

4 Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group:
Significance of A NATO Force in Germany.

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From Front-Line to Reserve: Perspectives of 4 Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group (4 CMBG) in Cold War West Germany.

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In the aftermath of the Second World War, rising tensions led to segregation between the democratic Western allies and the Communist Soviet Bloc. These two camps collided in the Cold War - an escalating competition of capacity, commitment, and challenge that would last for nearly half a century and largely dictate the domestic and foreign policies of Western and Communist nations alike.

As East and West consolidated against each other, the possibility of a Third World War became a legitimate concern. World leaders recognized that World War Two had changed the nature of warfare; combat was now faster paced, aggression required immediate response. Lengthy periods of mobilization could no longer be afforded. It therefore became a necessity to have forces on location in Europe to react with precision should conflict occur. Thus, in response to perceived Soviet threat, twelve nations met in April 1949 to form the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) which would coordinate military defences between members. In 1951, Canada contributed to NATO by placing a brigade on the ground in West Germany to aid in the defence of Europe. The brigade was originally stationed in Soest, and was composed of over 6000 men, with another two brigades on reserve in Canada. The two reserve brigades would be transferred to Europe immediately in the event of conflict. The brigade, although renamed several times, finally came to be known as 4 Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group (4 CMBG), and it remained on the ground in Europe until it was disbanded in 1993.

Upon investigation into the history of the Brigade, one seminal event stands out as a turning-point for Canada's role in NATO in general, and the Brigade specifically. In 1968, Pierre Elliot Trudeau became the Canadian Prime Minister. One of his first moves in government was the alteration of foreign and domestic policies in order to more forcefully promote Canada's national aims.¹ This prompted an investigation into 4 CMBG not only because of its international role, but also because of the financial support which it demanded. Thus, on 29 May, 1968, Trudeau publicly announced that a review of Canada's foreign policy would be conducted. Investigations were to be led by the Commons' Standing Committee on External Affairs and the Department of National Defence, in conjunction with the Special Task Force on Relations with Europe (STAFFEUR). Members of both of these groups visited 4 CMBG in Soest, and spoke with other NATO leaders on the ground in order to gauge the efficacy and necessity of the group. Simultaneously, each organization engaged in their own enquiries, focusing on finance and NATO obligations.

Trudeau's desire to conduct these investigations illustrates the nature of Canada's changing defence policy: national sovereignty over international deterrence. By focusing on the domestic sphere, this new directive necessarily downplayed the role of the Canadian brigade in Europe. Accordingly, in 1969, Trudeau announced that Canada's forces in Europe would be reduced to half size. As a result, 4 CMBG was shifted from a front-line defensive role alongside the British Army of the Rhine (BAOR) to a reservist role to act in liaison with either 7th American Corps or 2nd German Corps. In addition to the vast reduction in troop numbers, the brigade was to be relocated from Soest in Northern Germany, to Lahr in the South. This downsizing of commitment to NATO had

significant implications for Canada's place at the international table and the manner in which Canada was viewed by other NATO members. Highlighting the long-standing dichotomy between political and military forces, Trudeau's decision to downsize 4 CMBG led to increased tension not only between Canada and other NATO nations, but significantly, between the Canadian government and Canadian soldiers themselves.

The existing literature on 4 CMBG is limited and extremely narrow in scope, focusing mainly on logistics, weapons systems and operations performed by the Brigade.² References to the Brigade tend to be found in political science publications that describe Canadian foreign policy without offering substantive critical analysis. There is, therefore, a distinct lack of inquiry into the Brigade from a historical perspective. For example, current scholarship has failed to examine the origins and the life span of the Brigade and place it within the context of the larger historical past. While Trudeau's general defence policies have been the subject of frequent criticism, they have also failed to be conclusively linked to 4 CMBG; rarely, if ever, has his impact on the individual soldier received the attention it merits.

Through oral interviews with veterans of the Brigade, mainstream literature can be reassessed through the lens of historic investigation. Veterans of the Canadian officer corps offer colourful and unfiltered narratives which elaborate not only upon the daily activities of Brigade members, but also upon certain political dynamics that directly affected the soldiers. Repeatedly, veterans testify that prior to Trudeau's military restructuring, "we were part of the main defence [of Europe],"³ whereas following Trudeau's restructuring of the government and reduction of international forces, "the Canadian government [was] looked at as a bunch of pansies."⁴ This inquiry into

Canadian officer corps oral history thus contributes to an aspect of 4 CMBG which has been more or less overlooked within professional literature - the manner in which Trudeau's political decisions directly affected the Canadian Brigade in West Germany. By giving voice to a demographic which has remained relatively silent, this case study sheds light on an area of Canadian history which has been significantly neglected. In addition, this study highlights the value of oral history as a discipline, for it opens up a largely untapped wealth of information that together with written accounts constitutes a more complete version of the past.

