

# **The Information Front**

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**The Information Front:  
The Canadian Army and News Management  
during the Second World War**

*Timothy Balzer*



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# Abbreviations

AFHQ	Allied Force Headquarters
ADPR	assistant director of public relations
AP	Associated Press
BPI	Bureau of Public Information
BUP	British United Press
CCF	Co-operative Commonwealth Federation
CCO	chief of combined operations
CMHQ	Canadian Military Headquarters
CP	Canadian Press
CNR	Canadian National Railways
COHQ	Combined Operations Headquarters
CWRO	Canadian War Records Office
DADPR	deputy assistant director of public relations
DDPR	deputy director of public relations
DND	Department of National Defence
DPR	director of public relations
FANTOX	15 Army Group Headquarters
GPO	General Post Office
MoI	Ministry of Information
NDHQ	National Defence Headquarters
NRMA	National Resources Mobilization Act
PR	public relations
PRO	public relations officer
RAF	Royal Air Force
RCAF	Royal Canadian Air Force
RCN	Royal Canadian Navy

RN	Royal Navy
SHAEF	Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force
UP	United Press
WIB	Wartime Information Board

# **The Information Front**



# Introduction

*Compared with all previous wars, the Second was uniquely the  
Publicity War.*

– PAUL FUSSELL, *WARTIME*<sup>1</sup>

WAR HAS ALWAYS been news. According to tradition, the ancient Greek runner Pheidippides ran the thirty-five kilometres to Athens from the scene of the victory over the Persian force at Marathon in 490 BC to proclaim the news, whereupon he collapsed and died. Before the advent of mass circulation newspapers, town criers announced notices of important battles to the populace. Military leaders such as Napoleon courted publicity by using proclamations and bulletins to trumpet their victories to press and public, emphasizing the role of their leadership. Unfortunately, his victory bulletins also purportedly led to the phrase “to lie like a bulletin” because of their unreliability and obvious propaganda purposes. The dispatch of the *Times* war correspondent Howard Russell, who reported on the Crimean War, marked a new development: war news from the front written by a journalist rather than by military officers. The advent of the war correspondent meant a rival source of war news that could contradict and challenge official accounts of operations. Russell’s portrayals of the horrors of war and the suffering of the troops along with his accusations of bungling, particularly by the British commander Lord Raglan, raised anger in both the public and the military, although for very different reasons.

In the First World War, these two sources of war news came to greater prominence. The military and governments realized that information had become a potent weapon in the context of total war. Official propaganda sought to rally public support for the war effort by declaring the wickedness of the enemy and the justice of the cause. At first, British commanders regarded correspondents as little better than the enemy: at one point early in the war, the British minister of war, Lord Kitchener, ordered the arrest and deportation from France of a number of war correspondents. Grudgingly, the military recognized the value of news reports and allowed a limited number of correspondents to go near the front, albeit tightly controlled by escorting officers and severe censorship.<sup>2</sup>

During the Second World War, the volume of war news and publicity greatly exceeded that of the First World War. Much of the operational news came not only from the traditional source – communiqués written by staff officers – but also from reports sent by a greater number of war correspondents. While the restrictions on these correspondents were generally liberal compared with what they were in the First World War, the military enacted a number of steps to ensure that their stories did not involve sensitive or embarrassing information. The armies' military field press censors vetted reporters' copy before transmission, while press conferences at headquarters kept correspondents informed of the "big picture" of operations and implanted the military's interpretation into their stories. Public relations officers (PROs) liaised with the press, conducted reporters in the field, and sought both to control and to assist them. Military public relations (PR) organizations exploded in size and numbers during the war. As well, the major western Allies relied on civilian propaganda agencies for stories to motivate the populace. These agencies included the American Office of War Information (OWI), the British Ministry of Information (MOI), and the Canadian Bureau of Public Information (BPI), later renamed the Wartime Information Board (WIB).<sup>3</sup>

The Canadian Army began the Second World War with no PR organization at all, which is not surprising considering its shoe-string budget during the interwar period. Yet, by the end of the war, Canadian Army PR was a substantial organization employing hundreds of personnel, with First Canadian Army in Europe, Canadian Military Headquarters (CMHQ) in London, National Defence Headquarters (Army) (NDHQ) in Ottawa, and small PR establishments at each of the thirteen military district headquarters throughout Canada. The vast majority of the PROs had been reporters before the war or had worked in the advertising industry. These journalists in uniform oversaw a bewildering variety of tasks: press liaison, press censorship, psychological warfare, film and photographic coverage, accrediting correspondents, ensuring the transmission of news stories to Canada, promoting the image of the Canadian Army, and interacting with the Allied PR authorities.

The Second World War Canadian Army has been the subject of much historical investigation, but army PR has received relatively little attention. The books that have explored related aspects of it vary in quality and accuracy, and none provides a detailed examination of the Canadian Army's PR and its interaction with war news. Most memoirs and academic studies that explain PR do so only in the course of examining other subjects.<sup>4</sup> In contrast to the PR services, scholars have given some attention to the press coverage of Canadian Army operations, particularly in dealing with problems such as the disastrous Dieppe raid and



the botched announcement of Canadian participation in the Sicily landings.<sup>5</sup> Press coverage of incidents in Northwest Europe receives less attention, apart from studies about war crimes against Canadian troops.<sup>6</sup> On occasion, the official histories deal with press reports of routine operations such as Operation Goldflake, the move of I Canadian Corps from Italy to Holland in 1945.<sup>7</sup> Apart from Dieppe, few of these studies delve very deeply into the coverage of Canadian Army news and its political ramifications, perhaps because bad news attracts more controversy (and thus study) than good news.

While literature on army PR is sparse, rather more is written about Canadian war correspondents. During or shortly after the war, numerous Canadian journalists published memoirs, and a few wrote later reflections on their experiences.<sup>8</sup> Only three histories and one biography of Canadian war correspondents have appeared. Of these, the most recent and scholarly is Aimé-Jules Bizimana's study of French Canadian war correspondents. It is the only study to make significant use of the voluminous Canadian Army archival materials on the subject.<sup>9</sup>

Both Canadian and international studies of war correspondents typically offer two opposing evaluations of the quality of Second World War journalism and the severity of military control and censorship. In 1957, American historian Joseph Matthews argued that Second World War news was a prisoner of the military publicity machine, which enforced censorship and controlled correspondents' accreditation. He warns of "the overwhelming determination to force the news to render service in the common good" as the biggest threat to reporting a "modern war," yet he praises news coverage of the Second World War, saying that it gives an accurate overview of events and avoids the more blatant propaganda of the First World War. Journalist Phillip Knightley's 1975 Pulitzer Prize-winning study disputes Matthews' positive evaluation, contending that the correspondents became a virtual component of the military: in a total war against a clearly evil enemy, the "patriotic war correspondents got onside." He approvingly quotes columnist Fletcher Pratt, who said that censorship "pretty well succeeded in putting over the legend that the war was won without a single mistake by a command ... of geniuses." Knightley's final word on the quality of Second World War news is a quotation from Canadian correspondent Charles Lynch: "It wasn't good journalism, it wasn't journalism at all."<sup>10</sup>

The literature on Canadian war correspondents also reflects this controversy. Studies of censorship by Claude Beauregard and Gillis Purcell, as well as Stursberg's and Bizimana's reflections on war correspondents, resemble Knightley's views on censorship and correspondent patriotism.<sup>11</sup> In contrast, Canadian literature professor Eric Thompson's article on war correspondents quotes journalist Ross Munro as saying that he "never felt [he] was a PR agent for the

government” and that other correspondents were “wrong” when they made such claims. Thompson highlights the correspondents’ professionalism in seeking “to keep Canadians informed of the truth they witnessed and believed.” In his memoirs, former PRO Richard S. Malone argues that war correspondents had considerable freedom after D-Day, when policy censorship was invoked only twice. He says that censors passed criticism even when “untutored,” although they sometimes took steps to make sure the “correspondent got the correct facts.” Furthermore, “the army neither suggested nor fed direct lies to the press.” On the few occasions when correspondents had reason to complain, Malone took up their cause with higher authorities. War correspondent Gerald Clark respected censorship and believed that most Second World War correspondents “accepted it as logical and necessary – not as an attempt to stifle opinion which we could express even during the war.”<sup>12</sup> Clearly, opinions over the severity of military press censorship and the independence of Canadian war correspondents are divided.

