

Canadian Military History

Volume 5 | Issue 2

Article 11

1-23-2012

The Corps of Guides, 1903–1914

Dan Jenkins
Carleton University

Recommended Citation

Jenkins, Dan (1996) "The Corps of Guides, 1903–1914," *Canadian Military History*: Vol. 5: Iss. 2, Article 11.
Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/cmh/vol5/iss2/11>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Canadian Military History by an authorized administrator of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact scholarscommons@wlu.ca.

The Corps of Guides, 1903-1914

Dan R. Jenkins

The Canadian Corps of Guides was created in April 1903 by General Order 61, and fell under the purview of the Intelligence Department at Militia Headquarters in Ottawa. However, as the Guides were a service of the Active Militia, and not of the Permanent Force, they were not a full-time formation. The Corps was designed to fulfil both a peacetime and wartime role. During active operations it was to act as a combat intelligence force for Canadian armies in the field, and provide commanders with operational and tactical level intelligence. During peacetime it was to prepare for this eventuality, but more importantly, it was to help accumulate intelligence on Canada's military resources and capabilities, as well as on those of foreign powers, in particular the United States. As with all of Canada's peacetime military establishments, the Guides suffered from underfunding, understaffing and undertraining. Nevertheless, the Corps of Guides was still able to provide a valuable service in the years leading up to the First World War, and offered its members a background in Intelligence that would prove indispensable in that war.¹

Canada's experience in the Boer War had much to do with the creation of the Corps of Guides. In the South African War, Canadians saw first-hand the value of Scouts and scouting. Many, including General Dundonald, the General Officer Commanding the Canadian Militia, believed that a mounted scouting force would prove valuable in Canada, a country similar to South Africa, with wide open and sparsely populated spaces. As the 1904 Militia Report stated:

Valuable as such a corps proved in Natal during the South African war, its value to a country such as Canada can hardly be over-estimated. It not only forms an indispensable adjunct to an Intelligence Department, but it enables Canada to be covered by a network of capable officers, trained during peace in their special duties, and who would be invaluable to a General in the field from their knowledge of every part of the country.²

The Corps of Guides then, was designed very much as a force for use *in* Canada.

One of the objectives of the Intelligence Department was to make available to officers commanding field forces military intelligence pertinent to their commands. The Department was also charged with gathering information on the military resources of the British Empire and foreign powers, although efforts and results in this regard were meagre. Lieutenant-Colonel Denny, Director of Intelligence in 1903, stated in a letter to the District Intelligence Officers (DIOs), that information on Canada "should be as far reaching as possible," and he asked that DIOs send in clippings from newspapers and other sources on a monthly basis regarding any material of a military character, including information on the "movements of high USA Officials, troops, etc." All data collected would then be collated and indexed, and form the basis of the monthly Intelligence Diary.³

The accumulation of information on the military resources of Canada proceeded diligently. In 1903 Canada was still very much an unknown

and unexplored country, whose military resources were often a mystery to military planners in both Ottawa and London. The country had not yet been fully surveyed. The resource potential, including natural resources and regional and local manufacturing output, was unknown, and the country had yet to be mapped on a scale suitable for military use. The Intelligence Department's mandate was to correct these shortfalls so that military planners would at least know the country better than any potential enemies (read USA). It was the role of the Corps of Guides to help in the collection of this information. As General Dundonald stated in 1903:

Canada is now being covered by a network of intelligent and capable men, who will be of great service to the country in collecting information of a military character and in fitting themselves to act as guides in their own [military] districts to the forces in the field...Nobody is admitted into this Corps unless he is a man whose services are likely to be of real use to the country.⁴

In order to systematically gather intelligence on Canada's resources, the Guides' organization was designed to fit the pre-existing system of Military Districts. Each District was given its own District Intelligence Officer. The DIO was to oversee the entire collection process for the district, collect all intelligence reports and maps and forward them to the Intelligence Department in Ottawa. He was to advise the District Commander on intelligence matters, and be able to address any question regarding military intelligence for his district.⁵ "Officers receiving the appointment of D.I.O. should be of suitable spirit and one who would take a keen interest in his work." A military background was not a prerequisite – in fact, civil engineers, and land surveyors "or one connected with these professions would be preferable." Although those selected would also require "a general knowledge of military topography and reconnaissance duties, and to be acquainted with the geography of his District." In addition, it would be helpful if potential DIOs knew the "resources of [their] district" in terms of "produce, horses, cattle, and transportation," so that they could check for accuracy the work of those under their command.⁶

Districts were further subdivided into Sub-Districts, and commanded by Sub-District Intelligence Officers (SDIOs). These officers were

responsible for commanding the Guides in their respective Sub-Districts, collecting Guide reports, and gathering information from other sources, in addition to their own reconnaissances. They were to record all information onto sketch maps provided to them for this purpose. If called upon, SDIOs were to be able to answer any question of an intelligence nature regarding their sub-district, just as DIOs and Guides were expected to be able to do in their respective jurisdictions.⁷ Again, military experience was not considered necessary for the job. "If an officer can be appointed with some knowledge of military topography and reconnaissance work, so much the better, but the lack of these qualifications will not be counted when a man is keen and will take an interest in his work." Civil engineers and land surveyors were again the first choice. In any event, all those selected for the position would preferably have a profession or occupation that permitted them to travel about their sub-district and the country side regularly, to permit some familiarity with the residents.⁸

