

# A Military Enigma

## The Canadian Special Air Service Company, 1948-1949

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The Canadian Special Air Service (SAS) Company is truly a military enigma. Very few people are aware of its short-lived existence. Those who are normally have a misunderstanding of its origins and role, a misconception largely reinforced by the sparse and largely inaccurate material that has been written on the subject. For example, most believe that it was raised specifically to provide a commando capability within the Canadian Army immediately after the Second World War.

The story of the Canadian SAS Company is actually surreptitious. The army originally packaged the sub-unit as a very benevolent organization, centred on aid to the civil authority and assistance to the general public. Once established, however, a fundamental and contentious shift in its orientation became evident - one that was never fully resolved prior to the sub-unit's demise. With time, myths, often enough repeated, took on the essence of fact.

The cessation of hostilities in the spring of 1945, not only brought the Second World War to an end, but also closed the chapter on Canada's premiere airborne unit, the First Canadian Parachute Battalion. The paratroop 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.

Notwithstanding the military's achievements during the war, the Canadian government had but two requirements for its peacetime army. First, it was to consist of a representative group

of all arms of the service. Second, it was to provide a small but highly trained and skilled professional force which, in time of conflict, could expand and train citizen soldiers who would fight that war.<sup>1</sup> Within this framework paratroopers had limited relevance. Not surprisingly, few showed concern for the potential loss of Canada's hard-earned airborne experience.

In the austere postwar climate of "minimum peace-time obligations," the fate of Canada's airborne soldiers was dubious at best.<sup>2</sup> The training of new paratroopers at the Canadian Parachute Training Centre in Shilo had ceased as early as May 1945.<sup>3</sup> 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 Second World War. 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."<sup>4</sup> However, Flint and his staff filled the vacuum.



Photo courtesy of the PPCLI Archives

*Paratroopers exiting a C-47 Dakota.*

into cold weather conditions. Canada seemed to be the ideal intermediary for both needs.<sup>7</sup>

It was not lost on the Canadians 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, military headquarters authorized the formation of the Joint Air School (JAS), in Rivers, Manitoba.<sup>8</sup>

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:

- a. Research in Airportability of Army personnel and equipment.
- b. User Trials of equipment, especially under cold weather conditions.
- c. Limited Development and Assessment of Airborne equipment.
- d. 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; training in some of the uses of light aircraft.<sup>9</sup>

More important, the JAS, which was later officially renamed the Canadian Joint Air Training Centre (CJATC), provided the seed from which airborne organizations could grow.<sup>10</sup>

Once the permanent structure of the army was established in 1947, the impetus for expanding the airborne capability began to stir within the Joint Air School. The growth manifested itself in a proposal supported by Army Headquarters in Ottawa, in May 1947, for

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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, closer discussions ascertained 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

a Canadian Special Air Service (SAS) Company.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> Its development, however, proved to be very surreptitious.

The initial proposal prescribed a clearly defined role. The Army, which sponsored the establishment of the fledgling organization, portrayed the SAS Company's inherent mobility as a definite asset to the public at large for domestic operations. A military appreciation eloquently expressed the benefit of the unique sub-unit in terms of its potential benefit to the country. 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."<sup>13</sup> The official DND Report for 1948, reinforced this sentiment. Its rationale for the establishment of the SAS Company was the cooperation "with the R.C.A.F. in the air search-rescue duties required by the International Civil Aviation Organization agreement."<sup>14</sup>

The proposed training plan further supported this benevolent image. The training cycle consisted of four phases: 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).<sup>15</sup> Conspicuously absent was any evidence of commando or specialist training which the organization's name implied. After all, the Canadian SAS Company was actually titled after the British wartime Special Air Service that earned a reputation for daring commando-type raids behind enemy lines.<sup>16</sup> Yet the name of the Canadian sub-unit was a total contradiction to its stated role. It was also not 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.

