

King Confirms Simonds Leads Troops in Sicily

Premier Sends Message Through McNaughton
—Reviews Early Stages of Invasion Fight

Ottawa, July 18 (CP).—Canadian airmen and naval men came in for a share of recognition for work in the invasion of Sicily, along with the army, when Prime Minister Mackenzie King Saturday told the House of Commons that Canadians "have every reason to rejoice" at the success of the operations.

By reading the text of a message sent to Lt.-Gen. A. G. L. McNaughton, Commander-in-Chief of the Canadian forces overseas, Mr. King confirmed earlier indications that Major-Gen. Guy Simonds, 40, of Kingston, commands the Canadian forces fighting with the British 8th Army on the big Italian island.

Mr. King asked Gen. McNaughton to send a message to Gen. Simonds, which concluded: "Please give to all the assurance that our hearts are with them; that Canada is proud of the patience and courage of her army overseas, and that Canada will not fail her fighting men."

All Services Represented.

In a review of the operations launched against Sicily, the Prime Minister said a Canadian bomber wing, flying Wellingtons and under command of Major-Gen. James Doolittle of the United States Army Air Corps, helped to soften up Sicilian defenses for the army and that many other Canadians were flying in R.A.F. bomber and fighter squadrons, some of which now are based on captured Sicilian airfields.

In addition, other Canadian airmen flying from Britain in the continuing offensive against Axis Europe helped to keep a large part of the German air force engaged and out of the Sicilian operations.

Some 500 officers and men of the navy were there. Mr. King said some 2,000 Canadian naval personnel had been trained in assault landing operations and some had assisted in the North African landings.

"Last week they took their craft (assault landing craft) under enemy fire and ferried in troops who were part of the first wave of the invading forces to move onto the beaches."

Casualties Were Light.

The Sicilian attack, said Mr. King, marked the first time in history that troops of Canada and the United States had fought shoulder to shoulder, although the two countries are neighbors. In the first Great War both fought in France, but he said he believed it had never happened that they fought alongside one another.

"According to statements made by prisoners, the landings (on Sicily) were a complete surprise and created much confusion," said Mr. King.

"The element of surprise, combined with the fact that the landing areas were defended only by static or semi-static Italian troops, resulted in very light casualties for the landing forces. The bulk of the enemy operational divisions were in the central part of the island."

Mr. King warned that heavy fighting is still ahead of the Canadian forces and conditioned his suggestion for rejoicing with a warning against undue optimism. He said there are strong enemy forces on the island.

"But it is not too early to say that Canadian soldiers in Sicily are upholding the traditions established by the Canadian Corps of a quarter of a century ago," he said.

"While operations of our air units

and our personnel out of the United Kingdom are not directly linked with the Sicilian campaign, their activities are having the effect of tying a great part of the Luftwaffe to Western Europe. Were these Luftwaffe units released for service in the Mediterranean they could make our operations there far more difficult," he said.

Review of Operation.

The Canadian 1st Division landed at the southeast tip of Sicily and 2½ hours after landing had captured its first objective and made contact with the British division on its right flank, meanwhile British and American forces had landed to the east and west of the Canadians.

Canadian troops captured the airfield at Pachino six hours after landing and a short time later were in Pachino itself.

On Monday, Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, Allied commander-in-chief, visited the Canadians on Pachino Peninsula. He sought Canadian headquarters but they were moving forward so rapidly he was unable to make contact. On that day, the Canadians captured several inland towns, and the first enemy counter-attack was met and beaten off.

"It is eminently fitting that the 1st Division of the Canadian Army should have been given the honor of taking part in the first major Canadian land operations of the war," said Mr. King.

"The men of the 1st Division were the earliest to volunteer; they have waited longest for action. They are the most seasoned formation of Canada's Army overseas."

It would be "a satisfaction to Lt.-Gen. A. G. L. McNaughton, Canadian Army commander overseas, who led the 1st Division when it sailed for Britain in the autumn of 1939, to have seen these officers and men, after three years of waiting, now carrying the fight into the enemy's camp with such conspicuous success."

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