

JUL 17 1943

SHOULD NOT BE UNPREPARED FOR HEAVY ACTION TO COME

**Mackenzie King Says Few
Casualties Sustained
in Landings**

AIRMEN GREAT HELP

Ottawa, July 17.—(CP)—Prime Minister Mackenzie King said to-day in the House of Commons that if the Canadian people guard against undue optimism, they "have every reason to rejoice at the results so far achieved in the first major operations in which the Canadian army has taken part."

Can Be Thankful

During his statement, made a week after the landing on Sicily, the Prime Minister revealed that Major-Gen. Guy Simonds, of Kingston, Ont., is in command of the Canadian forces in the Mediterranean, including Sicily.

Mr. King said Canada had reason to be thankful the landings on Sicily were completed "with very light casualties," and that resistance during the first week of operations had been comparatively slight.

"The successes of the Canadian forces in the field should not, however, leave us unprepared for word of much heavier fighting which may follow at any time," Mr. King said.

Upholding Traditions

"There are strong enemy forces on the island and already stiff resistance has been encountered.

"Provided we guard against undue optimism, the people of Canada have every reason to rejoice at the result so far achieved in the first major operations in which the Canadian army has taken part.

"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."

Mr. King said Canadian airmen in R.A.F. and R.C.A.F. squadrons had a large share in "softening up" Sicily by air attacks after the close of the Tunisian campaign. Operating under the immediate command of Major-Gen. James Doolittle, of the United States Army Air Corps, an R.C.A.F. bomber wing made up of an unstated number of squadrons had helped pave the way for Allied invasion by "terrific bombardment of the island." A Canadian squadron also was operating in the Mediterranean area.

Canadians in the air had blasted enemy troop concentrations, strong points and supply columns during the actual invasion.

"It is known that many members of the R.C.A.F. are among the aircrews which now are operating from captured aerodromes on the island," said Mr. King.

It was safe to assume that there were few, if any, R.A.F. squadrons operating among the forces thrown against Sicily which did not include Canadians, Mr. King 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."

Many in Training

The Government had been advised that "several hundred" R.C.N. officers and men acting in conjunction with and under direction of the Royal Navy, took part in the hazardous work of safely effecting landings for the troops engaged.

For many months almost 2,000 Canadian naval personnel had been training at a combined operations base in England, preparing themselves to take part in landing operations, their ships being known as "assault landing craft."

A number of Canadian sailors took part in the combined operations when landings were made in North Africa last November, and at Sicily they took their craft, under enemy fire, and ferried in troops who were part of the first wave of the invading forces to move onto the beaches.

"We shall await with interest a more detailed account of their hazardous work," said Mr. King.

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.

Capture Several Towns

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 honour 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 Lieut.-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."

Messages to Leaders

With this in mind, and realizing the Canadian people would wish an immediate word of congratulation to their troops on their initial success, together with an assurance of unfailing support of them, Mr. King said he had sent Gen. McNaughton a message on Monday last:

"I know you must be exceedingly proud of the fine results of your long and arduous tour of duty. I congratulate you most sincerely on the achievement already evident in Sicily."

Mr. King asked Gen. McNaughton to have transmitted to Gen. Simonds, in command of Canadian troops in Sicily, a message stating that all Canada rejoiced in the initial success of the Canadian troops.

The message to Gen. Simonds said all good wishes were being extended to the officers and men under his command for the complete success of the hazardous operations in which they were engaged.

Mr. King noted that on Monday, near Ragusa, the Canadians on Sicily had made their first contact with American forces.

He commented this was the first "historic" occasion on which Canadians and Americans have fought shoulder to shoulder. He said they were allies in the first Great War but he believed there was no occasion on which they actually were fighting shoulder to shoulder.

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WAR
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King

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