Despite the memoirs and the existence of popular histories that suggest there is a market for such books, there has been little academic study of Canadian Army PR and war news during the Second World War that takes full advantage of the rich documentary sources. The often-sweeping comments in the memoirs of correspondents and PROs need to be checked against archival records to provide a more complete context for discerning the extent of military control over the news media. The whole question of how much PR independence Canada could exercise under the control of its more powerful allies also remains largely unexplored. Both Beaugard and Bizimana correctly place Canadian PR under the command of Eisenhower’s Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF), but did this leave room for Canadian concerns? Malone indicates clashes with Allied authorities over Canadian PR priorities, but were these conflicts typical? How great a control did the military actually exercise over the war correspondents? Which version of the role of the patriotic press and military censorship debate is more accurate? These various underexplored and controversial aspects of army PR demonstrate a need for a dedicated study of the Canadian Army and war news during the Second World War.

*The Information Front* seeks to answer these questions by focusing on how the Canadian Army attempted to influence, shape, and control war news during the Second World War. Since the army PR organizations were created to accomplish these tasks, in large part I concentrate on their organization, development, policies, and activities. During the war, Canadian Army PR grew both in size and in effectiveness, from individual officers who performed their duties virtually single handed to an efficient publicity machine, part of the larger Allied

PR effort coordinated by Eisenhower's SHAEF. Even so, PR did not affect every attempt by the Canadian Army to influence news of its operations. Often high-level decisions about PR came from the commanding generals, frequently in consultation with representatives of the government in Ottawa.

American military historian Russell Weigley writes that "it is to prepare for war and wage war that armies primarily exist."<sup>13</sup> Since fighting was, ultimately, the most important activity of the Canadian Army during the war, this investigation of Canadian Army PR and war news concentrates almost exclusively on operational news, combat activities overseas, and the planning that pertained to publicizing them. As such, the emphasis is on those PR activities that most influenced the production of war news for the public – those that brought the army into closest contact with the news media. Thus, the activities of the Canadian Army Film and Photo Unit receive less attention than do those of the conducting officers, PROs, and field press censors who directly influenced the content of newspaper reports and radio broadcasts. Similarly, the psychological warfare units and the producers of the army service paper the *Maple Leaf* receive slight attention because they primarily targeted audiences other than the Canadian public. Furthermore, because I focus on operational war news, I address the development and activities of army PR overseas rather than in Canada (although the various chiefs of army PR operating from NDHQ who had policy input into overseas PR activities make frequent appearances). While news about training, recruitment, publicity stunts, and other related activities was doubtless important to the war effort, it was not operational news; thus, the PROs at the various military districts, with a few exceptions, do not receive attention. The major exception is a brief examination of the conscription crisis in the autumn of 1944, an event of central political importance in Canada and one with implications for the army's conduct of the war.

Any study of the military and war news must be placed within the wartime context of censorship and propaganda. During the Second World War, Canadian censorship was not the privilege of the military. In fact, civilian censors carried out most of it in Canada itself; army press censors operated only overseas. Censorship of newspapers, the mail, telegrams, and radio broadcasts was a reality for Canadians, although the severity of and procedure for censorship varied with each medium.<sup>14</sup> News censorship in Canada was "voluntary" in that censors did not vet each story; rather, the media compared their stories to published lists of restrictions and consulted the censors if there were concerns an item might be illegal. Censorship of all types had its basis in law in the Defence of Canada Regulations, an emergency measure that allowed government greater powers during wartime. Its Regulation 39 prohibited a broad range of communications:

No person shall

- (a) spread reports or make statements intended or likely to cause disaffection as to His Majesty or to interfere with the success of His Majesty's forces or of the forces of any allied or associated Powers or to prejudice His Majesty's relations with foreign powers;
- (b) spread reports or make statements intended or likely to prejudice the recruiting, training, discipline, or administration of any of His Majesty's forces; or
- (c) spread reports or make statements intended or likely to be prejudicial to the safety of the State or the efficient prosecution of the war.<sup>15</sup>

These regulations potentially gave the state the ability to muzzle all dissent. They were used to ban publications and groups deemed opposed to the war effort (such as fascist organizations, the Communist Party of Canada and related groups, Technocracy Incorporated, and the Jehovah's Witnesses).<sup>16</sup>

Although these regulations fell mainly on radical or fringe groups, two incidents in which "mainstream" politicians and the media were their targets caused great controversy. The first involved the internment of Camillien Houde, the mayor of Montreal, for speaking against national registration. Threats to prosecute newspapers quoting his statements led to one of the war's biggest outbursts of editorial outrage. The *Globe and Mail* and the *Montreal Gazette* published Houde's remarks in defiance of the censors. They faced no charges, but the event stirred up a furor over the freedom of the press. The second incident involved charges laid against Ontario Conservative politician George Drew for criticizing the findings of the Duff inquiry into the dispatch of Canadian troops to Hong Kong. Drew called the inquiry a political whitewash whose purpose was to cover up deficiencies in training and equipment. Justice Minister Louis St. Laurent withdrew the charges after the Drew affair put an embarrassed government on the defensive.<sup>17</sup> While the government realized it could not push the regulations further than the mainstream media and politicians would allow without experiencing negative reactions, the Defence of Canada Regulations gave it extraordinary power to control freedom of expression, including the power to prosecute journalists who deliberately undermined Canadian military efforts by revealing secret information. I, however, concentrate on censorship that occurred directly under military control.

Any exploration of military PR and war news also relates to propaganda. What constitutes propaganda is murkier than what constitutes censorship. There is no clear delineation between the positive idea of "persuasion," the neutral term "information," and the pejorative term "propaganda." Arguably, the term used relates to the feelings of the person receiving the communication in question. As Gary Evans writes in his study of the wartime career of John

Grierson, “propaganda continues to be what you don’t like.”<sup>18</sup> One person’s information is another’s propaganda. So elastic are the boundaries of propaganda that French neo-Thomist philosopher Jacques Ellul, in his classic work on the subject, includes a fifty-page chapter on the multitudinous characteristics of propaganda without providing a simple definition. Victoria O’Donnell, however, does offer a useful definition: “Propaganda is the deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist.”<sup>19</sup> This is the definition I use in this book. Canadian Army PR attempted to influence the Canadian public’s view of the army and its importance. It sought to motivate Canadians to actively support the war effort and, significantly for an all-volunteer force, to enlist for active service. Thus, even though Canadian PROs overseas wrote very little for publication, their attempts to shape the news were a form of propaganda.

The Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) and the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) also established publicity services. The RCAF PR service competed with the army for war news coverage. Since extremely suppressive censorship hampered the RCN Naval Information Service’s reporting of operational stories, it tried its best to promote the image of the navy.<sup>20</sup> The study of the RCAF and the RCN PR departments, which faced different circumstances and challenges in reporting news of their services’ activities than did the Canadian Army, merits a separate study.

The major agency creating propaganda for the Canadian public was not one of the military PR teams but, rather, a civilian agency, the WIB, which oversaw efforts to ensure that Canadians remained committed to the war effort. The initiative began with the small BPI in December 1939 but grew continuously with the expansion of the Canadian war effort after the fall of France in 1940. While the press saw the growing role of the government-controlled WIB as a threat not only to itself but also to the democratic right of Canadians to form their own opinions about the questions of the day, the WIB increasingly used social scientists and their methods to gauge public opinion and to shape propaganda accordingly. When John Grierson became WIB chief in February 1943, he increased the number of academics on the board and emphasized social reforms. These techniques, especially the relationship between the Gallup pollsters and the WIB, remained secret in order to avoid accusations that the government was politically stage managing Canadian opinion.<sup>21</sup> While such fears were exaggerated, the press was correct about the emergence of a new emphasis on the government’s systematically manipulating public opinion – a phenomenon that continued to gain importance despite the disbanding of the WIB at war’s end.

During the war, all of these agencies, of course, had to work with the news media. Indeed, rather than have PROs write press releases, army PR overseas relied primarily on newspaper correspondents and radio broadcasters to report the activities of the Canadian Army. Therefore, the story of the army PR service is also the story of journalists at war. At the beginning of the war, daily newspapers were the main source of information for Canadians; during the war, radio news broadcasts grew greatly in importance. In 1941, total newspaper circulation in Canada stood at 2,378,657. In 1942, Toronto had the largest circulation of daily newspapers: the *Toronto Star* with 239,219, the *Globe and Mail* with 164,729, and the *Toronto Telegram* with 153,395. Montreal was the only other city with newspapers exceeding 100,000 copies, with *La Presse* at 158,122 and the *Montreal Star* at 126,123. Yet circulation is not the only measure of influence: the *Winnipeg Free Press*, with a circulation of only 72,706, possessed a great deal of political influence as well as a reputation for superior journalism.<sup>22</sup>

Canadian newspapers were no longer political organs tied directly to the political parties and merely acting as their mouthpieces. Nevertheless, most had a political bias: for example, the *Toronto Star* and the *Winnipeg Free Press* favoured the Liberals, while the *Toronto Telegram* and the *Globe and Mail* backed the Tories; however, political opinions were generally confined to the editorial pages. This separation was a result of the growing move towards “objectivity” as a journalistic ethos – a move that emphasized “informational” reporting rather than the partisan politics typical of the nineteenth century and the sensationalistic “yellow journalism” common at the turn of the century.<sup>23</sup> Newspapers helped shape public opinion and were the most important vehicle for providing news of the Canadian Army to the public.

