

# Holland Summer Awaiting Repatriation May-August 1945

**Captain Harold MacDonald with M.A. MacDonald**

When the German armies surrendered on 8 May 1945, the Canadian forces in northwest Europe had experienced 11 months of extremely fierce fighting. They had confronted elite German panzer divisions in Normandy and determined defenders within well-entrenched coastal fortifications at the Channel ports of Boulogne and Calais.

Then, in the late autumn of 1944, they had cleared a determined enemy from the Scheldt estuary under conditions of constant wet and cold, one of the worst battlegrounds of the entire campaign.

Their next assignment was to strike into Germany itself and then to liberate the northern provinces of Holland. Throughout those months of intense combat, Canadian losses had been heavy, equal to those experienced in the First World War. When peace finally came in early May 1945, those who had survived were anxious to be done with the army, to return to their own country and savour once more the comforts of home and family. Many had a substantial wait, much longer than they expected.

Repatriating some 343,000 Canadian military personnel from Europe back to Canada in a fair and expeditious manner presented the Canadian military with an enormously complex and politically sensitive task. Authorities were determined to avoid a repetition of the problems that had occurred at the end of the First World War, when delays in repatriation resulted in widespread rioting by Canadian soldiers in England, with consequent property damage and some deaths.<sup>1</sup> Just days before the German



surrender, on 4 May 1945, Canadian Military Headquarters issued a pamphlet entitled *After Victory in Europe*, reprinted in the soldiers' newspaper, the *Maple Leaf*, which spelled out the conditions of repatriation. This stressed that it would be based upon the principle of "first in, first out," which left an expectation among the troops that it would be a fairly straightforward process whereby those who had spent the longest time overseas would be the first to go home.<sup>2</sup> But the situation was complicated by factors such as the Canadian government's pledge to create a force to fight in the continuing war against Japan in the Pacific, which had to take foremost priority. Also, there was a need to retain some personnel in Europe both to compose an occupation force in Germany and to perform administrative tasks involved in overseeing the repatriation. At the same time, there were serious problems with the availability of shipping, given the huge demands involved in repatriating Allied forces from Europe generally and the need to supply the war in the Pacific. There was also disagreement within the Army as to whether priority for repatriation should be given on an individual basis according to length of service or whether entire units should be sent back intact based upon seniority of war service. The result was a compromise arrangement whereby both were tried.<sup>3</sup>

Priority for length of service was based upon a system of points, to which Hal MacDonald makes frequent reference below. First priority for repatriation to Canada was to be given to those who volunteered for service in the Pacific.



photo courtesy of M.A. MacDonald

Captain Harold S. (Hal) MacDonald of the North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment photographed while on leave in London in late 1944 or early 1945.

Europe went on much longer than he had anticipated. These letters are full of accusations, recriminations, and hostility expressed towards the Canadian officialdom. With similar complaints being expressed widely among the troops overseas, they were taken up by Canadian newspapers and became a concern of politicians. The latter brought pressures to bear and in August, Lieutenant-General Guy Simonds, who had replaced General Harry Crerar as commander of the Canadian forces in Europe on the latter's departure for Canada on 30 July, placed a greater emphasis on getting personnel with higher points home faster.<sup>5</sup> This, together with the freeing up of greater quantities of shipping with the end of the war in the Pacific in mid-August, increased the speed of repatriations, which doubtless lay behind MacDonald's receiving news of his own impending return to Canada at the end of that month.

At least the months of anxious waiting were spent in Holland, whose citizens, were immensely grateful to their liberators and anxious to do as much for them as possible. This took the form of entertainments, boating parties, and even free memberships in many clubs. Canada, after all, had provided a refuge for Dutch Princess Juliana and her children during the war. Strong ties between the two countries had already developed and, despite occasional frictions and irritations caused by the presence of so many restless and unoccupied troops who, for the most part, wanted simply to go home, warm relations would continue.

Captain Harold Stevens MacDonald had served with the Third Division's North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment since he had arrived at Juno Beach with regimental reinforcements on 27 June. He first served as Support Company commander and then, in late September, as regimental adjutant, and lastly as the North Shores' liaison officer to the 8th Infantry Brigade. In the latter capacity MacDonald had escorted Brigadier James Alan Roberts to the surrender negotiations at Aurich on 5 May, and witnessed the early stages of the formal capitulation, which took effect three days later. While the war was being waged, MacDonald had maintained a steady flow of detailed letters to his wife Marjorie

For the remainder, repatriation was to be carried out in accordance with a point system, whereby one month's service in Canada counted for two points and one month's service in Europe for three points, with additional percentages being added to the scores of married personnel, widowers, or divorcees with dependent children.<sup>4</sup> For example, Hal MacDonald, who had enlisted in 1939 and gone overseas in June 1942, had the high number of 174 points. Certainly the process went much more smoothly in 1945 than in 1919, with only one relatively minor disturbance occurring at Aldershot in June. Nonetheless, unexplained delays and complications were experienced and many men with high point scores found themselves waiting in Europe while men with lower ones boarded ship to go home before them. Even some NRMA men, or conscripts, who had only come to Europe during the last months of fighting, got to go before the volunteers, who composed the bulk of the overseas army.

A measure of the feelings generated by the issue is the content and tone of many of the letters written by the normally restrained and optimistic Hal MacDonald, whose own time in

in Saint John, which describe in vivid detail the story of an infantry officer in action. Now, with the war over, the letters switch to relating the details of his life in newly liberated Holland while he anxiously awaited his transportation home, which, to his mounting frustration, seemed to take forever.

At the war's end, 8th Brigade headquarters were still in Holtrop, a small town near Aurich. On 11 May he wrote that, to keep everyone busy and fit, he and the company sergeant major had decided to start the brigade staff on a daily course of physical training. Also, "René Harron, our I.O. [intelligence officer] went to the Burgomaster [the local mayor] and ordered riding horses, saddles, feed and a groom. Have the works established in the stable in our backyard. Order a horse, the groom saddles it & brings it out. On our return we just pass the reins to the bloke - he looks after everything." The Chaudières, in their turn, had requisitioned a power boat and were spending evenings speeding about the canals. But they were "all suffering from bites - they're all over. Might be a rash, or ticks, or scabies, that popular army plague. I'm going to paint myself tonight with a lotion I got from the Doc, and have thrown out the bed and mattress I had." To a question from Marjorie, "about pockets under helmet nets or tied to belts," he replied: "They are shell dressings kept in a convenient place. As I remember they came in very handy." Letters of 12 to 16 of May describe their first rides, with balky horses, scout car runs down to the units, sun bathing, and volleyball games. He thought he might get back to Canada fairly soon: "Hear rumours (very good) to that effect. You see, I have a fairly high standing on this pt. [point] business."

By 16 May they they had left Holtrop. "Up at 5:00 and on the move at 7:00. From then to dusk in an open car. Drove back through same country we had fought through. So nice to be able to smile at kids. Got into concentration area about 2300. Paul [fellow officer, Paul Verge] and I were filthy. Dust, wind & sunburn - eyes swollen & inflamed. Piled into bed on the floor of deserted house & had a marvellous sleep. Up at 7:00. Breakfast after a good wash & shave...Haven't seen the Kaiser's place yet but it's only a hop, skip & jump away. Maybe tomorrow I will." (This indicates that they were in Doorn, where Kaiser Wilhelm II, Germany's leader in the First World War, had

gone into comfortable exile after the war and where he had died in June 1941.) "Expect to be here for a few weeks, and then after that, oh, I daren't think of it. It can't be long now, after all these years." "This is beautiful country" he wrote the next day. "Our HQ is in a large house about 50 yards from main rd. [road]. One comment on warm weather - the gals keep cool by wearing as little as possible & riding bikes."

