company would provide an "efficient life and property saving organization capable of moving from its base to any point in Canada in ten to fifteen hours."[16] The official Department of National Defence (DND) Report for 1948 reinforced this sentiment. Its rationale for the establishment of the Cdn SAS Coy was the cooperation "with the R.C.A.F. [Royal Canadian Air Force] in the air search-rescue duties required by the International Civil Aviation Organization agreement."[17]

The proposed training plan further supported this benevolent image. The training cycle consisted of four phases broken down as follows:

1. Tactical Research and Development (parachute related work and fieldcraft skills);

2. Airborne Firefighting;

3. Air Search and Rescue; and

4. Mobile Aid to the Civil Power (crowd control, first aid, military law).[18]

Conspicuously absent was any evidence of commando or specialist training which the organization's name innately implied. After all, the Cdn SAS Coy was actually titled after the British wartime Special Air Service (SAS) that had earned a reputation for daring commando type raids behind enemy lines.[19] As such, the name of the Canadian sub-unit was a total contradiction to its stated role. In addition, the name was not at all in consonance with the four phases of allocated training. Something was clearly amiss. Either the sub-unit was named incorrectly or its operational and training focus was misrepresented. Initially, no one seemed to notice, or care.

Several months later, in September 1947, the Director of Weapons and Development forwarded the request for the new organization to the Deputy Chief of the General Staff. This submission affixed two additional roles to the Cdn SAS Coy. One was "public service in the event of a national catastrophe." The other was the "provision of a nucleus for expansion into parachute battalions." Despite the additional duties, the memorandum reinforced, "This [SAS] Company is required immediately for training as it is these troops who will provide the manpower for the large programme of test and development that must be carried out by the Tactical Research and Development Wing." It further outlined the requirement for the Cdn SAS Coy to "provide the demonstration team for all demonstrations within and outside the School."[20] Once again there was no emphasis on SOF or a warfighting orientation.

However, "mission creep" or perhaps "commander's intent" began to appear in late October 1947. Embedded in an assessment

of potential benefits that the proposed Cdn SAS Coy could provide to the Army was an entirely new idea hitherto unmentioned. "The formation of a SAS Company," the report explained, "is in line with British Army Air Group post war plans; whereby the SAS is being retained as a small group integrated within the Airborne Division. This provision is to keep the techniques employed by SAS persons during the war alive in the peacetime army."[21] Although this new task now appeared last in the order of priority on the list of activities, in practise it would soon move to the forefront.

Once the Chief of the General Staff (CGS) authorized the sub-unit, with an effective date of 9 January 1948, a dramatic change in focus became evident. Not only did its function as a base for expansion for the development of airborne units take precedence, but also the previously subtle reference to a warfighting, specifically SOF role, leapt to the foreground. The new Terms of Reference (ToRs) for the employment of the Cdn SAS Coy were forwarded for approval to NDHQ two weeks after the sub-unit's stand-up. The CDS confirmed the ToRs four months later. Apparently, no one noticed, or cared, that there was a glaring difference in priorities from the original ToRs that were submitted prior to the sub-unit's approval. The new ToRs listed the following duties in a revised priority:

1. Provide a tactical parachute company for airborne training. This company is to form the nucleus for expansion for the training of the three infantry battalions as parachute battalions;

2. Provide a formed body of troops to participate in tactical exercises and demonstrations for courses at the CJATC and service units throughout the country;

3. Preserve and advance the techniques of SAS [commando] operations developed during WW II 1939-1945;

4. Provide when required parachutists to back-up the RCAF organizations as detailed in the Interim Plan for air Search and Rescue; and

5. Aid Civil Authorities in fighting forest fires and assisting in national catastrophes when authorized by Defence Headquarters.[22]

The shift was anything but subtle. The original emphasis on aid to the civil authority and public service type functions, duties which could be pervasively justified to a war-weary government and a budget conscious military leadership, were now re-prioritized if not totally marginalized. In all fairness, the change in focus in regard to the terms of reference for the Canadian Special Air Service Company was in part pragmatic. It represented the Army's initial reaction to the Government's announcement in 1946, that airborne training for the Active Force Brigade Group was contemplated and that an establishment to this end was being created.[23]

Nonetheless, the dramatic mission shift also represented a case of "gamesmanship." It allowed the strong airborne lobby within the Canadian Joint Air Training Centre, and others within the Army, the majority of whom had wartime airborne and special operations (e.g. First Special Service Force (FSSF) and Special Operations Executive (SOE)) experience, an opportunity to perpetuate a capability that they believed was at risk.[24]

This shift was clearly evident in the 1948-1949 Joint Air School Historical Report. The Army Component of the JAS explained the establishment of the Cdn SAS Coy in the following terms:

> The Special Air Service originated during World War II when after numerous operations military authorities were convinced that a few men working behind enemy

> lines, could, with sufficient bluff and daring wreak havoc with supplies and communications. Results obtained during the war assured its continued existence.[25]

The report was not only incorrect in its assessment of the value placed on special operations type units during the war, but more importantly, it clearly reflected a warfighting rather than public service orientation.[26] This orientation was in complete contrast to the rationale used to justify the establishment of the sub-unit. It was, however, in sync with the beliefs of those who were selected to serve in the organization.