Sub-Districts were divided into Guide Areas in which specially qualified men with a knowledge of the local area were to be appointed as Guides. Guides were to do most of the ground work. They were to be intelligent and capable men with a thorough knowledge of the topography and resources in their respective area. They were supposed to be intimately familiar with such features as road and rail networks, water routes, telegraph and telephone lines, and pathways. As well, Guides were expected to be acquainted with the farmers and important towns' people in the area. If possible, Guides were to have a horse – indeed, it is difficult to see how they could do their job without one. All in all, the standards demanded were high:

Too much stress cannot be laid on the necessity for careful selection of Guides. The best class of man would be one who is of sufficient position and intelligence to be an officer in the Corps, but who, not willing to accept an officer's responsibility, might join as a Guide.

The Intelligence Department recognized that this class of men would be a rare find and told the SDIOs, who were responsible for selecting Guides, to do the best they could with the material at hand. The pay certainly would not attract good men. On the contrary, it was "presumed that those who join the Guides will do so from patriotic motives



Officers of the Canadian Corps of Guides, Cobourg, Ontario, 1906.

(E.L.M. Burns Collection, NAC PA 113014)

and from interest in a Corps the novelty of which cannot fail to appeal to those who desire something more than mere "Drill" soldiering.⁹ This point, however, is moot, as the Corps did not recruit Guides until 1912. Headquarters felt it was best to train officers in their intelligence duties before selecting Guides, as Guides were to be trained by the Corps' officers.¹⁰

Before the First World War, the annual *Militia Reports*, on the whole, looked favourably on the Corps of Guides. To cite two examples: the *Militia Report* for the year ending 31 December 1905, stated that "the duties of this corps are varied, and while only organized two years ago, excellent and useful work is being done by them in matters of surveying and furnishing valuable information."¹¹ For the year ending 31 March 1909, the *Militia Report* was equally positive. "Thanks are due to the officers of the Corps of Guides for the willing assistance they rendered during the year in collecting and communicating intelligence. The reports which they send in are always useful, sometimes very valuable."¹² Sir John French's 1910 report on the state of the Canadian Militia also viewed the Corps of Guides in a positive light. "I regard the establishment of the Corps of Guides," he wrote, "as being a most valuable and useful adjunct to the staff. I think it

is a principle which is capable of extension."¹³ Every year more useful military information was being gathered, tabulated and distributed in the form of an Intelligence Diary to those who could use it.¹⁴ And every year more officers were becoming proficient in their duties, with the Eastern Commands generally performing ahead of their counterparts in Western Canada.¹⁵

In reality there were shortfalls. Training in the Corps proceeded sporadically. During peacetime the Corps' officers - the DIOs and the SDIOs - were scattered all over Canada on intelligence gathering duties with little opportunity, apart from the annual training camps, to meet and train together. It was recommended that SDIOs arrange for themselves and their Guides to join local rifle clubs to gain some musketry practice. The First World War quickly proved that much of the limited training received was insufficient, and for the wrong war. Prewar tactical exercises were reminiscent of Boer War methods, and did not anticipate the conditions in Flanders. One training camp per year was often all the field training the officers in the Corps received. These camps were usually about 12 days long, and provided training in map reading, military topography, equitation, report writing, field sketching, and military organization

and administration.¹⁶ Guide officers spent most of their time at these camps training in practical field work instead of drill, as their role in time of war would be specialized intelligence work that did not require the traditional skills of the other arms.

Rifle shooting, military sketching, reconnaissance reports, and a general knowledge of the formation and composition of our own forces and those of the U.S. are about all the principal items which members of the Corps should study. There is generally speaking no knowledge of actual drill required, though every member of the Corps must be able to ride [a horse].¹⁷

The officers attending training camps were usually enthusiastic, but 12 days training could not produce an efficient Intelligence Service.

Officers were also required to pass a series of examinations before being fully accepted into the Corps. Generally speaking, examinations consisted of three written tests, practical field work, and equitation. The three written tests were each between two and three hours long. One examination usually dealt with the duties of Intelligence Officers in war and peace. With this test officers were examined on their understanding of their duties, reconnoitring patrols, definitions of military terms, the various types of information collected by Intelligence Officers, and the means by which it is transmitted to headquarters. One of the questions from the 1911 examination, for instance, was as follows:

In order to be prepared for war, it is necessary to collect and tabulate Intelligence in Peace time. Under what main headings may information collected in time of peace be said to fall; state briefly the sources from which the military operations Directorate derives the above information?¹⁸

Only one candidate answered this question well, according to the examiner's remarks. The majority did not understand it, and offered vague answers as a result.