For the next few weeks MacDonald's letters continued to report on his life in Holland and on the rumours circulating about when the early drafts would be leaving for home. "In the dumps," proclaimed a letter of 21 May. "This just waiting to get back to you is getting me down - it's becoming difficult to be patient." The Chaudières, he said, had organized a march past in the Hague for the Queen. As for his own unit, the North Shores: "the Bn. [Battalion] had a party Sat. night. What a go. Everyone happy. [We had] a number of local gals and 10 nurses from #1 Cdn. General Hospital. I won a bet from the Brig [Brigadier J.A. Roberts, 8th Brigade's commanding officer] - being still able to navigate at 3:30 a.m. In fact drove myself home." He and Paul Verge had recently driven around the outskirts of Doorn to see the beautiful houses, and had come across "an old 16th cent. castle complete with moat and lovely grounds." He would soon come to know the castle's owners and be entertained there.

Hal was depressed again on 25 May, "cause dammit I don't like waiting around." Nonetheless:

Frankly, we are having a fairly good time...This town of Doorn is noted for its wealth and it certainly shows. We had a dance Wednesday night - just Bde HQ. Had a good time - champagne, brandies, rum punch, whiskey, cognac - what a letdown when we get back on Civvy Street & have to pay for everything. Got paired off with a female member of the underground, daughter of a Baron - her uncle owns the house we use as a mess. Had a lot of fun and wound up at 5:00 - got to bed at 6:00. Oh yes, I had been riding in the morning...

Yesterday Paul & I went down to the Burgomaster's for tea. The Burgomaster is a Baron Van Nagle - they are appointed by the Gov't for life & are only responsible to the Gov't & not to the people or civilians. After tea, about 1900, we took the bloke's daughter down to Baron LaPorte's house - just a shanty. Gosh, Jan, a big castle with moat and drawbridge. He's very

interesting. Took us thru the castle, a marvellous collection of arms & armour & trophy room.

They were still in Doorn on 29 May, but “we may move. Not sure yet.” He had been busy, travelling to the battalion in Rhenen, then to Utrecht and after that “up to the MOB [Mobile Bath] & had a shower – twas good too.” They had another dance Sunday night in the mess.

It was swell. Had a great band led by a Darkie [sic] from Montreal. He’s been in Holland for years & years. Everybody got drunk or happy. Had to make a run to Hilversum that day, missed supper & got back at 2030. Had a quick large (extra) of Peach brandy while I was washing, shaving, etc., then called a former partner I had to a previous dance. She works with the underground and I see them every day. Was a bit peeved, though. She got the idea I shouldn’t dance with anyone but her & I should show her more attention. It made me cross, so I informed her she was only a dancing partner – then too Paul passed gum around & these girls really chew – that finished it. We’re still friends but I daren’t ask her to another dance.

He went on to report that snapshots he had taken had turned out really well: “...over six officers have asked for copies of the tent and the Jeep & DUKW scenes, including the Brig and BM, GIII.” (This refers to Brigadier Roberts, to the Brigade Major, Hugh Kennedy, and, presumably, to Major Arthur McKibben, the General Staff Officer III, the lowest of the brigade’s staff officer positions.<sup>6</sup>)

In a second letter of the same date, MacDonald reported: “One of the guys with 210

points is going home in a day or so & I have 174. Hon, it won’t be long.” He had been appointed chief instructor on rehabilitation with five officer instructors under him. “We are beginning a very intense schedule of lectures and discussions in order to train the men to be good citizens. So I’ll have my hands full.”

But within a few days, serious doubts about government promises of early repatriation had set in. On 2 June, he wrote:

I’m afraid our noble Gov’t is going to fall down on their promises as far as quick repatriation is concerned. I wouldn’t be a bit surprised. Naturally troops are required for the Burma show, etc. but why such optimistic promises...Last evening Cy Tanner & I accepted an invitation to visit M. de Beaufort. His family dates back to 11th century and so does their beautiful castle. He produced a bottle of whiskey & a bottle of champagne & we spent a pleasant two hours with the other guests – Baron something or other, another brother, & Dr. Van Damm – Prof of romance languages at Utrecht University. They have some beautiful china & his collection of weapons from all over the world is worth a fortune. Had a very nice evening.

Word was afoot, he added, that the Brigade was about to be moved. A long double airmail letter of 4 June related how, on the previous evening

the Burgomaster & family & the Baron & family came in to say Goodbye & the Brig & high priced help arrived. Had a lot of fun & sat talking till 1 a.m. Sunday we moved. As the house we had been occupying had belonged to a collaborator

Residence in Doorn that housed the Headquarters of 8th Brigade.



photo courtesy of M.A. MacDonald

we were free to take the furniture, so we sent our Jeeps and trucks back & brought up beds, tables, chairs, curtains, etc. We are now in Amersfoort – a very nice spot. Matter of fact we three L.O.'s [Liaison Officers] are living in same house the mess occupies – also the BM and GIII. Have elec[tricity] from a Generator & we have a lovely large room. We worked all yesterday p.m. tidying it up & now it's the envy of everyone. Water is on from 0900 to 1900...have curtains, pictures, & mirrors up, put coloured flannel blankets on beds. There's a small balcony off it [their room] where we put lawn chairs. Amazing but nice to just help yourself to the best of furniture. Also attached our loud speaker to mess radio & now have a home away from home...

Yesterday I was busy L.O.ing & receiving routes. Had supper, then Moose [Jackson], Paul & I went to Rotterdam...Visited 1st Div. Officers' Club there. Spent a good part of evening talking to a Dutch Navy Lt. Cmdr. [Lieutenant-Commander] – a darn nice guy and he was very keen that we have dinner at his mess anytime we were in Rotterdam. We left there at 2300 & when 12 miles from home our Jeep quit on us. Fooled around but no luck. Then about midnight Paul got a lift in a car to get us towed back. Moose & I went to sleep & it rained, of course. After two hrs Paul arrives with a huge wrecker & it towed us home. Got back at 03.30. Then had canned chicken, crackers & olives & got to bed at 0415.

The next morning he visited three units & was on duty in the afternoon. The troops overseas were then voting in the federal election and “incidentally,” wrote Hal, “I voted Prog[ressive] Con[servative].” (Hal's preference was not reflected in the armed forces as a whole, which voted 35 per cent Liberal, as opposed to 32 per cent CCF and only 26 per cent Conservative. When the full vote was held on 11 June, the Liberals took 127 seats to the Tories' 67 and the CCF's 28.) On the way in to Doorn on 5 June, “a motorcycle with two on board arrived at the same corner as we did & my first recollection was of two bodies – one on the hood, t'other clear over the hood. I instinctively slapped on the brakes & got jammed against the wheel. Rushed the two lads to a Doc. One was jarred up & had a bad bruise on shoulder – the other was o.k. No one's fault – shall not end up in a report or anything...Was very thankful they weren't injured. Gosh it's too late now to have an accident. I do want to go home to you in one piece & I'm going to.”

“Will you be my guest on evening of June 6? We're having a huge party as a D-Day celebration.