*Four "jumpers" at Rivers, Manitoba, 1948.  
(1. to r: L/Cpl Dawn, Pte. Roberts,  
L/Cpl. Reeves, and Pte. Tredwell.*

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 SAS Company. 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 that "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 SAS Company to "provide the demonstration team for all demonstrations within and outside the School."<sup>17</sup> Once again there was no emphasis on a special forces or war-fighting orientation.

However, "mission creep" began to appear in late October 1947. Embedded in an assessment of potential benefits that the proposed Canadian SAS Company 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."<sup>18</sup> Although appearing last in the order of priority in the list, in practise it would soon move to the forefront.

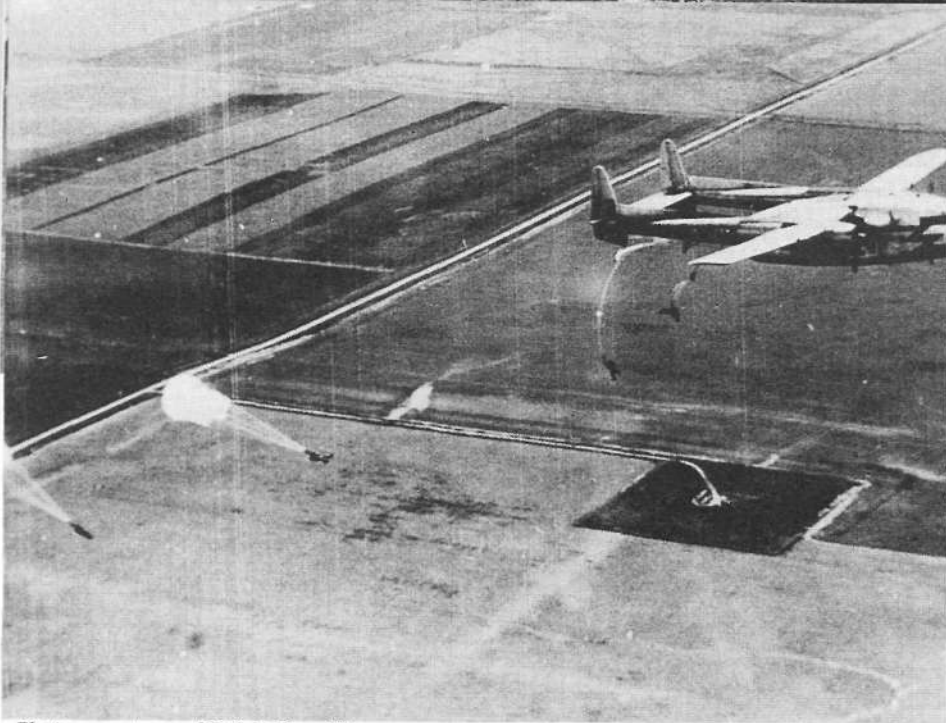
Once the Chief of the General Staff (CGS) authorized the sub-unit, with an effective date of



Photo courtesy Canadian Airborne Forces Museum



SAS Company paratroopers loading a C-119 Boxcar aircraft (left) and the subsequent para-drop (below left).



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

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

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

e. Aid Civil Authorities in fighting forest fires and assist in national catastrophes when authorized by Defence Headquarters.<sup>19</sup>

The shift was anything but subtle. The original emphasis on aid to the civil authority and public service functions, duties which could be justified to a war-weary government and a budget conscious military leadership, were now re-prioritized if not totally marginalized. In all fairness, the changing terms of reference for the Special Air Service Company was in part pragmatic. It represented the army's initial reaction to the Government's announcement in 1946, that contemplated airborne training for the Active Force Brigade Group and that an establishment to this end was being created.<sup>20</sup> But, the dramatic mission shift also represented a case of "gamesmanship." It allowed the strong airborne lobby within the

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 war fighting, special forces role, leapt to the foreground. The new terms of reference for the employment of the SAS Company outlined the following duties in a revised priority:

a. 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.