In the past few decades, scholars of the media have examined whose views and values the news reflects. One approach to the issue comes from the political economy school, which grows out of a class-based analysis and, in its most basic form, maintains that the wealthy and powerful tell the editors what to say. The most well-known example of this approach is the “propaganda model” of Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman. They argue that media “manufacture the truth,” serving as a propaganda arm of the elite, and that “money and power are able to filter out the news fit to print, marginalize dissent and allow the government and dominant private interests to get their messages across to the public.” Such filters include corporate media ownership, dependence on advertisers for revenue, media reliance on sources, experts provided and paid for by the state and corporations, media criticism by conservative groups, and “anti-communism as a national religion and control mechanism.” All media dissent amounts only to “tactics” used by the state. Any voices actually questioning “fundamental premises or suggest[ing] that the observed modes of exercise of

state power are based on systemic factors will be excluded from the mass media.” Thus, while having the appearance of independence, the media functions like a totalitarian state.<sup>24</sup>

In contrast, journalism scholars Lydia Miljan and Barry Cooper discuss the liberal pluralist view of media production. According to them,

The power and the importance of the media lie in the media’s ability to influence the formation and content of citizens’ opinions. We may call this liberal and pluralist perspective because it assumes that public policy to some degree is an outcome of a more or less reasonable and multi-part conversation among citizens and political institutions to which they accord legitimacy.

According to them, the news media operate in a “society of competing ideas and groups,” and, ultimately, the “journalists are responsible for the words they write and for choosing the sources they interview for their stories.” This assumes that individual reporters enjoy relative freedom with regard to what they write, without coercion from outside their media organization.<sup>25</sup> The news, then, represents the values of those who create it and may reflect the ideas of any number of the competing groups of which society consists.

I argue that, even in the context of wartime, the media remained a powerful force – one that the Canadian government and military either had to handle carefully or face the political consequences. Despite tight and overt government and military controls during wartime, the news media were not toothless, and authorities needed either to justify their actions through appeals to wartime security or risk political embarrassment and criticism. The political economy approach to news minimizes the agency of two important parties: the journalists who produce the news and the public that consumes it. Journalists are influenced by the norms of their profession, their personal viewpoints, and such external factors as government and corporate ownership. Nor is the public mind merely a receptacle for the message of the news media. Frances Henry and Carol Tator, in their examination of the English-language Canadian press, argue that newspapers primarily reflect the views of their owners, which, in turn, influence their readers’ opinions. Nonetheless, people read the newspapers that reflect their positions, and this influences the media’s approach to the news. Thus, according to Robert Hackett and Yuezhi Zhao, the “relation between a particular medium and its audience is interactive.”<sup>26</sup> Public opinion and the news media shape each other. The content of news results not only from hegemony but also from the interaction of multiple influences and groups.

My analysis of Canadian Army PR focuses primarily on its organization, its policies, and how it influenced news pertaining to operations – its completeness,



honesty, and accuracy. It does not attempt to “deconstruct” the content of war news. While gender is not a major focus, some discussion of the relationship between women correspondents and army PR, and how traditional views of gender roles frustrated and limited the work of the former, is relevant.<sup>27</sup>

*The Information Front* has two main parts. The first part is a chronological overview of Canadian Army PR during the Second World War, which traces the growth of the PR organization and its policies from nothing to an efficient publicity machine. It examines the growing pains of PR as it began in CMHQ in 1940 and expanded, along with the army, despite conflicts between the PROs and other agencies. Canadian Army PR had its organization and policies ready for the Sicily campaign of July 1943. The campaigns in Sicily and Italy were difficult for PR, which learned by trial and error how to conduct field operations, deal with Allied policies, and conciliate grumpy correspondents. This experience was a critical building block for the Northwest Europe campaign, in which Canadian Army PR performed at its best, making superior arrangements for the D-Day landings and enjoying good relations with both the press and Allied authorities. But this success had its costs: the news sanitized the war, PR in Italy struggled for enough resources, and the conscription crisis caused by the heavy casualties resulted in some PR blunders in Canada.

The second part consists of case studies that offer a detailed examination of news coverage and PR activities during select major Canadian operations. The Dieppe raid press coverage was not a triumph for Canadian Army PR. Not only was the news politically controversial and deceptive, but Canadian Army PR also took a back-seat role to the heavy-handed leadership of Combined Operations Headquarters. The Sicily publicity had mixed results: the news captured great support among the Canadian public despite its lacklustre content, but the PR arrangements left many correspondents and publishers exasperated with the army. Three case studies of incidents in Normandy – the murder of Canadian prisoners, the massacre of the Black Watch regiment, and the accidental bombing of Canadian troops – illustrate the growing complexity of PR as multiple military and political institutions clashed with regard to how best to handle controversial news stories. Bad news could not be made to disappear, although this strained relations between Lieutenant General Crerar, who commanded First Canadian Army, and his political masters in Ottawa. The conclusion evaluates the effectiveness and desirability of army influence over war news during the Second World War.



**PART 1**

**Canadian Army Public Relations and War News  
in the Second World War**



## The Beginnings: The Growth of Canadian Army PR and Policy, September 1939 to June 1943

DURING THE OPENING years of the war, the Canadian Army developed its PR organization. Since none existed in September 1939, this involved writing policy, creating units, and recruiting personnel. This process revolved around three main developments. The first was the creation of the PR organization at CMHQ in London between the outbreak of war and the end of 1940. This occurred after the government and the army had decided that the army rather than Canada House and the Department of External Affairs would coordinate its publicity. The second major development, the resolving of many enmities between CMHQ PR and non-military PR organizations, occurred after CMHQ PR became a functioning organization in 1940. The lack of leadership from Ottawa in coordinating publicity between rival organizations meant that some issues were never completely resolved. The third major development was the creation of additional PR establishments at corps, divisional, and army headquarters as the initial single division grew to become First Canadian Army, numbering 189,805 by 30 June 1943.<sup>1</sup> The subsequent organizational and interpersonal conflict had to be resolved by the development of policy and changes in personnel. At the same time, army PR learned its business by covering raids (like Spitsbergen and Dieppe), training, and large-scale exercises; organizing a French-language service; and creating a culture welcoming to journalists. All the while, PR officers carried out their duty of creating a positive image of the Canadian Army among the Canadian and British publics.

The Canadian Army began the Second World War with no PR establishment. Preparing for PR in the event of future war was not a priority during the severe financial restraints of the Depression. Nevertheless, the Canadian Army had not always lacked publicity. Beginning in March 1915, Canadians read reports from the “Canadian Eye-Witness” that were supposedly “wired from the trenches.”<sup>2</sup> It was actually Max Aitken, soon to be made Lord Beaverbrook, who was compiling the stories, with the help of his organization, the Canadian War Records Office (CWRO). Aitken was the driving force behind Canadian publicity during the Great War. The wealthy Canadian-born politician, industrialist, and publisher, already well connected and influential in the British establishment, was in the perfect position to act as intermediary between the British and Canadian governments. His appointment as official “eye-witness” added to this

influence as he used it to gain access to the meetings of the British General Headquarters. Aitken enlarged his eye-witness appointment and, in May 1915, became Canadian war records officer, a position combining the posts of publicist, historian, and archivist. Initially, he personally paid a team of writers to assist him. Despite the claims made by the term “eye-witness,” after Second Ypres he seldom visited the front himself. Using his influence as press baron and Conservative politician, he ensured that British newspapers featured Canadian publicity and even forced military censors to loosen their regulations. Clearly, he had powers about which later Canadian PR personnel could only dream.<sup>3</sup> Aitken supervised the publication not only of newspaper reports, pamphlets, photographs, and films but also of early wartime histories like the best-selling volumes of *Canada in Flanders*, which glorified Canadian troops. The CWRO proclaimed itself the “spokesman for the Canadian Army; it was the official reporter of what was good to report; it was the eyes and the pen of the great inarticulate mass of men who were too busy fighting to tell just how they were fighting.”<sup>4</sup> Aitken fulfilled his goals of lionizing and publicizing Canadian formations. So effective was Aitken’s propaganda that a number of British observers griped that some Americans believed that the Canadians were the chief combat force. His appointment by Lloyd George as minister of information for the United Kingdom in 1918 further demonstrates his effectiveness.<sup>5</sup> In terms of dominance, there was to be no equivalent to Aitken in the Second World War.

