

DUPLICATE

Report No. 74  
(dated 24 Jun 42)

REPORT NO. 74

HISTORICAL OFFICER

CANADIAN MILITARY HEADQUARTERS

Further Material on the SPITSBERGEN  
Operation, August-September, 1941.

1. This Report presents material on the SPITSBERGEN operation of August and September 1941, further to that collected in [Report No. 56](#).

NAVAL COMMANDER'S REPORT

2. The most important item here presented is a copy of the Report on the operation prepared by the Naval Commander, Rear-Admiral P.L. (now Sir Philip) VIAN, D.S.O. This copy was made from a carbon copy in possession of the War Office.

3. Also presented is a copy of the Report addressed to Admiral Vian by Captain W.G. AGNEW of H.M.S. "Aurora", who was senior naval officer at SPITSBERGEN on 26 Aug - 1 Sep 41, during the absence of Admiral Vian on the voyage to the WHITE SEA. This forms Appendix V to the Admiral's own Report. Of the total of seven Appendices, two (III and VII) were not present in the Canadian Official Historian elsewhere; and available to the Canadian Official Historian elsewhere; and one (VI) seemed scarcely of sufficient interest to justify copying it, the more so as the time available was short.

4. It will be noted that Admiral Vian's Report is dated 4 Sep 41 - the day following the departure of the Force from SPITSBERGEN, and previous to his own

enterprise against enemy naval forces which resulted in the destruction of the "Bremse" and other German vessels.

5. Admiral Vian's Report adds materially to the facts collected in [Report No. 56](#) on the naval aspects of the operation, particularly on points of details. Some of the more important additions should be noted here:

- a. There is valuable material on the prizes taken, names of vessels being given. the interpretation in footnote 14 to [Report No. 56](#) is confirmed. The prizes actually obtained in the course of this visit to SPITSBERGEN were evidently three colliers, INGERTO, NANDI and MUNIN, laden; one tug, ISBJORN; two sealing vessels, POLARIC and SVALBARD; one whaling vessel, ANGNES. It is important to note the ingenious work in this connection, of Lieutenant TAMBER of the Royal Norwegian Navy, whom Admiral Vian on his previous visit had left at SPITBERGEN in the capacity of Military Governor. (Admiral Vian's Report, para. 5);
- b. There is further useful material on the voyage to the WHITE SEA, on events there, and the return voyage to SPITSBERGEN. (Admiral Vian's Report, paras. 9 - 21);
- c. Captain Agnew's Report provides additional material on the evacuation of outlying Norwegian settlements, and particularly the measures taken for picking up individual trappers;
- d. In general, these Reports make available most useful additional material on the details of naval movements, and the Official Historian will probably be well advised to use them as his primary

source for this portion of his narrative. Comparison with [Report No. 56](#) reveals no very serious discrepancies, but Admiral Vian states that the squadron entered GREEN BAY at 0800 hrs on 25 Aug. not 0700 as stated in report No. [56](#), para. [57](#) on the less certain authority of Mr. Ross MUNRO. Captain Agnew's Report modifies the account of the evacuation of the Norwegian settlements given in [Report No. 56](#), paras. 82 ff., in certain particulars: e.g., "Aurora" went from SVEAGRUVA to ADVENT BAY (not BARENTSBURG) and arrived there not "on 31 Aug" but at 1900 hrs on 30 Aug.

6. Admiral Vian's Report has been copied quite literally including such obvious slips as "Grenfjord" for "Gronfjord" (para. 21) and "The" for "This" at the foot of the first page.

#### FREE FRENCH MATERIAL

7. Reference is made in Appendix "C" (below) to a book by Lieutenant BRILHAC of the Free French forces entitled "Poor Combattre Avec De Gaulle". A chapter of this book (which has not yet been published) was kindly made available to the writer by Free French Headquarters in LONDON in connection with the article "The Canadians at Spitsbergen", and extracts from it are included in that article. It has not been thought necessary to copy the whole chapter, as it adds little in the way of factual material to that already collected, and will presumably be available in print in due time. Its interest is less factual than "atmospheric". Incidentally, Brigadier POTTS' name invariably appears in it as "Pods".

8. It is worth noting that the Free French party are frequently referred to in M. Brillhac's manuscript as "les cent quatre-vingt-six". As Free French

Headquarters presumably have the best means of determining the numbers of this party, and as M. Brilhac was himself a member of it, it may be taken that its total strength was 186, not 192 as stated in Admiral Vian's Report (para. 19) in [Report No. 56](#) (para. 87).

9. the SPITSBERGEN chapter of M. Brilhac's manuscript has been placed on C.M.H.Q. file 24/ARTICLES/1.

#### DIARY OF CAPTAIN HALL

10. It should be noted that Captain Perry HALL of 1 Spec tun Coy, R.C.E., who was attached to the expedition, kept a useful and interesting diary of its operations. This diary will be found attached as an Appendix to the War Diary of 1 Cdn Spec Tun Coy for September 1941. It was not seen by the writer until 28 Jan 42 and no material from it is included in [Report No. 56](#).

11. It may be worth mentioning that the reference to the work of Captain Hall (who was attached to Force 111 on account of his technical qualifications as a mining engineer) inserted in the article (Appendix "C") was placed there as the result of a suggestion by General McNAUGHTON.

#### ARTICLE "THE CANADIANS AT SPITSBERGEN"

12. Attached as Appendix "C" is the text of an article prepared by the writer for the [Canadian Geographical Journal](#) but not yet published.