It's our Bde party & we're having all officers who ever worked with us, anticipating having at least 225 couples. No, I haven't a girl yet. Paul wants me to take his friend's friend. Don't know whether I will or not.” He had just got a cable from Marjorie sending wedding anniversary greetings for 5 June, while he had himself sent a cable and flowers, which he hoped had arrived.

They were all “getting whacky now” he stated on 5 June. “Jackson and I had a glorious wrestling bout yesterday, ending with the three of us [roommates] into it. The BM just shakes his head and says “Battle Exhaustion”...After a conference at Div[ision] got busy on organizing, or helping to org. the Bde share for a Div 6 June anniversary parade tomorrow in Utrecht.”

A letter of 7 June described the Brigade's D-Day dance. But first:

Remember I told you Paul wanted me to take his friend's friend? Well, after the big D-Day parade in Utrecht yesterday, which was quite something, we got back at 0530, a bath & shave & change & Paul & I started for Rotterdam. The friend's friend was not allowed to come, so Paul & friend & I started back...The party was held in a large dance pavilion here in Amersfoort. The floral decorations alone cost 400 guilders, which is a good sum. The entrance to the joint was through an LCA [Landing Craft Assault] and there were maps of the whole campaign & various other trophies of victory – very well done. Had lots to drink & two bands, and dancing went on to 0530 hrs – then we had a pianist who played til 0600 – then those still standing of Bde came back to the Mess & we had breakfast there – males & females. A swell party.

Had a beautiful glow on & kept it at that – just a perfect glow all night – never too much. Had a grand time all by myself, danced quite a bit, laughed all the time. The guys had 3 nursing sisters from #10 General & about 10 of us stayed on till 06.00 – then breakfast then took the N/srs [Nursing Sisters] & Major McGibbin [sic], Moose & Frank for a ride in Paul's scout car – the locals think we're crazy. Sometimes I wonder. Today was bad. Slept this a.m. – had dinner & mooched around this p.m. with 2 hrs sleep. A lot of fun today recalling incidents. Tonight Paul & I went to investigate a club we heard about – drinks, food & boating. We reserved a sailboat for three hrs. on Sat. p.m.

The following day, 8 June, he was again impatiently waiting for news of his return to Canada.

Anyway it won't be long now - it just can't be 'cause I'll go nuts. Still hearing things about the party. Have been asked where & how I ended up. Anyway 'twas fun & I got the urge to fling satisfied & not in any detrimental way. Was told that one N/S asked why I was alone & I replied: "'Tis my wedding anniversary & I'm with my wife." Frankly I don't recall saying that although it was my inner thought...Am off duty at 1900 & a show in the mess tonight. Want to come? Some of the guys bring their friends in - these people haven't seen a show in four or five years & they do enjoy them. Tonight we have "Pres. Wilson"...No more news of when I get home - rumours, but I dislike rumours. They can be so disappointing.

Hal continued on the same theme three days later, on 11 June.

At the bottom of a low mood...The Bde Comdr. [Roberts] had us all together this p.m. & gave us all the latest news on repatriation - here 'tis. Those with up to 100 pts are put into Occupation & remain there until their turn comes. Then, as a rough guide, 110 to 180 pts. return with their Bns on a territorial basis - over 180 pts are now posted to 1st or 2nd Div who go back before 3rd Div. It is anticipated that 3rd Div goes back in September...It def. put me into a funk. Had been planning on being back by August...it's only a month later than our orig. hopes & plans - but now a month seems like a year.

Doubtless it was hard on Marjorie, he added, with her having to wait at home while "we've had celebrations & a new country & so on...but now the novelty is over with & it's a matter of watching the days go by...Don't give up hope "cause miracles can still happen."

A sailing outing cheered up MacDonald considerably. A long letter of Saturday afternoon, 12 June said: "Moose, Paul, the Dental Off. Garth, Cy Tanner & I went sailing. Had a 17-footer & a barrel of fun - all of us got soaked. Paul & I made reservations for Monday and Wed. After 1° hrs. sailing we went back to the club & had sandwiches." On a completely different subject, he reported: "There's a hell of a lot of VD amongst the troops. We've started a drive against it. There's little risk of getting it other than through actual contact but we all get a blood test regularly." He and Moose had been to Doorn and "saw a Jeep that was stolen from Moose - by the time we got turned around it was out of sight on a side rd - travelled around trying to pick it up, but couldn't." He continued on a second airmail form: "Am still so damn

disappointed at finding it will possibly be Fall before I get back. Still that's only a few months, & look at the days & weeks I wondered if I'd ever get back to you again and, if so, in what condition - we have so much to be thankful for & yet, being human, are never satisfied."

Five of them had recently been to Amsterdam.

It's out of bounds but we got the BM to sign a duty pass. Looked up a Col. Paul we knew then went to the Lido - they said they had nothing but sherry & lemonade. Had a sherry & then a Brig. came over. He's O.C. Aux'y [Officer Commanding Auxiliary] troops - at present on way to Canada as Ass't Deputy Adj. Gen. [Assistant Deputy Adjutant General] He introduced himself & we (through him) got a whiskey. We sat around talking & looking at the horde dancing - some beautiful girls there but so help me we never talked to a single one. We left there at 10 & went to another club - a dive really. Spent a few minutes there & then came home. Like Amsterdam very much, very lovely city.

"Sunday night Paul, Moose, Hooker White & I went down to see Col. Anderson [a former commanding officer of the North Shore Regiment] - he's on the other side of Utrecht. Had a pleasant evening talking & sipping cognac." The next morning Hal was busy with his rehabilitation lectures and in the afternoon again went sailing. "Had a 20 footer with small cabin, spent an hour out, chilly & cloudy but a good brisk wind. After that had 2 rums & a few sandwiches & then home." He added more details the next day: "Moose & I got into a scuffle & ended with Moose dragging in the water." And that evening, had another "scuffle with the BM who was tying one on...Yes, we do act like kids, but the alternative is to mope around & we just can't do that."

On 14 June he helped René Harran supervise the brigade competitors at a Division sports meet in Hilversum stadium and then listened to Duke Ellington and the Ink Spots on the mess radio. He was having "very little to drink in the mess now...so I'm getting back into shape." To questions from Marjorie he replied: "Most of the people speak English - those who don't talk with us in sign language. Flemish is extremely difficult to pick up."

On 16 June they again went sailing. "Had a lot of fun - very windy, quite rough, enough for



The 8th Brigade Headquarters Staff at "de Heimstede," Doorn, Holland. Brigadier J.A. Roberts and his second-in-command, Major Hugh Kennedy are seated in front along with Jhr. and Mme de Beaufort. Hal MacDonald is standing second from the left.

whitecaps. The four of us took a cabin job & 'twas the best sailing we've ever had so far."

Now comes the troubles. This a.m. the Bde Major told me I was to be A & Q [adjutant and quartermaster] learner. I've told you my feelings about A & Q work & I still heartily dislike & despise it - furthermore the Learner under the present setup here is just the sucker for the DAAQMG [Deputy Acting Adjutant Quartermaster General] & I'll have none of it. After making my protest told the BM I'd help out in an emergency...Was down to see Col Gordon [North Shore Regiment commander] and he'll back me. Golly A & Q certainly follows me around...when Bob Ross "got it" I had to prac[tically] have a nervous breakdown to get out, and now this is the 2nd time in Bde.