If there was any confusion in regard to the purpose and role of the Cdn SAS Coy it certainly did not exist in the mind of the Officer Commanding (OC) the sub-unit. The new organization was established at company strength (125) and comprised one platoon from each of the three regular infantry regiments, The Royal Canadian Regiment (RCR), The Royal 22nd Regiment (R22eR) and Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI). Captain Guy D'Artois from the R22eR was posted to the sub-unit as its second-in-command. Contrary to popular mythology, Captain D'Artois was not selected as OC of the Cdn SAS Coy based on his wartime experience or exploits. In fact, he was originally not considered at all. Not surprisingly, within some elements of the Army "the future of the SAS Coy" was apparently "in doubt." As a result, little effort was made to find a qualified major to fill the appointment of Company Commander.[27] Therefore, by default, Captain D'Artois became the OC of the Cdn SAS Coy.

By late October 1948, the Army considered the sub-unit's existence to be safe and efforts were subsequently made to find a suitable candidate at the rank of major to take the reins. (Notably, in what could be considered testimony to military bureaucracy, the demise of the Unit occurred prior to the appointment of

a new OC. As a result, D'Artois was the first and only Officer Commanding, albeit in an acting capacity.)

Courtesy Canadian Airborne Forces Museum (CAFM).

CAPTAIN GUY D'ARTOIS IN HIS FSSF UNIFORM.

D'Artois' performance was outstanding by all accounts and the level of expertise was of no surprise. After all, he was the perfect candidate for the job. Captain D'Artois served in WWII as an officer in The Royal 22nd Regiment. He returned to Canada in the summer of 1942 to undergo parachute training when he volunteered for the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion. He subsequently transferred to the newly created First Special Service Force (FSSF) when

he discovered the FSSF would see combat against the enemy sooner than 1 Cdn Para Bn. While on leave in Montreal, Quebec in September 1943, he was recruited for the Special Operations Executive. He completed his initial training at Camp X near Whitby, Ontario and then proceeded to Scotland to complete his matriculation.[28] He was undoubtedly one of, if not the, best trained Canadian SOE operatives.[29]

Captain D'Artois was eventually parachuted into France near Lyon on 1 May 1944. He was assigned to the "Ditcher" circuit. His initial tasks were unenviable. First, he had to encourage the cooperation of the "right" and "left" political elements of the local resistance movement to try to create a more unified, disciplined and effective fighting element against the Germans. His other responsibility was to create a small security unit responsible for identifying and capturing German agents and the despised French *Milice* in his area of operations (AO).[30] His group arrested 115 collaborators.[31]

Known as Michel *le Canadien* by the French resistance members, D'Artois displayed remarkable initiative. He seized a rich French collaborator and held him for ransom; using the money he financed his entire unit. D'Artois also arranged for large arms drops prior to and immediately after D-Day, which allowed him to equip two battalions worth of fighters. One unit, numbering 700, was commanded by D'Artois himself. He continually cut rail lines and the night prior to the D-Day landings, D'Artois and his unit blocked 16 troop trains, disrupted and destroyed railways and telephone cables, blew up canal locks, and continually attacked resupply and reinforcement convoys.

By the end of September 1944, D'Artois' work was complete and he reported to advanced SOE headquarters in Paris. He was awarded the *Croix de Guerre avec Palme*, France's highest award, by

General Charles de Gaulle himself at a special ceremony in Canada in 1946. The SOE also awarded him the Distinguished Service Order.[32]

Predictably, D'Artois trained his sub-unit of paratroopers in the Cdn SAS Coy as a specialized commando force.[33] Members were required to meet high selection standards. Specifically, volunteers had to meet the following exigencies:

1. Have bachelor status;
2. Be in superb physical condition;
3. Demonstrate initiative, self-reliance, and self-control;
4. Be immensely quick in thought and action;
5. Possess a strong sense of discipline; and
6. Demonstrate an original approach.[34]

His own intractable approach and trademark persistence quickly made him the "absolute despair of the Senior Officers at Rivers [CJATC]."[35] Veterans of the Cdn SAS Coy explained that "Captain D'Artois didn't understand 'no.' He carried on with his training regardless of what others said."[36] Another veteran recalled that "Guy answered to no one, he was his own man, who ran his own show."[37] Roy MacGillivary, also a Cdn SAS Coy veteran, asserted:

> D'Artois was extremely energetic and he always seemed to have a twinkle in his eye. You never knew where you would end up. You never knew where he would pop up from. He was always checking on your reaction.[38]

Courtesy 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion Association Archives.

