

Roberts Charles G. D. Sir

Canada in Flanders. Volume

III



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Charles G. D. Roberts

Canada in Flanders,

Volume III

PREFACE

In writing this preface to Vol. III of "Canada in Flanders" I am saying good-bye to my task as author of the first two volumes. The increasing pressure of other duties has made it impossible for me to pay those prolonged visits to the Front which alone keep a writer in vivid touch with the constantly developing realities of modern war, or to spare the time for the proper study of the historical material. Under these circumstances it seemed better to retain the Editorship of "Canada in Flanders," but to hand over the story of the Somme to the practised pen of Major Charles G. D. Roberts, who was present with the Canadian Corps during that Autumn Campaign.

But in doing this it is necessary to make good as far as possible the errors and slips which have come to light and been pointed out by the critics in the text of Vol. II.

As in the case of Vol. I., the majority of the mistakes is in the misspelling of names or the confusion of identity between officers with the same surname. I particularly regret the mistake

by which the leadership of the advance on the lost craters at St. Eloi on the night of April 6th is ascribed to Lieutenant V. P. Murphy, of the 25th Battalion, instead, as it ought to have been, to Lieutenant G. D. Murphy, of the 28th Battalion (pp. 129, 132). Similarly, on p. 42, the name of Sergeant-Major Benton should have been inserted as the sergeant-major who went out with Private Donoghue to the rescue of the wounded; while the commanders of the raiding party of the 19th (Ontario) Battalion in August, 1916, should have been given as Captain C. E. Kilmer and Lieutenant H. B. Pepler (p. 68).

In the description of the battle of Sanctuary Wood there are several mistakes of the same character. Lieutenant Glassco, of the P.P.C.L.I., has his name misspelt on pp. 181 and 182, and Captain A. G. Wilken, the heroic chaplain of the 1st C.M.R.'s, is reported as being killed, whereas in reality he was taken prisoner. On p. 216 it should be made clear that the Colt guns under Lieutenant Ziegler, which played so important a part in the defence of the Hooge position on June 6th, belonged to the Machine Gun Company of the 7th Brigade. On p. 70 Lieutenant-Colonel C. H. Hill, D.S.O., is wrongly given as the Colonel of the Royal Canadian Regiment when the 3rd Division was formed in January, 1916, instead of Lieutenant-Colonel A. H. MacDonnell, D.S.O.; while the Commander of the 5th C.F.A. Brigade at the same period was Lieutenant-Colonel W. O. H. Dodds, and not Lieutenant-Colonel E. A. Carruthers.

Among more general errors it may be noted that Lieutenant

Elliot is described on p. 104 as the "signal" instead of the "signalling" officer, and that the German unit opposed to us at St. Eloi was the 214th Regiment, and not the 214th Battalion – a German regiment consisting of three battalions and approximating more in numbers to our brigade.

On more general questions, such as the position and actions of units, only one controversy has been raised, and that is concerned with the early stages of the Battle of St. Eloi. This difficulty is to some extent inevitable, for with the exception of the Second Battle of Ypres there has been no action in this history of the Corps in which the true facts have been more difficult to obtain than in that confused fighting in the mud on the dreary dawn of April 6th of 1916, which lost us the craters and the advanced line. But all the available evidence has been sifted with the greatest care, and nothing has been brought to my attention which makes me inclined to modify or alter the provisional account given in the second volume. This does not mean in the least that in the future quite fresh material, both from Canadian and German sources, may not become available after the war and throw a totally new light on certain episodes. With this additional evidence before him the future historian may be able to rewrite parts of the story from the standpoint of this fuller knowledge. There is, however, one particular correction which can be made at once. I find that I have done something less than justice to the work of the 2nd Pioneer Battalion during the St. Eloi fighting. Their task here was one of incredible difficulty owing to the

conditions of the weather, the state of the ground, to the severe and continuous shelling to which the whole area was subjected, and the uncertainty as to positions which wrapped the whole action in a fog. Yet the Pioneers' work was carried through with great courage and energy. In particular, the reconstruction of the old front British line from Shelley Farm to No. 2 Crater, which is ascribed on p. 144 to the infantry of the 5th Brigade, was in reality done by the Pioneers, who also took a large share in placing No. 2 Crater itself in an adequate state of defence.

There is an inevitable tendency to give to the work of the troops immediately behind the firing-line less attention and credit than they deserve.

The infantry sustain most of the hard knocks when it comes to climbing the parapet, and in return obtain the greater notice from the historian. But behind the thin and scattered lines, which wave after wave fall or go plodding on, the gunners, the sappers, and the pioneers are preparing or consolidating the victory. The battle is no longer between the opposing lines of the infantry, for to win a position you must hold it, and to hold it you must have brought up swiftly and safely from the rear bombs, ammunition, wire rations, and a means of entry for the supporting and relieving troops, the area of the battle is no longer the front line, it is behind this that the enemy barrage descends, and over a wide field of fire the German shells are searching for all those who would bring up succour and relief. It is under these conditions that the pioneers must do their work. In the night, only illumined

by the fitful flare of the star-shells shedding a pale and sudden luminance behind the front line and leaving the darkness more intense than ever, the old and battered communication trench of the Germans has to be made good to the front line. The trench from previous occupation is well known to the enemy, and as the pioneers shovel out the mud and the dirt to the left and right a new illumination is provided by the sudden glare and suffocating fumes of the heavies bursting right or left or in the trench itself. But night at least gives the appearance, if not the reality, of safety. As the infantry go forward the work must often be done in the broad daylight, the trench driven through to the new line, or a new resistance built to face the counter-attack. The men of the Pioneers who have to undertake this task must do it in cold blood. They are robbed of that excitement of personal conflict which can carry the fighting man through the most desperate dangers in a frame of mind which hardly remembers the horrors through which he passes, and crowns the story of his achievements with a halo and a fascination not granted to work less interesting but no less vital.