A second written test was concerned with military mapping and sketching. Officers were expected to demonstrate their level of skill in reading contour maps, map making, military sketching, and compass work. The 1911

examination provides another example of a question asked.

Mark on the diagram with a black line what you consider to be the shortest route by which you could proceed from the point "A" [marked on the map supplied] to the point "B" without being seen by a man at the point "D" (the height of the man and your own height may be taken as equal and omitted from the calculations).¹⁹

All those taking the test showed "a general idea of what is required [in answering this question], but the route chosen was by no means the shortest – in only one instance was any reason given for the route taken."

The final written examination normally focused on organization and administrative functions. Candidates were expected to be familiar with the organization of the Canadian Militia, the Corps of Guides, and have some understanding of the organization of US military forces. They were also to know which Staff Officers were responsible for what duties, in addition to other training and administrative details.²⁰

Written examinations were, of course, useful as a means for determining where more work and study was required. The June and July examination of 1907, for example, revealed that officers did not seem to know when reconnaissance reports were to be written. In fact, the test scores on the whole were not as good as 1906. In 1908 the matter of when to write reconnaissance reports had not been cleared up, as the question dealing with reconnaissance was "Not well answered." Indeed, "It was noticed that some officers are not clear as to when reconnaissance reports are to be written or the methods of carrying out reconnaissance."²¹ Obviously one of the most important responsibilities of the Corps of Guides was below standard.

With the practical application test officers were examined on their field work abilities. In 1911, for example, officers were given two hours to map three miles of road without instruments, and on a scale of three inches to the mile. In addition, they were to make notes on the tactical features of the ground on both sides of the road to a depth of 1,000 yards.²² This test clearly called

for a skilled officer with a trained eye, qualities of enormous value in an Intelligence Officer.

Equitation, of course, tested an officer's horsemanship. Any drill that was required would follow the cavalry manual. Although "officers will not be expected to perfect themselves in details, [so] long as they know sufficient to enable them to march troops on and off parade for inspectional purposes."²³

British Field manuals were the main source to which officers looked to find what skills were required. Colonel David Henderson's *Art of Reconnaissance* was also recommended, as was his *Field Intelligence: Its Principles and Practices*. Captain C.F. Vander-Boyle's *Practical Scout Train* was on the reading list as well. Examinations were based on these and other sources.

Officers without previous military experience were appointed to the Guides on a provisional basis, and given one year to pass the Corps of Guides' examinations, and to obtain a subaltern

certificate in either one of the cavalry, infantry or artillery services. Those with previous militia experience also had to pass all examinations, and bear a certification of rank in one of the three arms. Officers with two years' experience in the regular army, or the Canadian or some other Dominion's permanent force, had only to pass the third examination – equitation – unless his previous experience was in a mounted service.²⁴

Reconnaissance rides were also used in training. Once a year some of the Corps' officers would take ten to 12 days and ride from one predetermined location to another and make notes, maps and sketches on everything of a military nature. In 1909, for instance, one troop of officers left Kingston and rode to Petawawa. Included in their kit was a prismatic compass, protractor, note book, field glasses, and sketching materials. Their job was to take notes and make sketches on the condition of roads, railways, water routes and so forth, so as to practice their mapping and intelligence gathering skills.²⁵

Officers of the Canadian Corps of Guides, Niagara-on-the-Lake. Captain Lawrence H. Sitwell is at the extreme left. (Lawrence Hurt Sitwell Collection, NAC PA 111891)



Lectures given at local armouries presented another avenue for Guide officers to hone their trade. For example, Captain Lawrence Sitwell gave a lecture in March 1909 entitled "A Scout is born - not made, but much that is lacking in birth may be made up for by careful training." In it he outlined his views of what a Scout's duties entailed, and offered suggestions on how to sharpen one's scouting acumen. "A Scouts [sic] duties render it almost imperative," he wrote, "that he be imbued with sporting instincts; he must understand nature in its fullest sense, natural history, birds, wild animals and insects." It is the Scout's duty to "see without being seen." He told his audience that if they could outwit "an ordinary wild bird or animal" that they were "on the first rung of the ladder of success as a Scout," for outwitting nature is no easy feat. He believed that Scouts required special training to perform their tasks, especially in night-time operations. Sitwell asked his listeners to practice constantly their tracking and observation skills, and offered practical advice on how to perfect these skills. Scouts, he said, should learn the sounds of nature at rest so that when on outpost duty they would recognize changes. "Throw a stone into a Swamp and the croaking instantly ceases. It is by means of sounds like these...that enables a scout or a man on outpost duty...to tell whether his point or flank is in a state of rest and quiet and that no movement of the enemy is taking place in his immediate neighbourhood." Scouts, he said, could practice their art when off duty. When walking follow animal tracks, he suggested, to improve one's tracking abilities. Those who live in cities could practice their observation skills by noting, while walking along the street, what they see in shop windows. He offered easy methods to determine direction without a compass, and to gauge distances with the naked eye. He pointed out that distant sounds could be more readily heard if one placed his ear close to the ground. To hear even farther a Scout should immerse himself in water, such as a still lake, pond or river, as sounds travel farther in that medium. Good Scouts, he offered, should be willing to make such sacrifices. Moreover, Scouts, he explained, should also be able to read a map, although he felt that "As far as our Canadian Militia is concerned I regret to have to state that at least 75% of the Officers if given a map would not understand it any more than a lumber jack understands Greek." Scouts should possess all five senses plus the sixth sense "called common

sense or horsesense." He further stated that Scouts "should understand something about Signalling."²⁶ Later that year Sitwell was again lecturing, but this time on military mapping and sketching. He was probably heeding his own words, and was attempting to improve the performance of the 75 per cent of officers whom he felt could not read a map.