Canadian Joint Air Training Centre, and others in the army with wartime airborne experience, an opportunity to perpetuate a capability that they believed was at risk.<sup>21</sup>

This was clearly evident in the 1948-1949 Historical Report for the Joint Air School. The Army Component of the JAS explained the establishment of the SAS Company 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."<sup>22</sup> 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 war fighting rather than public service orientation.<sup>23</sup> This was in complete contrast to the rationale used to justify the establishment of the sub-unit. It was, however, consistent 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 SAS Company, it certainly did not exist in the mind of the Officer Commanding (OC) the sub-unit. The new organization was established at a company strength of 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, a wartime member of the First Special Service Force, and later the Special Operations Executive (SOE), 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 SAS Company based on his wartime experience or exploits. In fact, he was not originally considered at all. 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 billet as OC.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, Captain D'Artois, by default, became the Acting Officer Commanding. By late October 1948, the sub-unit's existence was considered secure and efforts were then made to find a suitable candidate. 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. His performance, however, was outstanding by all accounts.

D'Artois trained his sub-unit of carefully selected paratroopers as a specialized commando force.<sup>25</sup> His intractable approach and trademark persistence quickly made him the "absolute despair of the Senior Officers at Rivers [CJATC]."<sup>26</sup> Veterans of the SAS Company explained that "Captain D'Artois didn't understand 'no.' He carried on with his training

regardless of what others said."<sup>27</sup> Another veteran recalled that "Guy answered to no one, he was his own man, who ran his own show."<sup>28</sup>

Organizationally the sub-unit may have been solid, but 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 SAS Company 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 would be difficult to recapture "if they were required to reconstitute the SAS Company or as a nucleus of an SAS Regiment."<sup>29</sup> Clearly, his image of the organization's *raison d'être* was at variance with the original purpose given for its establishment.

But the central issue remained. Was the SAS Company 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.<sup>30</sup> This confusion was merely a symptom of a larger problem, namely there was no clear understanding or agreement of the role the paratroopers were to fulfill. It was characteristic of the blight that has permeated the entire Canadian airborne experience over the years.

The major problem was the lack of a coherent role for Canadian 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 airborne capability was largely due to an American and British preoccupation with airborne and air-transportable forces in the postwar period. This 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 obligations, yet minimize its actual defence expenditures. In essence, possession of paratroopers could



*SAS Company paratroopers providing a "wind machine" training demonstration at the Joint Air School, Rivers, Manitoba, January-February 1948.*

represent the nation's ready sword. They afforded a conceivably viable means to combat any hostile intrusion to the North. 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.<sup>31</sup> This obligation necessitated the retention of the Canadian Joint Air Training Centre. It also prompted the spark which fuelled the need for an organization which would act as a training tool and potential nucleus for an expanded airborne force.<sup>32</sup> As noted earlier, in 1946, the government had briefed Parliament that airborne training was planned for the Active Force Brigade Group. Yet, no action was taken for more than two years. The SAS Company represented the total sum of Canada's operational airborne capability. Incredibly, for most of that period contentious debate continued over its actual function and role.

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, 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.<sup>33</sup>

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. This program compelled the Canadian government to have a battalion combat team prepared by 1 May 1949 to respond immediately to any actual lodgement, with a second battalion available within two months, and an entire brigade group within four months.<sup>34</sup> Time was running out and with the possible exception of the 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 VCGS, Major-General Churchill Mann, visited the 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.<sup>35</sup> 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 SAS Company 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. Army Headquarters directed that the SAS Company's 'Patricia' platoon, once it had completed its instructional tasks, be permanently stripped from the sub-unit so that the platoon could return to Calgary with its parent regiment to provide a core of experienced

paratroop instructors.<sup>36</sup> Although a replacement platoon from the service support trades was raised, the fate of the SAS Company was sealed.<sup>37</sup> 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.