13. This is unlikely to have much value for the Official Historian except for the fact that it contains some "background material" on SPITSBERGEN, deriving from books consulted at the Library of the Royal Geographical Society. It may be noted in passing that this hasty piece of research

elicited the fact that the proper spelling of the archipelago's name is clearly SPITSBERGEN and not SPITZBERGEN. The former spelling has accordingly been adopted in the present report.

14. Needless to say, a great deal of material found in [Report No. 56](#) could not be given to the public at the present time. This article, therefore, is far from presenting the whole story of the SPITSBERGEN enterprise. It is however, the most complete account of it yet known to have been prepared for publication; and it is not wholly beyond the bounds of possibility that this brief connected narrative of the affair might assist the Official Historian in obtaining a general view of the operation.

(C.P. Stacey) Major,  
Historical Officer,  
Canadian Military Headquarters.

No. 45/0190  
MEMORANDUM.

H.M.S. NIGERIA.  
4th September, 1941

OPERATION "GAUTLEY"  
REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS

So; for better or for worse, ran Gauntlet.

1. The task of the command lay chiefly in the instillation of sweet reason: with the arrival in London of M. Yerzin of the Soviet Legation, and Major Pran, of the Norwegian, measure of the success or failure of the endeavour should become apparent.

2. Endeavour was made to leave unimpaired at Advent Pynt a quantity of steam coal against it being required in future for fuelling coal-fired trawlers. It cannot be said, until the main stocks are burnt out, whether this endeavour will provide successful.

3. The operation imposed hard work on small ships who, when not at sea, had necessarily to be employed for transport purposes, or for patrols; the excellent conduct of Lieutenant-Commander C.D. Maude, D.S.C., R.N., commanding H.M.S. ICARUS, and of Lieutenant A.C. Lister, D.S.C., R.N.R., commanding H.M.S. ELM, was brought constantly to my notice. Chief Officer W.H.G. Hine, Acting Master of R.F.A. OLIGARCH was remarkable by reason of the amount of work, extraneous to his duties proper, which he cheerfully undertook.

4. On no occasion until the night of 4th September was any attempt to communicate on high frequency successful, save only on 4740 kc/s.

Sgd....T. VIAN.

Rear-Admiral Commanding,  
Force "A".

NARRATIVE

Preliminary Movements

1. Force "A" proceeded from Scapa and met "Empress of Canada" on 19th August 1941, fuelled at Hvalfjord on 21st August and arrived at Position AA, 60 miles west of Isfjord, at 0930 on 24th August. The rendezvous with R.F.A. OLIGARCH and trawlers was not made until 2000 on 24th August, the magnetic conditions in these waters having put her some 40 miles out of her reckoning.

Arrival at Spitsbergen

2. The combined force entered Gronfjord at 0800 on 25th August, air reconnaissance having shown the settlements to be clear of Germans.

Disembarkation of Troops and Embarkation of Russians

3. The disembarkation of troops and embarkation of Russians from Grumantby, Pyramiden and Barentsburg proceeded somewhat in accordance with the plan, the latter operation being delayed by the insistence of the Russian Commissar, M.P.I. Wolnuhi, at Barentsburg on the transport to Russia of heavy communal machinery and other stores in addition to the personal belongings of the people. This situation was met by Brigadier Potts, in his own way, without detriment, I believe, to the relations which should exist between Allies.

Demolition - Visits to Barentsburg and Advent Fjord to decide on extent

4. Barentsburg and Advent Fjord were visited by the Brigadier and myself and the extent to which demolition should be carried out to fulfil the terms of our directives was decided on the spot. A copy of a letter on this subject written by me to Brigadier Potts is enclosed as Appendix I.

In Longyearby, protests were entered by the Civil Governor and the Coal Manager against the destruction of free stocks of coal. A copy of the report of a meeting held at Longyearby is enclosed as Appendix II.

I requested the Brigadier to leave me at Longyearby not less than 1000 tons of steam coal against it being required by trawlers who might be refuelled there in the future.

Norwegian Prizes, and Situation at Spitsbergen since previous visit of Force "A".

5. In Advent Fjord, there were the three Norwegian Colliers INGERTO, NANDI and MUNIN, laden: the W/T logs and miscellaneous documents impounded from these vessels are being forwarded to the Director of Naval Intelligence direct.

The presence of these ships at Spitzbergen is entirely attributable to the aplomb, during his period of office, of the Military Governor, Lieutenant R.A. Tamber, R.N.N. He informed the German Command in Norway, from time to time, that a collier could be received for loading.

The colliers duly arrived and each was sailed, by signal only, after a decent interval.

German air reconnaissances sent to determine the fate of these ships were not successful, no flight being pushed inland further than Kap Line.

Intelligence obtained from the Masters of S.S. NANDI and S.S. MUNIN is enclosed as Appendix VII.

6. On account of other measures taken by Lieutenant Tamber, censorship, false reports, etc., it seems clear that the Germans had no knowledge of the former visit to Spitzbergen of H.M. Ships.

7. Contrary to the intelligence reports shown me in London, no soviet ships had in fact arrived in the Soviet ports and supplies and become, in certain essentials, very small.

8. On the evening of the 26th August, the Norwegian convoy, of which Lieutenant Tamber was appointed Commodore with his Broad Pendant in S.S. INGERTO, was sailed for Hvalfjord, escorted by H.M. Ships SEALYHAM and AURORA.