Hey, latest repat news is that repat individually is down to 150 pts & demob 160 pts and they have said 160 pts home by July 30. That is hot news & very glad tidings - oh my spirits are up again, but lets not get too optimistic - just in case. Another good reason for not wanting A & Q job - then I'd be frozen till Bde goes home. Wouldn't like that at all...Keep fingers & toes crossed.

By 18 June he was starting "an intensive relax. & PT program." He had played three sets of tennis "our first in years. Last time I played with Noel, Cy Mersereau & Robbie & now look." (The first two of these friends had been killed in action and the third, Robichaud,

crippled for life.) The next day included church, then tennis again, after which, "Cy [Tanner] and I went down to the Indoor Pool & swam for 1/2 hr - getting into condition...We are living a good life now."

The next day he was:

sitting in the A & Q office. Just 'cause the Bde Comd insists I fill in till we get someone in here permanently. I'm taking tomorrow pm off. Bde Comd or not, I'm not going to do A & Q work & I'm not going to risk being frozen and having to remain till Sept or Oct. Am so damn mad and disgusted & fed up that I'd argue with anybody. I hate being made a goat of especially for or by someone who has fought the entire war behind a desk - by damn I won't.

There have been a lot of problems arise since Armistice. Decisions to make as to COF, CFEF & then UNRRA, all offering lucrative jobs for a year or more. [The first of these acronyms refers to the Canadian Occupation Force, then being set up in Germany; the third to the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, established in 1943 to deal with the problems of war-torn Europe. The precise meaning of CFEF is not known, although CFE refers to Canadian Forces Europe.] My decisions to return home have, of course, all revolved around us...There's so much to do here, swimming, golfing, sailing, riding, tennis, dancing, drinking & yet none of it is partic[ularly] inviting except as exercise - certainly not as

pleasure 'cause our wives aren't with us. That is the way most of us feel – some, of course, are happier this way.

On 22 June, he was beginning to recover from a bout of the stomach flu that was going the rounds. “The aches have gone and my stomach is def. more settled – only thing now is a splitting headache. Don't know what the cause of this illness is but in one Bn 95% of the personnel have it in various forms, and a good part of HQ.” The next day, he returned to the subject of repatriation. “The army as usual messes everything up. Personnel going home with extremely low point scores, fellows posted to COF who shouldn't be, etc. Lots of complaints now...The trouble is the guys in the infantry again take a licking. They are supposed to go as their turn comes up, but due to cross-postings to COF & CFEF, Bns are short of officers & they are being held – tough on them. Hope I'm not affected.”

By 24 June he was better and had been to church on Sunday. “The padre came up to the room at 0810 & threatened us with eternal damnation if we didn't get up & go. I never regret going to church if the minister is a really good 'un. Our present Padre is a prince. He often goes out with us & I've played tennis with him.” Hal had been invited to Moorsberg Castle again for tea & dancing, and drove down the next day, through its “perfect grounds & mile-long avenue of trees leading up to it.”

[A]ll their flunkies on duty from the head butler to the 2nd storey maid – really quite grand. The Limeys revel in pomp & show, as displayed by some officers] present that night. Cndns pay no attention to it. Regardless of class, etc. seems Cdn attitude is to approve because of character & not because of outward appearances...Came home at 2300 & sat on the balcony looking at the moon...The army HQ admits repatriation is bugged up. Guys going home with 70 & 80 pts – cripes the whole thing is bogging down.

Then, on Tuesday, 27 June:

Life is très [*sic*] quiet around here. The BM went on leave today & yours truly is acting BM – yeah, responsibility weighs heavily on my shoulders. No kidding, though, we are losing a lot of officers & then there's a bunch on leave so we are all short handed. Turned down my English leave – would be getting a leave in England when I go back anyway so why waste money now – would only go up to Carlisle & I couldn't stand a quiet

life now without you. Find life hard to put up with anyway. We're moving soon, back to Doorn...and we have a beautiful place for HQ this time...

Monday I went to Amsterdam trying to get evidence on a Summary of Evidence... Amsterdam is holding its festival & the place is beautiful in its decorations...sailboats on the canals, sculls out, barges decorated, streets & houses covered with flags, bunting – even curbs & poles painted with red & white & blue stripes.

On 28 June, he was busy with the summary of evidence and preparing for special parades. There was “no more news of repatriation, which is all balled up.” On June 29 he went “down to #5 Dental Coy with Geo. Werry – unit D.O. [Dental Officer] – and Doc. Werry said he was glad to see me 'cause I was so disgusted & browned off I made him feel better.”

At that point a Dutch camp just up the road were firing Verey pistols & some of the cartridges were coming perilously close to our thatched roof. If one had landed we wouldn't have a chance. The screamers sounded so like a mortar shell that I ducked onto the floor...We took my Jeep & went up – demanded to see the Cmd't & told him to stop. His excuse “They are all maquis & haven't had an opportunity to do this for years.”

That was the payoff. The bastards make a show of arms now. I'm rapidly losing my respect for the Dutch. The loyal ones who showed active resistance are either dead or practically forgotten. There are some good ones but as I say they've paid a price.

He was restless: “I'm a fool – why can't I just resign myself or read or do something constructive – but I can't settle down. I sit down to read & have to get up & walk or keep moving.”

Matters were no better by 1 July.

A quiet weekend & that damn song “Saturday Night is the Loneliest Night in the Week” is so true it makes me angry. The novelty of being away from war & tasting civilization is wearing or has worn off, i.e. the period of going to clubs & drinking & listening to the bands & dancing or watching people dance. Now we spend most of our time sitting in the Mess. In fact have recently been quite busy with the BM away & the DAAQMG going tomorrow and to top it off Cy Tanner rolled a Jeep over today & is now in hospital. What rotten luck & we're moving Wednesday. Can see problems ahead as the guys start getting picked up by the Provost on various charges.



He had been to Utrecht for dinner, then to the Officers' Club, which "was jammed. Saw two old friends - Dick Likely and Geo. Von Richter. We had a lot to talk over...Just found out something: The point priority is controlled by District i.e. if there's a high number of high pt men from MD 7 then it takes longer." (This refers to Military District (MD) No. 7 headquartered at Saint John, New Brunswick, which was MacDonald's home district.<sup>8</sup>)

"Moose & I have a new mascot," he revealed in a letter of 2 July. "It's a small spound puppy - half spaniel half hound. He spent last night in our room. It's a cute thing but subject to fighting nightmares when he'll growl somethin' awful...I went down to CCS [Casualty Clearing Station] to see Cy Tanner - he's o.k. just a badly bruised leg & should be out in 3 or 4 days...Tomorrow I have to represent HQ at the funeral of our Mail Cpl [who was killed in a road accident]. He's a brother of Web McRae our RSM who was killed at Calais or Sangatte with Noel. Web was the finest soldier I ever knew or will know. Young McRae was due to go home today too. Such is life. Now I drive at 15 or 20 m.p.h. & am very careful. I have so much to come home to."

By 4 July they had moved back to Doorn. "Feel very contented tonight. We have a lovely house, completely furnished," while his room, which he shared with Moose, had "a large writing desk, huge window & door leading onto a balcony with deck chairs, wicker tables, etc." He had just visited the billets and checked in at Ops, where he heard more news about repatriation. "Don't plan too much on an early arrival, don't be too optimistic. As I told you in the beginning, the repatriation setup stunk of politics, pre-election moves, etc. Well, now it has dwindled to 250 a day sailing instead of earlier 1500 per day - quite a reduction. There's a bottleneck in England which is gradually breaking loose."