At the beginning of the Second World War, the Liberal government of W.L. Mackenzie King hoped to participate in the conflict with as little expenditure in blood and cash as possible. Avoiding conscription for overseas service and the bitter national and political division that it had created during the First World War was the chief motivation behind many of King’s war policies. King hoped that the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan would be Canada’s main contribution to the war effort. Preparing British and Commonwealth aircrews and aerial warfare seemed more palatable than repeating the huge casualties that occurred in the trenches on the Western Front. Even so, the government agreed to send a single Canadian division to Europe, one that was easily sustained by volunteers. So, in 1939, the major story for the army was the sending to the United Kingdom of what was to become 1st Canadian Division.

Since the Canadian Army did not have a PR organization in place, the Canadian high commissioner in the United Kingdom, Vincent Massey, had ambitious plans to make Canada House the centre of a new CWRO, and he sought government funding for such an organization. Canada House press officer James Spence assembled “eye-witness” accounts such as those created by Beaverbrook and employed photographers and motion picture camera operators who were

already in London. As Spence explained to Colonel E.L.M. Burns of CMHQ, “any large immigration from Canada for the specific purpose of strengthening the [existing Canada House] organization, or creating another *de novo*, would be of doubtful economy and equally doubtful expediency.”<sup>6</sup> Massey was ready to step into the shoes once worn by Beaverbrook.

For reasons that remain obscure, the army did not follow up on Massey’s suggestions. It likely feared another powerful publicity figure outside its control. Aitken’s eye-witness PR program proved a mixed blessing to the Canadian Army’s high command. While ensuring positive publicity, Beaverbrook had been instrumental in having Edwin Alderson removed from the command of the Canadian Corps, and he “manipulated the command of brigades and battalions.” While Massey would not have had the same power in the British establishment as Aitken had enjoyed, he still had connections in both countries and was influential in his own right. The army decided that a PR officer directly under military control eliminated any risk of an outsider’s controlling the news. What also worried the army were the poor results of Canada House’s PR management of the first major Canadian Army news event in Britain.<sup>7</sup>

Canada House, in conjunction with the Canadian Army and British military PR and censorship authorities, coordinated aspects of the publicity for the December 1939 arrival in Britain of 1st Canadian Division. The careful handling of the press arrangements was critical. Foremost was the need for security: the enemy must not learn of the movement of troops, the port, or the names and numbers of transports and naval escorts. The order of battle of the Canadian division was also secret, as were unit names and numbers, any officer except the commander A.G.L. McNaughton, and any regiment’s home localities.<sup>8</sup> Second, given that the story was of critical interest to the Canadian public, the Canadian Press (CP), a non-profit news agency supplying stories to its member newspapers, was to receive the news simultaneously with the British news media on the second day after the landing. A three-hour delay imposed on the American Press would reduce the possibility of American radio news scooping Canadian newspapers. Finally, the impression would have to be given that the entire Canadian division had arrived when, in reality, it took at least three “flights” before this was the case.<sup>9</sup> Presumably, this would deceive the enemy regarding Allied military strength in Britain and disguise later troop sailings. Canada House was to communicate with the press, provide background information for the journalists, and arrange the release time with the other parties involved.

The troops themselves circumvented the careful planning by Canada House and the Canadian military. After disembarking in Southampton, they sent cables to Canada informing families of their safe arrival. No one had told the British

cable censors to hold back private telegrams. Widespread domestic knowledge of the arrival made the “position with respect to the press most difficult,” according to the Department of External Affairs.<sup>10</sup> To make matters worse, Winston Churchill broadcast the news of 1st Canadian Division’s arrival on the evening of 18 December 1939, two days before the planned release of the news on the morning of 20 December. Canadian Colonel Maurice Pope, who attended the conference on a “hunch” that Churchill “might crash through our previous agreement,” hurriedly notified the CBC and the press censors, who scrambled to revise press restrictions. Release of the story to Canadian newspapers followed quickly. Churchill later frequently ignored publicity arrangements. As chief UK censor Admiral George Thompson explained, “Churchill constantly surprised us and time after time he announced things which until he spoke had been covered by a strict ban.”<sup>11</sup>

The journalists who had invested several days in the story expressed frustration at its premature release. The British press launched a barrage of criticism. The *Evening Standard*, which had “pleaded” with the War Office and the Ministry of Information (MoI) to change the release time, only to be scooped by Churchill, asked caustically if he kept “back the news in order to provide material for his speeches.” The *Times* called for more effective censorship and publicity coordination.<sup>12</sup> When accounts of the controversy appeared in Canadian newspapers, Minister of National Defence Norman Rogers explained that the intention had been to release the story simultaneously in Britain and Canada. This did not prevent the *Stratford Beacon-Herald* from criticizing King for not announcing the Canadian troops’ arrival in his radio address on 17 December 1939, when this would have relieved families anxious for news of a safe arrival. In response, the Liberal-supporting *Toronto Star* warned that a premature announcement would have invited air attack. Even some anti-government newspapers, the *Globe and Mail* and the *Toronto Telegram*, defended the necessity of censorship. The arch-Tory *Telegram* refused “to join the criticism of the government ... for withholding the news of the arrival until it was announced ... [by] Winston Churchill.” In this instance, the editor’s anglophile opinions proved a greater priority than a chance to criticize domestic political opponents. Yet the Canadian government was clearly concerned that the British media had scooped it on a major Canadian story. The incident was one of the first of many in which the Canadian government would suffer public relations humiliation at the hands of its senior allies.<sup>13</sup>

Although little of the blame for this rested on Canada House, the PR arrangements for the first major Canadian Army story in Britain had been a fiasco. Much of the problem had been the multiple agencies involved in making the publicity arrangements. The Canadian Army had already begun steps to establish



Arrival of 1st Canadian Division in the United Kingdom, c. 1939. *Library and Archives Canada, PA-034185 (Lawrence Audrain, photographer)*

its own PR apparatus in Britain, distancing itself from reliance on Canada House for publicity. The incident can only have strengthened CMHQ's requests for its own PRO.

The proposal for an army PR organization at CMHQ originated from the man who was to lead it throughout the war, William Abel, a London-based employee of the MacLaren Advertising Company, a leading Canadian publicity firm. He had played a major role in a prewar Canadian commercial publicity campaign in Britain called *Canada Calling*. During the First World War, he served in the militia but only went overseas in 1918. By late 1939, he no longer held a commission. In November 1939, Abel approached Lester B. Pearson, the first secretary of Canada House, with a "hurriedly written" proposal for coordinating Canadian publicity in the United Kingdom. The need for a PR organization was great because "every parent, every community, every Province [would] be conjuring up reasons to be critical of our war effort." This organization was to "eliminate complaints growing out of operations" in Britain. Abel's vision, like Massey's, was of an agency similar to the CWRO that would control

both civil and military record keeping, publicity, and the collection of materials for an official history.<sup>14</sup>

Subsequent refinements of Abel's proposal brought some major changes. Pearson forwarded the proposal to CMHQ, where Lieutenant Colonel E.L.M. Burns wrote a memorandum recommending that the army form its own PR office in Britain. The memorandum introduced a concept critical to Canadian Army PR during the war: the "best way" to publicize and promote the overseas war effort was to "afford facilities to regular journalists – not to set up any sort of 'EYE WITNESS' [capitals in original] or group of official writers, whose product, however sound, will invariably be characterized as 'hand-outs' or 'propaganda.' The Canadian Press and individual newspapers would be prepared to send able correspondents."<sup>15</sup> Burns' suggestion of relying on journalists, rather than on official releases as the CWRO had done, remained the army's policy throughout the war, despite occasional arguments against it. This kind of publicity, perceived to be less biased than that written by the army itself, was indispensable both to civilian and to military morale. Providing a press liaison organization to coordinate with the news media would ensure that journalists got their story while military secrets remained secure. By the end of November, Burns and the senior combatant officer of CMHQ, Brigadier H.D.G. Crerar, separated army historical and PR tasks into two organizations, both of which reported to him. Canada House retained responsibility for publicity for Canadian civil affairs in Britain and the compilation of its historical records.<sup>16</sup> Beaverbrook's organization did not reappear. Canadians were a more sophisticated news audience in 1939 than they had been in 1914, and, as Burns perceived, the CWRO would likely have been dated and ineffective.

