

80 YEARS OF MILITARY DENTISTRY

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CANADIAN FORCES DENTAL SERVICES

There is no other valid reason to have dental personnel in uniform than the necessity of providing dental services in the field. The history of Canadian military dentistry began in the year 1900 on the velds of South Africa when the King's soldiers fought against the Boers. Two Canadian dentists, Dr. David Henry Baird of Ottawa (father of our fourth Director General of Dental Services) and Dr. Eugène Lemieux of Montreal, accompanied Canadian troops in operations in the Transvaal, the Orange River Colony and the Cape Colony. Dr. Baird served with No. 10 Canadian Field Hospital, and Dr. Lemieux with Second Battalion Royal Canadian Regiment. Both had no army status at that time.

The great number of soldiers who presented as dental emergencies established the fact that dental services in the field were indispensable. The Canadian Dental Association reacted, while the war was still on, by pressing the government of Canada to form a regular army dental staff as a distinct branch of the medical service. The effort was crowned with success when by General Order No. 98 dated 2 July 1904 an establishment of 18 dental surgeons in the Army Medical Corps was authorized. Among the first dental surgeons appointed to these positions were the Boer War veterans and now Honorary Lieutenants Baird and Lemieux. By 1907 all positions were filled.

On enrolment the dentists received a lieutenant's pay and the honorary rank, but their official designation was "Dental Surgeon". After five years in rank they became honorary Captains. This period was later reduced to four years, then to three years. The dental surgeons were paid only for those days on which they were actually on duty under militia headquarters authority. By the time the First World War broke out, 33 dental surgeons had seen duty in the dental services of the Canadian Army Medical Corps.

When war was declared in August 1914, recruiting began for the Canadian Expeditionary Force to France and Belgium. It rapidly became apparent that a significant number of potential recruits had to be rejected for dental reasons, and dentists were asked to volunteer their services to help the few militia dental surgeons resolve that problem. In April 1915 the first Canadian military dental clinic was established in a stable at the Exhibition Grounds in Toronto. In the meantime it had become obvious to Army Headquarters that the present dental organization was woefully inadequate. Consequently, on 20 April 1915 the Canadian Army Dental Corps (CADC) was authorized, though only as a temporary organization to support the Canadian Expeditionary Force. It was placed under the administrative and professional control of the Director of Medical Services.

All Dental Surgeons in the Army Medical Corps were now transferred to the CADC. The original establishment authorized the attachment of Dental Corps personnel to units and formations. In reality, however, they were attached to medical units. This was achieved, as the historian Sir Andrew MacPhail put it, by "extorted consent". By July 1915 the CADC had 30 dental officers, 34 non-commissioned officers and 40 privates providing dental services to Canadian troops in the United Kingdom.

It did not take long for the Canadian Army Dental Corps to earn the recognition of outsiders. The president of the British Dental Association wrote: "The Canadian Army is the only army in the world that attempts to send its soldiers to the front dentally fit, and keep them fit." The president-elect of the association expressed the same sentiment: "It is difficult to criticize the dental arrangements in our own army, but one feels that it might be possible and desirable to follow the example which the Canadians have set." Sir Cuthbert Wallace, a British Army dental consultant, wrote: "The Canadians have a very perfect dental organization. The British service might well copy the Canadians." Obviously the Canadian Army Dental Corps was a success.

By 1918, 223 officers, 221 NCOs and 238 privates of the CADC were serving in stationary hospitals, field hospitals and field ambulances in Great Britain, France and Belgium. Seven officers and ten other ranks died in action or otherwise.

On 11 November 1918 the last shot was fired. The war was over. In December 1919, after all returning troops had received their dental examination on release and follow-up treatment, the Canadian Army Dental Corps was demobilized.

No attempt was made to retain a permanent dental service. Not a single dental officer remained at Army Headquarters in Ottawa. But apparently the Canadian Dental Association did not share the common feeling that the war just won had been the war to end all wars. In September 1920 the association recommended to the Canadian government a reactivation of the Dental Corps. In consequence, on 15 June 1921 the Corps was indeed re-established, but only as part of the Non-Permanent Active Militia, not the permanent force. Canadian dentists reacted to this arrangement with a distinct absence of enthusiasm; over the next 14 years only 21 appointments to the Corps were made.

Administration of dental services for members of the Permanent Active Militia, the Navy and the Air Force was the responsibility of the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps. Treatment was provided by civilian practitioners under a fixed fee contract arrangement.

On 1 April 1935 the CADC, still as part of the Non-Permanent Active Militia, was placed under the control of the Director General of Medical Services. Dental officer positions were added to the establishments of a Casualty Clearing Station and a Field Ambulance for a total peacetime strength of 60 dental officers. Again there was no provision to have dental officers in the permanent force.