CDN SAS COY OFFICERS AND SENIOR NCOS AT RIVERS, MANITOBA.

Although organizationally the sub-unit may have been solid, its future was not. Its ultimate function and role were obscured by varied interpretations. As early as May 1948, less than six months since its establishment, the Army's Director of Air was compelled to defend the existence of the Cdn SAS Coy against calls for a review of its mandate. Interestingly, he rationalized the necessity of not only maintaining the sub-unit, but also of ensuring its continuance at full strength because of the expertise the members represented in such fields as "airborne, airtransported, air supply and SAS operations." He argued this expertise would be difficult to recapture "if they were required to reconstitute the SAS Company or as a nucleus of an SAS Regiment."[39] Clearly, his image of the organization's *raison d'être* was at variance with the original purpose given for its establishment. However, it resonated with everyone within the organization. To a man they believed the unit rationale was that of a commando force.[40]

But the central issue remained. Was the Cdn SAS Coy in fact the nucleus of a larger airborne force? Was it designed to be an elite commando unit? Or was it just simply a demonstration team for the Canadian Joint Air Training Centre? Evidence exists to support each perspective.[41] Additionally, one Cdn SAS Coy veteran revealed:

> We were never given any real purpose. No one ever told us what the unit was about. We did lots of physical PT, rope work in trees, and lots of explosive training. During exercises we would jump, do our RV drills and then go explode a charge.[42]

Not surprisingly then confusion existed with regard to the rationale for the Cdn SAS Coy. This uncertainty was merely a symptom of a larger problem, namely that there was no clear understanding or agreement of the role for paratroopers, SOF or special operations. And, to make matters worse, the conventional military was unreceptive to any and all of these concepts.

Courtesy CAFM

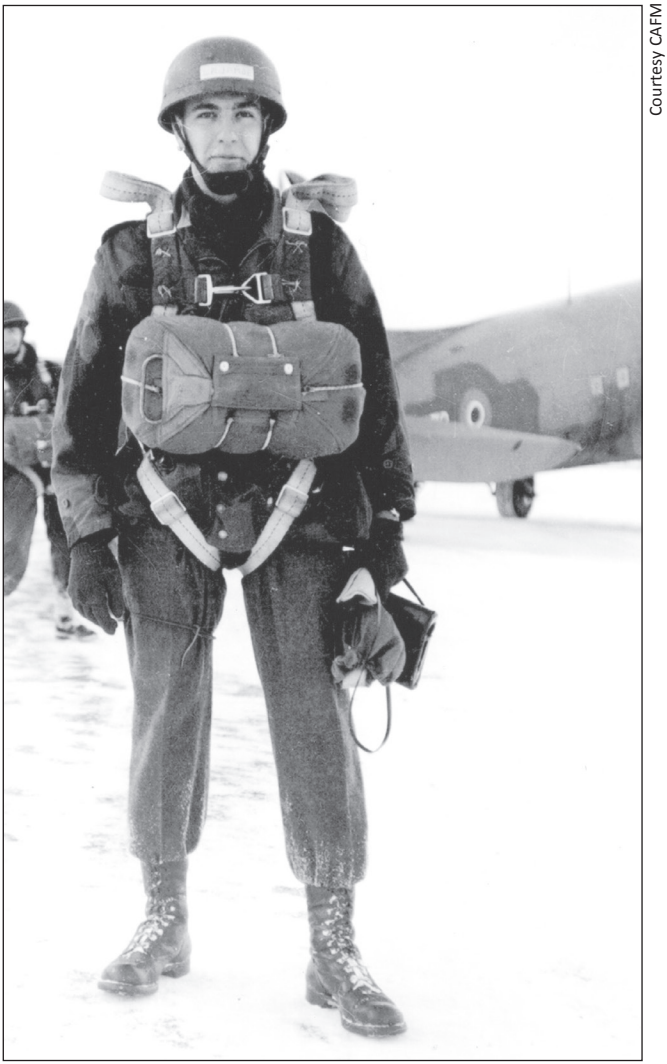
CDN SAS COY PERSONNEL CONDUCTING UNARMED COMBAT.

The major problem was the lack of a coherent and pervasive understanding of, or role for, SOF and/or airborne forces, which not only justified their existence, but also warranted the full support of the entire military and political leadership. The continued survival of the CJATC and its limited SOF/airborne capability, as represented by the Cdn SAS Coy, was largely due to an American and British preoccupation with airborne and air-transportable forces in the post war period. This view was based on a concept of security established on smaller standing forces with greater tactical and strategic mobility.