The achievements of the 2nd Pioneer Battalion at the Somme will take rank with any of those of the infantry. At Courcelette their duty was to follow on the heels of the 2nd Division, to drive communication trenches through without delay to the new lines, and to relieve the infantry immediately of the final consolidation of the captured trenches. In the darkness before the assault Lieutenants McGhee and Davis crawled out into No

Man's Land and pegged out the line of trenches to be dug next day. The moment the 2nd Division had taken the German front line the Pioneers started out to drive these trenches through in broad daylight and under a sweeping rain of heavies. Lieutenant McGhee exhibited great courage and devotion to duty; he was three times buried by the explosion of heavy shells close to him, and three times dug himself out with his entrenching tool and continued to mark out the line of the advancing trench for his men. What the effect of such shelling may be is illustrated by the extraordinary and gruesome story of the death of Lieutenant Tracy of the same regiment some days before. While prospecting in advance of the line a German shell burst right on him. A rescue party of Pioneers went out immediately to find him on the spot of the shell-burst. Not a sign of the unfortunate officer could be found, and the search was abandoned. On the day of Courcelette his body was found by the advancing infantry fifty yards from where he had been struck down. For the Pioneers this kind of work must be done, day in and day out, or night in and night out, for weeks at a time. When the infantry is too exhausted by its efforts to make good the line, the Pioneers must be called up to supplement their efforts. If a strong point has to be built, it is to the Pioneers that the engineer officer will look to carry out his instructions, and in the achievement of all these tasks the Pioneer Battalions of the Canadians have covered themselves with glory.

It is now my duty to hand over to my successor. Major Charles G. D. Roberts continues in Vol. III. of Canada in France and

Flanders, for France has now given us the names of the Somme and of Vimy, the story of the Autumn Campaign of 1916. I retire gladly in favour of one who has a real claim to literary and historical fame. The first and second volumes were the hasty product of one who was an amateur in the art of describing, but who, as an amateur, did his best. Major Roberts is a professional in the sphere of letters and of history, and therefore sets up a new and higher standard for the volumes which are to follow. In the sphere of letters he is well known throughout the Empire for his stories of the life of the men and the denizens of the wild, through which there blows, like the breeze shaking the pine-trees in the snows, both the warm wind of romance and the cold breath of reality. His *History of the Dominion* is equally familiar to all Canadians who care to consult the past of their country. In his record of the great deeds of the Canadian Corps on the Somme we shall find combined the two qualities which make letters last, the imagination which can convey to the future the agonies and heroisms of the past, and the chiselled style shaping the rough outlines of the records into a clean-cut and enduring narrative.

BEAVERBROOK.

Cherkley, 1918.

CHAPTER I

THE FOURTH DIVISION

In the first and second volumes of this history Lord Beaverbrook has told the war-story of Canada from the mobilisation of the 1st Canadian Division at Valcartier in August, 1914, to the conclusion of our work in the Ypres salient in June, 1916. He has dealt progressively with from one to three divisions, bringing the second and third in turn into his narrative, recording the organisation of each as it came into being, and then co-ordinating its military exploits with the exploits of its sister divisions.

During all that time the 4th Canadian Division was on its way. It was struggling into existence. Its battalions were forming, training, being reduced to skeletons by the necessities of the veteran units in France, and recovering strength by the absorption of raw material. The 44th Battalion was mobilised in the winter of 1915, while the 1st Division was still on Salisbury Plain; yet it was not until the autumn of 1916 that it reached France as a unit of the 4th Canadian Division. Between the date of its mobilisation and that of its first contact with the enemy it supplied many drafts of officers and men to reserve and fighting battalions in England and France, and absorbed drafts of all ranks from junior units. It was so with all the infantry battalions

which, in time, went to the composition of the new Division, only to a lesser degree than in the case of the 44th.

Of the infantry brigades of this Division only the 10th is of purely Western origin, its battalions – the 44th, 46th, 47th, and 50th – having been recruited in Winnipeg, Southern Saskatchewan, British Columbia, and Calgary respectively. These battalions had comprised the 14th (Reserve) Canadian Infantry Brigade during their period of training in England previous to the formation of the 4th Division. The brigade sailed for France on August 10th, 1916, and took a place in the front line for the first time twelve days later, when it relieved our 4th Brigade in a section of our tortured defences before Ypres.

During the first five months of its active service the 10th was commanded by Brigadier-General W. St. Pierre Hughes. On January 18th, 1917, it was taken over by Brigadier-General Edward Hilliam, D.S.O., late C.O. of the 25th Battalion. The story of this Brigade's offensive and defensive operations is to be found in subsequent chapters of this history incorporated in the general narrative of Canadian activities.

The 11th Canadian Infantry Brigade, organised in May, 1916, lost two of its original battalions in the following month, owing to the great and immediate need of reinforcements at the front in consequence of the bitter fighting of June in the Ypres salient. These units were replaced by others; and when it commenced its actual war-service it consisted of the 54th from Kootenay, the 75th from Toronto, the 87th of Montreal, and the 102nd

of Northern British Columbia. This Brigade was originally commanded by Brigadier-General F. O. W. Loomis, D.S.O., who had previously commanded a battalion of the 1st Canadian Division; but after Major-General Mercer was killed in action in June, the 2nd Brigade contributed its G.O.C., Major-General Lipsett, to the 3rd Division, Loomis was recalled to France to take the 2nd Brigade, and Lieutenant-Colonel V. W. Odlum, D.S.O., of the 7th Battalion, was promoted to the command of the 11th Brigade and the rank of Brigadier-General.