For weeks following the proposal, Abel and CMHQ sought official approval from Ottawa for a PR organization. Addressing concerns about costs, Abel argued that initial requirements were only one officer and a stenographer but that he would need as many as three officers and their assistants in the event of active operations in France. Depending on established news organizations and systems for the correspondents and for the distribution of their material would also save a great deal of money. In addition to emphasizing economy, Abel lobbied for his appointment with politicians and senior officers and got the support of Massey, Crerar, McNaughton, Pearson, Burns, and Minister of Trade and Commerce T.A. Crerar. His name went forward with the proposal for the CMHQ PR organization to National Defence Headquarters (NDHQ) for approval.<sup>17</sup>

Ottawa hesitated to approve the establishment of a PR officer at CMHQ, believing that such a position was unnecessary. Although Massey was eager to





Col. William G. "Bill" Abel (with dog) during visit to No. 3 PR Group, April 1944. *Department of National Defence collection, Library and Archives Canada, detail from PA-206112*

set up a PR establishment under Canada House, he threatened to stop covering PR affairs for the army if he did not get more staff and funding. McNaughton speculated that perhaps the delay was due to confusion over whether the PRO was to serve at CMHQ or 1st Canadian Division. By the end of January, Ottawa overcame its reluctance and obtained an order in council appointing Abel as PRO, although without military rank. When his lack of a commission became a hindrance, the army appointed him an acting captain. Promotions followed, and, by war's end, he was a colonel.<sup>18</sup>

CMHQ defined the duties of Abel's office. The PRO was to "control the Press correspondents, photographers, and cinematographers; to ensure that the publicity given is within the limits of censorship; to record the publicity given to the Canadian military in this country, and generally, to ensure that favourable publicity reaches Canada, while obviating criticisms and complaints built on incorrect information."<sup>19</sup> In addition to these duties at CMHQ, he was to screen all proposals from journalists and photographers before granting them access to 1st Canadian Division to ensure that doing so would "result in good publicity." He was also to protect the division's higher-ranking officers from reporters who would pester them for details and frequent interviews. CMHQ acted as the link between the Canadian Army overseas and NDHQ (Army); Abel was, therefore, not on the staff of the division itself. Divisional staff officer Captain Churchill Mann handled press liaison for the formation, although as a staff officer he also performed many other duties.<sup>20</sup> Eventually, as the PR organization expanded, the overlapping jurisdictions of the different headquarters of the expanding Canadian Army in Britain led to conflict between PROs.

When Abel became a PRO, arrangements had already been made for the news coverage of the activities of 1st Canadian Division. In November, the CP news service reached an exclusive deal with the army to supply a war correspondent to the division, although, in turn, it supplied stories to all member newspapers in Canada. Those few not belonging to the CP were supplied news at the cost of transmission only. Gillis Purcell, the general superintendent of the CP, became the correspondent. His stories were to be subject to regular Canadian civil and British cable censorship as well as to Canadian and British military censorship.<sup>21</sup> Giving priority for CP correspondents later resulted in controversy when other news agencies and individual newspapers wanted their correspondents to cover operations.

Until April 1940, when the "phoney war" ended with the German invasion of Denmark and Norway, the correspondents and the PRO had precious little Canadian Army operational news on which to report. That soon changed as the newspapers took the opportunity to invent fictitious actions for the army. The British planned to retake the Norwegian port of Trondheim and asked the Canadians for the assistance of two battalions. With McNaughton's approval, the Canadians proceeded to the embarkation ports in Scotland on 18 April. The British decided they did not require the Canadians after all, so they never left port. This did not prevent Canadian soldiers from fighting a lively Norwegian campaign in the pages of the newspapers. The British commander prohibited Johnson, the CP correspondent accompanying the troops, from reporting the expedition until authorized. Contravening these instructions, the Reuters news agency released stories claiming the Canadians were in Norway, which the BBC

announced as “officially confirmed.” CMHQ refused comment, and the British War Office declared that the composition of forces in Norway must remain secret. The War Office and MoI prevented the CP correspondent from filing the story of the decision not to send the Canadian force to Norway, which would have quashed the rumours. Captain Churchill Mann noted that, when Sam Robertson of the CP heard the decision, he “shook his head sadly.” While waiting for the minister of national defence to announce the news, Canadian reporters compensated for lack of hard news with imagination, picturing “Canadian ski troops” battling “Austrians chosen for their skill in snow fighting.” A 23 April denial of involvement in the campaign issued by the acting minister of national defence, C.G. Power, did not convince everyone: the *Globe and Mail* argued that, after all, pictures of trucks at the front with Ontario licence plates proved Canadian deployment to Norway. The situation remained unclear until the minister of national defence repeated the announcement on 21 May 1940.<sup>22</sup>

By the time of that statement, the eyes of the public had turned from Norway to France, which the Germans invaded through the Low Countries in May 1940, forcing the British Expeditionary Force to evacuate through Dunkirk by 4 June. The Canadians were not involved in the campaign except for a brief expedition to Brittany that began coming ashore on 11 June. On 14 June, the division received withdrawal orders while in the process of redeploying from England. Little was accomplished other than the loss of many new vehicles. The CP accompanied the troops, and CMHQ arranged for other Canadian newspaper correspondents to travel to the disembarkation port of Brest. Despite careful planning of the means and timing of releasing the news of the Canadians in Brittany, the *Times* (London) published the story early, again ruining the press arrangements. The news coverage was generally as positive as could be in the circumstances, with reports emphasizing the Canadians’ disappointment at not coming to grips with the Germans. However, the caption of an *Oshawa Times* photograph, which referred to how the Canadians “fled from France,” caused Abel much consternation, and he wrote a special story for that paper refuting the claim.<sup>23</sup> These early efforts at publicity control failed either because the British War Office and MoI imposed news blackouts or because British newspapers ignored censorship guidelines. Fortunately for the army, little negative press resulted.

Even without active operations, CMHQ PR had plenty to do, and the office expanded. By July 1940, it had added assistant PRO Lieutenant Eric Gibbs (a former Canadian feature writer) and an official photographer, Lieutenant Lawrence Audrain from Winnipeg. The volunteer work of Abel’s daughter augmented the small office staff, and Abel used his own vehicle for travel. The PR office assisted journalists and radio programs in getting stories about Canadian troops, ensured press compliance with security, assisted motion picture

makers, and kept an archive of still pictures for publication and the war record.<sup>24</sup> Sometimes unusual duties arose, such as requesting the British Beer Association to stop citing Canadian troops' love for its product in its "roll out the barrel" advertisements or dealing "privately and leniently" with a drunken war correspondent with a distinguished First World War record who divulged secret information when drinking with the troops. Most unusual of all, in February 1940 Abel found the funding to "bring over ... those unfortunate young ladies ... provided their soldier boys can get permission to get married." Abel felt this to be "a logical Public Relations job."<sup>25</sup> Reading through the euphemisms, Abel seems to be referring to arrangements to bring to the United Kingdom, for marriage purposes, several Canadian girls who had been impregnated by Canadian soldiers. If these marriages did actually occur, they set no lasting precedent. In January 1941, future official army historian C.P. Stacey wrote in a CMHQ report that PR did not write stories but, rather, notified the news media of important news and assisted them in getting the information. This was not strictly accurate as, earlier in the war, CMHQ issued a number of press releases, some of which appeared unaltered in Canadian newspapers.<sup>26</sup> CMHQ PR had quickly become a thriving news-assisting enterprise.

Despite the establishment of CMHQ PR, coordinating war news between numerous agencies, including CMHQ, Canada House, 1st Canadian Division, and NDHQ (Army), continued to be difficult. The initial attempts at coordination failed due to organizational rivalries and lack of clear direction from Ottawa. In February 1940, the Department of External Affairs, in replying to Massey's ideas, suggested setting up a "central organization" for coordinating publicity, which, it hinted, might even need to be larger than the CWRO because it would look to civil as well as to military PR. McNaughton and Crerar agreed that some kind of coordination was required. Massey's proposed "Coordinating Committee on Wartime Publicity" gave James Spence of Canada House responsibility for all military journalistic matters, while Abel would coordinate film and radio, then still regarded as secondary in importance to newspapers. This arrangement would have given Massey and Canada House control of most army news emanating from the United Kingdom. Abel disagreed and argued for limited cooperation and only "the outward appearance of unity," although he supported the pooling of resources in film, radio, and photography and even the creation of a central press inquiries office.<sup>27</sup>

The whole question of division of the responsibility for war news fell to a subcommittee that included Abel and Burns from CMHQ but not Spence. The subcommittee's conclusions reflected Abel's vision, with a central inquiry office to funnel news emanating from the autonomous PR organizations. Despite all

these plans, the new organization did not materialize. The reasons for this are unclear but appear to be financial. The cabinet refused to approve the appointment of an executive secretary and granted no funding. That certainly was Pearson's explanation of the subcommittee's failure. Although revived in 1942, the committee had "no executive authority" and became "only a clearing-house" for sharing ideas between the different PR organizations and for reviewing and approving applicants for war correspondent credentials. Ultimately, Massey did play a very important role in army PR and historical records, echoing a part of Aitken's role in the First World War. Through creating and supervising the Canadian war artists program, Massey ensured for Canadians an artistic representation of the activities of all three services.<sup>28</sup>