During this period the ongoing debate over the SAS Company's actual role and existence resurfaced. In September 1948, in light of the creation of the Mobile Striking Force (MSF), the Director of Military Training in NDHQ demanded a reassessment of the Canadian SAS Company. "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. 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

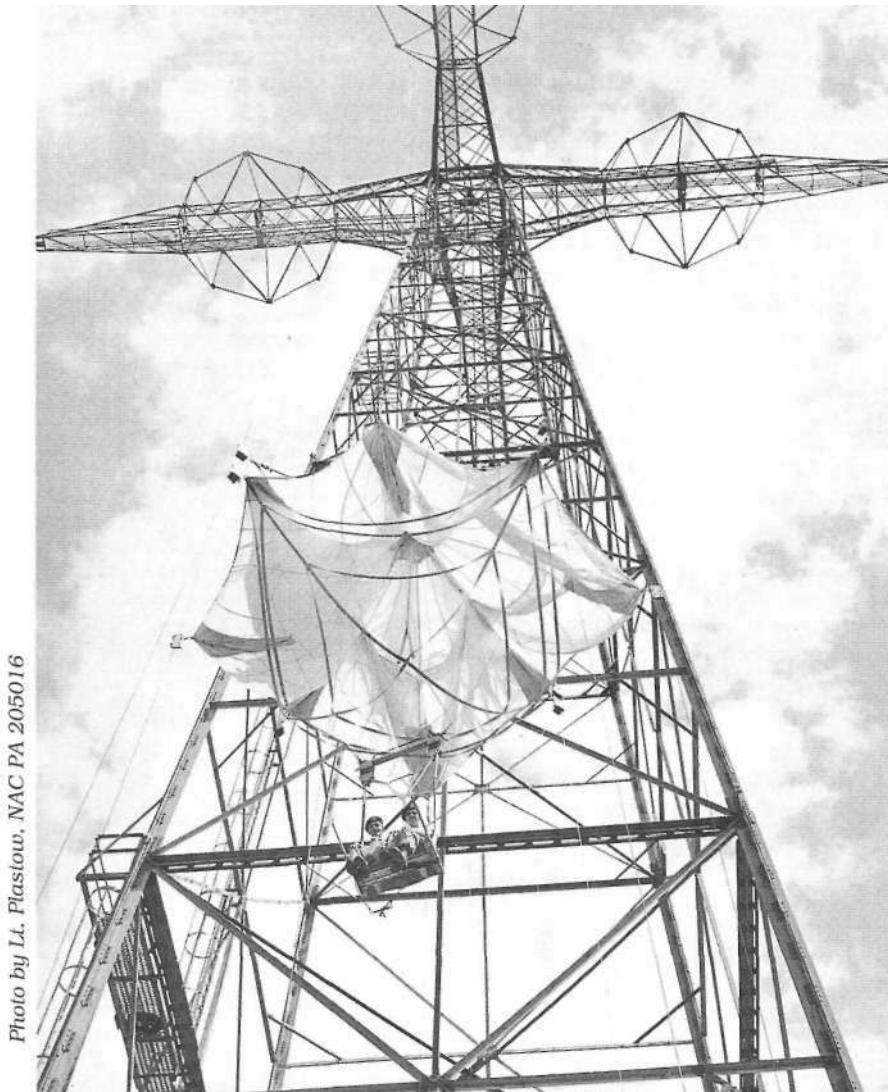


Photo by Lt. Plastow, NAC PA 205016

High tower training, Shilo, Manitoba.

sense, can be recruited from our peace time armed forces."<sup>38</sup> A month later the CGS announced his intention to disband the Canadian SAS Company 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.<sup>39</sup> As a result of this direction the posting of personnel to the SAS Company 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."<sup>40</sup>