The 12th Canadian Infantry Brigade was organised from the 16th (Reserve) Brigade in May, with Brigadier-General Lord Brooke in command. It originally consisted of the 51st, 72nd, 73rd, and 87th Battalions, but in June twenty-four officers and more than seven hundred other ranks of the 51st were drafted to France, and their place in the Brigade was filled by the 78th. The 87th was transferred to the 11th Brigade. The final composition of the 12th Brigade was as follows: – 38th Battalion of Ottawa (its *personnel* representing such well-known Canadian Militia regiments as the Governor-General's Foot Guards, the Duke of Cornwall's Own Rifles, the Brockville Rifles, the Lanark and Renfrew Regiment and the Stormont and Glengarry Highlanders), the 72nd Battalion of Vancouver, the 73rd of Montreal, and the 78th of Winnipeg.

Shortly after its arrival in France the command of the 12th Canadian Infantry Brigade was transferred to Brigadier-General J. H. MacBrien, D.S.O.

From the date of its organisation the 4th Canadian Division has been commanded by Major-General David Watson, C.B.

This Division has been fortunate from the first in the matter of the *personnel* of its higher commands and senior appointments. Major-General Watson commenced his military service in this war in August, 1914, as a Lieutenant-Colonel. He did splendid work with his battalion – the 2nd (Central Ontario) – during the Second Battle of Ypres and until he was promoted to the command of the 5th Brigade in the autumn of 1915.

Brigadier-General Edward Hilliam, who took over the command of the 10th Brigade in January, 1917, has had a career of distinguished activity since the first day of Canada's military participation in the war. As a Captain of the 5th Battalion he was wounded at Gravenstafel Ridge on April 25th, 1915, while engaged on a service of exceptional danger and importance. The story is told in Vol. I. of this history. After months more of hard service with the 5th, and a step in rank, he was promoted Lieutenant-Colonel and transferred to the 25th (Nova Scotia) Battalion. His success continued unflinching with his new command, as the splendid work of the Nova Scotians at Courcellette on September 15th, 1916, has proved to the world.

Brigadier-General Loomis, who commanded the 11th Brigade for a time in England, is another survivor of the Second Battle of Ypres. His original battalion was the 13th Royal Highlanders of Canada. From the 11th Brigade he was recalled to France in June, 1916, to command the 2nd Brigade. His

Brigade-Major, Captain Gardner, a veteran of the 7th Battalion, returned to France at the same time and took over the 7th from Lieutenant-Colonel Odlum, who was appointed to the command of the 11th Brigade.

Brigadier-General V. W. Odlum, D.S.O., before his promotion to a brigade had commanded the 7th (British Columbia) Battalion at the front since the death of Lieutenant-Colonel Hart-McHarg in April, 1915. To those who know, this statement sufficiently explains Odlum's fitness for any fighting command.

Brigadier-General J. H. MacBrien, commanding the 12th Brigade, was at one time D.A.A. and O.M.G. of the 1st Canadian Division, and in recognition of his services in this capacity he was mentioned in despatches and made a Companion of the Distinguished Service Order. He was afterwards promoted to the General Staff of the Canadian Corps.

Lieutenant-Colonel W. E. Ironsides, D.S.O., Major K. D. B. Murray, D.S.O., and Captain A. A. Aitken, General Staff officers, first, second, and third grade of the Division, all have served actively on one or more of Britain's fighting fronts since the first days of the war. Captain R. M. Redmond was drawn from the Casualty Centre after he had seen service with the 60th Battalion of the 3rd Division. All other officers of the Divisional Staff had seen previous service in France, and a number of them had been decorated for their good work. By hard work or hard fighting Lieutenant-Colonel E. B. Panet, Colonel H. A.

Chisholm, and Captain F. R. Burnside had won the D.S.O., and Captain Meurling and Hon. Major the Reverend A. M. Gordon the Military Cross, long before the materialisation of the 4th Canadian Division.

The 3rd Canadian Divisional Artillery, which was organised and trained in England during the spring and summer of 1916, and went to France with the 4th Division, consists of the 8th, 9th, 10th, and 11th Canadian Artillery Brigades and the Divisional Artillery Ammunition Column. The batteries and sections of which this force was formed came originally from almost every corner of Canada, north and south, east and west.

For a time the Brigades were composed as follows: – The 8th, of the 30th, 31st, 40th, and 41st Field Batteries; the 9th, of the 32nd, 33rd, 45th, and 46th Field Batteries; the 10th, of the 37th, 38th, 39th, and 44th Field Batteries; and the 11th (Howitzer) Brigade of the 29th, 35th, 36th, and 43rd Howitzer Batteries. This organisation was not satisfactory. The 29th (Howitzer) Battery was left with the 11th Brigade, and to it were added the 41st, 44th, and 46th Field Batteries. To replace these field batteries in the other Brigades the 35th (Howitzer) Battery went to the 8th, the 36th to the 9th, and the 43rd to the 10th. Thus each Brigade was composed of three field batteries and one howitzer battery.

The 8th Brigade, Canadian Field Artillery, which was brought from Canada to England by Lieutenant-Colonel Gillies, passed into the hands of Lieutenant-Colonel D. T. V. Eaton, of the

Royal Canadian Horse Artillery, on March 9th, 1916. Eaton had commanded the R.C.H.A. with our 1st Division in France in 1915. He is a professional as well as a practical artillery officer, with years of theoretical and scientific study behind his experience in the field.

The command of the 9th Brigade, C.F.A., went to Lieutenant-Colonel H. G. Carscallen, who had long ago been mentioned in despatches for his work at the Front with the 11th Battery; that of the 10th to Lieutenant-Colonel G. H. Ralston, who distinguished himself as far back as June, 1915, at the "Duck's Bill," when two guns of his battery were established and fought in our front-line trench, seventy-five yards distant from the German trench, with disastrous results to the enemy's wire, parapets, and machine-gun emplacements (see Vol. I., p. 133). Lieutenant-Colonel A. G. MacNaughton, late of the 2nd Brigade, C.F.A., was appointed to the 11th Brigade.