The cash-strapped Canadian political and military leadership also came to realize that such a force could provide a great political expedient. It provided the shell under which the government could claim it was meeting its security obligations, yet minimize its actual defence expenditures. In essence, possession of paratroopers could represent the nation's ready sword. They afforded a conceivably viable means to combat any hostile intrusion to the North, thereby appeasing a paranoid neighbour to the South who envisioned Soviet bombers staging from the Canadian Arctic to bomb continental USA.[43] Better still, they would be incredibly cheap, if they were maintained simply as a "paper tiger."

In addition, looming in the background was the 1946 Canada/U.S. Basic Security Plan which imposed on Canada the requirement to provide one airborne/air-transportable brigade, and its necessary airlift, as its share of the overall continental defence agreement.[44] This obligation necessitated the retention of the Canadian Joint Air Training Centre. It also prompted the spark which fuelled the need for a Canadian Special Air Service Company, which would act as a training tool and potential nucleus for an expanded airborne force capable of conducting special operations.[45] As noted earlier, in 1946, the government had briefed Parliament that airborne training for the Active Force Brigade Group was planned. Yet, no action

was taken for more than two years. The Cdn SAS Coy represented the total sum of Canada's operational airborne capability. Incredibly, for most of that period contentious debate over its actual function and role still continued.



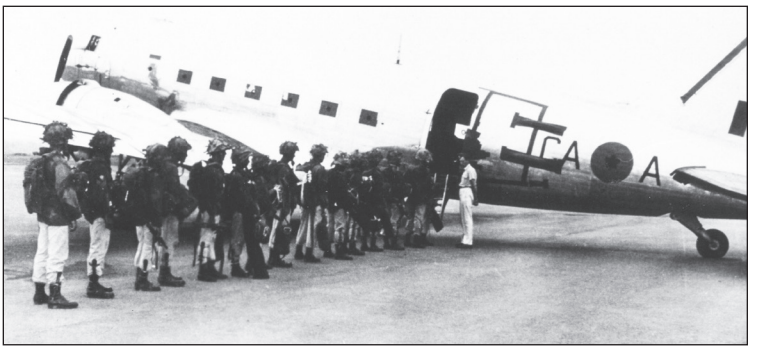
Courtesy CAFM

CDN SAS COY MEMBER READY FOR A PRACTICE JUMP.

By the summer of 1948, some form of action was required. The creation of the airborne/air-transportable Brigade Group had not advanced beyond the conceptual agreement of the senior military commanders. The plan finally moved forward with the Joint Air Committee decision that:

> The CGS [Chief of the General Staff], Canadian Army desires to commence the training of one battalion of infantry for airborne/air-transported operations. This one battalion is the Canadian component to meet the immediate requirements of the BSP. The air training of this battalion (less collective battalion exercise) is required to be completed by 1 April 1949.[46]

Courtesy CAFM



CDN SAS COY PARATROOPERS EMPLANING FOR A PRACTICE JUMP.

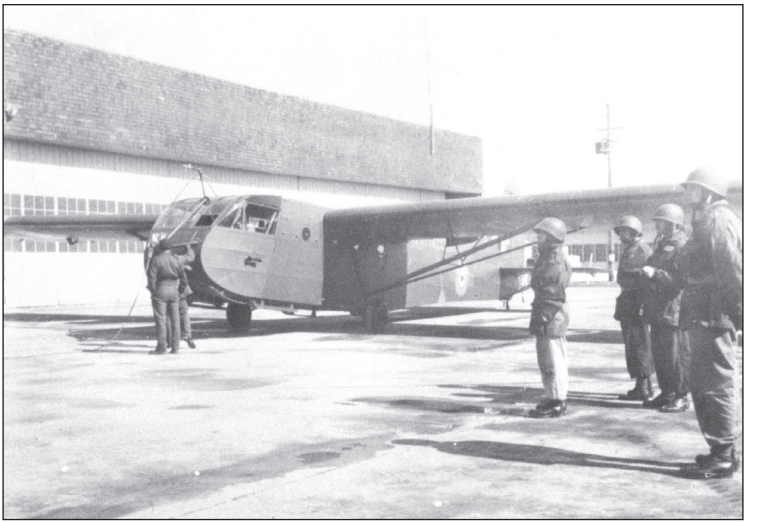
The spark was prompted not by governmental or military diligence, but again by the spectre of the Americans. The Basic Security Plan of two years previous had obligated the Canadian Army to be prepared for Arctic airborne and/or air-transportable operations, to counter or reduce enemy lodgements in Canada, on a prescribed schedule of availability. This program compelled the Canadian government, by 1 May 1949, to have a battalion combat team prepared to respond immediately to any actual lodgement with a second battalion available within two months, and an entire brigade group within four months.[47] Time was running out.

Until now, with the possible exception of the Canadian Special Air Service Company, nothing had been done.