"Today was a rush," he reported on 5 July, "and I enjoyed it - lots to occupy my mind. Did some paper work for Bde Major, still away, then checked area, then back to Ops. Had two civilians in for interviews, called Div. checked with CSM, a Bde Comd's meeting - lasted till 3.30 - wrote 5 army letters, discussion with Padre, cleaned boots, supper, & game of crib." The next day he took three accused soldiers into Amsterdam

The funeral of "Young McRae" in late June 1945. He was killed in a traffic accident weeks after the ceasefire and only one day before he was to go home. Hal MacDonald, (with his back to the camera) represented the unit at McRae's funeral.

photo courtesy of M.A. MacDonald



in a downpour. Rained all the way. Got to Amsterdam, trying to locate provost witnesses in the Summary of Evidence – got the runaround & got sore & determined to finish the thing. Ended up chasing provost patrols through Amsterdam getting guys I wanted – swore in one witness right in main thoroughfare. On way back got evidence from a Hosp In Amersfoort. After supper two interviews, met with Brig – then wrote up agenda for a conference this a.m. – & finished Summary – a busy day. While there talked the Brig into auth[orizing] me to submit names of HQ personnel with over 150 pts to 2 Ech, [Echelon] so if they have lost track of us they'll be reminded – hope it has some effect. ["2 Echelon" refers to the main Canadian military personnel records centre for the theatre, under the Deputy Adjutant General.<sup>9</sup>]

The next day, 9 July, after a sunny Sunday horseback ride, he referred to an incident that had recently occurred on 4 and 5 July at Aldershot in England, when Canadian troops awaiting repatriation rioted, causing much property damage.

What's your opinion of the Cdn riots in Aldershot? The men are justified in their beef, dammit, 'cause we fought the worst of it & spent years in Eng. previous to battle, training & absent from loved ones – should we suffer now in a farcical, stupid mixup & apparent lack of interest by Cdn Gov't? Small wonder the men were fed up & had to vent their emotions – a poor way to go about it. Beaverbrook's paper [presumably the *Daily Express*] panned the Cdn administration's repat arrangements & practised with the rioters. We don't blame them a bit.

C.P. Stacey called the Aldershot disturbance "deplorable" and "indefensible in that it took place so soon after the end of hostilities and at a time when the movement back to Canada was developing rapidly."<sup>10</sup> MacDonald's comments reveal the extent of the disgruntlement amongst the troops on the spot.

A second letter of 9 July noted that some men had got letters from their wives complaining that "the only reason their husbands aren't going home is because they're having such a good time in Holland – other men with low point scores are home, so what else can be the reason? A rather narrow-minded view, eh what?"

Our general attitude towards the mob demonstrations in Aldershot, Eng. is that the men had every reason to vent their frustration, though it's unfortunate they destroyed civilian

property. I had clipped the editorial the *Daily Gleaner* carried but some stoopid lug took it off my desk & I can't find it. It was very good & critical of Can.Gov't for not making some arrangements with either Eng. or the States for shipping. It pointed out that we were the first to go to England, spent the longest period away from home of any troops, underwent a long, tough period of intensive trng. [training] were the first to hit Normandy & were always in the toughest part of the fighting, with an enviable record & why should they be further persecuted? However, what's the use. We predicted a drastic reduc[tion] in repat after the Election. Why build up hopes if they couldn't stick to their optimistic figures? Why start working on an elaborate point system if they couldn't follow it through?...Well, must tell you what I have been doing to keep myself occupied and prevent insanity setting in.

He and Frank Wiggs had started morning PT. "Very energetic. Ran about a mile, then back, had shower, shaved, then breakfast. Result, about ten o'clock I wanted to go to bed." Then he had brought Cy Tanner back from the hospital, done some paperwork, had a conference with the brigadier, an officers' meeting, then wrote to Colonel Leonard, his prospective employer back in Saint John, outlining various plans and prospects. As to current news: "The locals tell me the Dutch in the parts of Holland now occupied by the Americans are pleading again for Liberators. They don't like the Yankees at all – stealing, looting, black marketing."

MacDonald had a lot to say in a three airmail form letter of 12 July. The brigadier had been pleased with his work as acting brigade major and had "sanctioned my jump up to GIII's place. It's actually a staff job & a GIII is supposed to be a Staff College graduate but he's pushing it through. It would mean an extra \$1 a day more pay, dated to a month back, and a lot more if discharge gratuity is based on it."

During a tour of checking billets he had found

a body stretched out on a bed with battle dress trousers, shirt, brown shoes etc. Said g'morning and had turned around and on my way out when it dawned on me it was a girl. She spoke very little English and I tried to check up and find out who she belonged to. Nobody knew. In fact the Sgt. was more surprised than I was. Mmm, not a bad lookin' pumpkin either. Too bad she has to be kicked out but it's just inviting increased VD if we let those people hang around

and God knows VD is too high now. Our guys are carefully checked and in fact the Cdn Army has the most efficient system of curing them, but there are so many carriers. We've been rounding up camp followers within the area and shoving them into the concentration camps run by the Dutch...

Hal had earlier indicated he planned to visit Amsterdam on 11 July to see the Canadian "Meet the Navy" stage show, and to look up a mutual friend of his and Marjorie's, who was in the cast. "Now for Amsterdam," he continued. "The premiere of "Meet the Navy" was on Wednesday and quite exclusive - Prince Bernhard, Gen. Crerar and a lot of brass hats there. The Brig had a special invitation, I took his two tickets and got two more...and Moose, Geo, Pat [identity unknown] and I went down." They took a bottle of brandy-based punch and sat on the terrace "of the Lido - the hotel of Amsterdam, overlooking one of the numerous canals." Hal wanted to find out where the "Saint John girls were staying and when a couple of Sigs Offs. drove into the Veh. [Vehicle] park with two Wrens I walked over to ask the Wrens where the gals were staying - Lo and behold, one of them was Frankie [Conely]. Well, we haven't seen each other in years and it was a treat to see and talk with a Cdn, especially an old friend." He learned that another old friend, Ora Griffin, was also in the cast, and after tea and cakes they went down to the theatre. "[A]fter I had dragged Pat and Moose away from a couple of Wrens that they were trying to date up, without success, we went backstage and found Ora - good to see her." After the show, with the speeches and presentations of flowers, it was too late to go dancing at the Officers' Club as they had planned "so we settled for some other time. I would like to see them and have a long talk instead of just a rushed conversation." (Regrettably, he says nothing about the show itself.)

On another subject, Hal was glad to hear that one of his former drivers, Eddie LeBlanc, had called on Marjorie in Saint John. "He was a good kid and always willing to go anywhere. Eddie was always a good talker - nice of him to give you such a good impression of your husband." But, one of the

best Bde drivers for around the front on mined rds during shelling was Patty Flood who is still with me and still talks of the day I took him on



photo courtesy of M.A. MacDonald

Hal MacDonald on "Dutchy," one of his favourite mounts.

a four mile cross country ride with just a map and compass and through a mine field and a tank battlefield. Thanks to the powers that be, that's in the past.... I'm sorry I couldn't keep you better informed during the campaigns but then we couldn't talk about them at the time, and by the time two or three weeks were up we had something else to occupy our minds and everything else was forgotten. Though now a lot of the incidents come back to us, especially if just sitting around thinking. C'est le or la guerre.