These four Brigades and their ammunition column went to France under the command of Brigadier-General J. H. Mitchell, late of the 3rd Brigade, C.F.A. This officer had been mentioned in despatches and awarded the Legion of Honour, Croix d'Officier, a year before.

The 4th Canadian Division went to France in August, 1916, the 10th Infantry Brigade arriving on the 11th, the 11th Brigade on the 14th, and the 12th Brigade on the 15th. On the 17th they assembled, and within the week were moved into positions on the war-torn front of the Ypres salient. There they remained until the

first week in October, when they joined the Canadian Corps on the Somme. During their occupation of the Ypres salient each of the three Brigades was withdrawn in turn for a course of tactical training.

So it was that the autumn of 1916 saw the Canadian Army in France flooding to and beyond the one hundred thousand mark. Four Divisions, according to the old establishment, which gave twenty-two thousand men of all ranks and arms to a division, would account for eighty-eight thousand Canadians in France at that time, but the development of the machine-gun service and the creation of trench-mortar batteries long ago caused the outgrowth and consequent revision of that establishment. And still, without the addition of a further Division, the Canadian Army Corps continued to grow, waxing greater daily to meet every progressive need and condition of modern warfare. By January, 1917, Canada's man-power in France reached the significant total of one hundred and twelve thousand. This figure takes no account of the wastage of battle. The seriously wounded and work-worn who are returned to England are, like the dead, immediately struck out of the tally. This figure stands for fit Canadians actively employed at the moment in first-hand combat with the enemy.

In the past, great battles have been won and long wars brought to a swift and violent end, tyrants have been broken, races enslaved, and thrones overturned by armies far weaker in numbers and in spirit than these fighting legions of Canada.

To enforce the significance of this Canadian Field Army of 112,000, we may compare the numbers engaged in some of the decisive battles of the past. The army of Napoleon, for instance, numbered but 70,000 men when he broke the power of Austria and Russia at Austerlitz. Wellington won the crushing victory of Vittoria, in the Peninsular War. with a force of 65,000; and at Waterloo he commanded rather less than 68,000. The terrific battle of Gettysburg, in the American Civil War, was fought by 78,000 Federals against the slightly smaller forces of the Southern Confederacy. Even at the great battle of Sedan, which decided the issue of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, the army of France, on which all her hopes were staked – and lost – numbered but 150,000. From such figures may be estimated the importance of Canada's contribution in the present gigantic struggle for liberty and right.

In the summer of 1914 Canada was a land of peace, of self-interest, of political warfare, and commercial and agricultural prosperity; and now her thousands lie dead on foreign battlefields; thousands of her sons have returned to her, maimed, broken, and blind; her forward army fights on, continually bleeding yet continually growing in strength, reinforced from her trained troops in England; and to her own home camps and garrisons her sons continue to gather from counting-house, school, and farm.

CHAPTER II

HOLDING THE LINE

The Battle of Sanctuary Wood was fought and endured throughout the first two days of June, 1916. Canada's resistance to that terrific and overwhelming onslaught of metal and men will live as long and gloriously as any victory in the great story of our arms. During those two fateful days Canadian trenches were obliterated – blown out of the ground; dug-outs were buried and strong points crushed; woods in our positions were mown and torn to earth; Major-General Mercer was killed and one of our Brigade commanders wounded and taken prisoner. The Canadian front was crushed by that indescribable deluge of exploding metal – but it was not broken.

Between the heroic actions in the Ypres salient in June (1st to 15th) and the commencement of our strenuous thrusts on the Somme front in mid-September, no unit of the Canadian Corps was in any major offensive operation. But the routine work of holding and strengthening our positions continued with the full measure of that activity for which the Canadians have become famous. The vitality of our opposition to the confronting masses of men and machinery did not lessen for an instant. Relieved from the recent terrific efforts of defence and counter-attack, we were stationary yet aggressive. Hostile trenches and strongholds

were raided and bombarded, wire was cut by hand and smashed by shell-fire, and mines were sprung. All arms continued to carry on enthusiastically, and the mental peace and physical security of the occupants of opposing positions were shattered constantly by bayonet and grenade, trench-bomb, bullet, and shell. The following instances will serve to illustrate the nature of our activities throughout this period of waiting, of preparation, and of so-called quiet.

Dominion Day (July 1st) was celebrated by the 26th (New Brunswick) Battalion in a manner little appreciated by the grey ranks across the way. Supported by the fire of our artillery and trench-mortars, two officers and twenty-five other ranks operated against a convenient point in the German front-line trench. The assaulting party were observed and subjected to a brisk but inaccurate fire of machine-guns and rifles before they had passed the enemy's inner wire. They pressed forward without a pause and rushed the parapet. The garrison of the trench immediately retired from this threatened point except for three men, who stuck to their loopholes and continued firing. Lieutenant Fleming accounted for one of these by thrusting his revolver into a loophole and returning the fire. The trench was then entered and its remaining defenders disposed of. After our party had investigated about forty yards of the trench they were driven out by a heavy bombardment of rifle-grenades and mortar-bombs. They then returned to our own lines with a few slight casualties, some useful information, and a quantity of

German equipment.

An encounter in No Man's Land between a patrol of the 22nd (French Canadian) Battalion and a German patrol on the night of July 4th resulted in the dispersion of the enemy and our capture of two prisoners.

Ten nights later a reconnoitring patrol from the 25th (Nova Scotia) Battalion attacked an enemy listening-post at the moment of its being strongly reinforced. After a brisk exchange of grenades the Germans ran for their trench, leaving the field and one of their wounded to us.