Two years had elapsed since the Government's public declaration that the Active Force Brigade Group would become an airborne/air-transportable organization. Yet, it was not until July 1948, that NDHQ granted authority to commence airborne/air-transportable training. It was another month before these words were finally translated into action. At this time the Vice Chief of the General Staff (VCGS), Major-General Church Mann, visited the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI) battalion in Calgary and asked them to convert to airborne status. Training, he stated, was to commence in three months time and was to be completed by May 1949. The effect was profound. The unit in its entirety volunteered for airborne service.[48] The first concrete step to establish the airborne/air-transportable brigade, as required by the 1946 Basic Security Plan, had finally been taken.

The effect on the existing small Cdn SAS Coy was immediate and corrosive. Initially the sub-unit lost only its PPCLI platoon, which formed the training cadre for the conversion of the "Patricia" battalion. However, Army Headquarters subsequently directed that the Cdn SAS Coy's "Patricia" platoon, once they had completed their instructional tasks, be permanently stripped from the sub-unit so that the platoon could return to Calgary with their parent regiment to provide a core of experienced paratroop instructors.[49] Although a replacement platoon, recruited from the service support trades, was raised, the fate of the Cdn SAS Coy was sealed.[50] Its personnel were increasingly drafted as instructional staff for the Canadian Joint Air Training Centre training scheme to convert the remaining two infantry battalions into airborne/air-transportable units.

Courtesy CAFM



CDN SAS COY PERSONNEL OBSERVE THE PREPARATION OF A WACO CG-4A GLIDER PRIOR TO AN EXERCISE.

Concurrently, during this period the debate over the Cdn SAS Coy's actual role and existence, which had never been resolved, resurfaced. In September 1948, in light of the creation of the Mobile Striking Force (MSF), the Director of Military Training in National Defence Headquarters (NDHQ) demanded a reassessment of the Cdn SAS Coy. "I cannot," he argued, "agree with what appears to be the present concepts of the SAS Company." He identified the contradiction between the original intent and the actual practise, namely D'Artois' commandos. He added, "I feel first and foremost that its name should be changed...it is true that in war they [special forces type units] do produce a result out of all proportion to their aims, if properly employed; but they do not win battles; they are a luxury and it is very much doubted if they, in their true sense, can be recruited from our peace time armed forces."[51]

Predictably, a month later the CGS announced his intention to disband the Cdn SAS Coy upon the completion of airborne conversion training by the R22eR, who represented the last unit of the three Active Force infantry regiments to undertake it.[52] As a result of this direction the posting of personnel to the Cdn SAS Coy dried up. "It should be noted that in view of the present policy," complained the Army, "the AG [Adjutant General] Branch regards the SAS Coy as a wasting commitment and is loath to post personnel to fill existing vacancies in it."[53]

Surprisingly, in June 1949, in a complete reversal, the VCGS affirmed that the Cdn SAS Coy "will remain in being indefinitely with its present organization and establishment" and that it would be brought to strength.[54] Lobbying in support of the sub-unit by its few senior supporters seemingly paid off. Despite the reprieve, however, the change in training focus and composition of the Cdn SAS Coy, as a result of its instructional duties in support of CJATC's airborne conversion training for the Active Force infantry regiments, eroded the sub-unit's make-up. The end result was the demise of the organization.

Problems with morale surfaced, particularly in the R22eR Platoon. An Army investigation noted that the "deterioration only set in when the terms of reference for the SAS Company were radically altered." An analysis of Cdn SAS Coy training revealed that the personnel were employed almost exclusively in administrative type tasks. The report showed that the RCR platoon was employed almost entirely in either instruction or on parachute packing and maintenance. The R22eR Platoon was described as "carrying out a rather haphazard form of training, part time and is almost continually on call to load and lash equipment."[55] And finally, the majority of the Composite Platoon, which replaced the Patricia Platoon, was employed in parachute packing and maintenance.[56]

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THE CANADIAN SPECIAL AIR SERVICE COMPANY, 1948-1949
by Silvia Pecota

The discontent manifested itself in the refusal of five members to jump in a two-month period and the request by individuals, particularly R22eR members, to return to their parent units.[57] Rumours and stories of dissension quickly spread. The situation was deemed so serious that the CGS personally visited Rivers in July 1949. Resolution to the problem followed swiftly. "The CGS having visited CJATC Rivers," the Vice Chief of the General Staff wrote, "has directed that the platoon of the R22eR will be withdrawn as soon as administrative arrangements can be completed."[58] Although direction was also given to the Commanding Officer of the R22eR to post two officers and 15 "Other Ranks," by 1 September as instructors to Rivers to replace the withdrawn personnel, the die had been cast.

The Cdn SAS Coy, whose role was never clear, became subsumed by the larger requirement to convert the infantry regiments into airborne units. By the time the program was terminated, the Canadian Special Air Service Company had virtually ceased to exist. Its personnel melted away and rejoined their parent regiments as their respective training was completed. Sergeant B.C. Robinson, a veteran of both 1 Canadian Parachute Battalion and the Cdn SAS Coy recalled that the news of the sub-unit's termination was discovered when Captain D'Artois informed the Company that they had been disbanded because the Mobile Striking Force was starting up.[59] The disbandment was so low key that no official date was ever recorded.