Ottawa's inaction resulted in a lack of coordination among PR organizations, a situation that lasted well into 1942 and that was made worse by interpersonal conflicts. Abel and Spence in particular did not get along. The official historian, C.P. Stacey, observed at the time that "relationships between the two Public Relations Officers ... [were] anything but cordial." Despite having adjoining offices in Canada House, the two officers had little communication and rarely cooperated. For example, Abel, completely ignorant of Spence's large film collection of the important recent activities of the Canadian Army, attempted to put together a similar collection. Other officials at Canada House told Abel they had no such film, and the CMHQ PRO did not approach Spence himself. Whether this lack of cooperation was due primarily to policy differences or to personality conflict is unclear, but bitter feelings existed. Abel complained about Spence's "wiles" and accused Spence of taking Abel's old proposals about publicity coordination and putting them forward as his own.<sup>29</sup> Nor were relationships always cordial between CMHQ and 1st Canadian Division. During an acrimonious exchange, Abel admitted he had "lacked courtesy," but he explained that this was because "[on] scores of occasions ... [he had] accepted humiliation, inconvenience and unjustifiable rudeness from members of the division," despite having "repeatedly pulled chestnuts out of the fire for the division, as far as contacts with the British and Canadian Press [were] concerned."<sup>30</sup> During his career as CMHQ PRO, Abel frequently feuded with PR personnel from organizations that were potential rivals. Despite these frequent conflicts, Sergeant George Powell, a writer for the *Maple Leaf*, remembered the big balding Abel as "normally a gentle man." Yet Abel's temper could unexpectedly erupt, and he would "simultaneously turn different shades of purple." CBC reporter Peter Stursberg had a fit of Abel's anger directed towards him: "Bill's face was red and there were beads of sweat on his bald pate."<sup>31</sup> Abel's anger sometimes got the better of him in his dealings with others. These interpersonal conflicts did not

improve the coordination between groups and certainly did nothing to prevent duplication of services. As army PR expanded, friction arose between PROs at the different formations.

Army PR also had strained relationships with the Canadian Bureau of Public Information (BPI) (later the Wartime Information Board [WIB]), the federal government's information service set up after the outbreak of war to control government publicity. According to historian William R. Young, after the fall of France, J.G. Gardiner, the minister for national war services, who oversaw the BPI, wished to "centralize ... all government publicity sections" under the bureau but was blocked by King. Despite King's actions and Abel's objections, the politically connected Brigadier Maurice Pope ordered that army photographs be distributed through the BPI rather than given directly to the newspapers. When they were sent through the BPI's distribution system, Abel complained that "less than ten percent" of the pictures showed up in the papers, where previously many more had appeared. Spence believed that the bad feelings between G.H. Lash, director of the BPI, and Abel originated with a press release about Major General Crerar on his return to Canada. Rather than depend on the BPI's distribution services, CMHQ sent the release directly to the newspapers. Lash believed that the BPI would have circulated it more quickly. The underlying issue may have been control as Lash proposed centralizing PR in the United Kingdom, with the various army and RCAF press liaison officers working "under the general authority" of James Spence, who would represent the BPI. This would have placed all military PR in the United Kingdom outside the effective oversight of both the army and the Ministry of National Defence. Lash's proposal was consistent with his actions in Canada, where he tried to coordinate all federal publicity through an interdepartmental committee, angering many cabinet ministers.<sup>32</sup> This lack of a good working relationship with the BPI was another symptom of Ottawa's ongoing lack of coordination of Canadian PR agencies.

Despite these conflicts, both in Canada and overseas, the Canadian Army expanded and organized its PR apparatus in preparation for active operations. The first step was the creation of a first corps PRO. Second Canadian Division began to arrive in late December 1940, joining 1st Canadian Division to form I Canadian Corps. Added to these over the next two and a half years were 3rd Canadian Division, 5th Canadian Armoured Division and 4th Canadian Armoured Division, and two independent tank brigades. These formed First Canadian Army, the largest Canadian military field organization in history, the headquarters for which was created in April 1942. These new formations required new arrangements for PR, the first of which was a PRO and staff at corps level. In September 1940, Gillis Purcell, of the CP, was appointed corps PRO with the



rank of captain, although he could not sail for England until late January 1941. Captain Purcell handled all PR matters for the divisions, releasing staff officers for their other duties. Purcell was also responsible for the single CP war correspondent attached directly to the corps, while CMHQ oversaw all others. This arrangement, and the attachment of Purcell as correspondent to 1st Canadian Division in 1939, were a departure from British policy in earlier wars, during which journalists dealt with GHQ and only visited subordinate units as permitted. Purcell soon became a casualty of war. During the filming of the air dropping of supplies during a training manoeuvre, a canister's parachute failed to deploy and the canister struck Purcell, whose leg had to be amputated. The departure of Purcell led to a period of uncertainty during which Abel struggled with the new PR officers over the duties of their respective sections. Purcell's military career had ended, but he returned to CP management and remained a major influence in war news. Purcell and PROs, especially Abel, would clash over policy. Conflict between the CP and the army was probably inevitable, but personalities undoubtedly played a role. Purcell was a driven, hard-edged, irascible individual. When Abel's tendency to protect his jurisdiction and temper met Purcell's drive to get the best for the CP, conflagration was inevitable.<sup>33</sup>

Adding to the new complexity in Canadian Army overseas PR was the appointment of Joseph "Joe" W.G. Clark as the Ottawa-based director of public relations (DPR) for the army. Clark won the Distinguished Flying Cross in the First World War and was already serving as director of PR for the Royal Canadian Air Force. He came from a family of prominent journalists: his father, Joseph T. Clark, had edited the *Toronto Star*, and his brother Greg was a popular reporter, humorist, and war correspondent. He had come to the RCAF on leave from his position at the Cockfield Brown Advertising Agency of Toronto. Clark set up a PR system for the army in Canada, appointing press liaison officers to the staff of each military district whose responsibility was PR within that regional command, while he reported directly to the minister of national defence. Clark added another dimension to the coming policy debates between the PROs of First Canadian Army and CMHQ, but he had the authority and mandate to impose solutions. Léo Cadieux, editor of *La Presse* and future minister of national defence under Trudeau, became assistant DPR, although he resigned in August 1944 to serve as a war correspondent for his newspaper.<sup>34</sup>

The underlying root of the PR troubles between the PROs was the army's unexpectedly long stay in Britain, which was due to the fall of France and the reluctance of the Canadian government to commit Canadian troops to other theatres. Reinforcing this situation was McNaughton's nationalistic insistence that Canadian troops should serve only in First Canadian Army under his own command. CMHQ, meant to be the link between the army at the front and

Ottawa, now remained on the same island as the army, with sometimes overlapping and unclear areas of responsibility.

Despite the unclear delineation of responsibility, the working relationship between the corps PRO and CMHQ PRO seemed to function until Purcell's departure. Unfortunately, his replacement as corps PRO – Kim Beattie, a veteran, columnist, and regimental historian – developed an intense personal dislike for Abel, who felt the same about him. In January 1942, Beattie, in a cryptic telegram to Clark, reported that "AAC" (Abel and company) showed personal spite towards Clark and opposed Beattie's appointment. By March, after several perceived slights, Beattie accused Abel of a "petty campaign which might be termed 'passive resistance'" and whose goal was to "broadcast the impression that PRO Cdn Corps is under CMHQ direction, and generally of little consequence in the scheme of things." In reply, Brigadier Penhale, Brigadier General Staff at CMHQ, wired Brigadier Simonds, his counterpart at 1st Canadian Division, expressing "strong exception" and calling on Beattie to "support the charge or withdraw it," noting the statements "revealed a state of mind that is petty to the extreme." The lack of cooperation between Abel and Beattie constituted a major problem for PR. According to Lieutenant General Crerar, the key to effective army publicity was "cooperation between the PRO CMHQ and the PRO, Cdn. Corps" and the cessation of the "competition between them."<sup>35</sup>

The dysfunctional situation in Canadian Army PR did not continue long. The personal problems ceased to be a major issue after the appointment of Major Cliff Wallace as PRO for the entire First Canadian Army. Wallace outranked Beattie and was in charge of liaison with CMHQ PRO. He possessed wide experience in the newspaper industry as managing editor of the *Edmonton Journal* and the *Globe and Mail*. Further, he had the advantage of having already served on CMHQ staff for over a year and relating well to Abel. Although some disagreements regarding organizational responsibilities and policy continued, Abel described the personal relationships between PROs as "friendly and harmonious."<sup>36</sup> A series of discussions between January and August 1942 resolved major differences concerning the duties of army and CMHQ PR. First Canadian Army PRO dealt with outside media agencies only "when circumstances so warrant[ed]," conducted liaison only with British Army GHQ and the CMHQ PRO, and supervised war correspondents' visits to army units. CMHQ PR interacted with Canadian and British military and governmental agencies and media agencies regarding PR policy. Abel also administered photography and film and coordinated all London publicity and VIP visits. CMHQ and First Canadian Army collaborated on communiqués. This was a compromise as the army PRO wanted to contact outside government and press agencies at will,



while Abel wanted only CMHQ to make these external connections. First Canadian Army PROs could contact media organizations, if necessary, but had to inform CMHQ immediately.<sup>37</sup> The arrangements needed to be refined, but they soon diminished the level of squabbling between CMHQ and First Canadian Army PR.