In a complete reversal, the VCGS affirmed in June 1949 that the SAS Company "will remain in being indefinitely with its present organization and establishment" and that it would be brought to strength.<sup>41</sup> The Army's lobbying in support of the sub-unit seemingly paid off. Despite the reprieve, however, the change in training focus and composition of the SAS Company, 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 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 SAS Company training revealed that the personnel were employed almost exclusively in administrative tasks, either in 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."<sup>42</sup> And finally, the majority of the Composite Platoon, which replaced the Patricia Platoon, was employed in parachute packing and maintenance.<sup>43</sup>

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.<sup>44</sup> 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," wrote the Vice Chief of the General Staff, "has directed that the platoon of the R22eR will be withdrawn as soon as administrative arrangements can be completed."<sup>45</sup> Although direction was also given to the Commanding Officer of the R22eR to post two officers and 15 "Other Ranks," by 1 September 1949, as instructors to Rivers to replace the withdrawn personnel, the die had been cast.

The SAS Company, 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 Special Air Service Company had virtually ceased to exist. Its personnel rejoined their parent regiments as their respective training was completed. Sergeant B.C. Robinson, a veteran of both 1 Canadian Parachute Battalion and the SAS Company, 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.<sup>46</sup> The disbandment was so low key that no official date has been discovered.

In the end, it seems as if the demise of the Canadian SAS Company was shrouded in as much contradiction as its establishment. Nonetheless, the SAS Company served as a "bridge" linking the Canadian Parachute Battalion and the three infantry battalions which conceptually formed an airborne brigade.<sup>47</sup> It perpetuated the airborne spirit and kept the requisite parachute skills alive. However, its existence suffered from a lack of clarity and commitment. Its 'successor' would be similarly handicapped.

## Notes

1. *House of Commons Parliamentary Debates* (hereafter referred to as *Debates*), 19 August 1946, p.5059.
2. *Debates*, 13 February 1947, p.394.
3. Harry Pugh, *Canadian Airborne Insignia 1942 - Present* (Arlington, VA: C & D Enterprises, 1994), p.24.
4. Interview with author, 20 November 1998.
5. Interview with author, 25 August 1998.
6. 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, p.97.