As the world unwound itself after the Second World War, the United States and the Soviet Union were recognized as possessing the highest consolidations of power. Having incurred more casualties than any other nation during the War, Stalin became unabatedly concerned with establishing security within the post-war world. The possible acquisition of buffer zones and sheer land mass presented itself as a solution to the question of security and with this in mind Stalin set about adding border states to his sphere of influence. While many hold that Stalin's territorial expansion was motivated by a desire to dominate Europe and spread Soviet ideology, it may be contended, rather, that Soviet expansion was motivated more out of a desire for stability and mechanisms of self-defence.⁵ Indeed, in 1924 Stalin had declared a focus on developing "Socialism in one country," rather than worldwide revolution. The objective of "Socialism in one country" focused on developing a contained socialist community that was interdependent in terms of economic, agricultural, and political welfare.

In the Western world, Stalin's grab for territory after the War was not perceived as a means of enhancing security, but rather as a means of extending ideological

influence over as much of the European continent as possible.⁶ Stalin's territorial advances, coupled with the build up of arms and the growth industrial economy, led the West to be increasingly suspicious of the Soviet Union. At the same time, the Korean War of 1950 to 1953 solidified fears that the Soviets were prepared to barter peace in an effort to redistribute the balance of power.⁷ Since the United States and the Soviet Union resurfaced after the War as the two most powerful nations on the planet, they found themselves in a face-off in what they perceived to be the struggle for global hegemony. In short, out of the ashes of World War Two rose two giant superpowers, each adopting world views that seemed at fundamental odds with the other. As tensions escalated into the Cold War, much of the world became divided between the democratic West and the Communist East, and a struggle was waged for those nations which fell in between. The Cold War was a time of intrigue, distrust, and ambiguity. Reality was highly punctuated by perception, and through misperception and deception the world came drastically close to annihilation.

It was within this frame of reference that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, hereafter referred to as NATO, came into being. On 4 April 1949, twelve nations including Canada, signed the treaty as a mechanism of solidarity against what was perceived to be the encroaching forces of Communism. The Organization was to function upon a system of collective defence, whereby an attack on one member nation would be taken as an attack on all member nations. The original spirit in which NATO was conceived reverberated with nationalist and moralist tones; in the words of the Canadian diplomat Escott Reid, "[NATO] should provide a basis not only for political, economic, and military cooperation against Soviet threats but also for what might be

called either a 'spiritual mobilization' of the liberal democracies or 'an ideological counteroffensive' to the demoralizing and insidious propaganda weapons of Soviet diplomacy."⁸ It was hoped that this cooperation between nations would serve not only as a defence against, but also as a deterrent for, Soviet aggression.

One of Canada's first contributions to the new NATO establishment was a brigade group stationed in West Germany, with two additional brigade groups held in reserve in Canada. These reserve brigades were to be immediately transferred to Europe in the event of conflict. Canada's first troops arrived on the ground in Soest, West Germany, in 1951 under the command of the British Army of the Rhine (BAOR). In 1953, this group was officially named 4 Canadian Infantry Brigade Group (4 CIBG) and was recognized as part of NATO's allied military force in Europe. For nearly twenty years, the brigade would function alongside of the BAOR, and would constitute an essential and highly respected entity within the British military strata. In 1963, the brigade was mechanized and acquired the M113-A1 family of Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs), along with the M155mm self-propelled howitzers. The brigade was renamed 4 Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group (4 CMBG) in 1968, and it retained this name until it was dissolved in 1993.

During the years that Canada operated alongside the BAOR, soldiers of 4 CMBG built upon a reputation of responsibility and fierce fighting capability which had been established during the First and Second World Wars. Lieutenant-Colonel Bob Peacock explains that this reputation dated back to the Canadian Corps who served in World War One, and he typified their reputation as "...highly trained, highly disciplined, [and] well-equipped."⁹ As part of 4 CMBG, Canadian soldiers ran exercises with the other Allied

forces, and in these "practice runs" at war, reaffirmed their reputation of determination, skill, and reliability. Under the command of the BAOR, the Canadian Brigade Group was entrusted with front-line defensive responsibilities; as Colonel "Cec" Berezowski observed, "they were considered fixed defences along the Wesser River; they weren't occupied, they weren't fixed like the Maginot Line, but it was fixed on a map."¹⁰ In other words, had the Soviet tanks begun rolling towards the West, Canadian troops were charged with holding a fixed deployment area and were aware of their exact defensive responsibilities. Reconnaissance groups regularly patrolled the Canadian deployment zone, and forward observation officers (FOOs) were highly knowledgeable regarding the specific area, scope, and geographical formation of their defensive front-line. Scholars have demonstrated that during the years in Soest,

...the Brigade was numerically and qualitatively significant in NORTHAG [Northern Army Group]. It possessed 20 per cent of 1 (BR) Corps' nuclear firepower and made up 15 per cent of 1 (BR) Corps' fighting strength. The Brigade itself occupied vital terrain within the NORTHAG EDP [Emergency Defence Plan], and would have been essential to the success of the plan in the event of war.¹¹

Thus, while 4 CMBG was modest in proportion, it was nevertheless, an integral component of the NATO structure in West Germany.