The RCAMC was unable to recruit enough dentists to fill all positions. The Defence Forces List of 1938 shows the names of only 41 dental officers. They were scattered thinly throughout the field units of the RCAMC. Apart from the medical units to which they were appointed, the dental officers had no other military affiliations. Ostensibly they belonged to a Corps of their own, wearing its insignia. In reality they were without Corps recourse since the Corps establishment lacked personnel for its own administration.

Dissatisfaction with the condition of the Corps was strong among Canadian dentists, particularly former members of the service. In June 1938 a military committee of the Canadian Dental Association was tasked to make representations to the Minister of National Defence proposing a self-administered dental corps.

Possibly these efforts would have been successful sooner or later even without the clouds of war looming on the horizon. As it happened, the political events in Europe accelerated the action. Mobilization threatened, and the need for an effective dental service became apparent. Therefore, on 30 August 1939 the Canadian Army Dental Corps was disbanded, and the following day the Canadian Dental Corps (CDC) came into being.

On 10 September 1939 Canada declared war on Germany. Shortly thereafter the Corps was called out on active service.

To that time the administration of the dental service had been provided by the medical corps, an arrangement considered unsatisfactory by the dental personnel. Now the head of the new organization became the "Chief Dental Officer and Officer Administering the Canadian Dental Corps", a very descriptive title demanded by the Canadian Dental Association. The first dental officer appointed to this position, on 1 September 1939, was Lt. Col. (promoted from Captain)

Frank Melville Lott of Toronto, a World War 1 veteran and 1923 University of Toronto dental graduate who had entered the CADC as a Lieutenant in 1937. He was the principal author of the plan of organization and mobilization of the dental service which the Canadian Dental Association had submitted to Army Headquarters in 1938.

Initially, the Chief Dental Officer was responsible to the Director General of Medical Services, but the dependence of the CDC on the CAMC lasted only three months. On 1 December 1939 the Canadian Dental Corps ceased to be a branch of the Canadian Army Medical Corps and became autonomous; Lt. Col. Lott was promoted to Colonel and became the first Director of Dental Services.

Eleven dental companies were mobilized, one in each Military District of Canada. One dental detachment was provided for every 500 recruits. Curiously, the first CADC clinic to process enlisting personnel was set up, as in 1914, in the "Cow Palace" of the Toronto Exhibition Grounds.

In December 1939 the First Divisional Dental Company sailed to England with troops of the Canadian Active Service Force. It was the first of 18 dental companies which eventually served overseas. Fourteen of them were with the Army, three with the Air Force, and one with the Navy. They were eventually widely spread over England, Northwest Europe, Italy and North Africa. At home the number of dental companies rose to 22: thirteen with the Army, six with the Air Force, and three with the Navy.

Although in soldiers' uniform, the Dental Corps was a tri-service organization. The Director of Dental Services was responsible for the dental health of the respective service personnel to the Vice Chief of Naval Staff, the Adjutant General of the Army, and the Air Member for Personnel. The Directorate of Dental Services was part of the Adjutant General's Branch at

National Defence Headquarters, with liaison established for Navy and Air Force through deputy directors.

In the field, each battalion or equivalent unit of a battle group was served by a dental detachment consisting of a dental officer, dental assistant, driver and a mobile dental clinic. When feasible, detachments were grouped to form a dental section. One dental technician was provided for two dental officers; the technician normally shared the mobile clinic of one of the dental officers.

The mobile dental clinic had been developed early in the war on a standard three-ton truck chassis. Thanks to the mobile dental clinic the CDC provided comprehensive dental treatment in all theatres of war and closer to the front lines than any other nation's dental service.

The equipment and mobility of the Canadian Dental Corps won the admiration of the dental personnel of other allied forces. It is certain that no troops in the Second World War received better dental care than the Canadians, especially under battle conditions. The mobile dental clinic made it possible.

Dental equipment and supplies were procured and issued by the directorate through Central Dental Stores in Ottawa. In Europe, the dental companies were supplied by the Central Dental Depot in Acton, England, a Base Dental Stores in Northwest Europe, and two Army Dental Stores operating in Northwest Europe and Italy.

The field equipment was packed in trunks with alphabetical designations. The A trunk contained the dental officer's instruments and supplies, the B trunk the field chair and foot engine, the H trunk an extra month's supply of consumable stores, the F and G trunks the x-ray equipment, and the C and D trunks the

laboratory equipment and supplies. In addition, the dental officer carried an L Kit, a small valise containing instruments and supplies which enabled him to perform simple operations anywhere.