On the night of the 25th a large German mine was blown in our lines on the Bluff. This was not the enemy's first attempt to possess himself of that advantageous position. It will be remembered that he attained his object in January of the same year and was not driven out until a month later, and then only at a heavy cost of killed and wounded. Fortunately the second attempt to secure a foothold on that ground failed utterly, thanks to the alertness and prompt action of our troops immediately concerned. Briefly, the story of the foiled effort is this: —

The 1st Canadian Division, which had taken over the Bluff sector on the 22nd of the month, received warning two days later from Major North, of the 1st Canadian Tunnelling Company, that the enemy might be depended upon to blow a mine very soon somewhere in the vicinity. The localities which were considered with the liveliest suspicion were a point known as the Bean and Trench 33. The Division immediately warned the

2nd Infantry Brigade of the menace; the G.O.C. the Brigade ordered reductions in the garrisons of the threatened positions, the covering of that section of front by machine-guns, and the detailing of parties for counter-attack and of other parties for the vital work of consolidation should a mine be blown.

The early hours of the night of the 25th were unusually quiet about the Bluff. Artillery was silent. Snipers and machine-gunners seemed half-hearted in their activities. The 7th (British Columbia) Battalion was engaged in preparing for a relief which was to be completed by midnight.

At ten o'clock the quiet was shattered by a tremendous convulsion. Earth, fire, rock, and smoke belched to heaven. Trenches vanished, engulfed. Instantly the S.O.S. rocket went up. Our machine-guns responded like crackling echoes of the explosion.

Within thirty seconds of the rocket-signal for help the guns of Dodd's Group commenced a crushing bombardment of the German positions which threatened the new crater. Our counter-attacking parties advanced, armed with rifles, grenades, and machine-guns. They occupied the forward lip of the crater, the flanking shell-holes overlooking its raw depths, certain points commanding the canal, and a ridge running between an historic old crater and the new.

The Germans, reinforced and ready for the dash from cover and the occupation of the Crater swarmed to their parapets, and swayed and seethed there for a little while like a headed wave

about to break and flood forward. Then the wave broke and subsided – backward instead of forward.

The great attack was dead, dead in the first half-minute of its furious and painful life, killed by the smashing fire of our artillery and the whipping hail of our machine-guns.

Within one and a half hours of the blowing of the mine the O.C. the 7th Battalion reported to his Brigadier that the menace was past, and that the new crater was being swiftly absorbed by our defensive positions. Our artillery reduced its fire by one-half. Five minutes later the German artillery retaliation ceased, the fire of our machine-guns and artillery dropped to normal, and the relief of our infantry – which had been interrupted and delayed for nearly two hours – was calmly continued.

Owing to the precaution of thinning the garrisons in the threatened locality, our casualties were wonderfully light – less than fifty all told in killed, wounded, and missing. It is safe to say that the enemy casualties, caused by our artillery, machine-guns, Stokes and trench-mortar batteries, were much heavier; and, in addition to their loss of life and limb, the Germans lost their adventure. The months of toil devoted to the laying of the mine and the tons of explosive which comprised it failed to strengthen their position by a tittle or to weaken ours by a jot.

On the night of the 28th a patrol from the Nova Scotian Battalion (25th), consisting of a lieutenant, a sergeant, and four men, carried out a daring raid on a small scale. They bombed the German trench at the point where they intended to enter,

and were about to negotiate the parapet when a party of eight enemy bombers attacked them on the flank. In the brief but desperate fight which followed this unexpected distraction three of the Canadians were wounded and the eight Germans were disposed of. Lieutenant Wise, with Sergeant Anderson and Private Johnson, then entered the hostile trench and discovered that their preliminary grenade-fire had killed five of the garrison. They drove the enemy down the trench, until Anderson was wounded. Lieutenant Wise ceased his offensive to help the sergeant over the parapet, and while thus engaged he received three wounds. Johnson continued to drive the enemy until all his grenades were thrown. He then escaped from the trench, returned to our lines, collected a rescue party, and led the way back to the scene of action. All our wounded were found and brought in with the exception of Sergeant Anderson.

At half-past eight on the morning of the 29th the 19th (Ontario) Battalion made a daylight raid into the enemy trenches on the St. Eloi front between Ruined Farm and the Canal. Two officers and the scouts of the Battalion had devoted every day and night of the preceding week to reconnoitring the ground over which the attack was to be made. During the night of the 28th the enemy's wire in front of the point selected for entry was hand-cut by two men of the Battalion. Machine-gun fire on the hostile parapet at the threatened point muffled the sound of the clipping of the wire. The raiding party, consisting of Captain C. L. Kilmer Lieutenant H. B. Pepler, and eighteen N.C.O.'s and men, covered

three-quarters of their journey between the lines by way of an old ditch, doubled across the remaining forty-five yards, passed through the gaps in the wire, and went over the parapet before they were discovered by the enemy. They moved to the right and left along the trench, shooting and bombing. Upon the approach of strong German reinforcements along a communication trench, the signal to retire was given and successfully obeyed. During the evacuation of the trench the raiders suffered a few slight casualties from grenade-fire, and the two officers and a sergeant sustained shrapnel wounds. Captain Kilmer was the last to leave the trench. One of his ankles had been broken in the fight. As he was unable to reach our lines unassisted, and unwilling to delay the retirement, he crawled into a shell-hole situated about eight yards in front of the German wire. He was rescued from this insecure retreat by Lieutenant Burnham, Corporal Wilson, and Private Newton, who, covered by an accurate barrage from the guns of Stewart's Group, moved out to the shell-hole and back to our lines under a heavy fire of machine-guns and rifles.