This period of time under the BAOR, from 1951 until the late 1960s, represents what Sean Maloney has termed, "the pinnacle" of 4 CMBG efforts in Europe.¹² At this point, Canada was held in high esteem by fellow NATO members, and the Canadian soldiers felt as if they were simultaneously propagating and maintaining this admiration. Colonel George Olson, commanding officer of the Brigade's 1 SSM Battery (Surface-to-Surface Missile Battery) from 1969-1970, recalls,

It never entered my mind that we were doing anything other than the best and

playing an integral part in the defence [of Europe]. I think the BAOR was pretty sad to see us go because they had to fill the hole and it was a considerable one, because of the size of our brigade...it was a powerful organization.¹³

During this period while the Brigade was stationed up North in Soest, it was mightier in terms of number and also in terms of organizational deployment than it was down South in the following years. Brigadier-General Jim Hanson (Ret'd) elaborates upon this point, claiming,

when the balloon went up, we knew exactly where we were to go and it was a chunk of the line held by the British, and a very key part of the defensive battle. So we had a piece of real estate with our brigade up North which was about 6000 [men] strong and which would hold probably almost the equivalent of a British division...¹⁴

In addition, it is exceedingly apparent in interviews with Brigade veterans that the men on the ground were aware and proud of their status within the NATO force. This pride is evident in the vernacular of Lieutenant-Colonel Bob Peacock, as he describes the composition of 4 CMBG in Soest; "we had worked for twenty years to build the force up to a razor sharp, highly regarded force; [we were] regarded by all the other allies [as] highly trained, highly disciplined, well-equipped, knew what [we] were doing..."¹⁵ Thus, even these fragmented excerpts from the recollections of Brigade veterans testify that within the larger scope of NATO and Europe, 4 CMBG was indeed significant, respected, and ready for action. Canadian scholars even assert that, "in fact...Canada's became the heaviest and arguably most powerful brigade within the BAOR, an invaluable asset in the Allied front line."¹⁶ Soldiers with 4 CMBG came to develop a close relationship with their European allies, and a tangible sense of camaraderie and support was generated within the NATO community in West Germany. Colonel Dave Walters declares that by working hand-in-hand with NATO allies, "...we demonstrated to the Warsaw Pact that if

they attacked, they were engaging in a war with Canada.”¹⁷ Accordingly, the pride generated within the Brigade as a result of Canada’s salience as a defensive partner was reinforced by the potentiality of action at ‘the sharp end,’¹⁸ or the front line. Canadian soldiers in 4 CMBG knew their pride was merited, because their contributions were singled out and acknowledged as being exemplary; Colonel Bruce McGibbon fondly recalls, “SACEUR would visit us and brief the officers and say, ‘the role you’re playing is very important and don’t let anybody ever tell you otherwise.’”¹⁹ Thus, it is overwhelmingly displayed that the Canadian force was valued in West Germany and that Canadian soldiers strove to build a reputation of respect and fortitude that reflected positively upon the nation as a whole.

In any discussion on the earlier years of the Brigade, one entity has remained specifically unexplored within academic commentaries. This entity is 1 and 2 SSM Battery, which drastically augmented Canada's defensive potency in Soest. The Surface-to-Surface Missile (SSM) Batteries operated under the Royal Canadian Artillery (RCA) and consisted of tactical nuclear weapons for use under sufficiently dire threat. 1 SSM Battery was formed on 15 September 1960, trained in Canada to operate the Honest John rocket launcher, and deployed to Germany in December 1961. It was stationed in Deilinghofen, Germany, quite near the rest of 4 Brigade in Soest. In 1964, the Battery became nuclear certified, and was entrusted with four Honest John rocket launchers which could be used to fire tactical nuclear weapons. The 69th USA Missile Detachment was charged with providing security for the Honest John warheads in Canada's possession.

Between 1964 and 1970, Canada's 1 and 2 SSM Batteries completed and passed a series of nuclear surety inspections (NSIs) that simulated the loading, transporting, and firing of a nuclear warhead. Safety mechanisms were in place whereby access to nuclear warheads was regulated by a 'two-key system,' called a Permissive Action Link, or PAL. The Battery would ready the weapon and rocket launcher for action, after which a support detachment would activate a permission system allowing the weapon to be fired. This created a series of authorization requirements which would ensure that the weapon was not fired without certain and cooperative intent.²⁰ Canada's access to and responsibility for nuclear armaments made Canada a decisive player in the NATO structure. While the Canadian presence in Europe has often been underestimated, 1 and 2 SSM Batteries are a testament to Canada's seminal role in the partnership against Communism. It is, in fact, a disservice to Canada's patriotic memory that the history and importance of these two Batteries has been thus far unduly overlooked. The possession of tactical nuclear weapons, and the ability of the SSM battery to fire those weapons, made Canada an integral actor in the NATO strategies of forward defence and flexible response.²¹

