

*Appendix #5*

SERIAL 186

7 July, 1940  
Secret

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Secretary,  
Dept. of Natl. Defence  
Ottawa, Ontario  
Canada

Your request for an appreciation of the military situation of the AIRPORT and BOTWOOD was received through the office of the Governor on the evening of 4 July, 1940.

The situation at both the above places has already been carefully studied. ST. JOHN'S, BELL ISLAND, and ARGENTIA are distant from the AIRPORT by a ten hours train journey - the only means of transportation to or from this Headquarters - and the report on them must of necessity be mostly compiled from outside information, and after a short reconnaissance from the air. In any defence scheme the landing field at HARBOUR GRACE must also be considered.

The following is submitted:

1. If attempt were made to land troops at AIRPORT, attempt must be made from the air or by railroad - there are no roads to or from AIRPORT.
2. The AIRPORT and receiving and transmitting stations are considered very important to enemy; therefore it is unlikely they will be heavily bombed. An attack here would most likely be by air, or land forces working from a base on the sea-coast, from which supplies could be forwarded.
3. Loss of AIRPORT to enemy would create a dangerous situation for the remainder of NEWFOUNDLAND and CANADA. It would be very difficult to hold AIRPORT if all supplies had to be brought by air: this applies to both sides. Therefore a sea base is essential to complete success. BOTWOOD is considered the best base, due to its proximity, however LEWISPORTE has docks for small ships, also rail connections. There are always locomotives and rolling stock at BOTWOOD due to operations of ANGLO NEWFOUNDLAND Development Company. Otherwise the nearest rolling stock in any quantity is at ST. JOHN'S.
4. AIRPORT has at present no reserve supplies of food or ammunition which must be maintained from another base, preferably on the sea, and there is a limited supply of water. Excellent landing field, but if the railway were cut to east and west the AIRPORT would be cut off except by air.
5. An attempt could be made to seize BOTWOOD by troops being landed from seaplanes or ships - there is no landing field.
6. BOTWOOD has a harbour with docks and railway sidings: it is an excellent place to establish a base which can be reinforced and supplied by seaplanes or by water. It is three hours by train from

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the AIRPORT, due to the railway going around the entrance of EXPLOITS RIVER. BOTWOOD can be temporarily supplied by GRAND FALLS (about 20 miles by road).

7. LEWISPORTE is also a likely spot for a base, although it is not as good as BOTWOOD, due to having inferior docks and railway connections; however, limited supplies are available here.

8. Have considered detailing a small force for LEWISPORTE, and also for GAMBO to the east, but do not think that our present strength will permit this force to be spared for this duty. GAMBO is not as dangerous as LEWISPORTE: no docks.

HARBOUR GRACE, from an air reconnaissance has one runway, running east and west. Small ships put in here: there are docks of a sort, and it is on the railway.

9. The nature of the country is very wooded, with many small lakes and swamps, and is considered impassable around AIRPORT with the exception of the railway line. The vicinity of BOTWOOD and LEWISPORTE is more open, but of the same rough type. There are innumerable small coves and landing-places in the vicinity of both places suitable for small boats.

10. BELL ISLAND is the site of iron ore mines: if the ISLAND of ST. JOHN'S were taken, the other must fall. The local militia is now being recruited to guard BELL ISLAND and an internment camp is being constructed for a thousand, near ST. JOHN'S, and a Guard for same is being recruited.

11. The Governor is most anxious to have a garrison for ST. JOHN'S which is the main source of supplies for AIRPORT - ARGENTIA being the alternate winter port. Both towns are railway terminals: and there would exist a tremendous moral effect should St. JOHN'S fall into enemy hands.

12. The many coves and inlets which are all along the east coast present many problems. But if all were even patrolled, it would necessitate a much larger force than is already here.

13. A Field Battery, which would allow of one section(4 guns) covering the narrows five miles from the docks at BOTWOOD: and two sections(8 guns) to cover the railway approaches to AIRPORT from east and west would be well employed. Seaplanes(bombers) could also be well employed at BOTWOOD.

14. Both places could use Anti-Aircraft Guns. In this connection it is felt that any attempt to gain the AIRPORT will be made in sufficient force to make success a reasonable possibility, in which case L.M.G.s for A.A. defence against heavy transport planes will not be sufficient. L.M.G.s are now sited to cover all runways by fire, and it is our intention to engage enemy at moment troops disembark.

15. If enemy seizes railway to east or west, it is presumed trains will stop short of AIRPORT and attack will be made from surrounding woods.

16. The moral effect on the population if any attack were successful

would be extremely great, as it is fully realized that this ISLAND has no defences, and it appears that those in authority, at least, are very worried at this situation.

17. Enemy could operate successfully by only holding northern part of ISLAND to, say, BOTWOOD, and blocking off southern section, that is, if they could bring supplies across the ocean. Otherwise ST. JOHN'S or CORNERBROOK are essential as a supply base. Even at that, supplies are very limited on the ISLAND and more must be brought in from elsewhere. This latter situation applies equally to defenders.

18. A garrison at ST. JOHN'S would produce a moral effect, but their position depends on holding the narrow neck of AVALON PENINSULA, between PLACENTIA and TRINITY BAYS. HARBOUR GRACE must be considered in this part of the picture.

19. Another Battalion, together with full Battalion complement of 2-inch and 3-inch Mortars and Hand Grenades; and one Battery of Field Guns, should allow of an adequate defence for BOTWOOD, the AIRPORT, other special danger points, and a garrison for moral effect at ST. JOHN'S or on BELL ISLAND.

20. Almost any number of men could be employed on defence, due to the peculiarity of the coast-line. This would mean innumerable posts, each producing separate rationing and billeting problems.

21. Before any defence scheme can be finally settled, it should be definitely established what importance is attached to the defence of the whole island in conjunction with the defence scheme for CANADA, what number of troops, and the branches of the Service available for this duty, what arrangements can be made for billets and rations and the cost of same.

Lt.-Col.

Commanding

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