On the last of his 12 July airmail forms, all typewritten, a welcome change from his difficult script, he remarked:

It must be a break for you to be able to read what I'm writing! The guys are planning a weiner roast next week. I think I'll see if Ora or Frankie would like to attend. It's only an hour and a half drive and it would be nice to have someone to talk to in English. The Canada news is on [the radio], "More than 6,000 Canadian troops arrived in New York and 10,000 more expected in Halifax." Hm, hm, hmmm, and where am I and lots like me with months of actual combat and months of frontline Bde work and a good number of points and where am I? Sitting in my room pounding out loving messages to my wife thousands of miles away while others - ah, what's the use.

After describing his day's routine on 14 July, he discussed some of his men's problems:

One Cpl wanted my advice re a marriage with the Dutch girl he's very much in love with, but he was also due for repatriation. As permission to marry would take quite some time to come through I advised him to go home and get straightened away and set up in business or study farming, whichever he decided to do, but also sent him to the Padre, and he advised the same. In that way, if it's just the first flush of being back in civilization and meeting a nice girl and if it's possible the thrill may wear off, then he has nothing to lose and has not sacrificed his opportunity of getting back. If it's the real thing, he's much farther ahead. I get a big kick out of being able to help them and hate to see them getting off on the wrong foot and getting into trouble that may affect their future lives...

Have I told you about our rehabilitation plans? Well briefly they are: the Army laid down a program consisting of two phases a) a citizenship phase consisting of lectures and some guide on selecting jobs and course, and b) a trade and tech. training phase. The citizenship phase has been completed and the Army lagged in deciding on a policy for the trade and tech. training phase - there are some trades courses going but not nearly enough to take care of the men now that war has ceased and so the Brig got very interested and together we arranged conferences and within our Bde we have a firm policy which the GOC [General Officer Commanding] has highly recommended to all other Bdes.

The Chauds are constructing a small town hall for the town of Leersum where they are billeted, also reconstructing a broken down rifle range and conducting Bn mechanic courses, have civilian experts conducting photography courses and are planning on erecting huts. The QOR of C [Queen's Own Rifles of Canada] are building a large Sports Field complete with all necessary buildings, stands, pits, etc. for the town of Doorn, and cleaning up the town park, running a chicken farm and truck garden and any interested in farming are being sent to farms to learn methods, besides running basic education courses and Mech courses and a welding school. The NSR [North Shore Regiment] are cleaning and draining the municipal wood, constructing a town park which can be added to as time permits and reclaiming a long disused rifle range. The Burgomasters are very much in favour of the schemes and with us it serves a twofold purpose, gives the men something constructive and visual to do, keeping them out of mischief, and makes use of any and all tradesmen and trains the others. Also from international goodwill angle, will give the towns a tangible remembrance of the goodwill of Cdns. May even import trees from Canada. That program is arousing interest now.

It was back to handwriting on 15 July. Hal had been taking riding lessons and had a

marvellous ride with Major Kennedy, the Brigade Major: "a walk, then a trot & then a gallop, then coming back used the cavalry method of strengthening knee grip, pulling stirrups over the saddle & using knees only." He thought it was time he had a change of scene and he and Tanner had plans for "a few days in Amsterdam - then we'll be able to get up to LaHague [sic] & Rotterdam - just travel around."

Two days later he wrote from the Victoria Hotel in Amsterdam, barges moving up and down on the canal outside their window. They had arrived the day before, "had a wash, supper & a drink & mooched around the various clubs sampling bar stocks. Ended up at the Lido where a couple of guys picked up babes (the town is full of them, such as they are). Cy and I sat around drinking and listening to the music." He was to take Frankie Conley dancing after her show, and in the meantime he and Ora went to a tea dance, "so nice to talk to Cdn girls again...the last time we had a dance was Grand Bay [on the St. John River] five years or more ago."

When he picked up Frankie after the "Meet the Navy" performance,

her two girl friends had been CB'd [confined to barracks] for being late the night before, so the three of us went to the Lido. Saw John McAvity and sat on the terrace talking. Had one dance then went to the Krasnopolsky, but it was closed, so went to the Dam Groot Club - not a bit of liquor left in any of them so drank water and danced - had a lot of fun just talking. You know I wouldn't trade 5000 Dutch girls for one Cdn girl.

During their leave he and Cy also drove to Noordwijk on the sea. "A grand beach & we had a swim (in fact 3) in the salt water & then sun bathed...in fact I look like the half Dutch half Javanese type."

In a letter of 15 July, he reports that concerns about repatriation delays had prompted him not to pursue the GIII job.

On returning from Amsterdam found a new ruling in place - Promotion & appointments made now require a statement that Off. "will remain in this theatre until services no longer required," which might mean returning with the unit or staying even longer. Called Div[ision] and made enquiries. Here are the facts involved 1) the increased pay would not affect gratuity and

there would be very little hope that I'd get a crown [Major's rank], in fact they assured me I wouldn't as I hadn't a staff course 2) I want to get back to you as soon as possible and don't want to have any strings attached to me 3) for the sake of \$1 a day I certainly wouldn't stay over here 4) my civvy job should be taken care of as soon as possible - so-oo, I told the Bm & Brig not to put through the recommendation. So now I'm GIII without pay, but the big thing is, I'm not committed in any way & am available for repat when called. They've started shipping overlooked personnel in Ist Div so darling, might have good news for you one of these days - I hope. So that is that. I'm 3rd senior off. in HQ but no extra pay."

However, on 23 July: "Moose's name appeared on a repat draft list - was very happy for Moose but dammit wish my name would turn up." He described a party the previous day. "The guys had arranged for a weiner roast and then return to the mess for dancing." He went riding before this, had a bath and was dozing

when Jackson came in with cold water (his idea of a joke), my yells brought the BM and Ted who proceeded to pile a table, two chairs, my slippers, five towels and various rags & table covers and soap dishes etc. on top of me - When I tried to get out the rungs caught in the fixtures and I had a bit of difficulty. Afterwards we went out to a small lake nearby...and sat around eating boiled corn and [hot] dogs and drinking punch. Some nice looking babes there from La Hague [sic] (Ted & Pat had brought them up). Left the lake about 11 o'clock after various guys went in swimming - including the BM who dove in and forgot to take off his balmoral. Then back to the mess...No one got too drunk but everyone was very happy - the party lasted until the break of dawn, the Band left at 3.30 but Marcel LaMarch (new LO from Chaudières) took over on the piano and we fooled around till 06.30. Then to bed and up at 08.00. Consequently Saturday was a very bad day.

The mail had just come in with "300 cigs for one H.S. MacD...and I had opened my last pack this morning...No one knows about repat. Div don't and Army just shrugs and says it's 2nd Ech and 2nd Ech go around with their heads whirling and say "I don't know - don't bother us," etc." They had a new BM and new DAAQMG, said his letter of 25 July, and he and Moose sat around till 1 a.m. talking with them. "Discussed a lot of former battles when they were on our flanks, and then got around to talking shop." He had then listened to Glen Miller's orchestra for half an hour before falling asleep.

Auxiliary services had just given them a library and he had put in a request for books on commerce. Also, "have been doing a bit of self-analysis and the only ill effect I have rec'd from the war is that when I get in a low mood my mind drags up a lot of things I'd rather forget. I'm sure they will pass into the limbo of forgotten things, and so many good effects have come out of it - my deep appreciation of all you mean to me and the value of friendship - unfortunately most of the real men I know & like are from outside our area."