Army PR did not have much news to handle apart from training. The story of the surrender of the Canadian contingent in Hong Kong in December 1941 was clearly beyond the jurisdiction of army PR in Britain.<sup>38</sup> Only the minor raid on the Norwegian Arctic island of Spitsbergen in September 1941 and the more substantial Dieppe landing in August 1942 broke the monotony. The publicity for the Dieppe raid (discussed in a detailed case study in Chapter 4) was egregiously deceptive on the part of British authorities, less so on the part of the Canadian Army. The Canadian PROs played only a small part in the planning of publicity prior to the event but had important roles in assisting the media afterwards. In any case, these raids were one-time events, and the PROs focused on preparing their organizations for sustained overseas operations and for performing their ongoing duties in Britain. The preparations for active operations meant creating units capable of guaranteeing that war news flowed steadily from the front and creating a PR culture that would work easily with correspondents.

The groundwork for PR policy for active operations came from meetings in January 1943 between McNaughton, Wallace, CP assistant manager Purcell, and Joe Clark (now chief of information for all three Canadian armed services). They struck a subcommittee consisting of Clark, Purcell, Abel, and Wallace to draft a plan for an expanded organization. They also established the principles for a greater role for First Canadian Army PR once operations began, PR personnel at every formation down to the division, and the training of Canadian field censors to handle Canadian copy.<sup>39</sup>

The expanded establishment ensured that PR units could manage war news once operations began. Both CMHQ and First Canadian Army gained large numbers of personnel and equipment. CMHQ PR personnel grew from fourteen officers to twenty-six, from seventeen other ranks to eighty-six, and from no vehicles to twenty-five. Twelve officers, sixty-one enlisted men, and all the vehicles comprised the Canadian Army Film and Photo Unit, which CMHQ controlled. First Canadian Army PR increased from five officers to twelve, six other ranks to twenty-five, and three vehicles to seventeen. In the field, it supervised all press and radio correspondents. To conform to British practice, Wallace and Abel received the title deputy director of public relations (DDPR) and were promoted to lieutenant colonel. In Ottawa, G.H. Sallans became DPR under

Chief of Information (Armed Forces) Joe Clark. Clark's title later became director-in-chief, public relations, armed forces. The vice chief of the general staff at NDHQ (Army) complained of a "400% increase in officers and 1200% increase in other ranks" but approved them in March 1943 at Clark's insistence. In order to conform more closely to British Army titles and organizations, Wallace and his successors became assistant director of public relations (ADPR) in June 1943.<sup>40</sup>

The new war establishment (see Appendix 1) received its first test, even before its official approval in March 1943, during Exercise Spartan, First Canadian Army's full-scale manoeuvres in England. To meet the increased press coverage during the exercise, McNaughton ordered a temporary expansion of the PR establishment.<sup>41</sup> At a press conference on 25 February, Brigadier Guy Simonds briefed the correspondents in advance about army organization for the exercise, assuring them of assistance in obtaining and transmitting their stories. The press reports for Spartan were overwhelmingly positive; CP reporter Ross Munro, who covered Dieppe and Tunisia, declared the Canadians "the top of them all with organization and weapons to handle the big job ahead." Others claimed McNaughton's army scored major victories: a *Globe and Mail* headline proclaimed "Whole Brigade Captured by Canadians," and the military columnist of the *Toronto Star* praised this feat and the "theoretical" destruction of ninety tanks. Nevertheless, in the opinion of many then and since, the Canadian command did not perform well: there were traffic jams, communications breakdowns, and an inadvisable nighttime redeployment that created greater confusion. The Canadians also suffered severe theoretical casualties. Both British and Canadian military critics of McNaughton received plenty of ammunition, helping to force his resignation in December.<sup>42</sup> The PR apparatus, however, had helped the correspondents get out their story swiftly and with a positive spin on the army.

Another important task preparing the Canadian Army PR system for operations involved providing for French-language press coverage. Public relations with French Canada were important because Quebec had the lowest support for the war effort and the lowest enlistment rate for overseas service. In August 1941, Minister of National Defence J. Layton Ralston set in motion a plan to increase French Canadian participation in the army. This contained an array of measures making the army a more attractive environment for francophones, including an expansion of French-language training and formations. The recruitment of more French speakers to the PR units received priority as part of this program.<sup>43</sup> In November 1941, Clark instructed Abel to ensure that French Canadian units received "the fullest possible publicity" and to gather "photographs of French Canadian soldiers ... taken at famous English spots ... [and]

stories of parties and entertainments at which French Canadians were present.” The purpose of this was to portray French Canadian soldiers as “happy, occupied and get[ting] along well with the other troops ... and the civilian population.” It was to show that they were not “being used in dangerous spots exclusively.” Clark hoped this publicity would be “a stimulus to recruiting in the province of Quebec.”<sup>44</sup> In March 1942, Clark dispatched a French Canadian PRO to CMHQ with the duty of French publicity. Minister of National Defence Ralston suggested the appointment, and CP manager Purcell welcomed it. Lieutenant Placide Labelle, a former *La Presse* journalist, was to gather “all possible information about French Canadian troops now stationed in England.” The press agencies and other correspondents received first crack at this material, and what they did not want, PR in Ottawa distributed to media outlets in Canada. Labelle had the freedom to travel to wherever he could get material, including active operations. Abel, who had persuaded the CP to open a French Canadian service just before Labelle’s arrival, now concluded that “French Canadians will be looked after exceedingly well.”<sup>45</sup> The later exclusion of French-language correspondents from the Dieppe raid and from most of the Sicilian campaign demonstrates the incorrectness of his conclusion.

The task of preparing Canadian Army PR for operations also involved creating a welcoming culture for journalists. Correspondents, like most English-speaking Canadians, already strongly supported the war effort, but a hostile environment or unreasonable barriers to reporting could strain the limits of this sympathy and result in public criticism of press arrangements. Therefore, it helped that the Canadian Army selected former journalists as PROs. According to Clark, this differed from the practice of the British and the Americans, who often assigned officers without media backgrounds. The employment of former journalists also predominated in the RCAF, the RCN, and civilian press censorship in Canada.<sup>46</sup> The PRO could mediate between the military and the correspondent, making the army more aware of journalistic requirements while encouraging correspondents to accept restrictions and controls more effectively than could officers with little understanding of press needs and culture. Despite the logic of this arrangement, the correspondents did not always view it as the best system for selecting the conducting officers who accompanied them on operations. Based on their experiences in Sicily, correspondents like Fred Griffin, Lionel Shapiro, Peter Stursberg, and Ross Munro argued that the most important qualification was military knowledge and field craft, not a journalistic background. Conducting officers required competence in “map reading, tank and aircraft recognition, first aid, driving and maintenance of motorcycles, cars, hup [sic], and use of prismatic compass, revolver, pistol and automatic weapons.”<sup>47</sup> The problem was finding officers who were both competent

soldiers and journalists. Later in the war, the commander of the PR unit in Northwest Europe, Lieutenant Colonel Richard S. Malone, with Abel's support, refused to take former newspapermen directly from Canada to the front.<sup>48</sup> Thus, while Canadian policy possibly avoided some of the problems of other armies, the employment of journalist officers could have drawbacks in the field. Despite these objections, most PROs throughout the war had a journalistic background.

Army PR also tried to create a journalist-friendly culture by seeking input on PR policies. The chief example of this is the inclusion of Purcell as a *de facto* member of the committee that created the organization and policy for Canadian Army PR field operations in January 1943. Purcell was the first to suggest that the Canadian Army have its own field press censors, a major policy decision later implemented during the Italian campaign.<sup>49</sup> The press, or at least the CP, which supplied all major daily newspapers in Canada, received the opportunity to influence the PR environment in which its correspondents would work. This was no guarantee of a frictionless working relationship, and some bitter disputes occurred once operations commenced, but the press could not claim it had had no input into army PR policies.

Furthermore, army PR did not attempt to control stories too rigorously. As Abel cautioned, "journalists, as a class, are conceited touchy people." Therefore, the form, style, and tone of a story remained the prerogative of the correspondent: "It was better to keep on the best of terms with newspapermen ... in this way we can have more influence over them." Sensationalism and error might trouble military minds, but only matters of security would be censored. Through interference, army PR felt, "[we would] lose more than we would gain."<sup>50</sup> Only occasionally did the army interfere with stories on non-security grounds.