Both written records and oral testimonies have sufficiently demonstrated the value of Canada's presence in West Germany and the NATO community. The nature of Canada's importance was two-fold;

First, Canadian troops became an integral element of the Allied force posture in Central Europe...Second, the Canadian commitment was important in a derivative context, one that stressed the strategic relevance of the American commitment to Western European security...²²

The question that arises then, is why did Prime Minister Trudeau choose to reduce the capability of the Canadian military in general, and 4 CMBG specifically? The answer to

this question is neither evident nor entirely conclusive. It requires a thorough investigation into the perceptions, attitudes, and prerogatives of the time, along with an understanding of the personal aims which Trudeau brought with him to office in 1968.

Significantly, Trudeau had never been a military man himself. As one Lieutenant-Colonel so tacitly put it, "of course, Mr. Trudeau didn't care [about the military] because he spent the Second World War on a motor bike, running around the streets of Montreal wearing a German helmet and shouting 'Sieg Heil!'."²³ Of course, this recollection is more humorous than it is entirely accurate, but it nonetheless illustrates an important point: that Trudeau lacked any sort of affinity with the Canadian Armed Forces. This sentiment is conveyed by Canadian historians J.L Granatstein and Robert Bothwell who state, "to him [Trudeau], the military was completely foreign, a world populated by men trained to kill."²⁴ Indeed, Trudeau was unconvinced from the outset that international military involvement was politically useful. On 29 May 1968, in a policy statement entitled, "Canada and the World," Pierre Eliot Trudeau announced an official review of Canadian foreign policy. This announcement came only one month after his appointment as Prime Minister, thus illuminating preconceived intentions to alter official defence policy. One of Trudeau's main arguments for the necessity of such a review was Western Europe's significant economic development since World War Two. He felt this recovery was sufficient enough to absorb the effects of Canadian military cutbacks without any major repercussions to the maintenance of power relationships with the Soviet Union.²⁵

Throughout the remainder of 1968 and for the duration of 1969, an extensive investigation into the state and relevance of Canadian foreign policy was conducted. The

review process was headed by the Commons' Standing Committee on External Affairs and the Department of National Defence. These two organizations were to consider Canadian defence policy with attention to national expenditure and the obligations entailed by partnership in NATO. In March 1969, a governmental delegation spent two weeks in Europe attempting to assess the value of Canada's nearly twenty-year long presence in West Germany. After viewing first-hand Canada's primary role alongside the British Army of the Rhine (BAOR), most members of the Review Committee could not help but acknowledge the continued relevance of Canadian military activity in Europe.²⁶ They returned home to Canada and reported as much, offering five recommendations to the Trudeau government. Most importantly, they stated that Canada would be wise to maintain a military presence in Europe and discounted the idea that defence costs were too high. Certainly, defence costs could be viewed as marginal, considering the alternative which would have Canada take a military stance on its own. Tom Keating and Larry Pratt voice this same concern when they state that, "Canada's land involvement in Europe is the visible symbol, the ticket of entrance that supports our policy of providing for our security through multilateral coalitions – a far less costly option than any feasible unilateral posture..."²⁷ In addition, the review committees recommended that Canada should emphasize the political functions of NATO and encourage the pursuit of *détente*.²⁸ These findings were reinforced by a simultaneous investigation of Canadian-European relations carried out by the Special Task Force on Relations with Europe (STAFFEUR). STAFFEUR completed their own study in early 1969, again concluding that Canada should continue to support troops in Europe, and arguing that "...it was in Canada's economic and political...interests to be actively

involved on the [European] continent.”²⁹ Regardless of these recommendations, Trudeau proceeded to announce on 3 April, 1969, that the decision had been made to implement a series of changes to Canada’s foreign policy and commitments overseas. The implications of this announcement created a rift within the cabinet, with those who favoured continued support of troops in Europe, and those, including Trudeau, who advocated full or partial withdrawal. Through the fall of 1969, the review underwent a series of revisions and in June 1970, the general paper and five sector studies were tabled in the House of Commons, thus finalizing Canada’s first white paper on foreign policy.

In a sense, Trudeau’s white paper sealed the fate of 4 CMBG. The era of front-line prominence had drawn to a close, followed closely by drastic reductions and redefinition as a reserve Brigade. Cutting the Brigade to half-size and eliminating its nuclear capacity meant that no longer was Canada’s force capable of executing its prescribed emergency defence plan (EDP). Trudeau’s policy changes rendered the Brigade unable to perform the essential task for which it had been trained since the early 1950s – defence of a designated area of land.³⁰ Therein lies the reason for the Brigade’s move south - in 1970, 4 CMBG was relocated from a position with Northern Army Group (NORTHAG) in Soest to a position with Central Army Group (CENTAG) in Lahr. This move allowed the Brigade to function at reduced size, for it was no longer responsible for a designated piece of real-estate, but was to be deployed as support for either the 7th U.S. Corps or the 2nd German Corps in the event of a Soviet advance. Not only did this create a gap in the defensive mechanism of the BAOR, it also complicated Brigade logistics systems, since supplies and equipment now had to be filtered through

American or German hands before reaching Canadian depots. This complication of logistics systems will be elaborated upon later.