In this, the first of our daylight raids, no prisoners were taken. The action was too swift and the encounters were too violent to permit of the removal of a single living Hun; but the operation was highly successful. The occupants of the trench were identified as the Royal Württembergers; valuable information of a technical nature was obtained; two machine-guns were put out of action and other machine-gun and trench-mortar emplacements located; many of the garrison of the

trench were shot, and four large dug-outs, crowded with men, were effectively bombed; and it is reasonable to suppose that the casualties inflicted by our artillery were severe. Lieutenant H. R. Dillon, Canadian Field Artillery, who acted as Forward Observation Officer throughout the operation, did splendid service, especially during the rescue of Captain Kilmer, when he stood fully exposed in No Man's Land at a point within forty yards of the German trench, and from there directed the fire of his battery. Lieutenant Hooper, of the 19th Battalion, whose active command during the raid included a Lewis gun, snipers, and a telephonist, also did fine work.

On the night of August 5th-6th the 27th (City of Winnipeg) Battalion sent a raiding party into the enemy trenches opposite their front, with the usual objects of obtaining prisoners and information and inflicting casualties. This raid was daringly executed; but the fighting in the trench was so severe that no prisoners were taken. Lieutenant Harris was wounded while carrying a wounded German toward the point of entry. Two unwounded Germans were caught, but owing to their struggles and the depth of the trench the efforts of their captors to expel them over the parapet were ineffectual.

Eight nights later Lieutenant Clarkson of this same Battalion led another party into the enemy's lines and succeeded in bringing out a prisoner. The garrison of the invaded trench suffered heavily. Of Clarkson's party only one man was wounded.

A party from the 28th (North-West) Battalion, supported by the artillery of Stuart's Group, our trench-mortars, and Stokes guns, entered the enemy's trenches in the neighbourhood of Ruined Farm on the night of August 10th-11th. Lieutenant T. L. O. Williams, who commanded the raiders, was wounded. The enemy and his trenches were severely knocked about and a prisoner was brought back.

A dummy raid on the hostile positions at the Hollandscheschuur Farm and Quarante Wood salients was successfully practised by Dodd's Group, C.F.A., and the 10th (Ontario) Battalion in the early hours of August 15th. The object of this long-headed enterprise was to draw the Germans in force into their front-line trenches and there drub them thoroughly with the combined fire of our field batteries, Stokes guns, and machine-guns.

At 3.45 a.m. three white flares were sent up from our lines, and at the same time the enemy's entanglements were violently shaken by means of strong wires which connected them with our forward positions. The Germans immediately took alarm and subjected their own entanglements to a heavy grenade bombardment along the whole front from the Quarante Wood to the Chemin de Poperinghe. Our artillery and Stokes guns then opened heavily and accurately on selected targets on the enemy front and support trenches. The Germans promptly attempted a retaliation with the fire of a five-point-nine battery; but as their first two shells fell in their own lines at the Farm, the third in No

Man's Land, and the next thirty-seven on various points behind and in their own defences, they soon became discouraged.

In addition to the casualties and material damage inflicted by our fire, the enemy must have suffered heavily from the erratic performance of his own five-point nines.

On the 17th a new strong point in the system of enemy trenches known as "the Loop," in Sanctuary Wood, about two thousand yards east of Zillebeke, was subjected to a concentrated bombardment by our 6-inch howitzers and partially destroyed. To complete its destruction the bombardment was resumed during the night of the 17th and 18th, and under cover of this bombardment a raid was undertaken by a party from the Royal Canadian Regiment against an advanced trench sector and bombing post in the immediate neighbourhood of "the Loop." The idea was to take the enemy by surprise while their attention was occupied by the bombardment, and to capture prisoners. In both these respects, however, the operation was a failure, as the Germans were found fully prepared and "standing to," with the post heavily manned, and not only were no prisoners taken, but not one of our men succeeded in getting into the trench. The affair was memorable, however, for the amazing courage and audacity with which it was pushed, in the teeth of overwhelming and ready numbers, and for the resourcefulness and heroic devotion with which the three officers – Lieutenant Bole, leader of the raiding party, and Lieutenants Churchill and Munn, who had come to his assistance – succeeded in bringing

all the wounded back to our lines. It was remarkable, too, for the slaughter inflicted in the crowded trench by this greatly daring handful of raiders. The raiding party consisted of sixteen N.C.O.'s and men under Lieutenant Bole. A gap was blown in the enemy wire by the explosion of an ammonal tube. Immediately Lieutenant Bole, who had gathered his men at the head of the sap running outward from our front line, led the way through the broken wire in the hope of gaining the position in one rush. They were met, however, by a storm of bombs and machine-gun fire, and fell rapidly. But even the wounded, if not utterly disabled, kept on hurling their bombs. Lance-Corporal Reynolds, though already hit, succeeded in reaching the enemy's parapet and delivering all his bombs with deadly effect among the packed ranks. Then, finding himself alone, he withdrew, and dropped, with two more wounds, a few yards back from the parapet. By this time every member of the party was down except Lieutenant Bole, who occupied himself calmly with the task of rescuing his wounded. Lieutenant Churchill came to his aid in this, while Lieutenant Munn, taking his Lewis gun out into No Man's Land, played it along the enemy's parapet to keep down their fire. Under cover of this gun, and of a trench-mortar barrage which was presently dropped along the trench, Lieutenant Bole got all his wounded, one by one, back through the sap and into our lines. And so the affair ended – not, indeed, with success, but with great distinction for all concerned, and with the consolation of having exacted a heavy toll in German lives.