Guide officers also polished their skills at annual Corps of Guide Conferences. These gatherings not only offered an opportunity to socialize with fellow officers, but a chance to hear various presentations by one's peers on Intelligence related matters. At the third annual conference held in 1909, for instance, topics discussed included "The Detroit River Tunnel," by Major H.J. Lamb, DIO for Military District #1. Captain R.R. Barber, of the Corps of Guides, explained "A system of indexing, recording, and transmitting information." Major-General Lake talked about "Reconnaissance in front of an Army," while Colonel Sam Hughes outlined his ideas on "The Guide, an asset in Peace and in War." Attending officers, of course, could take what they wanted from these conferences, but the opportunity was there to make connections for furthering their careers, and to learn more about their duties as Guide officers.²⁷

In 1912, the Challenge Cup was introduced to test the Corps' efficiency. The challenge was largely one of equitation and compass work. However, the Challenge Cup was as much a social event as a test. Officers who asked to participate in this cross-country horse race paid a five dollar entry fee for the privilege of being judged on their speed, jumping ability, pace, and the condition of their horse at the race's end. Competitors were allowed a map, compass and a watch with which to complete the 15 mile race with its six to ten jumps. Horses with spur marks were automatically disqualified, as were horses that did not eat half a feed of oats within one hour of completing the race.²⁸ Intelligence skills called for in the First World War were obviously lacking in this challenge. Indeed, intelligence skills in general were neither strenuously tested nor demonstrated.

Training in the Corps was severely handicapped by the fact that until 1912 it contained no Guides. The Corps of Guides was largely a Corps of officers. There were Guides

listed as present at annual camps before this date, but in reality they were the officers' grooms and batmen, not Guides.²⁹ During the first years of the Corps' existence, the officer commanding the Corps believed that one Guide per township was plenty during wartime, and should be restricted to "the least possible number" during peace.

It cannot be impressed too firmly on all officers that intelligence work...will form the chief and main work of the Corps for some years. It will be absolutely impossible and unnecessary even to form companies of guides; the object of the Corps is lost in formations of this kind.³⁰

In this case, the least possible number equalled zero. Nevertheless, when the time came every Guide - although none were being trained - was expected to "be able to think for and look after himself and his horse, and be dependent on no one, but rather seek that others should be dependent on him"³¹

By 1907 there were calls to reverse this situation. Major E.T.P. Shewen, of the Corps of Guides based in New Brunswick, explained his position forcefully in a letter to headquarters requesting 32 Guides.

I am very much in earnest about this matter. We have long been held up to ridicule, as being a regiment of officers without men. I can assure you, speaking as a civil engineer, it is impossible to do without men if you want to get any work accomplished.

