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Newspapermen Visit Petawawa Army Camp

The following account of a visit to Petawawa Army Camp has been written by Barry Wenger, publisher of the Midway Gazette and is reproduced in the Herald as a special feature for weekly newspapers.

Will Canadians take part in another major war in the near future? If so, where will they serve and how soon will they start to train? These and many other similar questions were uppermost in my mind when I reached Petawawa military camp last week.

"I found that a great training centre is about the last place in the world to find out for the very same question was addressed to me many times within the next two days. So very often a young Army officer or soldier would say 'What do you newspapermen think of the possibilities of war?'"

Perhaps questions about the international situation are pointless, for it is highly possible that even the best-informed diplomats are still in the dark. One thing became evident — the Canadian army is making every effort to get into shape for whatever emergency may arise. Officers are keen and the men are enthusiastic. Training at Petawawa deals almost completely with the practical aspects of modern warfare and there is absolutely no fooling about the seriousness of its intention.

When we were at the camp on August 2 and 3, conjecture was running high as to the future decisions of the Federal cabinet, for at that time there had been no announcement about the sending of the Canadian Army Special Force into training. To the last man we found the same opinion — the Canadian Army must be represented in the United Nations force if our country is to retain its identity as a full member of the UN. This week's announcement from Ottawa will come as a very definite relief to those who are responsible for our defence.

Two Day Visit

Our press party was composed of Robert J. Boyer, editor of the Muskoka Herald, Bracebridge, Alan Charters, editor of The Guelph Review, and myself, the tour being arranged for the representatives of the weekly press in order to carry the story of Canada's Army to the people of the rural areas.

As was the case last year, our press party had been invited to Petawawa at the direction of Major-General Chris Vokes, G.C., Central Command, who is genuinely anxious to have the public informed on subjects relating to military pre-

paredness and his cooperation with the press is gratifying.

With Major General Vokes in command, the Army gets action. There is a minimum of spit-and-polish in the places where it does no good. Whenever the men can be given a break, they get it . . . and whenever discipline and obedience to the letter are required the General leaves no one in doubt. In two separate tours of the establishment at Petawawa, and in conversation with dozens of officers and men I have been impressed with the loyalty of all who serve in his command.

The General is a plain-spoken man, easy to approach and genial when the occasion permits. The members of our party were entertained at his home last Thursday evening along with other guests and staff members, and enjoyed the most pleasant type of hospitality, extended by General Vokes and his charming wife.

Canada's Largest Training Centre.

Camp Petawawa is particularly interesting because it is by far the largest training establishment in the Dominion. Here troops from Vancouver to Newfoundland are brought for special training courses which will fit them for expert duties in their own localities. The great proportion of those under training are Reserve force personnel who come into camp for one week or longer if possible. For the Reservists the camp program is fitted to fill out the training which has been received in local centres throughout the year. Some elements of the Canadian permanent force, such as the Royal Canadian Dragoons and the Royal Canadian Regiment, are stationed there.

To mention a few of the branches which receive training at Petawawa, there are the infantry and infantry support outfits, anti-tank units, light and medium artillery, armored corps (tanks), military intelligence and several others. While we were in camp there was a special course in progress for padres, and they weren't devoting all their time to saying prayers. The clergymen in uniform were out on field exercises which included rescue operations for wounded men under fire. We watched the padres worm their way out of a theoretical battle area with a casualty. When they reached a stream they improvised a boat from stretcher frames and tarpaulins and ferried the wounded man across. They must be familiar with first aid, they learn a good deal about army organization and battle tactics so that their duties may be coordinated with the general scheme of action in time of war.

Only "M.I." School

One of the most interesting branches of the service which we visited was the "M.I." school, where the science of military intelligence is taught. This department, the only one of its kind in Canada is under the direction of Lt.-Col. Raymond, one of the keenest men I have ever met. He was gracious enough to show us a great deal of the equipment and explain many of the details about intelligence work, and since some of that information lies within the sphere of official secrecy, I intend to honour his request for caution in speaking of one of the most vital sections of military activity. Suffice it to say that the armed forces of this country are far from asleep, as far as knowledge of our potential enemies is concerned.

At the M.I. school the various phases of intelligence work are taught to members of the other services as well as the army. The work is dealt with in progressively intensive degrees depending on the place the student is to fill in future operations. The subject of air photo interpretation is taught even to non-commissioned officers who must be able to use this type of information in the field.