It may be in place here to give an interesting instance of the work that was being done by our Tunnelling Companies – work calling for not only great courage and devotion, but also the highest technical skill and resource. The work of a tunnelling company at the Front is like a duel with knives in a dark room, where one may feel at any moment the stealthy adversary's knife in one's back. The tunnellers' ears, nerves, and intuition are ceaselessly on the strain. And just when he has successfully mined his opponents and is about to blow them up, he may be counter-mined himself and hurled into eternity. At the position known as "The Bluff," overlooking the Canal, a mine had been blown by the enemy on July 25th, forming a new crater of which we had at once taken possession. By the explosion a lip was formed on the east side of the crater, which was capable of being transformed into an extremely strong position. But it was impossible to work on this position with any degree of safety, as it was certain that the enemy's gallery, from which he had laid the mine, ran somewhere beneath the lip, and was occupied. Any work we should attempt on the position would inevitably be heard in the gallery and could be frustrated, disastrously for us, by the explosion of another mine. It was decided to try to tunnel into the gallery from another direction. Bore-holes, therefore, were driven in the supposed direction of the gallery, in the hope of being able to locate it exactly by listening. In this the borers were so successful that they came upon the gallery before they expected to. The enemy made them aware of their

success by exploding a charge beneath the bore-holes, killing three of our men and injuring others. From this, however, it was obvious that the main charge was not yet laid in the gallery. Plans were therefore made at once for endeavouring to sap into the gallery from No Man's Land and blow it in, so as to cut it off at some distance from the crater, and thus, if possible, gain the crater end of it for our own use. In order to begin the work far out in No Man's Land it was absolutely necessary to obtain some cover there, and cover of such a nature that the enemy should not recognise its purpose. The problem might well have seemed an insurmountable one; but Major North, O.C. 1st Tunnelling Company, Canadian Engineers, solved it successfully, outwitting the Germans by an ingenious ruse. In the words of the Official Report: – "One hundred pounds of ammonal were taken over the parapet, and, after a rather difficult reconnaissance, were placed about fifty feet in front of the new crater... This charge was wired back to *Thames Street*. In co-operation with the 5th Battalion, two 60-pound trench-mortars were fired at the German line in front at a prearranged time, and at one minute interval. A minute later our charge was exploded, and after another minute another trench-mortar was fired, the object being to make the enemy believe that our charge was a trench-mortar fallen short. This charge made a crater about 4 ft. deep and about 8 ft. in diameter, breaking the tough surface layer of roots and gravel. We entered the crater immediately after it was blown, placed another charge

of 200 pounds of ammonal, and blew it. The next night we entered the crater, finding it about 8 ft. deep and about 25 ft. in diameter." From this effective cover our boring went on unsuspected, and a number of charges were laid in different bore-holes close to where the gallery was judged to run. When these were simultaneously exploded our calculations were proved correct. A sector of the gallery was found completely wrecked, effectually cutting the communications, and we entered into possession of the undamaged portion, about 112 ft. in length, extending up into the new crater. We thus secured a valuable post of vantage from which to conduct other mining operations, and the crater was consolidated into a strong point of considerable importance to our line.

By these and many similar small operations the enemy were kept at a tension and subjected to continual harassing annoyance; and our own men were encouraged and stimulated while perfecting themselves in the art of modern war.

CHAPTER III

ON THE SOMME

It is around the part played by the Canadian Forces in the gigantic and long-drawn-out struggle known as "the Battle of the Somme" that the interest of this third volume of our records must centre. The operations which began, on July 1st, 1916, with the ponderous thrusts of the British and French Armies from before Albert and Bray, and ended with the capture of Bapaume and Peronne on March 17th and 18th, 1917, constituted, according to the nomenclature of war before these days of Armageddon, not one battle, indeed, but a campaign of many great battles. In this war, however, all is on a scale so colossal that standards and terms of comparison have to be enlarged in due proportion. All that unparalleled outpouring of agony and splendour, of sacrifice and endurance, of heroism and destruction, which the Germans have so poignantly – and significantly – designated as "the blood-baths of the Somme," may be taken as one battle, a battle in whose vast rhythm the old values of hours and days are supplanted by weeks and months. Yet never before in the world's history was there a battle in which minutes have been held so priceless, the seconds themselves so reckoned upon with meticulous precision. To present an adequate picture of the battle as a whole, or even of the specific part played in it by this or that particular

corps, is a task that will tax the powers of the inspired historian, viewing the great subject at such a distance that he can see it as a whole and in its true perspective. He will need to be a new Thucydides, equipped, not only with grasp and vision, but also with mastery of the magic of words. And even so, the story will never be half told. Men will continue digging into the records and unofficial accounts as an inexhaustible mine, forever discovering new jewels of wonder and terror and pity. The utmost that can be attempted in this unpretending narrative is to set down the salient facts as to the achievements of our own Divisions, with such detail as can be sifted out, more or less at hazard, while the dust of the stupendous conflict is still in the air.

On September 1st the Canadians began to move from their sector of comparative calm toward the vortex of the gigantic struggle, which was at this period raging with special fury around Mouquet Farm and over the blood-soaked undulations between Pozières, Courcellette, and Martinpuich. The quality of our troops, and the estimation in which they were held by the Higher Command, may be judged by the fact of their being allotted to this vital area, which included the key positions on the direct road to Bapaume. How they justified this confidence, and at what a cost, the sequel will show.

The 1st Canadian Division, General Currie's veterans of Ypres, was the first to move south, and its headquarters were shifted to Rubempré, a few kilometres due west from shell-torn Albert. On the 3rd we find certain battalions supporting

the Australians at Tom's Cut; and by the 4th the whole division had moved up through Albert and out along the Bapaume road into the stress of the conflict, taking over from the 4th Australian Division under heavy shell-fire, a hotly-contested line of trenches running from a little behind Mouquet Farm to the junction of Munster Alley with Cameron and Highland trenches, about a mile to the south of Courcelette. On the following day the headquarters of the Division were transferred from Rubempré to the precarious shelters and dug-outs of Tara Mill, on the Bapaume Road, near the grim collections of calcined rubble which had been La Boisselle and Oivillers. On the 6th the 1st Canadian Divisional Artillery arrived, and took over from the 2nd Australian Divisional Artillery in support of General Currie's line. All the time, from the moment of their arrival, our troops were kept under a very destructive bombardment from 5.9, 8-inch, and 11-inch guns, the enemy hoping thus to shake their morale before they could get settled into their new positions; and the communication trenches were so effectively blotted out that the front line could only be reached by going overland. The relief was no more than satisfactorily completed when the war-worn old Division was given a chance to show that its mettle had not deteriorated in the transfer from "the Salient" to the Somme.