Trudeau justified his reduction to Brigade forces by emphasizing that the situation in Europe had ameliorated since the earlier years of the Cold War. While improvements had indeed been made, the rationale of this decision is unfathomable in light of continued tensions between East and West. Only three years prior, in a statement to the House of Commons, Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs Paul Martin argued that,

...any North American move to disengage militarily from Europe will be dangerously premature until the European countries have made the necessary political and institutional arrangements to take over the responsibilities involved. If follows, at this time of uncertainty about NATO's future, that Canada should avoid action which would create unnecessary strain or otherwise impair the solidarity of the alliance.³¹

Paul Martin's observations were backed by much of the Canadian government and by events in Europe themselves - one need look only as far as the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 to find proof of Warsaw Pact volatility. The manner in which Czech revolutionaries were ruthlessly crushed by the Soviet army stands as tangible evidence that Allied suspicions of conflict with the Eastern bloc still remained a distinct possibility. From the Western point of view, the crushing of the Prague Spring could be taken as a visible demonstration of Stalin's unswerving hold over the countries within his sphere and a devotion to maintaining the communist realm. In light of such events, it is startling that Trudeau was able to so deftly manoeuvre the longstanding perception of Soviet threat to a back-burner position. Indeed, at a time when other NATO members were talking of strengthening the alliance to deter further Communist advance, Mr. Trudeau announced to the House of Commons that, "we are not led to the

immediate reaction, after the Czechoslovakian events, to conclude that we should necessarily escalate in NATO.”³² Canadian officers and soldiers on the ground argued that regardless of opinions in Ottawa, the invasion of Prague was a wake-up call to those who thought that the Cold War could be approaching its end.³³ Indeed, one veteran goes so far as to vehemently state that, “I was there right up to ’79 and we were still very much twitchy about the Soviets...the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan showed us that they were still capable of moving into another country.”³⁴ And while Trudeau chose not to be influenced by the perception of Soviet threat, events indicated that he was perhaps overly optimistic.³⁵ The belief that the situation in Europe had stabilized enough to sustain the withdrawal of a large portion of the Canadian presence in NATO was not reflected by military evidence from the field.

This realization ushers in the crux of this paper - the impact of Trudeau’s policies upon the Canadian Armed Forces in West Germany. In one word, the impact was destructive. Not only were members of 4 CMBG obligated to surrender their position of front-line primacy, they were also forced to act under the directives of American or German orders. The reputation of independence and reliability that Canadians had established for themselves on the battlefield became tainted by the withdrawal of support from the home front. Thus, Trudeau’s policies illustrate what has long been referred to as the classic dichotomy between military and political interests.

The reduction of Canadian commitments to NATO was negatively received by all other member nations. Understandably, European partners saw Canada as renegeing on an obligation that was not thought to be negotiable, namely, the sustenance of a legitimate ground force operating within the larger defensive mechanism in Western Europe.³⁶ The

reduction of 4 CMBG was also subjected to criticism by Canadians at home, with commentators describing the reduction as both, "...a hastily improvised political compromise,"³⁷ and a "...notable disservice to Canada's position in the outside world."³⁸ While Trudeau believed the reduction of 4 CMBG would not significantly harm international relations, the negative repercussions of such a withdrawal were anticipated by various individuals, including members and non-members of the Canadian military alike. Many Canadian leaders, however, complied with Trudeau's nonchalance and failed to understand the political value of maintaining a military presence in Germany. This is due in part to the low priority that Canadian decision-makers have historically placed upon defence policy, leading to "...a superficial understanding of the purpose of military power and of its wider political and military usefulness and significance."³⁹

While the decision to reduce 4 CMBG came about in the effort to re-emphasize Canadian sovereignty and the domestication of foreign policy, Trudeau inadvertently embittered the economic, trade, and co-operative efforts of Canada in a European context. Excerpts from more conservative newspapers of the time illustrate the wariness with which more traditional individuals in Canada viewed implications of the defence reviews. In an article entitled, "Token Defence," published in the *Calgary Herald* in April 1969, the author responds to military cutbacks, claiming that, "Mr. Trudeau displays little understanding of military logic in holding that this nation's defence posture can be strengthened at the same time its' forward line in Europe is being weakened."⁴⁰ Another quote, this time from the *Winnipeg Free Press*, warns that, "A lack of cooperation from Canada...almost inevitably would lead to a lack of cooperation by Canada's friends and allies in other fields – in trade and economic matters in particular..."⁴¹ Judging by these

records, it is reasonable to assume that at least a small undercurrent of the population in Canada was aware of the consequences of Trudeau's defence policies upon the larger political framework.

