

CANADIAN TROOPS TAKE SPITSBERGEN

Potential German Coal Supply Shut Off, 700 Islanders Brought Back to England; Present Garrison Is Intentional Mystery.

LONDON, Sept. 9 (U. P.).—British occupation forces are remaining in the Arctic islands of Spitsbergen, it was indicated officially today in comment on a swift raid that eliminated the possibility of Germany receiving coal from the strategic islands.

Indications that some of the occupation forces, including Canadians and Norwegians, were remaining were given in Prime Minister Churchill's statement which said the Allied front now stretches in an immense crescent from Spitsbergen to the North African coastal base of Tobruk.

There were strong implications that only a part of the forces led to the islands by Maj. Gen. Potts of Saskatchewan had been withdrawn.

When authoritative military and other quarters were asked to clear up the confusion, they said that great pains had been taken to leave open the question whether troops remained or had all returned.

"The Germans would like to know," a spokesman commented.

In sending an expeditionary force to the Spitsbergen group, comprising four main islands and several small ones, the British were assumed to have concentrated on West Spitsbergen, the largest island of the group, which is a valuable source of coal for Norway, which owns the islands, and for Germany, which occupies Norway.

For a time or for the duration of the war, the British had shown interest in an island group which, while frozen for months in the year, occupies a strategically important position about equidistant from Greenland, the Arctic coast of Norway, and the Russian island groups of Franz Josef Land and Novaya Zemlya, on which Russia has maintained Arctic airplane forces and important meteorological stations.

The expedition involved a 1500-mile voyage through dangerous waters by troops who could not know how well the Germans might have defended the islands.

Bring Back 700 Miners

The troops, especially trained in invasion tactics, did not know their destination until they crossed the Arctic Circle. They struck at the islands secretly and swiftly but saw only one German plane during their stay.

The returning ships brought back 700 Norwegian miners, including 70 women and 70 children. The 2300 Russians who had lived on the islands apparently had left for home. The mines on the islands were made unusable, the communiqué said, indicating that the Norwegians would have no means of livelihood. Only a few Eskimos and Lapps remain on the islands now, besides the British garrison.

It was estimated that the coal mines could produce 350,000 tons a year and that it might also have been possible for the Axis to get low grade iron ore, gypsum and oil on the islands. The long distance to Britain made these supplies of little use to the Allies.

Valueless, Says German Spokesman

BERLIN, Sept. 9 (U. P.).—A Nazi spokesman said sarcastically today that the British landing on Spitsbergen brought them "one step nearer the North Pole."

"We wish them joy up there this winter," he said. "One may be certain that if Spitsbergen were of any military importance we would already have occupied it."

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