In the end, it seems as if the demise of the Cdn SAS Coy was shrouded in as much contradiction as its establishment. Nonetheless, it served as a "bridge" linking the Canadian Parachute Battalion and the three infantry battalions which conceptually formed an airborne brigade.[60] It perpetuated the airborne spirit and kept the requisite parachute skills alive. Furthermore, it was

an attempt to maintain a special operations capability that had begun during WWII and which was collapsed on termination of hostilities. However, the existence of the Cdn SAS Coy suffered from a lack of clarity and commitment from a larger military establishment that shunned the unique or special.

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NOTES

1 Dan Lamothe, "Retiring SOCOM Chief: 'We are in the Golden Age of Special Operations," *The Washington Post,* 29 August 2014. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2014/08/29/retiring-top-navy-seal-we-are-in-the-golden-age-of-special-operations-2/?utm_term=.a8663dc140d9, accessed 3 December 2016.

2 1 Cdn Para Bn is considered part of the Canadian SOF legacy as well. This unit, labelled an elite by the military, press and public, was manned through a careful selection process that witnessed only 30 percent of those attempting to join actually making it into the unit ranks. Moreover, they were given special training, special equipment and special missions during the war. See Bernd Horn and Michel Wycyznski, *Paras Versus the Reich. Canada's Paratroopers at War, 1942-1945* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2003).

3 *House of Commons Parliamentary Debates* (hereafter referred to as *Debates*), 19 August 1946, 5059.

4 During the war Canadians had been involved in a number of units and organizations that can be considered SOF and/or those conducting special operations. For example: Special Operations Executive, Viking Force, Naval Beach Commando "W", 1 Cdn Para Bn and the First Special Service Force.

5 *Debates*, 13 February 1947, 394.

6 Harry Pugh, *Canadian Airborne Insignia 1942 - Present* (Arlington, VA: C & D Enterprises, 1994), 24.

7 Interview with author, 20 November 1998.

8 Interview with author, 25 August 1998.

9 To avoid confusion, the designations of the period are as follows: *Airborne* is used "for those troops, units and their equipment which

form part of airborne formations and for which specific airborne war establishments exist. They are composed, equipped, and trained primarily for the purpose of operating by air and of making assault landings. They include parachute and air landing troops. *Air-transportable* designates those units, other than those of airborne formations which can be transported by air and employed in a tactical role. They may be part of a light division already specially equipped for movement by air in transport aircraft or they may be part of any other formation whose equipment as been exchanged or modified as necessary for a particular operation and for an approach by air instead of by land or sea." Canada, Army, Directorate of Military Training, *Military Science Part I and II*, 1948/49, 97.

10 See DND Directorate of History and Heritage (DHH) 168.009 (D45), specifically "The Organization of an Army Air Centre In Canada," 29 November 1945 & 27 December 1945; A-35 (No.1 ARDC), 7 December 1945; and "Notes of a Conference - NDHQ," 8 February 1946, HQC 88-5 (DSD (w)).

11 See file DHH 168.009 (D45) for a series of memorandums and proposals on the A-35 Canadian Parachute Training Centre and the No. 1 Airborne Research and Development Centre." See also "Reactivation A-35 Canadian Parachute Training Centre," 28 December 1945. DHH 163.009 (D16).

12 "The Organization of an Army Air Centre in Canada," 29 November & 27 December 1945. DHH 168.009 (D45). It was also noted that an organization would be required at NDHQ whose responsibility included the "complete direction of Airborne activity such as coordination of policy, liaison, air intelligence, personnel, equipment, training, war organization and particularly long-term planning to ensure rapid expansion in case of necessity." See also *DND Report 1949*,13; and Canadian Airborne Forces Museum (CAFM) Research Papers on Canadian Airborne Organizations, Part 1, 1.C, Document 2 - "Canadian Air Service," by Berkley Franklin.

13 The organization, as well as its name, was actually in perpetual evolution. Although the title Joint Air School was officially in effect until 1 April 1949, many in NDHQ and the JAS itself utilized the term CJATC

prior to this date. Nevertheless, in accordance with Joint Organizational Order No. 6, dated 5 March 1949, the title Canadian Joint Air Training Centre was to take effect 1 April 1949, upon reorganization and relocation to Shilo, Manitoba. *War Diary - JAS / CJATC*, 5 March and 1 April 1949 respectively.

14 "SAS Company - JAS (Army), 13 June 1947. Library Archives Canada [hereafter LAC], RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2. The author or catalyst for the original proposal is unknown. However, the Army's Director of Air, the Army Component of the JAS, and GOC Prairie Area are the predominant authors of most existing correspondence.