Back in Germany, the decision of the Canadian government to reduce the size and capacity of 4 CMBG, came as a shock. Members of the Brigade felt that their role was pivotal in terms of maintaining the defensive structure in Western Europe. The Brigade had known that the defence review was underway, but felt reassured by positive feedback from the parliamentary review committee that had visited them in March 1969.

Brigadier-General Jim Hanson recalls that, "[the delegation] came away with the conclusion that not only were we doing an excellent job for Canada, but that we should be reinforced and not brought home."⁴² For men on the ground who felt that they had been doing a great service to their country; Trudeau's cuts came as a slap in the face.

Lieutenant-Colonel Bob Peacock explains that political decisions of the late 1960s placed a shadow over two decades of industrious efforts to build up the Canadian reputation:

When one NATO partner says, 'ok, we don't see a threat anymore, we're up and out outta here,' what does that say to the rest [of the partners] and what does it say to the other side? Personally, I just felt betrayed by Trudeau, seriously betrayed...we had committed our largess, our youth, and this [was] *our* front line!⁴³

This sense of betrayal arises over and over again in interviews with veterans of the Canadian officer corps who served in 4 CMBG. Each felt personally affronted by the decisions made by the Canadian government - on behalf of their Brigade and on behalf of their nation. Lieutenant-Colonel Berezowski vehemently stated that, "while things are warming up and slacking off, you couldn't just walk away from [commitments], because what happens the day after tomorrow if you don't keep your powder dry?"⁴⁴ Indeed, the

opinions of 4 CMBG and the military in general erred on the side of caution. Those who experienced the dynamics of tensions on the ground felt that it was highly unwise to totally redefine 4 CMBG - a military entity of two decades - over the period of a mere two years. The final result of Trudeau's modifications to Canadian defensive policy can be summarized in a narrative offered by Lieutenant-Colonel Barry Phillips, who was on the ground in Europe during the move south, to Lahr. He thus experienced first-hand the changes which occurred as the Brigade's role morphed from front-line to reserve. He explains,

What I witnessed was a steady decline in capability. When I first arrived there [in Soest] in [19]67, we were something to be reckoned with. By the time we got down to Lahr, our capability had been reduced. Morale levels were down. We knew that we were important when we were in the North, and we knew we were less important when we moved to the South. The government paid less and less attention to our situation, and the equipment just kept getting older and older and we could see other people getting better and better. We knew that the political masters were not interested in keeping us at pace with anybody [else], let alone being better than anybody [else].⁴⁵

It is evident from this quote that Trudeau's reductions were experienced in a completely personal sense by all of the men on the ground. Members of 4 CMBG were subjected to watch as two decades of effort were whittled away by directives from the political authority. For those who had served on the front-line in Soest, the transition to a reserve body was demoralizing and, in the words of Sean Maloney, "a traumatic experience."⁴⁶

The move South also resulted in extensive complication of general supply, logistics, and deployment structures for the Canadian Brigade. Where up North, supplies had been directly funnelled through British supply depots, in Lahr, they now had to first pass through American or German hands. Brigadier-General Jim Hanson reflects on this dichotomy, commenting that,

...up North we were buttoned into the British supply chain...And it was quite simple because we were attached to the British Army, so we had Canadians all the way forward. When we were moved South, I don't think anybody paid a whole lot of attention to how we'd get stuff. And when I got there in [19]74, we'd been down there for four years and they still hadn't gotten all of the wrinkles out of the system. And partly because the Germans said if we were attached permanently to Germany, they'd be happy to give us everything, [and] the Americans the same. But since we were sort of in the crack between the two of them, they were not terribly interested.⁴⁷

Thus operational ease was negatively affected by the move to Lahr. The above quote illustrates the level to which Canadian soldiers became dependent on the American and German armies for sustenance and direction. This reliance was not only limited to logistics systems, but also extended into the field of action, as 4 CMBG was required to deploy with either 7th U.S. Corps or 2nd German Corps in case of war. Deployment was complicated because Canada's exact responsibilities were never clearly laid out, but were to be determined at the exact moment of Soviet aggression. Lieutenant-Colonel Barry Phillips offers a straightforward description of deployment procedure down South; he explains, "...we were going to respond to either an American situation or a German situation, so trying to plug [our]selves into two slightly different tactical arrangements was complicating."⁴⁸ Thus, logistical concerns regarding supply and distribution compounded upon concerns of tactical deployment, and together constituted unnecessary burdens for the Canadian troops in Lahr. In essence, the entire restructuring of 4 Brigade structure exaggerated the difficulties that the men were facing in their move south, from Soest to Lahr.