"We just finished a show in the mess, the 'Keys of the Kingdom,'" began his letter of 26 and 27 July. "Enjoyed it very much." On 29 July, it had been raining so hard for days that a lot of outside events had to be postponed, including the opening of a new swimming pool, which had been adjourned to the mess.

We had planned an informal party for after the ceremony. Started out very deadly...but after we got the people properly lubricated the party loosened up. At one stage the guests were doing parlour tricks - funniest one was when the Bde Comd stood on a chair and had Mae, his gal, support a glass of water against the ceiling with a broom handle then, when she was holding the glass in position, walking off and leaving her. Her screams for assistance had everyone roaring - eventually Cy went over to help and the glass and contents (water) came tumbling down over Mae and Cy. Very funny. Monday night we are having a stag dinner for those Officers leaving us. Have made all the necessary arrangements - as Mess Pres. part of my job...

In his own published account of these months, Brigadier Roberts recounts meeting May Ruys de Perez at his headquarters in Doorn on 25 May. Perez was a local widow with a young son. Her husband, an officer in the Dutch air force, was executed by the Germans a couple of years previously. The two struck up a relationship and were soon in love. Roberts departure for Canada, mentioned below, was to inform his wife, Helen, that he wanted a divorce so that he could marry May.<sup>11</sup>

MacDonald continued,

This life is ceasing to be a rest and becoming a bore. Would far rather have the excitement of action than just sitting around like this.... Walker, the runner, just came in and we started talking about the difference between this life and action, when we used to complain about lack of sleep

and never having a chance to stop, and now it's just the opposite.

A letter of 1 August described a farewell dinner held the night before. It was in honour of Majors Kennedy, Muise [*sic* – probably Major Arthur Meuse, another 8th Brigade general staff officer] and Mance Berry, with the three battalion commanders as guests. The lavish menu included “champagne, red wine, salad, steaks, fried onions, mashed potatoes, new beans, cauliflower & corn on the cob, with two decorated cakes, pastries, and coffee.” Some of the guests then brought in their girl friends for a movie in the lounge, followed by “a spirited sing song and skits by various members of the Mess. I was in one of those moods when I couldn't get happy if I had gallons to drink...Decided to go to bed about 12:30 and just got up and undressed when the BM came in feeling very happy. After a drink with him he said I looked very comfortable and turned the bed over.” Soon, the others came up and scene deteriorated further with Jackson's bed, four chairs and a table piled on Hal's bed as they tried to convince him to go back downstairs. The game went on and he took refuge in a closet. Then “they invaded Pat's room much to his annoyance as he was trying to get some sleep,” and another bed got overturned. There then followed

a chase through the second story & down over the balcony and up the front stairs...Moose and I got into a wrestling match, then Meice (Moose's gal and a damned good sport) showed up and took my side. It ended with Meice pushing Moose back into the bathroom with a broom, then Moose got the spray going and was going to dampen our spirits. Instead Moose got pushed into the bath himself and was laughing so hard that everytime he'd try to get out of the tub he'd slip back in and he ended up getting soaked to the skin...funniest scene I've seen in years. Then we decided 'twas time to break it up...Got to sleep about 5:30 hrs & was on duty next morning.

He had since had “nice compliments from all the officers on the dinner & the whole evening. Glad they enjoyed themselves!”

After more news about horseback riding, inter-unit softball games, and constant rain, he noted: “Now I have Flood back with me again. Patty had a great trip – mixed up in brawls in Paris and Brussels – passed off as a Lieut. at an American Officers' Club and brought back some

special samples of special Cognac for me. He's quite a lad – oh yes, he had his pockets full of snaps of girls he'd had. I'm not sure how he meant the 'had,' but as he came back broke I can imagine.”

Frustration had returned with the next letter. “Here it is August 3 and still no sign of going home.” If his name did not turn up on the next “MD 7 draft, then HQ is going into operation to find out why. The Brig is right behind me and has enough drag to demand an explanation.” One of his friends was on a repatriation draft “but the damn fool isn't going for awhile. Says he doesn't want to return “till Christmas. “

The next day, 4 August he was riding again. The horses had been full of spirit and it “was useless trying to keep them down...We'd been galloping about three miles on a fairly straight wood road” when the lead horse swerved suddenly and the others followed suit. Hal lost a stirrup and fell off, “hit a small tree on the way down and fell on my arms and head on the side of a German foxhole and rolled into the hole. A peculiar feeling.” Consequently he was “stiff all over and saddle burns on both knees. In spite of that we had a lot of fun” and he planned to go riding again the next day. He had also received a very encouraging letter from Colonel Leonard, his prospective employer in the Saint John brokerage business.

On the night of 6 August, he was on duty and “in a peculiar mood. Have been reading J.P. Marquand's “So Little Time” and his books always start me thinking.” His next letter of 8 August, reported that he had got “involved in a crap game Monday night, and walked off with a profit of 150 guilders – we think nothing of it here but actually that's about \$80.00 and not hay. This foreign currency tends to make us unconscious of money values.”

He won more the next night, he said on 10 August. They had three games of cribbage, at which he won 30 guilders, “then Bud suggested a short crap game...which actually finished at 12:30 hrs this morning...I was shooting my usual lucky bones, and was the big winner with pockets filled with notes and IOU's...Guess how much I made in one evening? All in all over 1000 guilders. The equivalent am't in Cdn currency would be around \$500...The guys all say I'm too

The *Pasteur* arrives in Halifax on 30 June 1945 to repatriate Canadian soldiers from Europe.

lucky to associate with – oh the cutting remarks. There’s a damn good gang here though.” He had visited the Knights of Columbus that morning and sent Marjorie some flowers as well as some to his mother, sister, sister-in-law, and to friend Robbie Robichaud in hospital back in Canada. He also sent some to the wife of his friend, Bud Davidson, a heavy contributor to Hal’s winnings, who couldn’t afford to send any himself at the time. “Bud says that if his wife doesn’t mention receiving flowers from a stranger, he’s going to cite me as a correspondent er somethin’.”

As to repatriation: “Peculiar, I had to fight to get over and now it seems I’ll have to fight just as hard to get back. Well, I’ll do it. Another bog down along the line. Nijmegen repatriation depot crowded and no movement from there.” His next letter continued in the same vein: “Damn Holland, I want to be back in Saint John. The Brig is going back to Canada on compassionate leave...He’ll be home Sunday at the latest.”

On the 14 August he was again “in a very disgruntled mood tonight,” one reason being that his riding sore “opened and was infected, so I bandaged it with a liberal sprinkling of sulphur,” and he had also been fretting about the lack of news about his return. On the other hand, “Jonker” [a Dutch term of civil respect equivalent to “Esquire” in English<sup>12</sup>] de Beaufort,

who had sent a group photo of the officers of brigade headquarters to Hal’s wife, Marjorie, “came up to see me personally and said he and his wife had rec’d “a sweet letter” from you and they thought it was so thoughtful...The past few years have been hard on you darling – although we had the danger, that danger gave a certain zest to living – whereas you had to depend on the radio – knowing anything could happen in the intervening period between action & the release of news. But God has been kind.”

The despondent mood continued on 15 August. “An MD7 draft came in last night but I wasn’t on it, though there were quite a number



Canadian Forces Photo UNlit ZK 1004-2

of chaps I know with far lower points. Jumped the DAAQMG today and he's going after 2nd Ech again. Enough is enough and I can stand being overlooked once or twice but not this often. Records must be twisted or something...I'm very disconsolate and nervous and irritable."