In its effort to create a culture welcoming to journalists, PR also prevented PROs from competing with the press by writing their own stories. This policy originated with Minister of National Defence Norman Rogers, who, in the first months of the war, observed that newspapers paying to keep correspondents overseas would not appreciate PROs supplying their rivals with free stories.<sup>51</sup> Although occasionally questioned, the policy was never overturned.

In contrast to army policy, the RCAF and the RCN relied heavily on their PROs and information officers to produce most of the stories covering their operations. The scatterings of ships and squadrons to various theatres, as well as security restrictions, made correspondent coverage difficult. Thus, RCAF PRO stories sometimes appeared under their writers' names, although sometimes they were offered directly to war correspondents and news agencies. Writing stories left PROs open to accusations of furthering their own careers as the rivals of war correspondents. In 1944, CBC reporters in France were livid

when they discovered that RCAF PROs were producing radio reports for rival stations on non-RCAF stories.<sup>52</sup> Whether or not this charge was justified, RCAF PR left itself open by allowing its PROs to write war news. For its part, apart from NDHQ (Army) press releases and “Little Joe” stories (see below), the army did not undertake such tasks.

The officials concerned with setting policies sometimes disagreed about what constituted competition with the newspapers. Abel at CMHQ envisioned PROs not writing anything for publication at all, a literal interpretation of orders from Chief of the General Staff Kenneth Stuart. Clark and others in Ottawa, however, believed that not competing with the newspapers meant not publishing news that would interest major newspapers; however, preparing special articles and news for small-town papers was not considered to be competition as long as overseas correspondents could choose to use it before anything went to PR in Ottawa. Ralston, after long consideration, modified the policy. By January 1944, Canadian PR could produce “Little Joe” copy (i.e., personal information on a particular soldier, including any interesting stories, accompanied by a photograph, sent to his hometown newspaper).<sup>53</sup> This clearly did not compete with the war correspondents; rather, it actually assisted Canada’s newspapers and drove home to Canadians the immediacy of the war effort overseas.

Creating a journalist-friendly culture encouraged correspondents to view and write about the military positively and to identify with the army. In recent wars, frequent criticism has emerged about “embedded” journalists assigned to one unit and therefore closely tied to the troops. Yet this is unusual only when compared to the relatively loose controls over journalists during the Vietnam War. The Canadian Army, like its Second World War Allies, promoted an even closer link between correspondents and the troops. Correspondents received the status of honorary officers: they held the privileges of rank but could not issue orders. All correspondents wore military uniforms and were subject to military law. The 1943 Canadian correspondents’ regulations booklet stated that the correspondent must “comply with any orders received from superior authority and to conform with the requirements of the Army Act or the Air Force Act, as applicable to a person holding status as an officer, while subject to military or air force law.”<sup>54</sup> Under military discipline, uniformed, and with officer status, correspondents were, in effect, part of the military, much more so than are recent “embedded journalists.” Their status, shared by chaplains, made them an integral part of the army. Seeing themselves as part of an organization would discourage correspondents from writing negatively about it.

Although the PR system in the Canadian Army attempted to be “journalist friendly,” once operations began the PROs were in the middle of inevitable disputes between military authorities and the press. The military in wartime



Gen. McNaughton understood the value of building good relationships with the press. Here he is interviewed by the CBC's Matthew Halton. *Library and Archives Canada*

needs to keep valuable information from the enemy and wants its institutions and leadership portrayed positively. The press, in contrast, wishes to publish as much information of interest to the public as quickly, and hopefully as accurately, as possible. Newspapers are commercial enterprises. Controversy sells copies and, as the case studies provided later demonstrate, can serve to advance a political agenda. These conflicting priorities ensured that there would be friction, especially once active operations began. The attempt to create a sympathetic PR culture likely lessened the severity and number of these disputes.

Besides creating an organization for field service and press relations, Canadian PR sought to protect and promote a positive image of the army with the Canadian and British publics. This was not simply a matter of appearances and personal reputations as the reliance of the Canadian Active Service Force on volunteers meant that bad publicity could result in fewer recruits. For example, in July 1940, Abel explained the need to “humanize” Lieutenant General McNaughton and paint him in “warmer colours” since the press represented him as “a hard hitting soldier-scientist,” and “mothers would be more anxious to have their sons join an army commanded by a warm-blooded human being than by some cold calculating killer.” Likewise, when the CP reported the refusal

of UK-bound air force personnel to board a transatlantic ship because of filthy conditions onboard, Abel succeeded in concealing its arrival in Britain, thus avoiding media interviews with passengers. Abel felt it wise to avoid controversy over conditions on troop ships.<sup>55</sup> Dirty ships would not encourage recruiting.

PR also promoted the image of the army by producing radio programs and newsreels for Canadians. Radio was a major entertainment and a growing source of news for Canadians during the Second World War. Canadian PR took advantage of this by providing much material for CBC-produced programs and some for the BBC as well. The effort was worth it, Abel reported in 1942, rejoicing that the army received “such a large share of radio publicity which is so effective in a direct link between the men here and their families back home.” These programs included *Khaki Scrapbook*, *Sur le qui vive*, *Eyes Front*, *Canadian Calendar*, and *Jean Baptiste s’en va-t-en guerre*. A French PRO wrote the latter. They frequently contained messages home from ordinary soldiers and described their experiences overseas. Newsreels, along with photographs, provided Canadians with a visual link to the action overseas. During the war, the Canadian Army Film and Photo Unit provided materials for 106 newsreels. Photographers took the shots and shipped them to CMHQ PR, where they were edited for release. Although Canadians did not rely on newsreels for current news as much as they did on newspapers and radio, seeing moving pictures of their troops was important to them. An April 1945 WIB survey of Canadian moviegoers revealed that 48 percent wanted more newsreel coverage of the Canadian Army, while only 7 percent felt that there was too much.<sup>56</sup> Radio and newsreels took much of CMHQ PR’s time throughout the war.

Establishing good relations with the British press and public was also an imperative function of CMHQ PR, who had to combat the stereotype of wild, potentially dangerous, Canadian soldiers running amok. Canadian legal arrangements with the United Kingdom helped to promote this unfortunate view. The army tried only military infractions, while Canadians accused of civil crimes faced the British legal system and subsequent bad publicity. This was in contrast to the American Army, which retained jurisdiction over both military and civil crimes, allowing trials to remain secret. Abel lobbied key British press figures, such as W.T. Bailey of the Newspaper Society and Viscount Rothmere of the Newspaper Proprietors Association, to refrain from using the term “Canadian” in crime stories, just as they would refrain from mentioning whether an offending soldier was “Scottish, Irish or Welsh.”<sup>57</sup> The DDPR sent dozens of letters with the same request to editors of newspapers, which reported the all-too-frequent crimes committed by Canadian soldiers. In December 1942, CMHQ announced that discipline was improving and that “only one seventh of one percent” of Canadians “were involved in police court cases,” a decrease since



January 1941. The *Times* ran a short story containing this information. Lieutenant General Crerar was not impressed, commenting that this appeared to be “admitting that things were really bad indeed.” The figure was probably overly optimistic because the military tended to refer only to convictions, not to the charges that British judges, who were lenient with Canadian soldiers, often dismissed. Certainly, there was crime – mostly petty theft and drunkenness. According to C.P. Stacey and Barbara Wilson, the Canadians had a “sordid record, but one that could easily be paralleled in any large community, civil or military, in peace and war.” Captain E.N. Ackroyd, a British PRO attached to First Canadian Army in order to help with PR difficulties, believed that, by May 1943, the British people’s familiarity and intermarriage with Canadian troops had helped to melt away the earlier stereotypes. As Stacey and Wilson concluded, “imperceptibly, the men from Canada were increasingly absorbed into ... [the British] social system.”<sup>58</sup>

From the outbreak of war to the time of Canadian troops’ entry into ongoing active operations in Sicily in July 1943, PR grew along with the army, experiencing the growing pains accompanying rapid expansion. The process of creating a PR organization and making it capable of handling the needs of not only an army in training but also of an army in battle took years. This development involved overcoming many difficulties: organizational and personal rivalries, government indifference, and the lack of a unifying direction. Nor were all these problems resolved by July 1943, although an organization for handling operational army news existed where none did before. Conducting officers escorted and assisted war correspondents, while army photographers took pictures and movies of operations. PR developed the important philosophy of influencing the news media through assistance, explanation, and identification rather than through censorship alone. The test of combat in the Mediterranean revealed that the PR organization still had much to learn. Despite later difficulties, without this time spent on developing organization and policy, it is hard to imagine that Canadians would have received high-quality news coverage during the upcoming campaigns.