15 "SAS Company - JAS (Army), 13 June 1947. LAC, RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2; and CAFM research information sheet entitled "The Canadian Special Air Service Company."

16 "SAS Company," 30 October 1947, 4. The proposed Cdn SAS Coy was specifically included in the Interim Plan for Search and Rescue (SAR). "Requested Amendment to Interim Plan - SAR," 11 September 1947. LAC, RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2. In the Cdn SAS Coy's short existence, its only operational tasks were Aid to the Civil Power. The first which was conducted by Captain D'Artois prior to the establishment of the sub-unit was Operation Canon in October 1947. A four-man team from the embryonic Cdn SAS Coy dropped into Moffet Inlet, Baffin Island, to assist an Anglican missionary who had been seriously injured by a firearms accident. The second was in May 1948, when the entire sub-unit participated in Operation Overflow, the DND relief effort in response to massive flooding in British Columbia. "OP CANON," CAFM, File AB- Research SAS History; J.M. Hitsman, "Parachuting in the Canadian Army," 5 March 1956, 4. DHH 145.4 (D2) and 112.3H1.003 (D5). See also B.A.J. Franklin's, *The Airborne Bridge. The Canadian Special Air Service Company* (Private Commemorative Publication, 1988), 50.

17 *DND Report, 1948*, 25. Amazingly, even before the sub-unit was officially authorized or established, it was included in the Interim Plan for Search and Rescue. See "Requested Amendment to Interim Plan - SAR," 11 September 1947, LAC, RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2.

18 "SAS Company - JAS (Army), 13 June 1947, Appendix A. LAC, RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2.

19 See Anthony Kemp, *The SAS at War* (London: John Murray, 1991); Philip Warner, *The Special Air Service* (London: William Kimber, 1971); and Ben MacIntyre, *Rogue Heroes* (New York: McClelland & Stewart, 2016).

20 "Special Air Service Company - Implementation Policy," 12 September 1947. LAC, RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2.

21 "SAS Company," 30 October 1947 (Air S94), RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2.

22 "SAS Terms of Reference," 16 April 1948; "Duties of the SAS Coy," 29 January 1948; SAS Coy - Air Training Directive," December 1948. LAC, RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2. The establishment of the SAS Company was effective 9 January 1948. See also "Aviation Teamwork in Canada," *Military Review*, Vol. 28, No. 5 (August 1948): 96-97.

23 *Debates*, 19 August 1946, 5056. The government's sincerity is questionable. When grilled by the opposition on how this airborne force would be transported, the reply stated, "But I only said the group would be trained."

24 In this case, it appears that the Army's Director of Air and the Army component of the CJATC, all strong airborne advocates, used the benign tasks as a means to secure authorization for the required sub-unit. Once established, training philosophy and practise was easily co-opted.

25 Canadian Airborne Centre Edmonton, UIC 1326-2695, Vol 1, Annual Historical Report, 1 April 1948 - 31 March 1949, Sect XVIII - SAS Coy. DHH.

26 There has always been a recognized institutional hostility towards SOF type units. The conservative military mind shuns the unique, special or unconventional. During World War II there was much resistance to the establishment of such units and as hostilities neared completion

those that did exist were quickly disbanded or at best, severely curtailed. Among the casualties were such well-known organizations as the First Special Service Force (FSSF), Long Range Desert Group (LRDG), Layforce, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), Phantom (GHQ Reconnaissance Organization), the Rangers and Raider Battalions, and the Special Air Service (SAS). See Colonel Bernd Horn, "Love 'Em or Hate 'Em: Learning to Live with Elites," *Canadian Military Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (Winter 2007-2008): 32-43.

27 "SAS Company," 27 October 1948. LAC, RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2.

28 See Bernd Horn, *A Most Ungentlemanly Way of War: The SOE and the Canadian Connection* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2016) for details on Camp X and the Canadian participation in the SOE.

29 When D'Artois was in London in December 1943, he met another new SOE recruit, 19-year-old Sonia "Tony" Butt. While on training together in Scotland, they decided to get married, on 15 April 1944. They did not see other for the next six months as each was sent on a separate mission. Butt, the youngest SOE operator to be deployed in the field, was dropped near Le Mans to assist the resistance movement create as much havoc as possible prior to the Normandy invasion. They reunited in Paris after the Normandy campaign.

30 The *Milice*, or French Militia, was a Vichy French paramilitary force created in cooperation with the Germans on 30 January 1943, to assist with rooting out and destroying the French Resistance during World War II.

31 D'Artois was hardly squeamish. In a *Toronto Star* interview in December 1944, he recounted how the Germans had bludgeoned to death 59 captured *maquisards*, considering them criminals and terrorists. In retaliation, D'Artois lined up 52 captured German prisoners and executed them one at a time. Roy Maclaren, *Canadians Behind Enemy Lines 1939-1945* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 97.