Hal was able to ride again on 18 August and went out for the afternoon in a light mist. The next day he played tennis with René Haran, and they

stopped in to see Moose's old gal friend and as she is the best sport of the girls in Doorn, I asked her to the [Saturday] dance. Went back to the mess and found a message waiting for me...from a Major Hoogewegen, personal assistant to Prince Bernhard. He and his wife and young son live near us and we used to know them quite well. She is a beautiful doll, part Russian and part English and educated in England. Edward, the husband is away quite a bit and she used to come to our dances once in a while and we have all been to their place, and he wanted me to go up and see him.

MacDonald then returned to the mess to find some marvellous news. "A special message from Division to the effect that H.S. MacDonald would proceed to Nijmegen on Wednesday to join Canada Draft 367. Don't faint or anything now. I can't believe it. I have to pinch myself to make sure it's true. Didn't need any stimulants to make me happy last night. Had two civilians come up to wish me luck and René and Pat and Geo. the last three old timers, got drunk as owls because I was leaving them. People said some very nice things too - hope they meant them. The party was a huge success...finished about 0300 which was very good." The head steward, two waiters and cook and the two stable boys, for whose operations he was also responsible, "told me how much they would miss me. All of which was very comforting."

Baron de Beaufort came up again the next evening, 19 August, to say goodbye and again mentioned his appreciation of Marjorie's letter of thanks. For his part, Hal asked Marjorie to stop sending mail to him; rather: "jot your letters down & save them for me - all the things you want to tell me - all your thoughts, dreams and hopes...Shall bring back some champagne and cognac." With his next letter of 24 August, he was "sitting in the transient lounge at Nijmegen."

After an evening in the mess he and René Haran had left for Brussels "at 0430 next morn so as to avoid traffic and get in lots of shopping time." He had exchanged his guilders for francs, and bought some presents, to be a secret until presented, "then went to dinner at the Rendezvous Club, had a few dances with hostesses, saw a few floor shows & and all had a good night but little sleep. Next AM shopping - still a surprise." Back again at brigade headquarters, Mae and "Meice came to say goodbye."

He left early in the afternoon on Wednesday "with the whole outfit gathered to see me off. Almost made me cry. They were a grand bunch to work with." Once at Nijmegen, he found he had been made adjutant of the draft, which was to leave that night for Calais, and then England. Hal was sick on the bumpy train and a gale warning held up the Channel crossing, said a letter of 25 August. Another of 31 August recounted events of busy days after their arrival at "#3 Repat Depot at Cove, just outside Aldershot & Farnborough, with 159 O.R's and 11 Offs." As adjutant, he and the staff had to organize "documentation, parades, forms, travel warrants for Eng. leave, and ration cards." Moreover, the commanding officer of the draft, George Cody, who was married in England, chose this moment to take a 30 day leave, leaving Hal to handle his duties.

"Worked like a beaver right up to Wed. morn' when his own leave came due. He decided to stay "at Tweedsmuir's Cdn Club...Found it was [Woolworth heiress] Barb[ara] Hutton's home, taken over for an Off. Club, right smack in the centre of St. John's Wood. Mere words can't describe it...Only thing is the Club is operated by Sally Ann (Salvation Army) and a bit straight-laced." During the next few days he and other friends on the draft, George Fawcett, Yvon Cormier, and "Arch," shopped for pyjamas, shirts and ties. After linking up with René Haran they went to see "Vic Oliver's 'The Night and the Music' at the Coliseum - twas a marvellous show, very colourful, amusing and oh what girls."

A letter of 4 September, told of more shopping, and of another show that night, which was "Out of this World." A friend of René's named Edith, took them to Petticoat Lane where Hal



bought records, including “Rum and Coca Cola,” which they played later “about 50 times” at Edith’s house in Finchley Wood.” He and Cy Tanner, whose draft was still in England, then had a reunion, drinking in former haunts such as the Waldorf and Strand hotels, ending up back at the Officers’ Club. “I’ve enjoyed my leave tremendously” he wrote, “though it has been expensive.”

The next day, 5 September, Hal told of seeing another show the night before, “the 1100th performance of ‘Arsenic and Old Lace.’ It wasn’t too bad but I was disappointed.” Afterwards, he, Yvon, Cy, and George went into the bar at the Waldorf. “Two gals there on the make, with their own apartment. They wanted us to take them to a club first. We strung them along for awhile & then walked out. Didn’t ask their price but was told twas around five pounds – rather expensive things.” He bought some scarves for Marjorie and some ties at Liberty’s the following day, then had appointments with Colonel Leonard’s principal British business connections, which he felt had been very satisfactory. That night he and the same friends went to a movie, “Incendiary Blonde” with Betty Hutton, had sandwiches and coffee at Ontario House afterwards.

He was back at his camp on 9 September, but the night before had “developed chills and lost my appetite. Took two 217s – what a night. Shivered and shook, then nightmares.” He was now feeling a bit better “but still not fit. Here’s the big news, Hon, have been told we sail on the Pasteur – on the 13th. Isn’t that marvellous? Should be home by the 20th at that rate! Have to pinch myself to make sure it’s true.” By 11 September he thought he had at last defeated that feverish cold, and was doing his final packing.

Hal MacDonald wrote his final letter from wartime Europe on 14 September. The morning had been spent “putting the men through their last Medicals and Pay, etc.” His gripper bag was now packed with everything needed, “Yep, including some of your presents and a bottle of bubbly.” He had received word that they would embark a day late, on the 15th, at

Southampton. “We have been warned of the possibility of sleeping on troop decks in hammocks or palliases. Gosh if needs be I’ll sleep in the boiler room or the hold. The main thing is, I’m on my way back...still find it hard to believe. This will be my last letter from England.” Awaiting him on the other side of the Atlantic, were Marjorie, Canada, and a productive peacetime life.

## Notes

1. Desmond Morton, “Kicking and Complaining: Demobilization Riots in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1918-1919,” *Canadian Historical Review*, 61, 1980, pp.334-360.
2. See C.P. Stacey, *Six Years of War: The Army in Canada, Britain and the Pacific* (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1955), pp.431-434.
3. The most recent as well as the best discussion of the Canadian repatriation issue at the end of the Second World War is Dean Oliver, “Canadian Military Demobilization in World War II,” in J.L. Granatstein and Peter Neary eds., *The Good Fight: Canadians and World War II*, (Toronto: Copp Clark Ltd., 1995), pp.367-386.
4. Stacey, *Six Years of War*, pp.432-433.
5. Oliver, “Canadian Military Demobilization,” p.379. The issue is also addressed in Dominick Graham, *The Price of Command: A Biography of General Guy Simonds*, (Toronto: Stoddart, 1993), pp.214-223.
6. See J.A. Roberts. *The Canadian Summer: The Memoirs of James Allan Roberts*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), p.98. See pp.148-170 for Roberts’ own account of these months in Holland.
7. J.L. Granatstein, and Desmond Morton, *A Nation Forged in Fire: Canadians and the Second World War*, (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1989), p.241.
8. Stacey, *Six Years of War*, p. 55, p.622.
9. *Ibid.*, p.211.
10. *Ibid.*, p.433.
11. Roberts, *Canadian Summer*, pp.148-156.
12. On the back of a photo that Hal sent to Marjorie showing a group of Canadian officers with De Beaufort (who also bore the title of Baron), Hal wrote: “Jhr is for Jonkheer. We call them acting Barons unconfirmed without pay.”

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