7. 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)).
8. 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).
9. "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*, p. 13; and AB Museum Research Papers on Canadian Airborne Organizations, Part 1, I.C, Document 2 - "Canadian Air Service," by Berkley Franklin.
10. 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.
11. "SAS Company - JAS (Army), 13 June 1947. NAC 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.
12. "SAS Company - JAS (Army), 13 June 1947. NAC RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2; and AB Museum research information sheet entitled "The Canadian Special Air Service Company."
13. "SAS Company," 30 October 1947, 4. The proposed SAS Coy was specifically included in the Interim Plan for SAR. "Requested Amendment to Interim Plan - SAR," 11 September 1947. NAC RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2. In the 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 Canadian SAS Company 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," AB Museum, 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. Franklins, *The Airborne Bridge. The Canadian Special Air Service Company* (Private Commemorative Publication, 1988), p.50.
14. *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, NAC RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2.
15. "SAS Company - JAS (Army), 13 June 1947, Appendix A. NAC RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2.
16. See Tony Geraghty, *Inside the SAS* (Toronto: Methuen, 1980); Anthony Kemp, *The SAS at War* (London: John Murray, 1991); and Philip Warner, *The Special Air Service* (London: William Kimber, 1971). Contemporary accounts of the Canadian SAS often state erroneously that the organization was originally established to provide Canada with such a capability.
17. "Special Air Service Company - Implementation Policy," 12 September 1947. NAC RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2.
18. "SAS Company," 30 October 1947 (Air S94), NAC RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2.
19. "SAS Terms of Reference," 16 April 1948; "Duties of the SAS Coy," 29 January 1948; SAS Coy - Air Training Directive," December 1948. NAC 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, pp.96-97.
20. *Debates*. 19 August 1946, p.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."
21. 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.
22. Canadian Airborne Centre Edmonton, UIC 1326-2695, Vol 1, Annual Historical Report, 1 April 1948 - 31 March 1949, Sect XVIII - SAS Coy. DHH.
23. There has always been a recognized institutional hostility towards special forces 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).
24. "SAS Company," 27 October 1948. NAC RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2.
  25. Franklin, pp.2 & 7; Interviews Firlotte and B.C. Robinson (member of SAS Company), 21 September 1998. Selection standards included the requirements to be: a bachelor; in superb physical condition; demonstrate initiative, self-reliance, and control; immensely quick in thought and action; have a strong sense of discipline; and an original approach. AB Museum, Research Papers on Canadian Airborne Organizations, Part 1, I.C, Document 1 - "Canadian Special Air Service Company," p. 1.
  26. Interview with Ken Arril, 25 August 1998.
  27. Interview with Ken Arril.
  28. Interview with Bob Firlotte.
  29. Special Air Service Company," 30 May 1948, NAC RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2.
  30. Numerous memorandums exist clearly stating the role of the SAS Company as that of a nucleus for a larger force. See NAC RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2. The perceived "commando" role was held by virtually all who served in the sub-unit. Interviews and AB Museum, Research Paper, Part 1, I.C, Document 1 - "Canadian Special Air Service Company." The role as a demonstration and test group was 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. NAC RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2.
  31. George Kitching, *Mad and Green Fields. The Memoirs of Major-General George Kitching* (St. Catharines, ON: Vanwell Publishing Ltd., 1986), p.248; "Command, Mobile Striking Force," 21 October 1948. DHH 112.3M2 (D369); Lieutenant-Colonel D.J. Goodspeed, *The Armed Forces of Canada 1867-1967* (Ottawa: DHH, 1967), p.213; and Sean Maloney, "The Mobile Striking Force and Continental Defence 1948-1955," *Canadian Military History*, Vol 2, No. 2, August 1993, p.78.
  32. "Special Air Service Company - Implementation Policy." 12 September 1947. NAC 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."
  33. "Training of the PPCLI for the Airborne/Air-transported Operations," 28 July 1948. NAC RG 24, Vol 2371, File HQ-88-33, Army/Air Training of Airborne Infantry, Vol 1.
  34. "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.
  35. 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, p.1; and G.R. Stevens, *Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry 1919-1957* (Edmonton: Historical Committee of the Regiment, 1959), pp.262-263.
  36. "PPCLI Airborne/Air-transported Training - Employment of SAS Company," 2 October 1948; "SAS Company - PPCLI Platoon," 14 October 1948; "SAS Company," 12 November 1948. NAC RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2.
  37. Continuing conceptual turmoil prevailed even at this late period in the development of both the SAS Company 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." (NAC RG 24, Vol 2371, File HQ-88-33, Army/Air Training of Airborne Infantry, Vol 1). However, this never happened. The SAS 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." NAC RG 24, Vol 2371, File HQ-88-33, Army/Air Training of Airborne Infantry, Vol 2.
  38. "Training the Active Force - Airborne and Airtransported Aspects," 7 September 1948. NAC RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2.
  39. "Special Air Service Company - Joint Air School (Army Component), 4 October 1948. NAC RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2.
  40. "Special Air Service Company," 6 May 1949. NAC RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2.
  41. "Special Air Service Company," 4 June 1949; "Special Air Service Company," 7 June 1949; and "SAS Company - CJATC," 21 July 1949. NAC RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2.
  42. "SAS Company - CJATC, Rivers," 13 June 1949, 1. NAC RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2.
  43. *Ibid*, p.2.
  44. "Special Air Service Company," 20 June 1949. NAC RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2.
  45. Untitled Memo from VCGS, 6 July 1949. NAC RG 24, Reel C-8255, File HQS 88-60-2.
  46. Interview with author, 21 September 1998.
  47. The "bridge" analogy was coined by Lieutenant-Colonel Moncrief, a platoon commander in the SAS Company and later a PPCLI Battalion Commander. See Franklin's, "Airborne Bridge," p.4.
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