AURORA parted company and returned to Gronfjord on the morning of the 27th August.

In my message timed 0006A of 27th August the route of the convoy was reported to you with a request for additional escort to be sent in the latter stage of the passage.

Departure of NIGERIA, EMPRESS OF CANADA and Destroyers for Archangel.

9. NIGERIA, EMPRESS OF CANADA, ICARUS, ANTELOPE and ANTHONY sailed from Gronfjord for Archangel at midnight on 26th August; at Spitzbergen there remained OLIGARCH, HAZEL and VAN OOST who were, for security, to be sailed to the westward on 27th August so soon as the trawlers had completed coaling; and ELM who with AURORA was to operate in Spitzbergen until the return of NIGERIA.

NIGERIA left one Walrus at Spitzbergen for co-operation with the Military.

Proceedings of H.M.S. AURORA

10. The proceedings of H.M.S. AURORA for the period 26th August to 2nd September are included as Appendix V.

Passage to Archangel

11. At 1300 on the 27th August, in position 75°55'N 24°E, H.M.S. NIGERIA spoke H.M.S. DEVONSHIRE in company with Convoy "DERVISH".

12. At 1045 on 29th August, when 20 miles from Dvina Light Vessel, a destroyer was sighted which proved to be "Groznin" flying Admiral Dolini's flag.

The "Groznin" remained in company and anchored with the Force off the Dvina Light Vessel.

Archangel

13. Admiral Dolini called bringing with him Captain Blinov and Commander Wyburd: the two latter remained in NIGERIA for the period of the visit.

14. Admiral Dolini described the measures which he had taken for the security of the force, which included the trawling of the anchorage and the provision of three motor cutters for patrol purposes during daylight hours.

15. The Admiral was most cordial and preferred the services of the port; arrangements were therefore made to oil H.M. Ships ICARUS and ANTELOPE in the river.

The report of the Commanding Officer, H.M.S. ICARUS, on the oiling arrangements is included as Appendix III to these proceedings: paragraph 3 of this report is being dealt with separately.

16. At the Admiral's suggestions, M. Yerzin and the Russian Consul and Vice-Consul from Barentsburg came on board NIGERIA and, in his presence and mine, were asked if the arrangements made for their evacuation, and for their passage to archangel, had been satisfactory.

They said that they had; there were ten or twelve persons who had not as yet connected with their personal baggage, but it was doubtless on board and would come to light during the course of unloading.

I wished them good-bye, thanked them for their co-operation, and they left.

A report by Major A.B. Blake, M.I.L.O., relating to the evacuation of Barentsburg, is included as Appendix IV.

17. Admiral Dolini, with whom I exchanged presents, left shortly afterwards.

18. At 1400, two merchant vessels arrived at the anchorage from Archangel and were berthed alongside "EMPRESS OF CANADA".

Into these vessels the 2175 Russian passengers, their baggage and over 200 tons of their communal stores were off-loaded the work being carried out by seamen sent from H.M.S. NIGERIA.

19. Off-loading was completed by 0400 on 30th August; sailing was postponed until 1100 to enable 192 de gaullists, whom Admiral Miles had sent from Moscow, to be embarked.

There were embarked also in EMPRESS OF CANADA the following British Officers:

Colonel Paget  
Colonel Guinness  
Major Birse  
Squadron Leader Slee

#### Return passage to Spitzbergen

20. The passage northward through the White Sea was rendered unpleasant by fog failure to meet the convoy "Dervish", as had been expected, before entering the narrows at dusk, and mine reports.

The Senior British Naval Officer, Murmansk's, message timed 20260 of 30th August, in which mines were reported in position 67°55'N41°30'E, was received in NIGERIA when 10 miles to the southward of this position.

21. Grenfjord was reached at 2200 on 1st September.

#### Spitzbergen - Embarkation of Imperial Troops and of Norwegians

22. On passing Barentsburg, it was evident that the demolition scheme had gone awry, part of the city being in flames. This, it is understood, was due to an unexplained mishap.

The circumstances are being reported fully by the Brigadier Commanding Troops.

23. The arrangements for embarkation made by H.M.S. AURORA were so well forward that the work was completed and ships ready for sea by 2200 on 3rd September.

24. EMPRESS OF CANADA was loaded with a very large bulk of Norwegian personal property and stocks of preserved food.

OLIGARCH was loaded with Norwegian preserved food and Russian machine tools and wireless stores. Details of the latter are included as Appendix VI.

#### Withdrawal from Spitzbergen

25. On the morning of 3rd September, H.M.S. ELM escorting the sealing vessels POLARIC and SVALBARD and the whaler ANGNES was sailed to Akuyreri to pass west of Jan Mayen.

In the afternoon, R.F.A. OLIGARCH escorted by H.M. Ships HAZEL and VAN OOST was sailed to the westward to rendezvous with cruisers later.

At 2030, the final meteorological report was transmitted from Longyearby W/T station and this and the station at Kap Linne dismantled.

H.M. Ships NIGERIA and AURORA and EMPRESS OF CANADA and Destroyers sailed at 2230.

The Rug ISBJORN, which had been fully employed until this time, sailed with the cruisers with orders to join ELM's convoy.

The master of the Tug placed every obstruction in the way of sailing his ship. He is credited with having handed over to the Germans last year, with fatal results, a number of his crew who attempted to persuade him to take the vessel to Iceland.