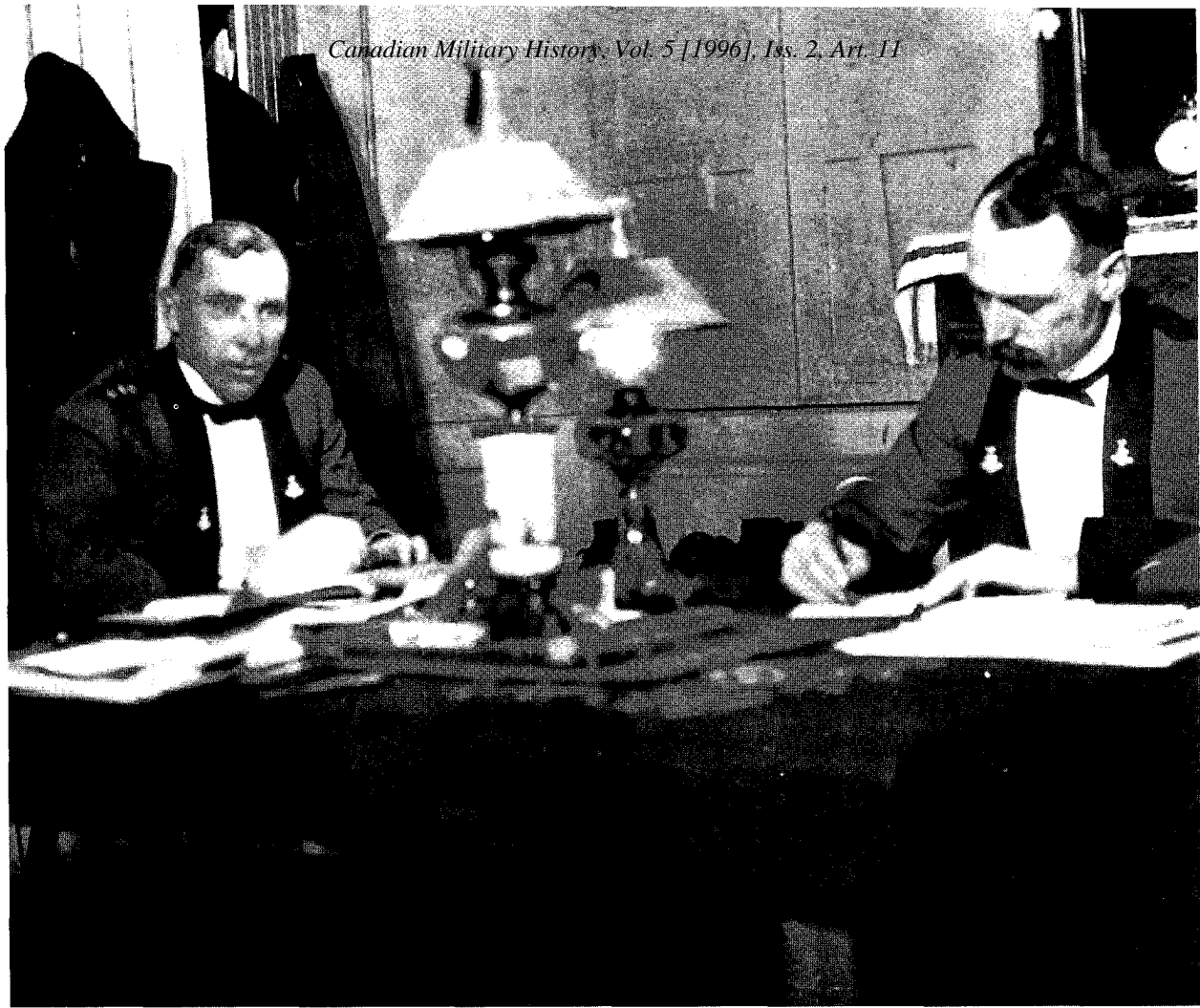
He further went on to say:

It is absurd to suppose that five officers, in a military district comprehending 28,000 square miles, could, in time of war, conduct an effective, local, intelligence service, that is to say, one that could furnish information of an enemy's approach, open or disguised, by sea or land. It would be equally unreasonable to assume that in event of a crisis, men, picked up at a moment's notice, would prove efficient scouts...or would be able to satisfactorily perform the important duty of keeping a look-out, exercising judgment and giving notice, by wire, to the nearest officer commanding, if occasion required.³²

Finally, in 1912 a company of mounted Guides was organized and trained. This gave officers of the Corps their first real opportunity to command a body of troops designed for battlefield intelligence work. The training of Guides at the annual camps followed the same

or similar syllabus as that offered to officers. The training syllabus for the 1912 camp at Calgary offers an example. Day one dealt largely with horse care. Day two focused on map work, conventional signs and the use of simple scales. On the third day the officers and men of the Corps worked in the field and received specific instruction on how to report on such features as roads, railways, farms and villages, rivers and enemy positions. The fourth day saw the Guides practising their message writing skills, comparing maps to ground, tracking and making deductions. The fifth day was a repeat of day three, while the sixth day concentrated on reconnoitring an enemy position. Patrol work and the transmission of messages made up the seventh day's schedule, while the eighth day was set aside for musketry. On day nine the men practised reconnoitring an enemy outpost line "by day with a view to a nearer approach by night." Day ten was used to repeat some of the exercises practised earlier. Days eleven and twelve were for use as the camp commandant may direct. It was assumed that all ranks were already proficient riders, so there was no instruction in equitation. So as not to waste any time, scouting formations would be practised as the Guides rode in and out of camp on their way to and from field training. The objective of the camp training was to "provide a body of Officers and men who are skilled in reading a map and who know what to report and how to report it, either verbally or in writing."³³

One district did, however, experiment with Guide officers commanding Scouts before 1912. During the Thanksgiving weekend camp in 1911, Major C.H. Mitchell, the DIO for the Second Divisional Area, took part in a tactical exercise in which Scouts, commanded by Corps of Guide officers, were employed.³⁴ The positive experiences of this camp contributed to the creation of a company of mounted Guides the following year. Several lessons were learned at this camp about the employment and training of Scouts. It was clear to Mitchell that the time had come to train an independent body of Scouts under the Corps' command, as the attitudes and skill level of some of the men detailed to act as Scouts from the other services were inadequate. It seemed that commanding officers were unwilling to part with their best men by handing them over to Guide officers. It was also apparent that scouting was specialized work, requiring specific training not available in the other arms.