32 He also served in the Korean War, completing an operational tour with the 1st Battalion, The R22eR. D'Artois died in 1999.

33 Franklin, 2 & 7; Interviews Firlotte and B.C. Robinson (member of Cdn SAS Coy), 21 September 1998.

34 CAFM Research Papers on Canadian Airborne Organizations, Part 1, 1.C, Document 1 - "Canadian Special Air Service Company," 1.

35 Interview with Ken Arril, 25 August 1998.

36 Ibid.

37 Interview with Bob Firlotte.

38 Roy MacGillivary, interview with author, 28 June 2014.

39 Special Air Service Company," 30 May 1948, LAC, RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2.

40 Interviews and CAFM, Research Paper, Part 1, 1.C, Document 1 - "Canadian Special Air Service Company." The role as a demonstration and test group was very clear. This took up a large portion of their time. In fact, it was directed that approximately one platoon of basically trained airborne personnel should be available at most times for demonstrations duties, allowing the remaining two to carry on with normal training. "Demonstration Commitments 48/49 - JAS," 5 March 48. LAC, RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2.

41 Numerous memorandums exist clearly stating the role of the Cdn SAS Coy as that of a nucleus for a larger force. See LAC, RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2.

42 Roy MacGillivary, interview with author, 28 June 2014.

43 See Colonel Bernd Horn, *Bastard Sons: The Canadian Airborne Experience 1942-1995* (St. Catharines: Vanwell Press, 2001).

44 George Kitching, *Mud and Green Fields. The Memoirs of Major-General George Kitching* (St.Catharines, ON: Vanwell Publishing Ltd., 1986), 248; "Command, Mobile Striking Force," 21 October 1948. DHH 112.3M2 (D369); and Horn, *Bastard Sons,* Chapter 3.

45 "Special Air Service Company - Implementation Policy," 12 September 1947. LAC, RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2. The memo clearly stated, "As it is intended that all three infantry battalions will in future be trained as parachute battalions it is recommended that the Company should comprise one platoon from each of the three battalions."

46 "Training of the PPCLI for the Airborne / Air-transported Operations," 28 July 1948. LAC, RG 24, Vol 2371, File HQ-88-33, Army / Air Training of Airborne Infantry, Vol 1.

47 "Brigade Headquarters - Army Component - Mobile Striking Force," 29 April 1949; and "Operational Requirement of Airborne Forces for the Defence of Canada," 29 November 1948. DHH 112.3M2 (D369). The commitment prior to 1 May 1949 was for the availability of one battalion combat team capable of responding within two months of a lodgement, two battalion combat teams within four months and a brigade with six months. Throughout this period the military was incapable of meeting these demands.

48 Major-General C.C. Mann, " The New Role of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry," *Canadian Army Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (July 1948): 1; and G.R. Stevens, P*rincess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry 1919-1957* (Edmonton: Historical Committee of the Regiment, 1959), 262-263.

49 "PPCLI Airborne / Air-transported Training - Employment of SAS Company," 2 October 1948; "SAS Company - PPCLI Platoon," 14 October 1948; "SAS Company," 12 November 1948. LAC, RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2.

50 Continuing turmoil with regard to the organizational "concept"prevailed even at this late period in the development of both the Cdn SAS Coy and the embryonic airborne brigade group. In October 1948 it was directed that "On completion of the PPCLI airborne / air-transportable training the SAS Company will resume normal training in accordance with the block training program." (LAC, RG 24, Vol 2371, File HQ-88-33, Army / Air Training of Airborne Infantry, Vol 1). However, this

never happened. The Cdn SAS Coy personnel became training cadre. Their position was further hampered by the loss of a platoon. It was noted that the "departure of the PPCLI platoon of the SAS Company to rejoin its parent unit further aggravated the shortage of competent instructors." LAC, RG 24, Vol 2371, File HQ-88-33, Army / Air Training of Airborne Infantry, Vol 2.

51 "Training the Active Force - Airborne and Airtransported Aspects," 7 September 1948. LAC, RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2.

52 "Special Air Service Company - Joint Air School (Army Component), 4 October 1948. LAC, RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2.

53 "Special Air Service Company," 6 May 1949. LAC, RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2.

54 "Special Air Service Company," 4 June 1949; "Special Air Service Company," 7 June 1949; and "SAS Company - CJATC," 21 July 1949. LAC, RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2.

55 "SAS Company - CJATC, Rivers," 13 June 1949, 1. LAC, RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2.

56 Ibid., 2.

57 "Special Air Service Company," 20 June 1949. LAC, RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2.

58 Untitled Memo from VCGS, 6 July 1949. LAC, RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2.

59 Interview with author, 21 September 1998.

60 The "bridge" analogy was coined by Lieutenant-Colonel Moncrief, a platoon commander in the Cdn SAS Coy and later a PPCLI Battalion Commander. See Franklin's, *Airborne Bridge*, 4.

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