Major Pran of the Norwegian Legation in London had undertaken to place a Norwegian armed guard on board, but this he failed to do and it was necessary at the last moment to place a guard from AURORA onboard.

26. On 4th September, aircraft from H.M.S. NIGERIA were flown back to locate and to check the reckonings of ELM and ISBJORN.

It appeared from their positions that ISBJORN would join ELM on the morning of 5th September.

27. At midnight, the cruisers parted company from the EMPRESS OF CANADA and Destroyers, the latter being routed to Scapa in accordance with the Vice-admiral, Second in Command, Home Fleet's, message timed 2326A of 3rd September.

OPERATION "GAUNTLET"

(Appendix V to Flag Officer Commanding, Force "A"'s No. 45/0190 dated  
4th September, 1941)

H.M.S. "AURORA" - REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS FOR PERIOD  
26TH AUGUST TO 2ND SEPTEMBER, 1941

No. 0691/09.

H.M.S. AURORA.

2nd September, 1941.

Sir:

I have the honour to submit a report of my proceedings for the period  
Tuesday, 26th August, 1941 to Tuesday 2nd September, 1941.

Tuesday, 26th August

1800 Sailed from Gronfjord and with SEALYHAM escorted convoy of 3  
Norwegian ships to the Westward.

Wednesday, 27th August

0400 Left convoy and returned to Gronfjord arriving there at 0900.  
1500 Brigadier Potts came to live on board.  
1700 OLIGARCH, HAZEL and VAN COST sailed to the Westward.  
1800 Lieut. A.R. Glen, R.N.V.R., flew up the coast in the Walrus and  
dropped notes on the trappers' huts to inform them that AURORA  
would collect them the following day. Lieut. Glen was landed in  
Kongs Fjord to inform the population that AURORA would evacuate  
them the following day. He spent the night there.  
2200 Sailed for Kong Fjord.

Thursday, 28th August

0600 Arrived Kong Fjord, landed the Military demolition party, picked up  
Lieut. Glen and 2 trappers and sailed up the coast to collect 2  
trappers who were at Ling Bay (79°50'N. 12°20'E).

On the way up the coast sent a boat in to Hamburger Bukt (70°32'N.

10°46'E). to get some fox skins which had been stored there by the trappers from Kongs Fjord.

1100 Proceeded up the coast but on passing north of Amsterdamoya Is. found that we were obtaining soundings half those marked on the chart. Decided not to attempt to take the ship to Ling Bay and instead entered Fair Haven and sent the motor boat for the trappers.

1930 Motor boat returned with the trappers. Proceeded to Kongs Fjord arriving there at 2315. Commenced to embark the population and Military.

Friday, 29th August

0145 Sailed from Kongs Fjord and arrived Advent Bay at 0845. Landed Norwegians. During the afternoon Lieut. Glen flew to Sveagruva to inform flew to Sveagruva to inform the population that AURORA would evacuate them the following day. He spent the night there.

2200 Sailed for Sveagruva.

Saturday, 30th August

0400 Arrived Sveagruva and landed Military demolition party.

1200 Embarkation of Norwegians and demolitions completed. Embarked Military and sailed for Advent Bay, arriving there 1900. Landed Norwegians.

Sunday, 31st August

Landed Band and small seaman party for Church Parade. After church the Band played for half an hour for the benefit of the population. P.M. Commenced loading 200 tons of Norwegian food stores for transshipment to EMPRESS OF CANADA.

Monday, 1st September

0600 OLIGARCH, HAZEL and VAN COST arrived.

0900 Completed loading stores. Fuelled from OLIGARCH. Commenced loading OLIGARCH with Norwegian food stores.

1300 Hear that Barentsburg had caught fire. Despatched HAZEL, VAN COST and Norwegian tun ISBJORN to evacuate Military and stores.

Tuesday, 2nd September

0600 Sailed for Gronfjord. Arrived there at 0800, proceeded alongside

EMPRESS OF CANADA and unloaded Norwegian stores.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

(SGD.) W.G. AGNEW.

Captain

The Flag Office Commanding,  
FORCE "A".

THE CANADIANS AT SPITSBERGEN

By Major C.P. Stacey

Illustrated with British and Canadian  
Official Military Photographs

In the year 1856 an adventurous young Anglo-Irish aristocrat, Lord Dufferin, sailed to the Arctic archipelago of Spitsbergen in his schooner-yacht the Foam. He subsequently described the voyage in a book which became a minor classic: Letters from High Latitudes. Of Spitsbergen he wrote: "I think, perhaps, its most striking feature was the stillness - and deadness - and impassability of this new world: ice, and rock, and water surrounded us; ..... no atom of vegetation gave token of the earth's vitality; an universal numbness and dumbness seemed to pervade the solitude".

In later years Lord Dufferin became Governor-General of the young Dominion of Canada. At that period not many people thought of the possibility of the "Colonies" playing important parts on the international stage or intervening in theatres of war far from their own shores; and it would probably have surprised Dufferin - as it would certainly have pleased his romantic imagination - could he have known that, eighty-five years after his youthful voyage, the changing fortunes of a great world conflict would bring a force of Canadian soldiers sailing into the Norwegian Arctic in the track of his brave little Foam, to break in upon the ancient solitudes which he had described and provide the islands with the strangest episode in their chequered history.