Major A.J. Van Nostrand (left) and Captain C.H. Mitchell, Stanley Barracks, Toronto, Ontario, January 1911.
(Lawrence Hurt Sitwell Collection, NAC PA 111942)

From his experience at this camp, Mitchell also realized that the transmission of messages called for some improvement, as important information sometimes took longer to reach headquarters than was desired. Intelligence and communications work go hand-in-hand, and information would have come in faster, Mitchell thought, if the cavalry had had a visual signalling system, a field telephone, and a motorcycle. This would also save valuable horse flesh. Mitchell's concerns presaged the Canadian Corps' experience during the First World War, where communications and specialized scouting skills were also of premium value.³⁵

Other Districts were not as innovative, and performed below expected standards. For example, an inspection of Military District #10, in 1912, revealed that the District Intelligence Officer had made no compilation of military intelligence and statistics. Many maps, though, had been gathered, "but none of a strictly military

character." The sub-districts were also ill defined and liable to cause confusion, and there was a considerable shortage of equipment.³⁶

By 1912, even the normally positive *Militia Reports* hinted at imperfections in the Corps. There was a warning about the importance of selecting high quality officers for the Corps, for "in no other branch does "dead wood" so materially mar efficiency as in the Corps of Guides." On the other hand, the *Militia Report* also stated that officers, "with very few exceptions," were aware of the "importance and highly technical cast of their duties." There were also hints that some ill-feeling towards the Corps was brewing in the other services. "Hitherto," the *Report* reads, "in the eyes of many, little or no thought has been given to [the Corps'] value and responsibilities, consequently [the Corps] has been looked upon as a comfortable refuge for such as desired rank and uniform without the attending sacrifices."³⁷ The *Militia Report* for the

year ending 31 March 1913 pointed out that “Adequate accommodation [was] wanting for such officers as are specially charged with the care and compilation of maps and records.” Furthermore, it expressed regret that Royal Military College graduates who joined the Corps tended to “evade their obligation as to training, and for this reason a doubt is created as to whether such a desirable source can be counted upon to fill vacancies.” There was also difficulty in procuring horses.³⁸

Moreover, as late as 1913, ten years after the Corps was organized and only one year before the First World War, there was still some confusion over the organization and battlefield role the Guides were to play. The Corps was viewed by many as a “hybrid” of the three standard services, without any clear function. This, according to George Paley, the officer administering the Corps of Guides in 1913, was understandable as the Corps did not fit into the “stereotyped organizations with which [commanders] are familiar.” As it was not until 1912 that Guides were organized into mounted companies “no clear ideas ever appear to have been expressed as to the exact organization, training and employment in war of the rank and file.” The Corps’ role was so misunderstood that Lieutenant-Colonel Paley felt he had to explain its role in a letter to the commanding officer of the First Divisional Area. During wartime, if operating as Divisional mounted troops:

the Guides could be of service in the opening of a campaign in patrolling, scouting, and despatch riding, whilst, from their local knowledge, they would come in particularly useful for any independent reconnaissance.

If nothing else, they could act “as expert despatch riders and for intercommunication purposes...a service the want of which is apparent in every campaign.” Paley also thought that the Guides would probably “prove of value in making rough sketches and plans required by the Staff, and in providing Intelligence Police,” and in gathering “information under cover of the protection afforded by the troopers, especially so at first before the cavalry had developed much expertness in the art of scouting.” As well, Guides could be used to watch all friendly lines of approach and give early warning of attack. After all was said and done, however, what Paley described sounded very much like a force of independent, well trained traditional cavalry, and it would be interesting to

learn if his letter cleared up the situation to any great degree. Paley also explained something of the proposed organization of the Corps in wartime. The *Staff Manual (War)*, he noted, expected the Corps of Guides to form part of the Intelligence Corps under the Commander-in-Chief. In this capacity Guide officers could be assigned “multifarious appointments in connection with Intelligence and Censorship.” However, there was a:

tendency on the part of some members of the Corps to think that officers intended for these appointments, will derive little benefit from the nature of the training at camp, and that they should therefore be excused. This is very erroneous...[Such a position] would be to acknowledge that any civilian of good standing in his business or private profession would be equally suited, and consequently one of the strongest arguments for the maintenance of the Corps of Guides would be removed.³⁹

Nonetheless, there were some shining lights in the Corps. One example was Major C.H. Mitchell, DIO for District Two. During the Great War, he would hold in turn the position of General Staff Officer for Intelligence in the First Canadian Division, the Canadian Corps, the Second Army of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), and later, the BEF forces in Italy. In 1911, while still a captain, he wrote a report entitled “Aerial Navigation in Warfare.” In it he recognized the important role that aircraft would play in any future war, and proceeded to describe the type of craft available to contemporary armies, including captive balloons, dirigibles and heavier-than-air ships. He was somewhat futuristic and Orwellian though, when he declared that

There is no doubt that very shortly a vertical lifting “heavier than air” machine will be brought out capable of standing stationary or hovering over any point; this will probably combine the horizontal speed properties of the aeroplane.