Despite the many criticisms that may be directed towards Mr. Trudeau's foreign policy, the fact remains that in the end, the Cold War died down, and Canada came out physically unscathed. What this paper hopes to point out is that for a period of time, Mr.

Trudeau's decisions with regard to 4 CMBG caused unfortunate tension between NATO partners, and set Canada at a disadvantage amongst the allied nations. Where Trudeau focused on the fiscal constraints of the Brigade, he might have chosen to appreciate the political stature and respect it generated as a demonstration of Canadian solidarity and support for Europe. Though it would be imprudent to hypothesize at the impact of the latter, it is nonetheless tempting to infer that the Brigade would have continued on as a highly effective, independent force for many years under the BAOR.

The only conclusion that may be drawn with certainty is that Trudeau's reduction of 4 CMBG placed Canadian soldiers and officers at a disadvantage in terms of operation and deployment. His decisions minimized the role that they were sanctioned to play in European defence, and placed them at the whim of American or German orders. Oral testimonies from Brigade veterans testify to the difficulties that were encountered by 4 CMBG as it sought to redefine a place for itself within NATO structure. At the very least, this paper seeks to motivate thought and to question the validity of Trudeau's actions in a world that continued to be plagued by Cold War tensions and fear of communist expansion. While Trudeau considered the threat minimal enough to justify partial withdrawal, Brigadier-General Jim Hanson contends that at the time 4 CMBG was reduced, the Cold War in Europe was nowhere near thaw; "...when the [Berlin] Wall came down, that was the first indication that things were going to change. But I don't think that the Cold War really ended until Gorbachev disappeared and Yeltsin took over in '91."⁴⁹ While it may be considered admirable that Trudeau was prepared to leave behind the Cold War by the late 1960s, it is not necessarily the case that Stalin and the Warsaw Pact were equally compliant. Trudeau's actions may have been overly

competent, had conflict occurred, may have placed Canada in a position it was not prepared to be.

The perspectives offered in this paper have not been widely circulated within current literature on the topic, nor has there been any significant inquiry into history of 4 CMBG through the vantage point of the veterans themselves. The ideas set forth by this paper constitute a minute starting point for an investigation into the opinions and memories of Brigade veterans. In addition, it is essential for research to be continued with specific regard to Canada's nuclear weapons capacity under 1 and 2 SSM (Surface-to-Surface Missile) Batteries. Using oral testimonies to supplement the written record can provide a unique and often coloured perspective into the experiences of veterans during their years on the ground in West Germany.

In conclusion, Trudeau's focus on the domestic sphere downplayed the role of Canada's brigade in Europe, and shifted its role from front-line defence alongside the British to a reservist role under the American or German Corps. In addition to the vast reduction in troop numbers, the brigade was to be relocated from Soest in Northern Germany, to Lahr in the South. This downsizing of commitment to NATO had significant implications for Canada's place at the international table and the manner in which Canada was viewed by other NATO members. Highlighting the long-standing dichotomy between political and military forces, Trudeau's decision to downsize 4 CMBG led to increased tension not only between Canada and other NATO nations, but significantly, between the Canadian government and Canadian soldiers themselves.

Through oral interviews with veterans of the Brigade, mainstream literature can be reassessed through the lens of historic investigation. By giving voice to a

demographic which has remained relatively silent, this case study sheds light on an area of Canadian history which has been significantly neglected. In addition, this study highlights the value of oral history as a discipline, for it opens up a largely untapped wealth of information that together with written accounts constitutes a more complete version of the past.