The rapid growth of the Corps during the war created a greater demand for trained dental assistants and laboratory technicians than could be met through enlistment. To overcome this problem a "Technical Training Wing" was formed in Toronto in December 1943 to qualify suitable personnel in these trades. Instruction in service dentistry was provided for newly enrolled officers, and special refresher courses for all officers. The Toronto Training Wing was in operation until November 1945. Other training wings were established in England and continental Europe for field units.

When the manpower situation became critical as the war went on, the dental assistant trade was one for which female volunteers were accepted. By 1945 female dental assistants were serving with all three services at many locations in Canada and overseas.

During the war the CDC grew to a strength of 1562 dental officers and 3725 other ranks, of whom 748 officers and 1747 other ranks served overseas. Fourteen officers and 19 other ranks were killed or died on active service. These were almost exactly double the casualty figures of the First World War.

It was the outstanding performance of the Canadian Dental Corps in World War II which convinced the Canadian Government that the Corps should be kept alive after demobilization in 1946. On 1 October 1946 the Corps was reorganized as a component of the peacetime forces, with an authorized establishment of 93 dental officers and 147 other ranks. The components were the Directorate, No. 11 Company (Army), No. 12 Company (Navy), No. 13 Company (RCAF) and No. 1 Central Dental Stores. (In 1950 two more dental companies

were authorized because of an increase in the size of the armed forces; they were No. 14 and No. 15 Company.)

The dental companies provided treatment for all three services on a regional basis. Dental Services was a directorate in the Adjutant General's Branch at Army Headquarters, with Naval and Air Force liaison maintained through deputy directors. The Central Dental Stores in Ottawa continued in its supply role.

The Corps' wartime director, Brigadier F.M. Lott, had retired on 15 February 1946. His successor, Colonel Dwight Samuel Coons, retired just before reorganization of the Corps, on 27 September 1946, and was succeeded by then Colonel and later Brigadier Elgin McKinnon Wansbrough who would hold the reins for twelve years - a record unbroken to this day.

Royal recognition of the Dental Corps' splendid performance during the war came on 15 January 1947 when His Majesty King George VI granted the Corps the title "Royal".

Following the reorganization of the Canadian Army in October 1946, provision was made for each Corps to have a school or a training wing. The initial training element in the RCDC was a Technical Training Wing on the establishment of No. 11 Dental Company with headquarters in Edmonton. The RCDC Training Wing was established in the Mines Building on Sussex Drive in Ottawa, and training commenced there in August 1947. In November of the same year the Training Wing became the RCDC School. It remained in Ottawa for ten years until authority was granted to construct a new Corps School in Camp Borden. Construction was completed in April 1957. The school was formally opened on 13 June 1958 by the Honourable George Pearkes, VC, Minister of National Defence.

From 1950 to 1954 the RCDC was in the field again. War broke out in Korea in June 1950, and Canada contributed troops to the United Nations Force. The 20th (later 25th) Canadian Field Dental Unit was established in August 1950 and continued to serve in Korea until November 1954 when it was disbanded. Two dental sections remained in Korea and Japan until March 1955, and the remaining section left Korea in October 1957.

In May 1951 No. 27 Canadian Field Dental Unit was established to serve with the 27th Canadian Infantry Brigade in Germany. It was later redesignated No. 4 Field Dental Company and continued to serve in the Soest-Werl-Iserlohn area of Germany with the 4th Brigade until 1970 when the Brigade moved to Lahr and 4 Field Dental Company was disbanded.

On 29 April 1953 the formation of No. 35 Field Dental Unit was authorized to provide dental services to No. 1 Air Division RCAF in Metz, France, and Lahr and Baden-Soellingen, Germany. In 1965 the Metz component of the Air Division followed an invitation of the French government under Charles De Gaulle to leave France, and moved to Germany. Today 35 Field Dental Unit still serves in Lahr and Baden-Soellingen.

When the Suez crisis occurred in 1956, Canada again followed the call of the United Nations. The UN Emergency Force, dispatched to the Gaza strip in November, included a Canadian contingent. A ten men dental detachment was part of it. The force was withdrawn in 1967.

Since March 1964 a dental detachment has been serving, on a six month rotation basis, with the Canadian Contingent of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus.

On 1 February 1968 unification of the three services took effect. Since the RCDC had been a tri-service organization all along, unification did not very much affect the Corps; the khaki and olive drab uniforms were exchanged for the CF green. The name of the Corps was changed to Canadian Forces Dental Services.

In November 1973 the second United Nations Emergency Force Middle East was sent to Egypt, again including a Canadian contingent with a dental detachment. The contingent served in Egypt, the Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights until it was disbanded in October 1979.

What lies ahead? The unexpected, for sure, and plenty of challenges for the Canadian Forces Dental Services.