He saw in the airplane not only intelligence capabilities such as reconnaissance, but a screening role whereby enemy planes could be blocked from viewing friendly forces. Aircraft, he recognized, would also be valuable in a signalling and communication role, in directing artillery fire, strategic bombing, antisubmarine warfare, and in general land and sea co-operation. He further saw the airplane as a natural adjunct to the Corps of Guides, providing a service that Intelligence

Officers “must early become proficient” with.⁴⁰ In 1912, after having been promoted to major, he composed a paper titled “Intelligence service in relation to Army Service Corps. His understanding of intelligence as described in this report would hold true throughout the First World War. “It goes without saying,” he wrote,

that the better intelligence obtained beforehand regarding an enemy’s country, his resources and his transportation facilities, as well as of our own country, the more positively and consequently the more safely can a plan of operation be conceived and carried out. The failure to obtain early information of this nature was especially apparent in the case of our own South African War and on the part of the French in 1870.⁴¹

During the First World War he tried not to make the same mistake. Mitchell also stressed the need for co-operation among the various services in order for Intelligence to provide the best possible service. This was an attitude he maintained throughout the war. Mitchell also laid the groundwork for the Canadian Corps’ Intelligence Service. As such, he can take much of the credit for its organizational, administrative, and battlefield success. His achievement in the Intelligence Corps during the war attests to his efficiency.

Prior to the war Ottawa periodically forwarded intelligence gathered on Canada’s military resources to the Colonial Office for use by the Committee of Imperial Defence. This surrender of national secrets and military intelligence clearly demonstrates Canada’s colonial status in relation to Great Britain at the time. No independent nation would countenance such actions. The forwarding of intelligence to Great Britain also suggests that Canada would not, and could not stand aside if the Empire went to war. In fact, the *Militia Report* for the year ending 31 March 1908, is even more pointed in this regard.

Special efforts were made to ascertain the manufacturing capabilities of Canada in respect to those articles which would be required for the use and up-keep of an army in the field, not only for the purposes of the Dominion, *but with a view to acquainting the Imperial authorities with the material resources upon which the Empire might reckon in the event of a great war* (emphasis added).⁴²

When war was declared in August 1914 the Corps of Guides was not called up to serve overseas. At least 235 of the 499 members of the Corps did, however, volunteer for the first Canadian Contingent; while in British Columbia various units in Military District #11 were placed on active service to guard the coast, including the 11th Detachment of the Corps of Guides. This was “the only Guides unit formally placed on active service in 1914.”⁴³ The British Army, to which the Canadian Contingent conformed, did not have on establishment a Guide organization. As a result, the men of the Canadian Corps of Guides were distributed throughout the Contingent in various staff and specialist functions, some as Intelligence Officers. However rudimentary their Guide training may have been before the war, it was still more than the prewar British Army offered its troops. The regular British Army was largely without any trained field Intelligence Officers in August 1914, and sent untrained men to meet the Germans. Although the men of the Corps of Guides had, in some ways, trained for the wrong war, many of the intelligence skills they possessed were transferable to the mud of Flanders, and proved a valuable contribution to the Canadian Corps. The very existence of the Corps of Guides kept the importance of battlefield intelligence before the eyes of Canadian soldiers in the years prior to the war, and probably goes a fair way in explaining why Canadian formations tended to employ more Staff Officers on Intelligence duties than did their British equivalents.⁴⁴ And as combat intelligence was crucial to success in the First World War, it is probably fair to say that the Corps of Guides contributed to the success of the Canadian Corps.

Notes

1. I would like to thank Sydney Wise for his comments and advice.
2. 1904 *Militia Report*.
3. National Archives of Canada (NAC), Manuscript Group (MG) 30 E60, H.H. Matthews Papers, Volume 1, Folder 4: Corps of Guides. Lieutenant-Colonel Denny, “to District Intelligence Officers,” 12 November 1903.
4. 1903 *Militia Report*.
5. NAC Record Group (RG) 9, II B3, Volume 58: *General Orders, 1903*. General Order No.61.
6. NAC MG30 E60, H.H. Matthews Papers, Volume 1, Folder 4: Corps of Guides. From an undated memo titled