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- ¹ Bruce Thordarson, *Trudeau and Foreign Policy: A Study in Decision-Making*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1972), 2.
- ² While these sources may acknowledge the role of Trudeau's politics upon the military in general, none of them are exclusively concerned with the manner in which 4 CMBG was detrimentally affected by the Canadian government. See *4 CMBG: Canada's NATO Brigade, A History*, (Gesamtherstellung: Moritz Shauenburg & Co., 1983); Larry Stewart, *Canada's European Force 1971-1980: A Defense Policy in Transition*, (Kingston: Center for International Relations, Queen's University, 1980).
- ³ Interview with Lieutenant-Colonel "Cec" Berezowski, Canadian Army (Ret'd), 7 November 2007, Victoria, B.C.
- ⁴ Interview with Colonel Bob Peacock, Canadian Army (Ret'd), 30 October 2007, Victoria, B.C.
- ⁵ Geoffrey Roberts, "Ideology, Calculation, and Improvisation: Spheres of Influence and Soviet Foreign Policy 1939-1945," in *The World War Two Reader*, ed. Gordon Martel, (New York: Routledge, 2004).
- ⁶ Stephanie Curwich, *War and Red Scare, 1940-1960*, Communism in Washington State History and Memory Project. Accessed online: <http://depts.washington.edu/labhist/cpproject/curwick.htm>.
- ⁷ Tom Keating and Larry Pratt, *Canada, NATO, and the Bomb: The Western Alliance in Crisis*, (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers Ltd., 1988), 27.
- ⁸ J.L. Granatstein, ed., *Canadian Foreign Policy: Historical Readings*, (Mississauga: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd., 1993), 208.
- ⁹ Peacock interview, 30 October 2007.
- ¹⁰ Berezowski interview, 7 November 2007.
- ¹¹ Sean Maloney, *War Without Battles: Canada's NATO Brigade in Germany 1951-1993*, (Whitbey: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd.), 234.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 243.
- ¹³ Interview with Colonel George Olson, Canadian Army (Ret'd), 21 November 2007, Victoria, B.C.
- ¹⁴ Interview with Brigadier-General Jim Hanson, Canadian Army (Ret'd), 13 November 2007, Victoria, B.C.
- ¹⁵ Peacock interview, 30 October 2007.
- ¹⁶ David Haglund and Olaf Mager, eds., *Homeward Bound? Allied Forces in the New Germany*, (Boulder: Westview Press Inc., 1992), 215.
- ¹⁷ Interview with Colonel Dave Walters, Canadian Army (Ret'd), 8 November 2007, Victoria, B.C.
- ¹⁸ Berezowski interview, 7 November 2007.
- ¹⁹ Interview with Colonel Bruce McGibbon, 21 November 2007, Victoria, B.C.
- ²⁰ Olson interview, 21 November 2007.
- ²¹ Roy Rempel, *Counterweights: The Failure of Canada's German and European Policy 1955-1995*, (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 54.
- ²² Haglund and Mager, *Homeward Bound? Allied Forces in the New Germany*, 217.
- ²³ German phrase meaning "hail to victory;" Berezowski interview, 7 November 2007.
- ²⁴ J. L. Granatstein and Robert Bothwell, *Pirouette: Pierre Trudeau and Canadian Foreign Policy*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 7.
- ²⁵ Arthur E. Blanchette, ed., *Canadian Foreign Policy 1966-1976: Selected Speeches and Documents*, (Toronto: Gage Publishing Ltd., 1980), 48.
- ²⁶ Thordarson, *Trudeau and Foreign Policy: A Study in Decision-Making*, 133.
- ²⁷ Keating and Pratt, *Canada, NATO, and the Bomb: The Western Alliance in Crisis*, 12.
- ²⁸ Greg Donaghy, Mary Halloran and John Hilliker, *The White Paper Impulse: Reviewing Foreign Policy under Trudeau and Clark*, Historical Section, Foreign Affairs Canada, 5. Accessed online: <http://www.cpsa-acsp.ca/papers-2005/Halloran.pdf>.
- ²⁹ Thordarson, *Trudeau and Foreign Policy: A Study in Decision-Making*, 136.
- ³⁰ Maloney, *War Without Battles: Canada's NATO Brigade in Germany 1951-1993*, 241.
- ³¹ Blanchette, ed., *Canadian Foreign Policy 1966-1976: Selected Speeches and Documents*, 38.
- ³² Thordarson, *Trudeau and Foreign Policy: A Study in Decision-Making*, 68.

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- ³³ Hanson interview, 13 November 2007.
- ³⁴ Ibid.
- ³⁵ Philip C. Bom, *Trudeau's Canada: Truth and Consequences*, (Ontario: Guardian Publishing Co., 1977), 121.
- ³⁶ See Granatstein, ed., *Canadian Foreign Policy: Historical Readings*, 290; Keating and Pratt, *Canada, NATO, and the Bomb: The Western Alliance in Crisis*, 33; Thordarson, *Trudeau and Foreign Policy: A Study in Decision-Making*, 14; Keating and Pratt, *Canada, NATO, and the Bomb: The Western Alliance in Crisis*, 32-33.
- ³⁷ Granatstein, ed., *Canadian Foreign Policy: Historical Readings*, 290.
- ³⁸ Maloney, *War Without Battles: Canada's NATO Brigade in Germany 1951-1993*, xxx.
- ³⁹ Rempel, *Counterweights: The Failure of Canada's German and European Policy 1955-1995*, 5.
- ⁴⁰ Rick Butler and Jean-Guy Carrier, eds., *The Trudeau Decade*, (Toronto: Doubleday Canada Ltd., 1979), 116.
- ⁴¹ Butler and Carrier., eds., *The Trudeau Decade*, 83.
- ⁴² Hanson interview, 13 November 2007.
- ⁴³ Peacock interview, 13 November 2007.
- ⁴⁴ Berezowski interview, 7 November 2007.
- ⁴⁵ Interview with Lieutenant-Colonel Barry Phillips (Ret'd), 31 October 2007, Victoria, B.C.
- ⁴⁶ Sean Maloney, *War Without Battles: Canada's NATO Brigade in Germany 1951-1993*, 264.
- ⁴⁷ Hanson interview, 13 November 207.
- ⁴⁸ Phillips interview, 31 October 2007.
- ⁴⁹ Hanson interview, 13 November 2007.

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