Spitsbergen - called by its Norwegian owners Svalbard - lies 370 miles from the northern point of Norway, roughly 1200 from the mainland of Scotland, and only some 600 from the North Pole. The archipelago has a total area of about 25,000 squares miles. It has been well known to Europeans since 1596, when it was discovered by an expedition of Netherlanders whose leading spirit was William Barendszoon or Barents. Barents perished the next year off the coast of Novaya Zemlaya; but the islands still bear the name he gave them, deriving (as he said) from the fact that "the land .....consisted only of mountains and pointed hills", and his own name is kept in memory by the Barents Sea to the eastward where he met his end, and the town of Barentsburg in Spitsbergen itself.<sup>1</sup>

Almost from the date of its discovery, Spitsbergen was an international bone of contention as a result of its importance as a centre of the whaling industry, and many nations, including England, laid claim to it. None, however, colonised it, and though parties sometimes wintered there and a few Russian trappers spent several consecutive years in the islands, the Encyclopedia Britannica could still say as recently as 1911, "Spitsbergen has never been permanently inhabited". The fact that the islands have 112 days of total darkness annually certainly helped to discourage colonization. Just before the first Great War the whaling industry, to all intents and purposes, finally died out. Already, however, a new and more important activity had made its appearance. The exploitation of the important coal deposits on West Spitsbergen began in 1900; and it received new impetus from the war of

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The rather more common form in English is "Spitzbergen"; but the name is Dutch, not German, and "Spitsbergen" is clearly correct. On the history of Spitsbergen see two books by Sir Martin Conway, No Man's Land : A History of Spitsbergen from Its Discovery in 1596 to the Beginning of the Scientific Exploration of the Country (Cambridge, 1906), and The First Crossing of Spitsbergen (London, 1897). Two more recent works are R.N.Rudmose Brown, Spitsbergen (London, 1920) and Seton Gordon, Amid Snowy Wastes (London, 1922).

1914-18, when Scandinavia found itself largely cut off from its more normal sources of coal. By 1922 the archipelago had acquired a permanent mining population of about 1,000, predominantly Norwegian.

This new situation increased the desirability of settling the status of Spitsbergen. This was effected as part of the general post-war settlement by a treaty (1920) which awarded the sovereignty to Norway. Germany and Russia subsequently accepted this arrangement, and Spitsbergen ceased to be "No Man's Land" with the formal proclamation of Norwegian sovereignty on 14 August 1925. Hereafter, however, Russia's interest in the islands increased rather than diminished. In 1931 a Russian state coal company began work there. The Russian community enjoyed a very large measure of autonomy, and its life was organized much as if it had been situated within the territories of the U.S.S.R.

In 1941, when a new turn of the Second Great War suddenly broke in upon Spitsbergen, the total population of the colony was about 2,800 souls, of whom some 2,00 were Russians. The whole 2,800 lived upon the large island of West Spitsbergen, the vast majority of them upon the banks of the Isfjord (Ice Sound), the great inlet, more than 55 miles long, upon whose shores are found the richest seams of coal. The administrative centre and the chief Norwegian settlement was at Longyear City (Longyearby, Longyearbyen), on Advent Bay near the head of the Sound. This place owed its name to an American whose company formerly operated a mine there. The chief Russian settlement was Barentsburg on Green Harbour, another branch of the Sound much nearer to its mouth; this was the largest single community in Spitsbergen.

In its early stages this War affected Spitsbergen relatively little. The Germans overran the Norwegian mainland in 1940 but made no attempt to occupy this distant dependency. With their attack on Russia on 22 June 1941, however, these northern seas took on a new importance. Germany was now known to be casting sheep's eyes at the archipelago, with the idea of possessing herself of its coal and utilizing it to support her campaign against Russia in the Far North. In these circumstances, the British authorities, in agreement with Russia and with the Norwegian Government in London, resolved to make measures to deny these supplies to Germany.

The means which it was decided to employ was a small military expedition under naval convoy. This force was to disable the mines to the point of ensuring that the Germans could derive no benefit from them, and destroy the accumulated stocks of free coal. In addition, it was to remove the Russian population of Spitsbergen to Russia, and to evacuate the Norwegians to England. It was arranged that a small Norwegian military detachment would form part of the expedition, and that a Norwegian governor-designate and Russian representatives would accompany it; but Canada was offered, and accepted, the honour of providing the major part of the military force from her army in the United Kingdom.

Early in August, in consequence, a considerable force of Canadian troops slipped unostentatiously away from their quarters in Southern England. They travelled to a special training establishment where for a time the units tidied the technique of "combined operations". They familiarized themselves with various types of landing-craft; they practised employing these for landings on beaches held by the enemy; they carried out long route marches ashore; and in other ways they fitted and hardened themselves for the distant and adventurous operation which lay ahead. On the nature of that operation -

and whether there was really to be one at all - they speculated freely (and inaccurately); for only a very few of the senior officers of the force had the slightest inkling of the real plan. After some days of this activity a considerable part of the force returned to their former quarters; but the units selected for the actual expedition found themselves, to their unbounded satisfaction, embarked upon a transport and setting out under naval escort from a British port.