- "Qualifications for a District Intelligence Officer," likely written in 1903.
7. NAC RG9, II B3, Volume 58: *General Orders, 1903*. General Order No.61.
 8. NAC, MG30 E60, H.H. Matthews Papers, Volume 1, Folder 4: Corps of Guides. From an undated memo titled "Qualifications for a Sub-District Intelligence Officer," likely written in 1903.
 9. NAC MG30 E60, H.H. Matthews Papers, Volume 1, Folder 4: Corps of Guides. From a memo dealing with the selection of Guides, likely written in 1903. Also, NAC RG9, II B3, Volume 58: *General Orders, 1903*, General Order No.61.
 10. 1906 *Militia Report*.
 11. 1905 *Militia Report*.
 12. *Militia Report* for the year end 31 March 1909.
 13. NAC RG9, II C2, Volume 8: Militia Department, Military Intelligence: Corps of Guides. Report 24.
 14. 1905 *Militia Report*; 1906 *Militia Report*; *Militia Report* for the year end 31 March 1908.
 15. 1906 *Militia Report*. Also NAC RG9, II B5, Volume 5: Inspection Reports.
 16. NAC RG9, II C2, Volume 8: Militia Department, Military Intelligence: Corps of Guides. Report 19.
 17. NAC MG30 E60, H.H. Matthews Papers, Volume 1, Folder 4: Corps of Guides. Confidential Circular Memorandum Number Four. No date.
 18. NAC RG9, II C2, Volume 8: Militia Department, Military Intelligence: Corps of Guides. Report 19.
 19. *Ibid*.
 20. NAC RG9, II C2, Volume 8: Militia Department, Military Intelligence: Corps of Guides. Reports 18, 19 and 20.
 21. NAC MG30 E60, H.H. Matthews Papers, Volume 1, Folder 4: Corps of Guides.
 22. NAC RG9, II B3, Volume 66: *General Orders, 1911*. General Order No.41.
 23. NAC MG30 E60, H.H. Matthews Papers, Volume 1, Folder 4: Corps of Guides. Director General of Intelligence, Canadian Militia, "To District Intelligence Officers," 21 April 1904.
 24. NAC RG9, II B3, Volume 66: *General Orders, 1911*, General Order No.41.
 25. NAC RG9, II C2, Volume 8: Militia Department, Military Intelligence: Corps of Guides. Report 15.
 26. NAC MG29 E92, Lawrence Hurt Sitwell Papers, Folder: Captain Sitwell Lecture, March 1909.
 27. NAC MG29 E92, Lawrence Hurt Sitwell Papers, Folder: Newspaper Clippings, 1907-1909.
 28. NAC RG9, II C2, Volume 8: Militia Department, Military Intelligence: Corps of Guides. Report 14.
 29. NAC RG24, Volume 4256, File: MD1 512: Functions of the Corps of Guides. Folder 5-1-2. See also the 1905 *Militia Report*.
 30. NAC MG30 E60, H.H. Matthews Papers, Volume 1, Folder 4: Corps of Guides. Confidential Circular Memorandum Number Four.
 31. NAC MG30 E60, H.H. Matthews Papers, Volume 1, Folder 4: Corps of Guides. From a memo dealing with the selection of Guides, likely written in 1903.
 32. NAC RG24, Volume 6526, Folder: HQ 493-1-1: Training of Brigade and Regimental Scouts. Major E.T.P. Shewen "To Major," 23 January 1907.
 33. NAC MG30, E117, J.L.R. Parsons Papers, Volume 4, Folder 23: Promotion Exam, Militia Staff Course, Notes on Training Courses. "Syllabus for Training, Corps of Guides," 1912.
 34. NAC RG24, Volume 6526, Folder HQ 493-1-1. A.J. Van Nostrand, "To Colonel Paley," 4 November 1911.
 35. NAC RG24, Volume 6526, Folder HQ493-1-1. Major C.H. Mitchell, "To GSO, 2 Division," 10 November 1911.
 36. NAC RG9, II B5, Volume 5: Inspection Reports.
 37. *Militia Report* for year ending 31 March 1912.
 38. *Militia Report* for year ending 31 March 1913.
 39. NAC RG24, Volume 4256, File: MD1 512: Functions of the Corps of Guides. Folder 5-1-2. Lieutenant-Colonel George Paley, "To Officer Commanding First Division," 30 January 1913.
 40. NAC RG9, II C2, Volume 8: Militia Department, Military Intelligence: Corps of Guides. Report 11: "Aerial Navigation in Warfare," by Captain C.H. Mitchell, 1911.
 41. NAC RG9, II C2, Volume 8: Militia Department, Military Intelligence: Corps of Guides. Report 12: "Intelligence Service in Relation to A.S.C.," by C.H. Mitchell, 1912.
 42. *Militia Report* for the year end 31 March 1908.
 43. Major S.R. Elliot, *Scarlet to Green: A History of Intelligence in the Canadian Army 1903-1963* (Toronto: Canadian Intelligence and Security Association, 1981) p.22.
 44. Currie, General Sir Arthur. "Historical Resumé." Located in Major J.E. Hahn's, *The Intelligence Service Within the Canadian Corps 1914-1918* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1930), pp.xv, xvii.

Dan R. Jenkins is a doctoral student at Carleton University in Ottawa. He is currently writing his dissertation on the Canadian Corps' Combat Intelligence Service during the First World War.

Announcement

A militaria collectors group devoted to the insignia of peace-keeping missions has been formed. The **Peace Keeping Insignia Collectors Group (PKICG)** was created 21 November 1995 and now has members from Canada, Denmark and the USA.

The focus of this organization is the preservation of items of militaria worn by the troops participating in peace-keeping missions. This includes the mission insignia, eg: the standard United Nations arm patch or the NATO "IFOR" patch, the national insignia of each contingent and mission-unique items such as metal pocket badges, flags, T-shirts and other items that are produced.

Subsidiary aims include preserving these items for the military history of each participating country and to further the understanding of peace-keeping to the citizens of the world through displays and presentations.

For more information, please contact:

Douglas Townend
1758 Harvest Crescent
Orleans, Ontario, Canada K1C 1V4
Phone (613) 837-1916