Training Methods Have Changed

In all branches we found a big change in training methods, even from last year. Individual instructors and wing commanders have apparently been placed upon their own initiative to get their messages across in the most graphic manner. Many of them have resorted to methods which are reminiscent of the more progressive academic schools in Ontario. They frequently resort to skits which deal with a proposed situation in time of war. The younger officers act out the proper sequence of procedure.

One such playette, in which we were particularly interested took place in the instruction quarters of the Armored Corps, under direction of Major Platt. Actually the men taking the course that day were not only tank corps people, but infantry types as well, and the point of the skit which was presented was to demonstrate the proper methods of coordinating infantry and tank operations for a forthcoming encounter with the enemy.

Life on the Open Range

Camp Petawawa is a big place. It stretches almost twelve miles north and south along the Ottawa River and at some points is six miles in width. Of course only a small proportion of the total area is occupied by the buildings of the camp proper. The remainder is laid out in ranges, or training areas for artillery, small arms, mortars, tanks,

etc. The terrain is ideal for this purpose.

One of the most interesting visits was to the medium artillery range where two batteries of 8.5 inch guns were firing. These weapons, which are completely mobile, have a fearful striking power. Their 80-lb. shells can be hurled out to ranges of almost ten miles. The shell leaves the gun with a disconcerting screech and explodes with a terrific blast at the point of impact.

The Canadian Army still trails its armored corps on our counterpart of the American Sherman tank which, of course, has been outdated by fighting in Korea. It is expected that more modern equipment will be available soon. The tank range is an interesting place, and the student soldiers get their initiation into the actual operation of the big machines here. Courses are taught in driving and maintenance, as well as use of the tank's weapons.

Food and Quarters Good

As I recall, the only real criticism I had for Petawawa last year was the meals. At that time they were not good, but this year there is a vast improvement. Both officers and men are getting the best of food and kitchens and mess huts are clean.

Even the men who are engaged in exercises in the field, many miles from the camp proper, are served hot food. When we were going through the kitchens at 9.30 in the morning the cooks were packing big metal containers with hot meats, vegetables and beverages. The containers are first heated and before they are taken away hot water is placed in the double bottoms of the insulated boxes, which will, if necessary, keep the food hot for 48 hours. Trucks loaded with the hot dinners arrive at the scene of action in time for the noon break.

Since our visit to Petawawa last year the giant stoves in each mess hut have been converted to the use of propane gas, a much cleaner source of heat than the coal which was formerly used. When we visited a typical hut the meats and vegetables were cooking for the next meal, pastries were cooling and preparations were under way for the dinner which was later served to the men in camp. The word "hut" in this connection must not be confused with a small structure, for each of the buildings accommodates a thousand men at a sitting.

Permanent Homes Available

One large area of the camp is taken up by permanent houses of several modern designs which can be rented by the married men who are accompanied by wives and families. The homes are well constructed and the streets are laid out in curves to provide for more pleasing landscaping possibilities. When completed, the housing projects will contain 450 homes, 75 per cent of which have already been erected. Lawns have been laid and cement sidewalks and curbs are in place. Rates of rent are determined not by the class of home but by the rank of the tenant, private soldiers paying much less than the officers.

In addition to the permanent homes, there is still another section where several hundred families live in tents for the summer. The residents of this quarter seem to like the life, many of them being city people who appreciate the chance to get their youngsters out of the heat and off the street.

Demonstration of Fire Power

By far the most spectacular part of the visit to Camp Petawawa was the fire power demonstration on Thursday evening. The display has been changed considerably since last year, even in its basic purpose. The intention of this year's demonstrations is to illustrate to troops and spectators alike, the principles involved when a regular infantry company is defending itself in the field. This demonstration includes the use not only of infantry weapons, but such other supporting arms as might reasonably be called upon for assistance.

A squadron of jet-propelled Vampire aircraft from Montreal opens the show by blasting rockets into the positions held by the "enemy." Then comes one of the most inspiring sights one could imagine. Two giant Dakota aircraft fly in over the area to drop paratroopers, soldiers of the Royal Canadian Regiment. As the big planes approached the battle area at 2,000 feet, the announcer on the ground switched over his controls and brought in the sound from the interior of the plane itself. Believe it or not, those boys who were about to leap out into endless blue space, were singing at the tops of their voices, and we were told this is just what they do in a real action.

At the command of the officer in the plane the first tiny figure whirped away from the side of each aircraft, closely followed by the rest of the men in that "stick" or group. Parachutes blossomed out and the fighting men drifted down to earth, ready to take the enemy by surprise. The Dakotas circled the field and came back to drop the second and last stick of paratroopers. By the time they reached the ground the first to land had formed up on their section leaders, whose

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