In the early morning of the 8th an exposed section of our front trench, about seventy-five yards in extent, held by Lieutenant G. B. Murray, of the 14th Battalion, with Lieutenant B. L. Cook and twenty-four other ranks under his command, was

attacked with the bayonet by some two hundred of the enemy, who succeeded at the first rush in forcing their way into the position. The little party of defenders, however, held their ground with bomb, rifle, and cold steel till reinforcements came up, whereupon the assailants were expelled with heavy loss. On the following day came the opportunity which the tried and seasoned Division was waiting for. But it came to one Battalion only – the "Fighting Second" from Eastern Ontario, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel A. E. Swift, D.S.O.

At exactly twenty-five minutes past one in the afternoon of September 9th, the 2nd Battalion relieved the 4th along the sector of trench, on the right of the Canadian position, from which the attack was to be made. Some 250 yards to the front, south-east of the Windmill on Bapaume Road and near the northern extension of the trench called Walker Avenue, was a blunt salient of German trench, 550 yards or so of it, which was strongly held and proving a thorn in our side. It hung doggedly and defiantly athwart our plans for the advance on Courcelette, a mile away to the north. It was this blunt salient that the "Fighting Second" had been appointed to bite off in order to clear the way for greater enterprises. At a quarter to five precisely the first wave of our attack went over the parapet behind an intense barrage from all our guns. The first three companies of the Battalion only were engaged in the attack, No. 4 Company being held in reserve close by, in Luxton Trench and Walker Avenue. In spite of the punishment which the Germans had been

receiving from our barrage, the assaulting wave encountered a sturdy resistance when it reached its objective, and for a few minutes the enemy trench was a pandemonium of savage hand-to-hand struggles with bomb and bayonet. It was a reversion to the ancient form of individual fighting, when great issues so often hung upon the personal prowess of this or that one hero. In this mad encounter individual heroism was too universal to admit of particularisation, but the exploit of Corporal Clarke lifts itself into prominence even in that splendid company. Attacking with a squad of bombers on the extreme left of the wave, he jumped into the trench and found himself alone among a swarm of extremely lively and unsubdued Germans. With the remainder of his bombs he cleared a way for himself. Then with his revolver he accounted for eighteen opponents, two of them being officers, and found himself undisputed master of two bays of the trench. Even more splendid, perhaps, by reason of its self-sacrificing devotion, was the action of Lieutenant Pringle. Leading his platoon against the centre of the enemy's line, he caught sight of a machine-gun hurriedly being mounted on the parapet in such a position that it would be able to wipe out his platoon. Pushing forward at top speed through the storm of shell and bullets, he threw himself single-handed upon the gun-crew before they could get their deadly weapon into action. It never came into action. His men, following close behind, found his body sprawled across the muzzle of the gun, with the crew lying dead around him. Along the rest of the sector the fighting fervour of our men was not

to be denied, and the survivors of the enemy presently flung up their hands. In just twenty-two minutes from the beginning of the assault the whole objective was in our hands, 138 prisoners had been gathered in, and the second, or consolidating, wave of the attack was settling itself to the task of making secure the captured position, reversing parapets and firing-step, and commencing new communication trenches back to the old line under the continuing shelter of our barrage. In the meantime, the assaulting wave, taking their Lewis guns with them, moved on and occupied a strong line of shell-holes in front of the trench, while the bombing parties, in the face of desperate opposition, fought their way along the trench and established their blocks some sixty yards to either flank. The price of this victory was two officers killed – Lieutenant Pringle and Lieutenant Stuart – and nine wounded, the wounds of three – Major Williams, Major A. E. McLaughlin, and Lieutenant Bishop – later proving fatal; and of other ranks 69 killed and 190 wounded.

In view of the narrow frontage involved in the attack and the small number of troops engaged, this operation must, of course, be classed as a minor one. But by reason of its soundness of conception, the precision and completeness of its execution, and the importance of its bearing upon our enterprise against Courcelette a few days later, it takes rank with affairs of much greater magnitude and renown. It reflects unbounded credit upon the commanding officer Colonel Swift, whose operation orders were remarkable for their clarity, foresight, and exactness of

detail, and upon his second-in-command, Major Vanderwater, who led the attack and carried out those orders with such accuracy. The Battalion was congratulated by General Plunier, the Army Commander, on the following day in terms of unusual commendation.

In the meantime, the 2nd and 3rd Canadian Divisions, following hard upon the heels of the 1st, had moved down from the north to Rubempré and La Plouy, close behind the battle area. On the 11th Major-General Turner, V.C., C.B., D.S.O., commanding the 2nd Division, transferred his headquarters to Tara Hill, and assumed command of the sector which had been so ably controlled by General Currie since the 4th. Throughout the nights of the 10th and 11th the 2nd Division was occupied in relieving the 1st Division, the relief being carried out under extremely trying conditions and at the cost of a good many casualties; for not only the line to be relieved, but all the stripped and tortured waste behind it, was swept by an unceasing storm from the German gun positions across the Ancre and around Pys and Warlencourt. Our communication trenches in many places had been pounded out of existence and landmarks obliterated, with the consequence that some platoons went astray in the darkness and the bewildering uproar, and were hours late in reaching their allotted sectors of trench. Moreover, along with their shrapnel and high explosive, the enemy were sending over many gas and tear shells, which added greatly to the strain of the situation. But the nerve of our Battalions refused to be shaken

by this stern ordeal. There was no going back, no wavering. By the morning of the 12th the relief had been completed, and our lines were held by fresh units keen for the test which was already being prepared for them.

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