The force, which thus set out for a destination which most of its members did not even suspect, was commanded by Brigadier A.E. Potts, E.D., Officer-in-Command of a Western Infantry Brigade of the Canadian Corps: a veteran of the last war, in which he rose from the ranks to a commission, and in civil life a member of the staff of the University of Saskatchewan. It was made up of a Field Company of Royal Canadian Engineers commanded by Major G. Walsh, a detachment of the Edmonton Regiment commanded by Major W.G. Bury, and one of machine gunners of the Saskatoon Light Infantry (M.G.) under Captain G.F.P. Bradbrooke; in addition to detachments of the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals, the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps, and the Royal Canadian Army Pay Corps. Several small detachments of British troops were also included in the force, among them a party of Royal Engineers.

Many of the men included in the Spitsbergen force had been members of the Canadian expedition which was organized to take part in the projected attack on Trondheim in the Norwegian campaign of 1940, but which never sailed. It was poetically just that these should now get this new opportunity. And it was particularly appropriate, perhaps, that the Edmonton Regiment should be well represented in this Arctic operation; for this unit claims to be the most northerly Infantry Regiment in the British Empire, and many of its men serving in this expedition came from the region of Peace

River. This adventure, however, was to take them into latitudes which were not those of Northern Alberta, but those of Ellesmere Island.

The transport which carried the force to Spitsbergen was, again appropriately enough, a liner famous in the River St. Lawrence in time of peace, and which, since the outbreak of war, had carried many Canadian soldiers to the United Kingdom. The naval force which escorted her on the first leg of her journey subsequently handed her over at sea to the squadron which was to form the all-important naval component of the expedition to Spitsbergen. This force was commanded by one of the great naval leaders of this war, Rear-Admiral P.I. Vian, D.S.O. Admiral Vian first came to public notice in 1940 as the bold commander of the destroyer "Cossack", which liberated the British prisoners held on the German ship "Altmark". He had subsequently distinguished himself in the action against the "Bismarck", in which he earned a second bar to his D.S.O.; and he was to win fresh laurels on the present occasion. More recently he has gained still more fame in operations in the Mediterranean, and has become Sir Philip Vian. For the Spitsbergen operation he had under his command a mixed force of cruisers, destroyers and smaller craft.

The voyage was untroubled by enemy action, and the sea was calm. A call at Iceland afforded Admiral Vian and Brigadier Potts (who had met in London some time before) an opportunity for a conference on the flagship in which the final details of the operation were settled. Only after the squadron was well out from Iceland did the Brigadier take his men into his confidence. Speaking just before a ship's concert, he told them the full story of the task ahead, warning them that it meant long hours of hard work; that the highest standard of discipline would be required; and that they must be prepared to encounter and crush attempts by the enemy to interfere with the programme. The

announcement was received with cheers. When the sharp snowslide mountains which gave Spitsbergen its name finally lifted their heads on the horizon, the men of the force were tense with expectation.

Early in the morning of 25 August, the ships steamed towards the mouth of Ice Sound. Aircraft roared off from the flagship to search the nooks and crannies of the coastline for enemy vessels, and found none. Then a destroyer, speeding ahead of the squadron, set the first landing party ashore on the soil of Spitsbergen. This party was composed of men of the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals and Norwegian soldiers; and their mission mouth of Ice Sound. They went ashore well armed and prepared for any eventuality; but they were greeted with smiles handshakes.

The squadron now sailed majestically into Ice Sound and came to anchor in Green Harbour. Naval vessels carried military detachments to settlements further up the Sound - the Norwegian metropolis of Longyear City (where another wireless station was at once taken over), and the Russian mining villages of Grumantby and Pyramides. While these arrangements went forward in accordance with plans made in advance, Brigadier Potts himself went ashore at Barentsburg and the Eastern town which hung precariously on the steep eastern side of Green Harbour. The inhabitants here were delighted to see the expedition; the local dignitaries were on the jetty to greet its leader (Mr. Ross Munro, the correspondent of the Canadian Press, who was present, recorded that one of them "shook hands bowing formally as if he were being presented at Buckingham Palace"); and friendly relations were established at once. Negotiations followed at the Communal Centre in the town, and arrangements for the evacuation of the Russian population were speedily completed.

This evacuation was the first great task; for the Russians were to be carried to their own country by the expedition's transport, which would then return to Spitsbergen to take the troops and the Norwegians back to Britain. The embarkation of the whole Russian population with their baggage was a tremendous undertaking, complicated by the fact that the troops were simultaneously completing the landing of the force's stores; but the whole job was done within the compass of one hectic day and that day's midnight saw the great transport steaming out of Green Harbour on her way to one of Russia's northern ports. Men of the Edmonton Regiment, the Saskatoon Light Infantry, and the R.C.A.M.C. made the voyage on board her. A strong naval escort watched over her; while other ships of Admiral Vian's force remained at Spitsbergen to protect the troops ashore and assist in the strangements for the Norwegian evacuation.

With the Russians safely on their way, the Engineers, Canadian and British, fell to work on the business of demolition. Essential parts of the machinery of the various mines were either removed or destroyed, the power plants receiving particular attention. In this work an important part was played by Captain Perry Hall, an experienced mining engineer and an officer of a Tunnelling Company of the Royal Canadian Engineers, who had been attached to the expedition with this in view. The disused wireless station near Barentsburg was blown up. A particularly spectacular piece of demolition was the destruction by explosives of the overhead conveyor system which brought coal from one of the Longyear mines to the dockside. The great piles of free coal were ignited by the use of petrol and oil, scores of fires being started in each of them; the total amount of coal thus destroyed on the island was in the vicinity of 450,000 tons. In addition, perhaps 275,000 gallons of fuel oil, petrol and grease were done away with, either by burning or being poured into the sea. The oil fire at Barentsburg impressed even those who had seen

the London fires of 1940. One witness wrote, "Exploding barrels were seen to a height of about 250 feet and were thrown out from the pile, flaming, to a distance of from 350 to 400 feet".

The evacuation of the Norwegian population involved visiting outlying settlements, carrying out demolitions there, and bringing the people from them to Advent Bay. The most important of these visits was that paid by a cruiser to Ny Aalesund on King's Bay, or Kongsfjord, an inlet some 60 miles north of Ice Sound. This little settlement, situated just below the 79th parallel, is said to be the most northerly town in the world. A similar call was made at a smaller Norwegian village at Syeagruva on Low Sound, south of Ice Sound. In addition a number of hunters and trappers living in isolated spots along the coast were picked up individually.

On Sunday, 31 August, the Sabbath was celebrated at Longyear City with a modest touch of ceremonial. A naval and military Church Parade took place; soldiers and sailors led by a Marine band marched to the settlement's little wooden church, and Brigadier Potts took the salute as the force marched past him.

The evacuation of the outlying settlements was only well completed when the expedition's transport and her escort again dropped anchor in Green Harbour, having successfully completed their mission to Russian waters. The ship had discharged her Russian passengers, but had embarked in their place a group of nearly 200 Free French officers and soldiers. They had escaped to Russia from German prison camps, and were overjoyed at the opportunity which the expedition afforded them of reaching England and joining the forces of General de Gaulle. These valiant Frenchmen had undergone many hardships and miseries during their long Odyssey; but their hearts were high and their

courage unbroken, and more than one Canadian recorded his admiration of their spirit.

Through the kindness of one of these French officers, Colonel Billotte, now Chief of Staff to General de Gaulle, it is possible to print here a few eloquent paragraphs of a book which another of the party, Lieutenant Brillhac, has written to tell the story of their experiences, and which will be published shortly under the title "Pour Combattre Avec De Gaulle". These passages tell of the comradely association between the Frenchmen and the British and Canadian soldiers who welcomed them to the ship in the White Sea, and of the scene that greeted them on her arrival at Green Harbour.

"Mais ce qui nous rend ces quelques jours passés sur le paquebot plus précieux, ce n'est pas tant d'y avoir retrouvés les raffinements de la civilisation que d'y avoir été accueillis comme nous l'avons été; la façon de donner vaut mieux que ce qu'on donne: clochards sans Patrie qui tremblions qu'on prétendit nous faire honte de la France, nous avons découvert que, pour les Anglais comme pour les Canadiens, la France reste la France, grande de son passé et de ses vertus. Chaque minute nous a apporté la preuve d'une affection qui passe les bornes de la fraternité d'armes; ceux d'entre nous qui ignoraient la délicatesse anglaise, ont appris qu'elle se marque dans le moindre geste et dans le moindre silence aussi bien que dans le plus gracieux don. A peine avions-nous mis le pied à bord que des officiers anglais et canadiens frappèrent à la porte de nos cabines et apportaient à chaque officier français une de leurs propres tenues afin de leur permettre d'être enfin présentables. Pour comprendre ce que nous avons ressenti, il faudrait avoir

entendu des mots tel que celui du second du paquebot qui, apres nous avoir fait visiter la salle des cartes et le poste de commande, et comme nous le remerciions d'avoir bien voulu nous montrer des lieux qui sont habituellement tenus secrets, nous rJpondit: "Rien n'est secret quand il s'agit d'amis". Surtout, il faudrait avoir assistJ a s'agit d'amis". Surtout, il faudrait avoir assistJ a la reception qui fut offerte, le premier soir, aux officiers JvadJs et dont je ne veux garder qu'une vision, celle d'officiers anglais, canadiens et franHais c^te B c^te au garde-B-vous, fraternellement unis et chantant d'une seule voix "La Marseillaise" et le "God save the King".

"AprPs de telles experiences, qui d'entre nous ne souscrirait aux paroles que prononca le Colonel Billotte le dernier soir du voyage: "Un Polonais illustre a Jcrit que tout homme avait deux Patries: la sienne et puis la France. De mLme, nous pouvons dire que tout FranHais aujourd'hui deux Patries: la France et l'Angleterre".

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"Maurice Constantin-Weyer de retour du Grand Nord a contJ ce qu'il appela "La nuit de Magdalena": notre journJe de l'Isfjord aussi meriterait son roman. Ce fut une journJe de quatre jours telle qu'en croisiPre n'en a jamais vJcu ni n'en vivra jamais nul Rockefeller. Tout est encore prJsent sans que nous ayons besoin de scruter nos souvenirs: le bateau est ancrJ au pied d'un cirque de rochers immenses dont des lichens et des herbes qu'on dirait brflJs par quelque incendie teignent les versants de couleur ocre et fauve, vision sinistre dans de paysage ou les seules tonalitJs de la terre sont les blancs, les gris et les bleus; domme fond de dJcor, c'est la

magnificence blanche des glaciers de l'Inlandsis, six larges chenaux de glace débouchant sur la rive en un seul et formidable confluent. Et derrière nous, avenue d'eau calme parmi les solitudes, s'étend l'Isfjord; au pied des glaciers, les eaux sont noires avec parfois des reflets blancs, mais vers le large, elles sont belles et claires, bleues comme celles d'un lac italien et, la nuit, on dirait que le bateau repose sur une nappe d'émeraude. Qu'est-ce que l'immobilité russe auprès de ces étendues mortes! Et quel silence! Sur une plage se dressent quelques baraques c'est un village de pêcheurs de phoques abandonné, village du bord des eaux tel qu'il dut en exister aux premiers âges, village perdu des confins nordiques pareil à tant d'autres de tous les rivages du monde, début de l'humanité, extrémité de l'humanité. Rien ne parvient à troubler ce calme, ni les vols de goélands qui tournoient autour de nous, ni notre foie, ni même la présence de la guerre: pourtant une flotte britannique est ici et devant nous Barendsbury, rougeoyant sous un énorme champignon de fumée, brûler la ville de Troie quand les Grecs l'eurent pillée: cinq cent mille tonnes de charbon se consomment parmi les glaces".

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The time was now approaching for the force to say goodbye to Spitsbergen. The final demolitions were carried out. The last task in this respect was the destruction of the wireless stations at Kap Linne and Longyear City. All through the occupation these stations had remained in operation, communicating normally with German-controlled stations in Norway, and transmitting weather reports, apparently as usual. Actually the messages thus sent were less ingenuous than they appeared; for on several occasions they

reported fog conditions which did not exist. The object was to discourage aerial reconnaissance which might lead to discovery of what was going on in Spitsbergen and its surrounding waters. It appears, in fact, that the deception was completely successful and the Germans never realized that anything was wrong until wireless transmission ceased; for when the expedition was well out at sea on its way back to Britain their station at Tromsøe was heard calling Spitsbergen and inquiring urgently why it did not answer.

Shortly before midnight on the night of the 3rd - 4th September, the transport, having re-embarked the military force, sailed with her naval escort from Green Harbour. Moving out to sea in the Arctic twilight, she passed what the demolitions and accompanying fires had left of Barentsburg, with its great coal-piles blazing brightly; and as she turned towards the open ocean the fires lit days before at Grumantby, far up Ice Sound, could be clearly seen. These various fires may well be burning still.

The ten days' sojourn in Spitsbergen had been a change for the Canadian troops, but certainly not a rest. Throughout the period they worked in shifts, four hours on duty, four hours off; and the work was heavy. During the occupation, thanks to the "midnight sun", which was never far or long below the horizon, it was never wholly dark, though towards the end the nights were growing noticeably darker. In these conditions it was difficult to keep track of the passage of time, and officers and men on their return to Britain frequently found it hard to say how long the occupation had actually lasted.

Although the men of the expedition had been issued with special Arctic kit, the weather during the stay at Spitsbergen was not especially cold and the troops were able to work without heavy outer garments. The temperatures in western Spitsbergen are, in fact, a trifle less extreme than might be

expected in so high a latitude; the branch of the Gulf Stream sometimes called the "North Atlantic Drift" washes this shore of the Archipelago and materially affects its climate.

The company on board the great steamship on the homeward voyage was mixed in the last degree. British and Canadian soldiers; Norwegian soldiers and civilians, - men, women and children; the Free French officers and men; the Russian official party - all these contributed to make the group one of the most cosmopolitan that ever put to sea. Not the least popular members of the company were the team of 15 sled dogs which one of the Norwegian trappers had brought on board.

The weather continued pleasant and the sea calm, and for the military force the voyage was pleasantly uneventful. For the Navy, however, the really interesting part of the affair was just beginning. After seeing the transport well on her way to Britain, Admiral Vian, leaving an adequate escort with her, parted company with the expedition which he had so efficiently protected and with his main force steamed off to the eastward on business.

The nature of the business became apparent a few days later. British newspapers then told how a force commanded by Admiral Vian had fallen suddenly upon a German naval formation "within five miles of the North Cape", and taking the enemy entirely by surprise had sunk the 1500-ton gunnery training cruiser "Bremse", a destroyer, and two smaller vessels, while scoring hits on at least two other ships. All this was accomplished without a single casualty on the British side. Such was Admiral Vian's characteristic postscript to the Spitsbergen operation.

The Canadian troops of the expedition had been absent from their accustomed stations in England for an entire month on the day when "the green and brown hospitable shores of Scotland" (as one of the members of the expedition wrote) again came into view; and the troops, who had been delighted to leave, were now glad to be returning. On September 8 the ship came to anchor in a British harbour, and that afternoon the Canadians entrained for their old quarters.

They regretted extremely that the adventure had brought them no contact with the enemy. Nevertheless, the expedition had accomplished everything which it set out to do. The population of Spitsbergen had been safely evacuated - the Russians to their own country, the Norwegians to Britain. Spitsbergen's coal had been denied to the enemy, and he had been deprived of valuable meteorological facilities. Not a man had been lost from any cause. And far from interfering with the enterprise, the Germans had not even succeeded in discovering that it was in progress. This was due mainly to the very complete precautions which had been taken to conceal the fact that the force had moved, and in particular to conceal its destination.

Brigadier Potts and his officers and men had, in fact, been the chief actors in an episode unique in military history, and one which illustrated in singularly striking fashion the extent of a conflict which, far better even than that of 1914-18, deserved the title of World War. No previous struggle between modern states had brought the Arctic seas so definitely within its scope; and never before had a military force advanced so close to the North Pole. Before this unpredictable war has run its course, Canadian soldiers may serve in other strange corners of the world; but it may be doubted whether any detachment will find itself operating in a more remote area than that which fell to the lot of the expedition to Spitsbergen.

